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Identities, intentionality, and institutional fit: Perceptions of senior women administrators at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States

Kathryn A. E. Enke^a

This qualitative study engaged women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States to better understand how their intersecting identities mediate their enacted leadership. Data were collected from eight participants via a questionnaire, document review, one-on-one interviews, and observations. Positionality theory informed the study design and inquiry. Data analysis using the constant comparative method revealed that women leaders' positionality is intentionally monitored and constantly negotiated in the liberal arts college context. Participants described that they had to be more intentional about revealing or displaying traits associated with those identities that did not fit their institutional environment. This study was an important step in broadening understandings of the complex ways in which leaders' multiple identities interact to shape women's leadership.

Keywords: gender; leadership; qualitative research

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Women are underrepresented in senior level leadership positions in higher education institutions, as in other kinds of organizations (Hartley, Eckel, & King, 2009). Until recently, research also has focused on leadership as a male activity (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). More research on women and leadership in higher education is needed in order to contribute to fuller understandings of what leadership is in this context and how it is enacted by various people. This qualitative study sought to understand how women senior level administrators with multiple and overlapping identities and backgrounds, working at various liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States, define their salient identities and understand the ways those identities mediate their leadership enactment, interactions with others, and their power as leaders. This paper investigates themes of intentionality and institutional fit as they relate to women's leadership at liberal arts colleges.

Women as higher education leaders

While 64% of all higher education administrators in the USA are women, senior level leaders remain predominantly male (Hartley, Eckel, & King, 2009), and women face significant barriers to advancement to senior level leadership posts (Eagly & Carli, 2007a). Women comprise only 23% of college presidents in the US (*The American College President*, 2007). Women are slightly better represented in some other senior level leadership positions on the pathway to the presidency, but their numbers rarely indicate gender parity. In total, women hold 45% of all senior administrative posts in US higher education, including positions like chief of staff, vice president, provost, and dean, those positions that are considered stepping stones toward a presidency (King & Gomez, 2008). Women are much more likely to be chiefs of staff (55% women) than executive vice presidents (31% women) or provosts (38% women). In addition, women are much more likely to lead associate's degree-granting institutions (where 29% of

presidencies are held by women) than doctorate-granting institutions (where 14% of presidents are women; *The American College President*, 2007).

Women leaders' ascension to leadership roles within higher education has been stymied by assumptions about women and their leadership potential. Research suggests that current expectations of leaders within higher education are aligned with socialized expectations of male behavior (Eddy, 2009). Researchers question whether women can successfully engage certain leadership styles that are perceived as masculine. Gender norms guide women toward a relational and democratic leadership style, and women may experience negative evaluations when they use a more assertive or autocratic leadership style associated with masculinity (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, 2007b). Women leaders are expected to exhibit both feminine and masculine behaviors in a contradictory blend (Grogan, 2008), and assumptions about men's and women's competence and legitimacy affect the leadership options available to women (Eagly, 2005; Ridgeway, 2001).

Women leaders within higher education also face gender bias and discrimination, differential perceptions of effectiveness, devaluation of their work, and legitimacy issues. Recent studies have confirmed that glass ceiling barriers still exist within educational settings (Wallin & Crippen, 2007). Sixteen percent of women within academe reported having experienced sexual harassment at work, and 58% reported having experienced potentially harassing behaviors (Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003). Women also face gender bias and discrimination in hiring and promotions in a variety of workplace settings. 'Evidence suggests that gender and gender-related traits are primary components of interviewers' cognitive structures for evaluating applicants' for jobs (Graves, 1999, p. 161) and that men are often preferred over women applicants for both masculine and gender-neutral jobs (Davison & Burke, 2000).

Many studies confirm that women's leadership effectiveness is evaluated differently than

men's leadership effectiveness. Reviews of research on gender and leadership have concluded that women leaders are often evaluated more negatively than their men peers, especially when women leaders employ an assertive, agentic, or autocratic leadership style (Eagly & Carli, 2007b). Women receive prejudiced evaluations as leaders and potential leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003), and women leaders fare especially poorly when leader roles are male-dominated or when men serve as evaluators (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Studies of women who were not successful in their leadership roles have revealed that women leaders' values sometimes clash with masculine organizational cultures (Grogan, 2008; Kloot, 2004). Leader behaviors that are effective for men, like agentic communication styles and self-promotion, may not be viewed as effective for women (Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Yoder, 2001).

