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Women University Presidents: Career Paths and Educational Backgrounds

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project was to explore the lived experiences of women university presidents in developing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies required for successful leadership in higher education. This specific report focuses on the educational backgrounds and career paths of these women. Ten women university presidents were interviewed for two to three hours each using the phenomenological research approach. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and theme generation techniques used. Although there were some similarities among the women in terms of educational backgrounds and employment positions, the data show that presidents can emerge from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. Specific job titles are not as important as opportunities to learn and develop through a wide variety of positions, responsibilities, and experiences. It was discovered that no president followed a formal career path. This paper offers important implications. Understanding the experiences and perceptions of these women provides insight into the types of activities, influences, and experiences that are beneficial for women to develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for effective leadership.

Women University Presidents: Career Paths and Educational Backgrounds

During the past few decades, research and scholarly dialogue focused on the topic of academic careers has increased. Although academe is just one of numerous industries whose career systems might be studied, it is a large and growing sector (Baruch & Hall, 2004a). In the UK alone there are 120 universities and more than 2000 in the US, not including other types of higher educational institutions. According to Baruch and Hall (2004a), "with the accelerated level of available knowledge and the pressing need to develop human capital, there is a growing need for research on careers in academe, as well as a need for more people who wish to gain academic qualifications" (p. 237). They also argued that current models of careers need to be "revisited and revised to fit the current reality of organizations" (p. 237).

Within the academic arena, growing interest and concern now focus on the academic careers of leaders in post-secondary educational institutions. Rubin (2004) wrote of the development, attraction, and retention of outstanding leaders as one of eight fundamental challenges in higher education today. He stated, "Extraordinary challenges face higher education…and leaders with exceptional capabilities are needed to help institutions meet these challenges" (Rubin, 2004, p. 288). He argued that the "task goes beyond simply locating outstanding leaders. It includes encouraging, facilitating, and rewarding their development" (p. 289). The role and leadership abilities of university presidents and chancellors are of particular importance in higher education because of the influence and power these leaders have on the direction and strategy of their institutions. Yet, little research exploring the development of effective university presidents (men or women) has been published, and even less on the development of women leaders in academia.

Although record numbers of women educators are enrolled in and completing masters and doctoral programs in educational administration, Gill (1997) reported that fewer than 30 percent of women who graduate from educational administration degrees actually obtain applicable positions. She argued that although most women candidates are reading and following advice found in the available literature, there is still evidence that women are not acquiring or staying in administrative positions. Glazer-Raymo (1999) acknowledged that since the 1970s significant advances have been made to increase women's participation in higher education. However, in terms of gender disparities, she argued that women's equality is a myth (especially among academic leaders such as senior faculty, department chairs, deans, and administrators). These disparities related to almost every indicator of professional status (e.g., rank, salary, tenure, job satisfaction, and working conditions). Sagaira (1988) purported, "Colleges and universities have failed to examine our social values and the corresponding assumptions governing the attitudes, talents, and behavior of women and men," and that "women's special concerns and issues must become higher priories at all institutions of higher learning" (p. 6). She argued that colleges and universities must systematically educate women for leadership in society and that models of leadership for women in this context must be developed.

Encouragingly, some women are preparing, obtaining, and maintaining successfully high level post-secondary positions of influence, including that of university president. There are many women in higher education who do not fear success and who believe that playing the dual roles of career woman and mother have not affected their professional progress (Woo, 1985). Yet, currently there is little research focused on in-depth analyses of executive administrative leaders. To develop applicable and rigorous models of leadership for these women, more exploratory research must be conducted to provide insight into the characteristics and dynamics

of this phenomenon. Hence, it is imperative that the backgrounds, experiences, and perceptions of successful women presidents be studied so that commonalities can be discovered. This will assist women interested in personal and career development, as well as the educators, administrators, and consultants who will be designing future leadership development interventions (e.g., training, development, individual preparation, mentoring, career management, and self-directed learning).

