Leading & navigating: a qualitative inquiry on women[1] leaders, gender equity, and sexuality center work

By

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[1] women - all who experience life through the lens of woman in body, spirit, identity - past, present, future, and fluid (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)

[2] siya – Tagalog gender-neutral pronoun

Dedication – Ialay

This work is dedicated to my partner, my sibling, in-laws, niblings, and cousins - my ancestors and the generations who will follow. This doctorate is just as much yours as it is mine. A deeply personal work, it is a culmination of knowledge, values, and guidance throughout time.

To my parents, Marilou Punzalan Dayoan and Telesforo Aliño Reyes Ambrosio, the aunties, uncles, and extended family: your hard work, courage, and sacrifice made this all possible. As immigrants, you risked it all by leaving your homeland behind to build a better life. Amidst bias, unfair treatment, and inequitable laws and policies, you persisted.

As I continue to reap benefits as a settler in California, I honor and acknowledge the original caretakers of the lands that I have inhabited, including Gabrielino-Shoshone, Tongva, Kizh, Ohlone, Massachusett, and Patwin peoples. With gratitude, I also recognize my role in sharing resources and growing relationships with the communities of Native peoples as we live together as neighbors.

To my WGSC colleagues, before me, who stand alongside me, and those who will come after. Our work is based on the heart, and our stories need to be told.

My hope is that we leave the world in a better place than we found it.

Acknowledgements – Pasasalamat

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the decision-making and navigation strategies of seven current women leaders of campus-based Women, Gender, and Sexuality Centers (WGSCs) at large public research universities across the United States. With a feminist research design and an intersectional feminist lens, leaders illuminated their own personal transformational journeys as a driving force behind their commitment to equity and inclusion work. Recognizing foundational values and early experiences informs the ways they navigate their environments.

As pivotal hubs for gender equity initiatives, WGSCs also serve as platforms for fostering connections and facilitating collaboration, collective strategies, and partnerships. Drawing on a proposed Applied Critical and Intersectional Feminist Leadership framework, the analysis of findings revealed the innovative and unique insights for negotiating power and positionality within higher education institutions. Given the changing landscape within higher education, women's center leaders draw upon their own survival strategies to harness solutions to our most complex problems today.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Purpose Statement

> Imagine if all leaders in the world approached the work from [the place of paving an easier path for those who come after them]. There likely would be more peace, more justice, more kindness, and more love. We need more [women] leaders, now more than ever.
>
> (McManus, 2018, p.172)

Overview

In the early years of women, gender, and sexuality centers (hereafter, WGSC[3] or women's centers) starting in the 1960s, WGSCs focused on the emerging campus population of mainly middle-class white cisgender women matriculating into colleges and universities after the women's rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Astin & Parelman, 1973; Bengiveno, 2000; Blair-Medeiros & Nelson-Alford, 2021; Boxer, 1982; Keniston, 1970; Stineman, 1984; Tobias, 1978). Under the larger category of identity centers, which are institutionally supported spaces created to support a hxrstorically[4] marginalized or minoritized group (Magolda & Baxter Magolda, 2011), women's centers sprung up across colleges and universities in the United States (U.S.). For some, these centers have been hubs of feminism and critical spaces of resistance (Davie, 2002; Marine, 2011). By the late 1980s, there were as many as 2700 centers (as cited in Saucier, 2019, p. 1). As of the publication of this study, the number of women's centers had decreased to approximately 260 remaining centers (Women's Center Committee, National

[3] WGSC –women, gender, and sexuality centers; this acronym is expanded from campus-based women's centers to acknowledge how center names and missions have evolved to recognize the broader work including gender and sexuality that many centers have adopted over time. Also, important to note is the evolution of the work to support a broader definition of gender.

[4] hxrstory(ies) - term to reject patriarchal domination. With this alternative spelling, the author resists a tradition of our lives being written under a "his-story" of colonizing patriarchy. Hxrstories center stories as womxn of color as a process of decolonization and liberation. (Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari, 2017, p.102).