Researchers also have found that women's work in organizations consistently is devalued, and success is attributed to external factors rather than to women's competence (Heilman, 2001). The devaluation of women's work also is evident in wage gaps between male and female workers (Hagedorn, 1996). The median income for full-time women workers in the USA was only 77% men's median income in 2008 (Catalyst, 2010), although the gender gap in earnings varied according to race, age, and education level (Roos & Gatta, 1999).

Theoretical perspectives

Less apparent than the lack of women in educational leadership is the lack of understanding of and theorizing about diverse women's leadership. While data are collected on senior administrators' gender, race/ethnicity, age, and years in position, the characteristics of women administrators often are not available in published reports. Similarly, while there is a robust body of literature on leadership in higher education, scholars have noted that this literature largely has ignored gender and the experiences of women leaders (Coleman, 2003; Jablonski, 2000). Studies

of leadership in higher education have considered routinely only the perspectives of male leaders and described leadership in stereotypically masculine ways, without acknowledging that these understandings of leadership are gendered (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006).

Extant studies of women's leadership often have included only White, middle-class, heterosexual women and have not illuminated the way that these women's racial/ethnic, class, and sexual identities impact their leadership enactment. Generalizations about women's leadership styles tend to promote an essentialized view of women's leadership, normalizing a universal category of women (Kezar & Lester, 2010). Even as feminist scholars note that gender is a complex category and a problematic analytical frame (Tarule, Applegate, Earley, & Blackwell, 2009), very few studies of leadership have considered other identities, such as race/ethnicity and sexuality, along with gender (Eagly & Carli, 2007a). Studies of leadership conducted with White, middle-class men and women often are presented as race- and class-neutral (Parker & oglivie, 1996).

In addition, there has been no research on the gendered experiences of leaders at liberal arts colleges. Considering the importance of context to leadership and the multiplicity of contexts in higher education, it seems unlikely that all modes of leadership would work equally well at all kinds of institutions. Still, few studies of leadership in higher education have considered the institutional contexts within which leaders work as a major influence on leadership enactment.

Positionality theory

Kezar and Lester (2010) proposed positionality as a powerful approach to studying leadership that avoids essentializing women's and men's experiences as leaders. The theory posits that an individual's position within the world impacts his or her perspective (Alcoff, 1988; Kezar &

Lester, 2010). An individual's position is simultaneously informed by his or her intersecting identities, the context in which he or she is acting, and power relations. Kezar and Lester adopted the theory to assert that intersecting identities, context, and power relations shape leadership enactment within higher education. Within this study, I explored how women leaders' positionality affects their enactment of leadership.

Positionality theory rejects 'that women have an essence,' and denies 'that female leaders have a particular way of leading' (Kezar & Lester, 2010, p. 169). It also moves beyond the poststructuralist 'idea that the category "woman" is a fiction and that feminist efforts must be directed toward dismantling this fiction' (Alcoff, 1988, p. 417). Positionality theory assumes that women 'share certain experiences and parts of their identity' (Kezar & Lester, 2010, p. 169), and that those similarities may lead to some similar leadership behaviors and experiences. Positionality defines a 'woman' by a particular position within an external context rather than by a particular set of internal characteristics (Alcoff, 1988). Therefore, her identity is fluid and 'relative to a constantly shifting context' shaped by herself and others (p. 433).

Leaders' identities are complex and overlapping, and they include facets such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and religion. Positionality theory does not privilege one identity over another. Kezar and Lester (2010) noted that 'particular facets of identity (such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and religious affiliation) may be more salient than others at any given time' and in any given context (p. 171). Ferdman (1999) suggested that the influence of gender on leadership is not the same for people of all races or cultures, and that the influence of race and culture is not the same for women and men. Therefore, researchers must examine leadership dynamics pertaining to gender, race, and culture simultaneously. Other scholars have also called for leadership research that maintains an 'awareness of multiple dimensions of identity and their

intersections' (Dean, Bracken, & Allen, 2009, p. 6).