This paper reports qualitative research results from interviews with ten women university presidents regarding their "lived experiences" of developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for effective leadership in post-secondary institutions. Although all of the participants in this study were women from the U.S., studies from various countries have been reviewed and similar challenges have been reported throughout Europe and other parts of the world. Because of the lack of research on women presidents in any country or continent, findings should be useful in advancing the understanding of high level women leadership in the educational arena. This paper reports the results focused on the career paths and educational backgrounds of these presidents.

<div align="center">Theory and Literature</div>

The development of leadership is a lifelong, continuous process for effective and successful post-secondary leaders. Since a majority of all university presidents emerge from positions and experiences within the educational environment, a framework that "has always been part of the intrinsic nature of the work in academe" (Baruch & Hall, 2004b, p. 248) was explored. In 1995, Arthur, Claman, and DeFillippi presented the "Intelligent Career" idea that was based on three dimensions: knowing why, knowing how, and knowing whom. Baruch and Hall (2004b) describe these steps as follows:

Knowing why—academe is one of those areas that usually requires a certain urge to

explore, to be scientific, and to use your cognitive and innovative competencies.

Knowing how—in academe, certain competencies are essential for success. These mostly

involve cerebral abilities, but emotional intelligence…, resilience and the ability to

bounce back (particularly in areas where rejection rates for publications are high) are also

crucial for long-term endurance.

Knowing whom—there are studies…that associate career success (at least in terms of

publications) with the right connection and networks. Even at the dyad level, finding the

right mentor seems to be of specific importance in academe, and the mentoring concept

flourished in academe long before it was introduced to organizational studies. (p. 248)

Although all presidents do not emerge from traditional academic backgrounds, the search for

answers and meaning within these three dimensions provides a helpful framework for

understanding the leadership development of women university presidents, with a particular

focus on career paths and educational backgrounds.

Gupton (1997) explained that women seeking administrative careers in education should

1) obtain education in appropriate fields, 2) acquire meaningful experience, 3) develop a record

of improving and updating professional qualifications, 4) participate in ongoing networking

opportunities, and 5) make strategic and long-range plans. In this section, the literature regarding

these elements will be reviewed. Some findings related to the applicable knowledge presidents

need to understand and address will be highlighted. It is important to note that some of this

research is dated. There are generational differences that are emerging in recent decades related

to leadership development that have not yet been studied.

In 2005, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* published an issue titled *What Presidents Are Thinking: About Higher Education, Their Jobs, and Their Lives.* It was reported that over 46 percent of the women were previously provosts or chief academic officers compared with 28.5 percent of the men. In looking at the presidents' positions (men and women) before assuming their current posts, 21.5 percent were presidents of another institution, 32.1 percent were provosts or chief academic officers, 22 percent were nonacademic university vice presidents or similar posts, 7.2 percent had other academic posts, 6.7 percent were deans of a graduate or professional school, 2.5 percent were corporate executives, 2.2 percent were government officials, .8 percent were lawyers, and 3.8 percent marked "other" (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005). Nearly 84 percent of presidents had doctorates (Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.), 7.2 percent obtained professional degrees (J.D., M.D., Psy.D., etc.), and 5.2 percent held a variety of master's degrees. Nearly 57 percent of the presidents said they had never held a tenured faculty appointment.

Presidents worried most about a balanced budget, excellence of educational programs, quality of faculty, and meeting fund-raising goals (Chronicles of Higher Education, 2005). Presidents reported their primary issues of concern in five categories: 1) faculty issues (i.e., salaries, diversity, quality, grade inflation, adjunct ratios, and plagiarism); 2) enrollment issues (i.e., student retention, balancing financial-aid costs with student needs, improving the academic profile of entering students, ability to meet enrollment targets, visa difficulties for international students, and overcrowding); 3) financial issues (i.e., rising health-care costs, rising tuition, cost of technology, rising cost of student services and student faculties, decline in state support, decline in federal support, and competition from for-profit colleges); 4) student issues (i.e., insufficient academic preparation for college among students, lack of racial and ethnic diversity,

cheating, lack of political and philosophical diversity, and lack of economic diversity), and; 5)

other issues (i.e., government regulation, litigation, and real or perceived conflicts of interest that

arise because of the sources of research grants) (p. A38).