Women's Studies Association, 2020). This overall reduction included “defunding” (Saucier, 2019), center closures, repurposing, or reorganization (Bonebright et al., 2012; Davie, 2002).

As higher education has shifted over 60 years since the founding of the first WGSCs, center missions have evolved from supporting the career development of women, many of whom were returning to complete their degrees to developing empowerment programs and reducing barriers to women’s advancement campuswide. Specifically, center leaders have continued to advocate for policies to improve the campus climate, to provide support resources for those harmed by sexual harassment and sexual violence, and to increase a sense of belonging and advancement of women, especially in STEM fields (Byrne, 2000; Davie, 2002; Rettke, 1979). Kunkel (2002) and Willinger (2002) described a phenomenon where women’s center priorities shift based on a balance between the disparate needs of campus administration, the institution, and center constituents. In reality, there are times when these priorities conflict (Davie, 2002). Ensuring the continued existence of WGSC remains a significant part of WGSC leader work. Through a qualitative design, this study sought to illuminate not only women’s center leaders’ strategies but also the tenets behind their work in what seem to be otherwise neutral or even male-dominated spaces of higher education administration.

Contemporary leaders of campus-based WGSC remain steadfast in their values. With a unique perspective, they traverse a complex context where women graduate at impressive rates and yet some patterns of behavior that harm women persist (Alexander & McKendry, 2023). Record numbers of women have been elected to U.S. Congress and reflect improvement in the state of affairs for women. In stark contrast, however, the simultaneous backdrop of women bearing a disproportionate burden during the recent global pandemic and the 2022 overturn of Roe v. Wade exist. The post-facts era and “modern sexism” (Valentino et al., 2018) punctuate

the antiquated attitudes about women's value in society and the stereotypes of who are considered leaders and what actions they take continue to exist in American society.

Status of Women

Women hxrstorically have been oppressed (Jaggar, 1997, 2002; Omvedt, 1986) and occupy a subordinated position (Fonow & Cook, 1991). The descriptor "second class citizens" has meant access to less power and fewer rights, protections, and resources compared to cisgender men, usually, white and straight, who, in patriarchal society, are considered to be the dominant. The feminine, or by extension, the feminized[5] are devalued due to these patriarchal systems denoting that what is not masculine is treated as less than, looked down upon, or seen as inferior. This is the manifestation of misogyny and its intersectional forms of transmisogyny and misogynoir (Battered Women's Support Services, 2018). Furthermore, systemic racial disparities complicate how privileges extend to white cisgender heterosexual (cishet) men more so compared to other genders, cisgender and trans, who are also hxrstorically marginalized. One example that illustrates this disparity is the continuing gender pay gap (see Figure 1.1), especially for those multiply marginalized, and the years it will take to achieve pay equity (American Association of University Women, 2020). Because women also carry a larger amount of student debt (American Association of University Women, 2021; Hanson, 2023), the issue compounds because it takes longer to pay off loans given pay inequities (See Figure 1.2). Thus, the gender gap pervades (American Association of University Women, 2021). Overall, current

[5] feminized - make (something) more characteristic of or associated with women (https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/feminize); akin to the term minoritized (Harper, 2012, p. 9), author uses this term to refer to people who are oppressed because of systemic structures like sexism and genderism; it is the perceived association with woman in a gender binary; examples are feminized work.

research still needs to expand to include information for trans, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and gender expansive people.