Still, research has shown that gender is one of the most salient identities in people's lives (Eagly & Carli, 2007a). Gender has been used to organize society in subtle and systemic ways that advantage men and disadvantage women (Bem, 1993). While institutions of higher education often have a façade of gender neutrality, in reality they perpetuate 'gendered processes,' whereby 'advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine' (Acker, 1990, p. 146). Because of this, women leaders face particular challenges within gendered higher education environments.

Research approach

This paper presents findings from a qualitative study of women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States. Specifically, the study sought to understand how senior level women administrators with multiple and overlapping identities and backgrounds, working at various liberal arts colleges in a specific region of the USA, define their salient identities and understand the ways those identities mediate their leadership enactment, interactions with others, and their power as leaders. Positionality theory guided determinations of the research approach, including the selection of participants, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures.

Participant selection

I used The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2010) to identify liberal arts colleges for potential study. Participants were women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges in Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. I limited the population of institutions included in this study in order to better understand how diverse women

administrators at liberal arts colleges in this particular region understand leadership, and to ensure that I could travel to each of the institutions to conduct interviews and observations in person. The region contains 24 liberal arts colleges, which vary in enrollment size, selectivity, residential status, and cost.

Via a search of each institution's Web site, I located a population of women senior administrators at the 24 colleges. I included only those administrators who had all of the following characteristics: they lead their institution (presidents and/or chancellors) or report directly to the leader of the institution; they serve on the leader's cabinet or senior administrative team (making them collectively accountable for institutional policy); they interact with the board of regents or board of trustees; and they are the leader or primary representative of an administrative division. In all, I identified 155 administrators who met these criteria: 46 women (30%) and 109 men (70%). The group of 46 women administrators served as the population for participant selection.

Data collection methods

In September 2010, I e-mailed potential participants inviting them to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to collect demographic information about the potential participants so as to select a diverse sample for further phases of my research. Specifically, it asked each participant's gender (to ensure each administrator self-identified as a woman), race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital/partnered status, parenting/caretaking status, age, spiritual/religious beliefs, geographic background, and socioeconomic class background. Twenty women senior administrators completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 47%.

Table 1. Interview and observation participants ($N = 8$)

Name ^b /title	Years in current position	Race/ethnicity	Marital/parenting status	Age	Spiritual/religious beliefs	Socioeconomic class background
Ms. Alice White, VP for student development	11	Latina/ White	Married, 2 children	47	Catholic	Middle middle class
Dr. Becky Jones, VP for student development	4	White	Single, no children	44	Lutheran	Lower middle class
Ms. Elizabeth Howard, VP for business affairs	2	White	Married, 2 children	48	Ordained minister in her Christian church	Middle class
Dr. Hannah Lee, VP for enrollment management	2	White	Divorced, no children	51	Loosely Christian, does not attend church regularly	Lower middle class
Dr. Lisa Robertson, VP for international development	20	White	Single, no children	53	Presbyterian	Upper middle class
Dr. Maren Peterson, VP for student life	19	White	Married, 2 children	59	Lifelong Lutheran	Middle class
Dr. Margaret Lynn, VP for student life	3.5	White	Married, 1 child	59	Christian	Middle class
Ms. Nimi Craig, VP for enrollment & communication	4	White	Married, 1 child	40	Catholic	Severely financially challenged

^b*Pseudonyms selected by the participants.*

From the questionnaire responses, I selected eight participants for further participation in the study. More information about each participant is presented in (Table 1). I used purposive sampling to select information-rich cases for this study (Patton, 1990): women leaders with a variety of identities, at a variety of liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern USA. My sample was restricted by the characteristics of the population of women who completed the initial questionnaire and by each woman's willingness to participate in my research. Participants

were therefore less diverse in race/ethnicity and sexual orientation than I would have liked.

However, the sample did include women who differed in many other ways: in age, marital status, religious/spiritual beliefs, employment and educational experiences, geographic origin, socioeconomic class background, and the ways that they described their enacted leadership.