The various activities in which presidents participated include the following: fund-

raising, budget/finance, educational leadership, personnel, student life, writing, strategic

institutional planning, relations with governing board, town-gown relations, enrollment

management, alumni relations, athletics, relations with political leaders, relations with chancellor

or equivalent, technology, security, dealing with faculty, campus politics, and marketing

(Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005).

In the previous study, nearly half of the women presidents stated that they were provosts

or chief academic officers before becoming presidents. Walton and McDade (2001) studied

women chief academic officers and found that most had doctorate degrees, experience with

faculty (including teaching and scholarship), knowledge of curriculum development and

evaluation, the ability to work well with all types of people, the capacity to provide leadership,

and the ability to solve problems. While women in this and other studies admitted that

"experience as a researcher and teacher were not necessary preparation for the role, there is

agreement across studies that degrees and scholarly pedigrees" earn chief academic officers

respect from their faculty constituency (p. 88). These women felt that the most important

preparation for a presidency was experience in other administrative positions where they learned

the following: business of higher education, budgeting, political skills, understanding, and

patience. Key learning opportunities also included linkage in networks and participation in

professional development programs.

The topic of career paths (formal vs. informal or linear vs. non-linear) has been an ongoing topic of discussion. Some of the literature reported studies of women who generally had linear career paths as they rose through the ranks to become leaders. White (2003) stated that women who achieved leadership roles in universities in Australia "merely replicated the behavior" of a narrow management profile and were often tokens (p. 50). Walton (1996) studied women presidents/educational leaders from the U.S. and UK. She noted that the career paths of the U.S. women were, in general, "steps up the academic ladder: faculty member, department chair, academic dean or vice president, then president" (pp. 9-10). Clark, Caffarella, and Ingram (1999) interviewed 23 mid-level women managers from education, corporate organization, and religious ministry and found that twice as many women in their research described their career paths as linear. It important to note, however, that most of the women in their sample were single.

On the other hand, literature also reports findings of women leaders having informal and emerging career paths. Aldoory (1998) found that many of the participants in her study (public relations leaders) stated that they did not intentionally look for leadership positions. They took on responsibility but claimed they did not aspire to official leadership positions. Hill and Ragland (1995) studied women educational leaders but instead of finding commonalities in career paths, they concluded that (at least for the women in their study) there was no norm in terms of "job sequencing to reach top levels of school leadership" (p. 102). Waring (2003) interviewed six African American college presidents and reported they followed more informal career paths. She termed them *reluctant leaders*. These women became administrators in one of two ways: 1) they were "drafted" by others who identified their leadership potential and helped to develop it, or 2) "they were interested in improving the educational opportunities for students,

primarily minority students, and took administrative positions where they felt they could have an impact" (p. 37). After they entered administration they worked hard and their "record of success propelled them steadily upward" (p. 37). Hartman (1999) interviewed a variety of women leaders, including those serving at educational institutions, and concluded that there was "no single formula for leadership, nor a single path to leadership" (p. 246). Other researchers also claimed women's career paths are non-linear (Cheng, 1988), that women do not plan their careers as carefully as men (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003), and that women are positioned disadvantageously because of their life career paths (Blackmore & Sachs, 2000).

Scholarly literature also addresses the career path differences between men and women. Hojgaard (2002) studied politics, business, and civil service (in Denmark, Nordic countries, and other western countries) and found that "women achieved their current leadership position, to a greater degree, via the category of 'professional' jobs and 'functionaries/middle management' jobs and to a lesser degree via other 'top management' positions and other jobs" (p. 26). She also reported that "a higher proportion of the male leaders start their top-leadership career from a broader range of jobs than the female leaders" (p. 25). Hennig and Jardim (1977) argued that individual self-improvement is the critical factor in determining career advancement for women. They explained, "Women see a career as personal growth, as self-fulfillment, as satisfaction, as making a contribution to others, as doing what one wants to do. While men indubitably want these things too, when they visualize a career they see it as a series of jobs, a progression of jobs, as a path leading upward with recognition and reward implied" (p. 14). In a Swedish study, Marongiu and Ekehammar (1999) examined the influence of individual and situational factors on the career advancement of men and women. First, they reported that instrumental personality styles were essential for leadership success. Second, they found that career paths were different

between the genders. It was essential for women to have a clear aspiration to pursue a managerial career while men advanced without such pronounced aspirations.