Figure 1.1

Women's Median Annual Earnings by race/ethnicity. (American Association of University Women, 2020)

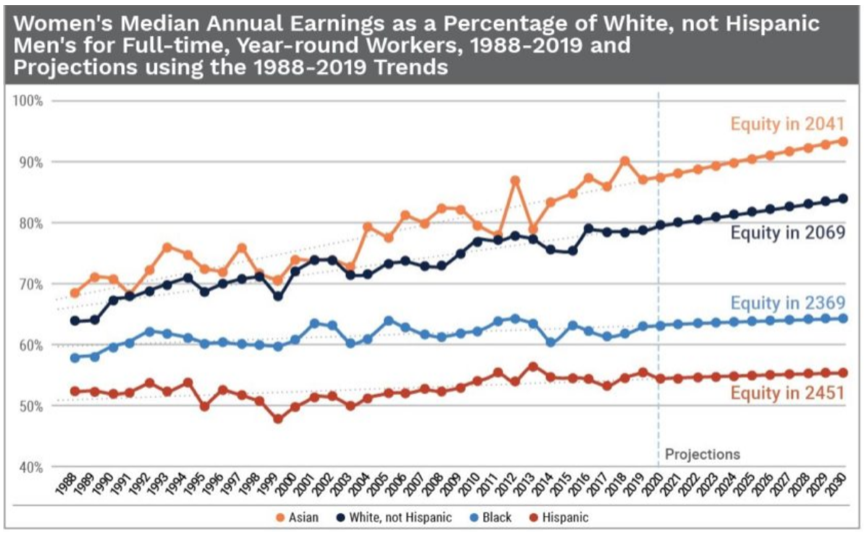
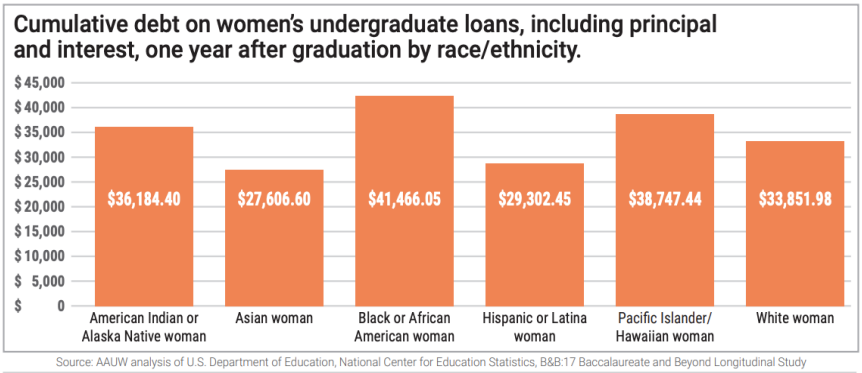


Figure 1.2

Cumulative debt on women's undergraduate loans by race/ethnicity. (American Association of University Women, 2021)



Efforts to promote global gender equality encompass a wide range of initiatives, such as, the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (UN Women, 2007) and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Goal 5, which aims to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations, n.d.). Vestiges of exclusion and subordination of non cishet men, extend beyond cishet women to encompass transgender, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and gender expansive people, as well as those who are marginalized based on their sexual orientation (The Nation, 2007; Pharr, 1988). In general, these groups of people face discrimination because they do not conform to traditional or conventional societal expectations, particularly regarding gender roles or gender expression of behaviors associated with the gender associated with their sex assigned at birth. Unfortunately, these people are often perceived as deviating from the norm, and they may encounter prejudice, social stigmatization, and violence. For those who hold multiple marginalizations, the consequences are even higher. In 2020, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest national lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer civil rights organization, tracked at least 38 fatal deaths of transgender and gender nonconforming people, many who were Black and Latinx transgender women (Human Rights Campaign, 2019). Throughout this study, I will refer to these oppressed groups collectively as hxrstorically marginalized or those who hold multiple marginalizations. Further, I use this grouping to illustrate the interconnectedness of sexism, misogyny, homophobia, heterosexism, cissexism, transphobia, and transmisogyny. Gendered expectations and the conflation of gender and sex terms compound the manifestations of sexism and misogyny that continue to plague various sectors of society – in the community at large, in institutions like higher education, in the workplace, in policies, and in life at home.