In fall 2010, I conducted one semi-structured face-to-face interview with each selected participant. I asked participants what brought them to their leadership position at a liberal arts college, what identities are salient to who they are, how those identities play a part in their leadership and interactions with others, how they define ‘a leader’ and how they describe their leadership styles, how they define ‘power’ and how they enact it, what they like and dislike about their job, and about their professional goals. Interviews lasted one to two hours, and they were audio recorded and transcribed in full. Interview transcripts were shared with participants to ensure accuracy and representativeness.

After the interview, I observed each participant going about her daily work as a woman administrator at a liberal arts college (six to eight hours). My observations were targeted, looking for ways in which the interview responses of the participants were reinforced, complicated, or contradicted by their interactions with others and their exercise of leadership on campus. I kept brief field notes of my observations throughout the day, and I prepared detailed notes of my observations within 24 hours.

In spring 2011, I shared a preliminary summary of my research findings with participants to ensure that their views were accurately represented in the findings. I asked each participant to consider the way that she was represented within the research and contact me if she wished to be represented differently. I also asked each participant one or two individualized clarifying questions that addressed complexities emerging from my earlier stages of data collection and

analysis. I integrated participants' responses into the final research findings.

Data analysis procedures

I began data analysis while data collection was still in process, utilizing the constant comparative method to seek patterns in the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 1998). Bits of data were constantly compared and grouped into categories, which were constantly created or revised in order to better fit the data. I started with a large number of categories and eventually merged them into about 30 themes clustered in five broad areas. Finally, I integrated the themes from the data into a larger narrative that described the experiences of participants in the study. I engaged in member checking, thick description, and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 1990) to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings. Within this paper, I discuss the findings related to two themes emerging from the data: intentionality and institutional fit.

Findings

Findings from this study illustrate complex ways that women's multiple identities, the power relations surrounding them, and the contexts in which they work shape their leadership experiences. Further, the findings assert that participants were intentional in their leadership enactment and that they constantly monitored the identities that they brought to their leadership roles. In this section, I use quotes and examples from individual leaders to exemplify how identities, institutional fit, and intentionality mediate the experiences of women administrators at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern USA.

Identities and institutional fit

I use the term 'institutional fit' to describe the ways that participants' identities met institutional norms for or expectations of leaders. Fitting an institution made the relationship between leader and institutional community easier. Lisa admitted that institutional fit made it less stressful to be

in her community. Fit also helped participants embody the mission of their institution. For example, Maren's identification as a lifelong Lutheran allowed her to completely embrace the Lutheran mission of her college, as did Nimi's identification as a Catholic at a Catholic institution. Their participation in on-campus religious events allowed them, in Nimi's words, 'an opportunity to engage with people and create relationships in a way that if I was Lutheran I wouldn't have that same engagement on campus.' Maren also articulated that her college's Lutheran identity was a part of the college context which influenced her enactment of leadership and her identities. She said,

I think the fact that it's a liberal arts college of the Church, and the kind of egalitarian Lutheran kind of place it is, makes it easier to be a whole kind of person. . . . I'm a lifelong Lutheran and this is a very open, liberal, challenging, ecumenical kind of place. And that's me as well.

Each of the participants exhibited some identities that were unusual or unexpected in their institutional context. Participants were very aware of their identities that did not fit institutional norms for leaders and that had to be intentionally monitored, and this became an important theme throughout my interviews with the eight participants. For Alice, leadership was about assessing situations very quickly and bringing the 'appropriate' identities to the table. Alice's use of the word 'appropriate' signifies that certain of her identities were not perceived as acceptable (by her or by others) and therefore had to be hidden or subdued in particular situations.

Alice described her relationships with her men colleagues on campus in a particularly interesting way, calling them 'cordial,' 'pragmatic,' 'collegial,' 'almost friendly, comfortable.' These words do not evoke negative reactions, but neither do they describe fully positive and uncomplicated relationships. Similarly, Elizabeth described her campus environment as collegial but not quite friendly, and her relationships with her colleagues (all men) as only 'surface'-level.