Understanding the types of leadership knowledge, skills, and abilities important to learn and develop is also central to this discussion. A list has already been provided in the previously described *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2005) study. In addition, Walton and McDade's (2001) chief academic officer study (also described previously) provided additional insight into essential or helpful knowledge, skills, and experiences: teaching, scholarship, research, curriculum development and evaluation, interpersonal abilities, leadership capacity, problem-solving skills, networking, participation in professional development programs, and experience in other administrative positions. Chrisler, Herr and Murstein (1998) stated that accepting appointments and/or assignments (committee work) in areas which they have little experience is an effective way for women to learn and develop central leadership knowledge and skills. Twale and Shannon (1996) agreed but specified that women need to serve on powerful committees that have more impact in key policy areas like personnel, promotion, tenure, planning, and grievance. Sagaira (1988) also reported that assignments and committee leadership provided helpful developmental experiences and allowed women to gain a sense of their own competence and personal leadership capacity.

The participants in this study indicated that it was their interactions with others (in these assignments, activities, and experiences) that contributed significantly to their leadership growth. Finally, Radin (1980) reported that upper level women felt that the ability to self-educate was essential to their career development. And, Taylor and Conradie (1997) argued that the most enriching developmental experiences in a woman's life are her own life experiences. They

claimed that effective women leaders develop the ability to embrace and apply the concept of lifelong learning. These experiences are springboards for future development and empowerment.

Research Methods

Research for this paper is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with ten women university presidents or chancellors within the United States. The interviews were designed based on the phenomenological research methodology which is a human science that studies individuals (Van Manen, 2001). Van Manen explained that "phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9). This approach appeared to be very applicable to understanding the experiences of these presidents in becoming leaders. The *voices* of these women needed to be heard in order to explore their backgrounds and perceptions regarding their career paths as well as their training, development, and educational opportunities and experiences. As Eisner (1988, p. x, as cited in Brunner, 1998), argued, "It is more important to understand what people experience than to focus simply on what they do" (p. 161). Van Manen (2002) contended that truly understanding the *essence* of life experiences or incidents involves a "progress of reflection, deconstructing assumptions and conceptualizations, of clarifying, interpreting, and of finally making meaning of the lived experience" (p. 24).

Ten women university presidents were interviewed (with 25 being initially invited), using the methodology described, at their own location (typically in the president's office) for two to three hours each. The invited women served as presidents or chancellors of public and private post-secondary educational institutions (eight research-focused, two teaching-focused). Eight of the women were Caucasian and two African American, while four were in their fifties and six in their sixties.

Interview questions were drafted based on the phenomenological research methodology, an extensive review of the literature, and the review of other instruments measuring similar constructs for different populations or at lower levels of leadership. They were open-ended probing questions designed to extract all types of information about the presidents' experiences and perceptions of becoming leaders. Questions were reviewed prior to the interviews by two experienced leadership researchers, and slight instrument adjustments were made based on their feedback.

A number of steps were utilized to analyze the interviews. First, all interviews were transcribed in full by the researcher and an assistant. Each interview was analyzed to categorize responses throughout the interview into specific sections. Related responses (comments and perspectives) from all ten interviews were then combined into separate categorized documents. Each interview transcription and analysis were reread to identify key ideas and phrases about the presidents' experiences related to each particular category. Interview phrases or statements were grouped by topic. The primary themes that emerged from the interviews were noted. Finally, the presidents were asked to review the themes and results via email or phone and provide additional perspective and insight into their experiences that may not have been captured in the original interviews. Because of the large amount of data collected, only two of these themes (education backgrounds and career paths) are discussed in this paper.

There are several limitations to consider in reading the results of this study. First, the perceptions and experiences of the ten women may not have been totally representative of all women presidents; hence results should not be widely generalized. This research was exploratory in nature so finding commonalities through emerging themes, not generalizability, was its focus. Second, the participants were a convenient sample. Names were collected from a variety of

sources so ideal participants could have inadvertently not been included. Third, the ten women who agreed to participate could have had different experiences, perspectives, and memories regarding their childhood experiences; a control group was not possible or recommended for this type of study.

Results

In understanding the education backgrounds and careers paths of these women leaders, it is important to highlight some marital and family data. Seven of the women were married between 19 and 22 years of age, two after 25, and one has a long-term partner. Five women have remained in their first marriage throughout the years, two are currently in their second marriage, one is single after two marriages, one is in her fourth marriage, and one with a long-term partner. Three of the four presidents said that divorce was related to their goals for advancement/career choices and goals. Currently, nine claim to be in happy marriages or partnerships. One president has four children, one has three, four presidents have two children each, two have one child, two did not give birth to children, although one has a step-child.

Educational Backgrounds

To understand the various influences in the university presidents' careers, the women were asked to describe their educational backgrounds. Five presidents had education-related bachelor degrees, four had bachelors' degrees in the math and science area, and one received a social science degree. These women attended a variety of undergraduate post-secondary institutions that included public and private, large and small, all-women and mixed gender, liberal arts and comprehensive, teaching-centered and research-centered, and renowned and less recognized. All but two (mid-west, mountain-west) institutions were located in the east (north and south) generally within the same state or adjoining state of the presidents' upbringings. All

of these presidents either majored or stated that they would have majored, if the counseling or

opportunities were different or better, in math or science. For example, one president said that

her high school counselor didn't give her the support she needed. The counselor focused on those

students clearly going to college, and she felt that she had to fend for herself. Her parents were

not overly involved, and she knew she had to pay for her own college. She started out in a male-

dominated science program and eventually had to change majors. She stated, "I was a good

science student and loved it. Had I had better counseling maybe I would have tried a different

kind of science first that may have been more acceptable for women. The only fields that were

acceptable for women at that time were nursing and teaching." Another woman stated,

"Chemistry was my favorite subject in high school, but I ruled it out. I had to work to pay for my

education, and my schedule and the required labs didn't appear that they would work. I decided

to go into a different direction because of my schedule. I did not really seek counseling but

dismissed it before I even tried. Another explained that chemistry was always her favorite

subject as well. She excelled in it. She wanted to major in chemistry, but she was "afraid of one

professor" and didn't feel she could talk to anyone about it, so she went into humanities instead.

Finally, one president stated that as a freshman she tested very high in hard science/medical

fields, but the counselor said it was not good for girls to major in these areas. She took this

advice and majored in education.

   All but one (who went immediately into a Ph.D. program) received various types of

masters' degrees (M.A., M.S., M.Ed., Sc.M,) in similar areas as their bachelor degrees. However,

one did receive a master's of education administration with goals of obtaining a leadership

position in a K-12 environment. Degrees ranged from philosophy to social work and also

included special education, economics, secondary education, and a variety of science-related

emphases. Seven presidents pursued these degrees immediately (or within a year or so) after graduating with undergraduate degrees. Two started working on master's degrees two to four years later. One took a longer break for reasons related to bearing and raising children.

Four presidents obtained doctorate degrees in higher education administration, while two additional women had other types of educational doctorates. Hence, six of these women had doctorates in the educational field and four majored in non-educational areas. Four received educational doctorates (Ed.D), five received doctorates of philosophy (Ph.D), and one remains a doctoral candidate because she had job opportunities and promotions that interfered with the completion of her dissertation. There is wide variation regarding the timing of doctoral degree completion. Some started the doctoral program immediately after the completion of previous degrees. However, some of them gave birth to children and stayed home with children for several years before deciding to pursue terminal degrees.

Career Paths

Job titles of the various positions the women occupied throughout their professional careers were extracted and compiled into Table 1. Four started out as K-12 school teachers, while four started their careers in various positions within higher education. Hence, eight of the ten president began their professional work careers in education (K-12, post-secondary).