I believe that these distant, or even strained, relationships are the result of Alice and Elizabeth not quite fitting the expectations of leaders on their campuses, Alice as a biracial woman on a predominantly White campus, and Elizabeth as the only woman on her cabinet, representing the traditionally masculine division of finance.

Participants described a variety of identities that set them apart from institutional norms, and discussed the complexities with integrating those identities into their leadership. Three examples of such identities are gender, marital status, and age. These three identities will be discussed below, along with the identities that participants said they left out of their leadership.

Gender

For all participants, gender was an identity that differentiated them from social norms about leadership. Most participants agreed that their gender influenced the ways that their leadership was perceived, and they were aware of gender roles that had to be managed in relation to their leadership behaviors. Because of gendered expectations of women leaders, I observed that even highly effective leadership styles held challenges for the women participants who enacted them. The examples of Hannah and Becky are particularly illustrative. Hannah and Becky employed different styles of leadership which led them to different successes and challenges in their roles.

Hannah described her leadership as pragmatic and intentional. She was highly organized and admirably prepared for on-campus meetings. However, Hannah perceived that her successes in leadership led to some jealousy on campus, as some community members perceived Hannah and her division as unduly influential. Hannah perceived that her staff members rose to the high expectations she set for them but admitted that not all staff members relished her challenges, and that some staff members in other divisions resented that they did not receive the same expectations, feedback, and development as staff in Hannah's division.

Hannah articulated that these challenges could be expected in any institutional environment, but I wondered how they related to her identities and people's expectations about women leaders. Hannah was a woman on an all-woman cabinet. I observed that Hannah led differently from the other women in leadership positions on her campus. How might expectations about women's leadership on her campus—as formed via gendered assumptions and reinforced via the leadership enactment of other women on campus—have led campus constituents to be surprised or threatened by Hannah's style? How might Hannah's enactment of a non-traditionally feminine style of leadership enhance or detract from her chances of obtaining the presidential position she aspired to? These complexities were constantly negotiated by Hannah as she enacted leadership.

Unlike Hannah, Becky was a relational leader. She described herself as a good listener, and she garnered power from the information that people shared with her in personal and professional situations. However, like in Hannah's case, Becky's leadership style also brought challenges. Becky perceived that work friendships had become more difficult since she became a vice president at her institution. Now, people 'managed' their relationships with her and were less likely to share personal information with her. She articulated that people's perceptions of her job kept her from fully enacting her relational identity, and kept her from being herself in her leadership role.

Becky's comments in her interview asserted that leadership in higher education may be constructed in such a way that relational individuals cannot be themselves. How might Becky's relational leadership mediate her ability to obtain future leadership roles? Are relational leaders welcome within higher education? And, since researchers find that gender norms tend to lead women leaders toward an interpersonally-oriented or relational style of leadership (Eagly &

Carli, 2007a), how do women disproportionately face these challenges?

Higher education leadership remains a complex forum for women. Hannah's and Becky's cases reaffirm that leadership is gendered, even as women bring multiple other identities to their roles and enact diverse styles of leadership. It is important to acknowledge leadership as gendered in order to understand the particular challenges that women with various other identities face when they ascend to higher education leadership roles.

Marital status

Unmarried participants agreed that they did not fit expectations about leaders at their institutions. Hannah said that people constantly assumed that her long-term significant other was her husband. When I observed her, she was planning a tropical vacation with her significant other, and several different people on campus made jokes about her eloping on her upcoming trip. These jibes are evidence of the expectations people on campus had about Hannah being heterosexual and married. Though Hannah did not intend to marry soon, and she was clear about this with her colleagues, her lack of fit with institutional expectations caused her to be the butt of non-malicious but persistent jokes. Hannah worried little about her unmarried status now, but said, 'I think someday I'll be a college president and then I wonder what happens when you don't have a spouse to accompany you to the fundraising and social functions? Can you date as a president?' Hannah's worries illuminated the way that presidential roles are currently structured to presume that leaders are married, or at least partnered. I add that presidential roles assume a 'First Lady' will be available to take on a particular supportive role for her presidential husband. None of the senior women administrators participating in this study had a 'First Lady' to support them in their leadership role.