Six presidents had academic career paths while four followed non-academic routes. It was also discovered that only one president followed the *official* traditional male career path (faculty member, chair, dean, academic vice president and/or provost, and president). Two had chair experience (one department chair, one associate chair). One was an academic dean of a core school while two others were deans of graduate studies and continuing education. Three obtained dean experience through being in positions of associate deans of academic schools or

associate deans of continuing education or academics. Three of the presidents became assistants or special assistants to the presidents along their journeys. They described these positions as very valuable to their growth and development.

Other women went through non-traditional career paths related to finance/budgets, community and government relations, non-educational appointments/experience, and Board of Regents or commission support or leadership. Six were, at one time, full-time assistant professors while five continued to associate professor status. Although there are six presidents listed as full professors, only four of the original six are in this group. Two other presidents were awarded the status without going through the ranks of assistant and associate professor (one before becoming president and one afterwards).

Nine of the ten presidents taught in the college classroom as professors or instructors at one time throughout their careers, and not just as a side assignment after they had become high level administrators. Teaching and research (academics) played an important role in the development of knowledge and skills important for post-secondary leadership. A number of presidents on the academic path obtained major grants for research laboratories and experimental research. They spoke of developing many competencies throughout these years related to budgeting, managing people (e.g., hiring, firing, motivating, conflict resolution), and strategy and planning.

Presidents came to their current posts from a variety of positions: five were provosts, vice presidents or vice chancellors of academic affairs; two were vice chancellors/presidents of administration and finance, one was a vice president of university relations, one was in a leadership position in a government agency, and one was a president at another institution.

None of the ten presidents had an official career path targeted at becoming a university president. One claimed, "I thought I was going to be a teacher forever, but I did think I might be a department chair. By the time I was 40, however, I was wondering what I was going to do with the rest of my life. I did not plan to go into administration. It just happened." Most stated that they began thinking about becoming a president when they were vice presidents. One stated, "I never thought that I could possibly be a university president." Another explained, "I did not think about becoming a president until after I became a provost. I did not think about becoming a provost until I was far enough in a deanship and worked closely with the provost. Eventually I thought, 'I could do that!'" A third explained, "Before I became a dean I watched them and thought to myself, 'I could do that better than they could.' I did the same for all my positions after that." Another said, "I did not think about a presidency until the president I worked for as a vice president told me I could be a president. I still did not believe it until people from the community called me, and people at the university encouraged me to do so. I was surprised." One president did say that she thought of becoming a president before her provost position. She said, "When I was assistant to the president I became an ACE fellow. That is when I decided I wanted to become a president. Then I made a plan for next steps and followed it."

A number of presidents spoke about their promotions in higher education. One president mentioned, "The best positions I have had, I've actually not sought out." One woman explained, "I believe what my father taught me. He always said that the way to get your next best job is to do as well as you can in the one you're currently in." A third claimed that one of her early mentors said, "If you do the job you're doing well enough, the next one will find you." She said that she believes that up to a point that is true. Three stated in various parts of the interviews that they seemed to *fall into* new and more challenging positions.

Some of the presidents mentioned the influential individuals around them who gave them ideas or encouragement to take opportunities (new positions, new responsibilities within current positions, and new institutions). The women were influenced by these individuals who planted ideas in their minds, like "you can do it." In most situations, these women did not have one mentor but listened to many different voices. One president explained, "I based my career decisions on other trusted individuals' ideas." Another president told about the following incident:

> As a junior faculty member, one very influential senior faculty member took me aside and said, "I feel compelled to tell you something. I'm going to give you some advice, and I want you to think about it and do whatever you want with it." He said, "You have an uncanny ability to see right straight through to the core of a problem. You hold back, listen, and observe, and at a moment when people are struggling you have this ability to move in and say, 'Aren't we really talking about this? Isn't some of what we have been discussing a bit peripheral to what we are really trying to resolve?'" He told me this was unusual. This was the first time someone had said something like this to me."

Many of these presidents said that it was primarily men (not women) who encouraged them and wanted them to obtain promotions. When speaking of her ambitions to become a president, one woman stated, "I never thought I would end up at the level I did. It was never part of my mindset. I did not plan to apply. So many people encouraged me to apply, and I couldn't say no to these people who I respected so much."

Discussion and Conclusions

The educational backgrounds and career paths of the ten women university presidents reveal a history of desire and drive for continuous learning and development. They possess a

"certain urge to explore, to be scientific" (p. Baruch & Hall, 2004b, p. 248) and to use their cognitive and innovative competencies. They desired to *know why*, as previously described in the "Intelligent Career" framework. This is demonstrated by their history of advanced degrees (master's and doctoral) and their interest, openness, and drive to take on new responsibilities, positions, and opportunities in a variety of areas. They enjoyed challenges and change primarily because of the opportunities these provided for ongoing personal and professional development and the chance it gave them to make a difference for the institutions, organizations, or individuals they worked for and/or served. Their desire to *know why* also relates to their need for service or their idealism or sense of duty.

The presidents also had a deep need for "knowing how" (Baruch & Hall, 2004b), which is the second dimension in Arthur et al.'s (1995) framework. The presidents saw the need for changes and improvements and thought deeply about how to create solutions to issues at hand. They asked questions, observed, and reflected on how effective individuals were able to have the influence they did. They had the desire to strengthen their skills and found satisfaction when competencies (e.g., cerebral abilities, emotional intelligence, and resilience) were developed or strengthened. Although the third dimension (knowing whom) was not addressed in this paper, data were collected in the larger study. This data show that these women developed the unique ability to network and connect (often for life) with influential individuals throughout their educational experiences and professional positions, including mentors, coaches, peers, supervisors, and even subordinates.

Interestingly, half of the presidents as young adults chose education majors as undergraduates and six obtained educational doctorate degrees. They were interested in teaching and learning as a profession as nine had teaching as their primary part-time or full-time vocation

for at least a time. Although they obtained various degrees during their bachelor's degree

programs, all women expressed interest and passion in the math and science area and spoke of

the joy they found in logic and rationality. Although these women had self-esteem, they were not

willing to pursue their interests at all costs (e.g., majoring in math and science without support

systems in place). They knew they wanted to graduate and made compromises if it appeared that

they were not in a win-win situation. A majority of the women spoke of the ineffective

counselors or counseling assistance available for young women in past decades. It appears that

helpful and effective counseling is now a priority at their current institutions, possibly in part

because of these past negative experiences. Most of the women were wives and mothers during

at least part of their educational preparation and during most of their professional careers. None

of these women regretted having children and most of them brightened and smiled as they talked

of their children and grandchildren.

The data regarding the positions they held previous to their current position were similar

to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2005) data already presented (47 percent of women were

previously provosts or chief academic officers). However, this sample differs from the general

Chronicle sample in that 80 percent (instead of 55 percent) had vice president/chancellor post

immediately before becoming presidents at their current institutions. The samples are

comparable with regard to educational backgrounds and tenured faculty appointments. The

educational and professional backgrounds of this sample also compared well to Walton and

McDade's (2001) sample of women chief academic officers. Most of the women had

backgrounds that included teaching, scholarship, curriculum development and evaluation,

budgeting, political skills, and the business of higher education. All had positions that helped

them learn to work well with all types of people, the ability to solve problems, and the capacity

to provide leadership.

A major finding of this research is the value of informal or non-linear career paths for

women. This research supported findings from other researchers (i.e., Aldoory, 1998; Cheng,

1988; Hartman, 1999; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Vinnicobme & Singh, 2003; Waring, 2003) that

successful women leaders did not intentionally look for leadership positions, but instead worked

hard, performed to the best of their abilities, and were encouraged by others to apply for new

positions or were just offered increased responsibilities or promotions. None of the presidents

expressed regret that they took this indirect path. None said they wished they had done things

substantially differently. All said that each position they filled provided them with the

opportunity to learn and develop essential knowledge and competencies that have been

imperative for success in their current posts. In fact, when the presidents spoke about each

position listed in Table 1, they reminisced about what each had taught them and how it was

helpful in their current presidency positions. Yet, every woman took a different path. This

research supports the notion that various career paths can lead to top leadership positions in

academe. Although there are a set of common presidents' issues, activities (as outlined in the

2005 *Chronicle of Higher Education* summary), and competencies that had to be learned for

adequate presidential performance, the presidents demonstrated that these can be learned from a

variety of positions and experiences. These can include membership or leadership on committees

(Chrisler, Herr, & Murstein, 1998; Twale & Shannon, 1996), conducting research and writing

grants, and experiences related to opportunities to exert informal influence.