Age

No matter their age or years of experience, all participants agreed that both age and years of experience mattered to their leadership enactment and to perceptions of their leadership capability. Most said that their age had mattered less to others as they had grown older and thus grown into expectations about how old a senior administrator should be. Margaret said that both age and experience made her a more skillful and focused leader: ‘I think I have a broader view of leadership in general—that there are different ways to lead, and that you don’t have to be in charge of everything sort of every minute. And you can prioritize things.’ Elizabeth said that her experiences in leadership helped her let issues ‘roll off’ more easily, without making a big deal out of everything.

Elizabeth and Margaret both said that there was an expectation that a senior administrator would be quite a bit older than 30. Nimi had started in her current role at age 35, and she said that her age definitely mattered at that time, as did assumptions about her lack of experience and assumptions based on her gender. Alice agreed that it was hard to establish herself when she first came to her position in her mid 30s:

A lot of people just didn’t expect a vice president to look as young as I did. . . . I think that with the faculty in particular. . . . I think to them, experience looks a certain way. And I just didn’t look, and to some, still don’t look like I have enough experience.

Even though Alice had been in her position for 11 years, she perceived that some still questioned her experience.

Identities left out of leadership

Even as participants noted that they brought multiple identities to their leadership roles each day, they all mentioned identities that they downplayed in certain professional situations. One participant in the study used the metaphor of leaving particular identities ‘in the parking lot,’ and I asked all eight participants what identities they leave in their parking lot when they come to

work.

Becky and Nimi noted that they leave their social lives in the parking lot. Because of their leadership positions, they are unable to have close personal relationships with many people on campus. Maren (whose brother was an alcoholic) and Margaret (whose husband had cancer) had only shared these details about their families with a select few on campus. Hannah, Margaret, Lisa, and Elizabeth were all private about their religious beliefs. Elizabeth said she was not very self-revealing in her professional life and that all of the cabinet members at her institution ‘go through our lives on the surface . . . and we don’t always get down deep into where the person [is] and how they are doing.’ Hannah noted that she leaves her ‘non-VP’ self in the parking lot, the ‘more unguarded or casual’ self, the ‘more sensitive side.’

What does it mean that some of these women left identities in the parking lot, or that Alice assessed situations to determine whether it was appropriate to bring her whole self? To some extent, this is simply politically savvy behavior, and all people are expected to do this in professional situations. However, Alice and Nimi, at least, said that women had to be more cautious about revealing their identities than men did. As women, these leaders were particularly wary of revealing all of their multiple identities through their leadership enactment.

Context and institutional fit

All of the liberal arts contexts considered in this research, though different from each other, could be considered fairly homogenous environments (i.e., predominantly White, politically conservative or liberal, religiously-affiliated). This homogeneity contributed to the comfortable community contexts that most leaders described. For Maren, this fit made it easier for her to be ‘a whole kind of person’ in her leadership role. For others, however, a lack of fit could serve as a boundary to how much of themselves they could bring to their leadership enactment. For

example, Alice, a biracial woman, described her race as sometimes invisible within her predominantly White college environment, and sometimes hyper-scrutinized.

While many of the participants lauded the liberal arts context for developing students' whole persons, they felt these contexts provided little support for leaders to bring all of their multiple identities fully to their leadership roles, unless those identities exactly fit institutional expectations about who a leader should be. This illustrates an inconsistency between one of the aims of liberal arts education—fostering increased understanding of and concern for those who are different than oneself (Zinser, 2004)—and the reality on some liberal arts college campuses.

Intentionality

Findings from this study suggest that women leaders' positionality is intentionally monitored and constantly negotiated in the liberal arts college context. Intentionality was highly related to institutional fit: participants described that they had to be more intentional about revealing or displaying traits associated with those identities that did not fit their institutional environment.

All of the study participants exhibited some intentionality when sharing their identities with others. As Becky said, she was 'conscientious of positioning [her]self' and she did it 'intentionally and politically.' Alice said that she muted certain aspects of herself in different situations, and Lisa and Margaret described ways that they intentionally kept their personal lives separate from their professional roles. Elizabeth spent extensive time journaling about her various identities, considering whether they were all about past experiences or whether she could actively shape them into the future.