The presidents have a passion for learning and growth. And, with this passion has come a

desire and ability to learn from nearly everything (e.g., formal and informal positions,

responsibilities, experiences, mistakes, observations, successes, feedback from others, and even motherhood). Some researchers argue that women should decide early and plan more direct career paths toward their intended leadership goals. However, it is clear that these women became the leaders they are today because of every differing career opportunity. Each president leads differently because of the insights she gained from past lived experiences. All of the presidents found institutions that benefit from the breadth and depth each attained from their lifelong collage of learning. The richness of their current perspectives and insights can be attributed to the powerfulness of the variety of career and service choices and opportunities. Their desire to perform to the best of their abilities in each position or assignment, without the constant questioning of how each task and title would help them attain a higher position, has a quality of selflessness that benefits those who truly desire to make a difference for their students, and in their institutions, communities, and beyond. It is the journey that has brought lifelong richness to their lives.

As mentioned previously, there is little research currently published on the leadership development of women university presidents. Similar research with presidents of teaching-focused and community college institutions would be insightful. Larger samples could also lead to wider generalizability. Although empirical data would also be helpful, additional studies that delve into the president's perceptions and experiences would be most valuable in developing applicable and rigorous models of leadership for women interested in academic leadership. Future research agendas should also include gathering data on the differences among generations of leaders. Leadership development programs now include women from multiple generations. These women may have different views on how to serve, why they are serving, and what they think they need to learn and do to be effective (i.e., knowing why, knowing how, and knowing

whom). This paper also offers important implications. Understanding the experiences and

perceptions of these women provides insight into the types of activities, influences, and

experiences that are beneficial for women to develop the needed knowledge, skills, and

competencies required for effective leadership. This research will assist 1) individual women of

all ages interested in personal and career development, and 2) educators, administrators, and

consultants who will be designing future leadership development interventions (e.g., training,

development, individual preparation, mentoring, career management, and self-directed learning).

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Table 1. Job titles/positions of women before becoming university presidents

Title	No.	Title	No.
Accreditation Officer/Coordinator	2	Director of Graduate Programs	1
Adjunct College Instructor	3	Director of Institutional Research	1
Assistant Professor	6	Director of Office of Field Studies	1
Assistant VP for AA	1	Director of Outreach	1
Assistant VP for Community Partnerships	1	Director of Professional Development	1
Assistant VP for Finance	1	Education Coordinator	1
Associate Chair	1	Faculty Union Leader	1
Associate Dean, Academic School	3	Family Counselor	1
Associate Dean for AA	1	Full-time instructor	4
Associate Dean for Continuing Ed.	1	Instructional Developer	1
Associate Director of Continuing Ed.	1	Instructor of Special Programs	1
Associate in HE Opportunity	1	Interim/Acting President or Chancellor	2
Associate Professor	5	K-12 Classroom Teacher	4
Associate VP/VC of Budget and Finance	1	Manager of Budget/Planning	1
Board of Regents Admin./Consultant	3	Non-educational agency director	1
Budget Analyst	1	Principal	1
Business Officer (non-education)	1	Professor	6
Commission on H.E. Adminstration	1	Research Fellow	2
Consultant	2	Researcher, Lab	2
COO (educational setting)	1	Special Assistant/Assistant to the Pres.	3
Curriculum Development, Chair/Coordin.	2	Teaching Assistant	1
Dean, Academic School	1	Vice Provost	1
Dean, Undergraduate Programs	1	VP of Community Relations	1
Dean, Graduate School	1	VP of Government/Community Relations	1
Department Chair	1	VP of Research	1
Director of Community Leadership	1	VP/VC for Adminstration	2
Program		VP/VC for Finance	2
Director of Finance	1	VP/VC/Provost of AA	5