The women were also intentional in their interactions with others. Becky noted a responsibility to remind herself of the privilege that comes with her White identity, and the importance of listening and supporting those who are marginalized even as she could not fully

understand their experiences. Similarly, Margaret noted that she was ‘intentional and symbolically aware’ of how she made connections with students who were not members of the majority.

The participants were also intentional in their uses of power. Becky noted that she was intentional about when she spoke in meetings: when she took the floor and when she remained silent. Hannah described herself as the intentional in ways she accumulated success in order to build her power on campus. And Nimi was reflective about the ways that her physical appearance—including her identities as well as the clothing she wears and the quality of her office—affected the way that her power was perceived by others.

I observed that the intentionally monitored positionality of participants in my study was complicated and required a constant negotiation of identities, power, and context. Other recent research at a community college in the USA similarly found that women faculty intentionally managed impressions of their identities in the workplace by aligning their behaviors with gender roles (Lester, 2011). Lester found that these women expressed conflict between their identities and gender roles, and that the constant managing of impressions in order to fit expectations was both frustrating and exhausting.

Who, exactly, must be intentional about the identities they bring to leadership and who is free from having to constantly monitor their identities? What identities do leaders have to be most intentional about, and what identities can leaders give less attention? These questions link back to the issue of fit. Leaders must be more attentive to the way they enact those identities that separate them from norms about leaders in a particular institutional context, and less attentive to those identities that fit those norms. To some extent, expectations about leaders cross organizational boundaries. Therefore, White, heterosexual, Christian men may have to be less

intentional about enacting those identities within most leadership positions at liberal arts colleges in the USA because these identities match historical expectations about who a leader should be.

It is important to note, however, that expectations about leadership are contextual: leaders at Becky's college were also expected to be Christian, leaders at Hannah's college were more likely to be women than men, and leaders in student affairs were more often expected to be women. And, no one perfectly fits all of the traditional norms surrounding leaders at all institutions.

Implications

As described above, findings from this study suggest that women leaders' positionality is intentionally monitored and constantly negotiated in the liberal arts college context. All of the study participants exhibited some intentionality when bringing their identities with them to work and sharing themselves with others. Participants in this study perceived that identities that made them different on their campuses were the most important to their interactions with others, and all identified some identities that helped them fit in their particular institutional context.

The importance of institutional fit is partially what makes it so hard to increase diversity among higher education leaders because leaders who are different from the norm do not perceive themselves as good fits for the campus. Leaders who do not fit institutional norms must constantly monitor their identities and perhaps leave certain aspects of themselves out of their job in order to succeed (such as a relational identity). Or, they may feel pressured to take on new (and perhaps ill-fitting) identities in order to meet others' expectations, thus contributing to future norms for leaders. While many institutions have stated goals to hire more women, women of color, lesbians, etc. in leadership roles, in addition, institutions must interrogate the notion of fit and how it can undermine their diversity efforts among students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This process will involve discussions of organizational culture and values,

examination of expectations that community members hold for their leaders, and interrogation of the ways that higher education institutions continue to discriminate against those who challenge their cultures and values and attempt to expand their expectations of leaders.

Again, the examples of Becky and Hannah are illustrative here. Both Becky and Hannah described ways in which they took on identities—Becky as a Lutheran and Hannah as a sports fan—in order to better fit expectations about leadership in their organizational environments. What are the implications of this? Are all leaders called upon to change themselves in order to better serve as leaders within particular organizational cultures? Or do some leaders with particular unchangeable identities (like gender or race) that do not fit leadership norms in higher education feel more intense pressure to fit institutional norms in other ways by manipulating or morphing their identities that are changeable? How did Becky's and Hannah's choices to take on identities contribute to future expectations for leaders?

Fit may play an especially important role at liberal arts colleges. These are generally small, residential environments where students live, work, and learn. Many are homogeneous communities. These institutions, in particular, may rely on institutional fit (or conformance to institutional culture) to build a sense of community within a tight-knit living and learning community. More research is needed to understand how the notion of fit affects the experiences of students, faculty, staff, and administrators in these unique environments.

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