Statement of the Problem

The changing landscape within higher education in the United States is unprecedented (Bonebright et al., 2012; Daninhirsch, 2023; Marri et al., 2022; Staley & Trinkle, 2011; Taylor et al., 2023; Tomlinson, 2023). Looking back to the circumstances surrounding the global pandemic in 2020, protests highlighting the violence against Black citizens, a worsening economy, and current political leadership not only compound the challenges of being in a resource-constrained environment but also a climate where misogyny, transmisogyny, misogynoir, racism, cissexism, homophobia, and xenophobia manifested themselves. Arguably, these are the very things that WGSC stands against. In the current climate, characterized by a disregard for objective facts, the true nature of oppression often gets clouded as attention shifts from verifiable information to emotional narratives (Bluemle, 2018). The emergence of a "new normal" has been characterized by shrinking campus budgets, burgeoning campus populations, and dwindling staff numbers. Now, these circumstances have intensified the burden on women's centers and their leaders to demonstrate the ongoing relevance of their services. This heightened expectation coincides with the existing challenge faced by higher education administrators in justifying resource allocations. The context is further complicated by the influence of the backlash on women's rights, the post Dobbs and Affirmative Action decisions, #MeToo movement, the dynamics of the 2016, 2020, and upcoming election cycles, climate change, and the conflicts worldwide like in Gaza, Sudan, and Ukraine. These circumstances set the stage for critical decisions, such as potential budget reductions and the possibility of closing centers (Kasper, 2004; Sweeney, 1978).

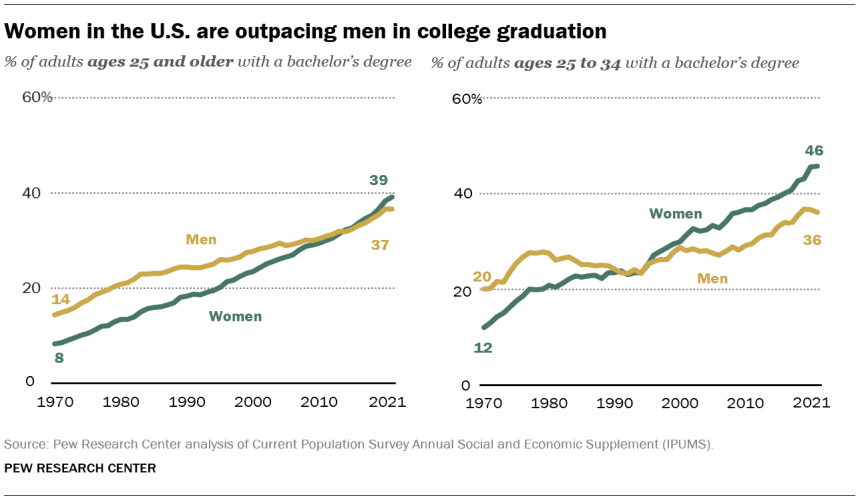
Furthermore, it is essential for WGSC leaders to underscore the transformative opportunities provided by these centers for the communities they serve, namely, those who are

marginalized and navigate life from the perspective of "woman" in body, spirit, and identity—across past, present, future, and fluid contexts. This emphasis is particularly critical amidst the growing restrictions on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts as we recover globally poet-pandemic, where women, especially those facing multiple marginalizations, disproportionately bear the brunt of its effects.

Given pressures, such as funding, interpretation of laws and policies, some centers have closed (Barajas, 2022; Saucier, 2019). There is also perception that because more women are in school and graduating at higher rates (Parker, 2021; Fry, 2022; Johnson, 2016; Johnson et al, 2023) that women's centers are no longer needed (Bethman et al., 2019). There is also critique that WGSCs are not on the same level as an academic department, such as, women studies or gender studies (Devi, 2015). There are, however, advocates who see the need for these centers (Bethman et al., 2019; Gould-Wartofsky & Troychansky, 2004; Santovec, 2014, Saucier, 2019).

Figure 1.3

Women in the U.S. are outpacing men in college graduation (Parker, 2021)



While the number of women on college campuses has increased, gender inequities persist. First, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has still not been ratified in all states. Second, the persistent pay gap (https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2020/02/Simple-Truth-Update-2019_v2-002.pdf) continues to disadvantage women, especially Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and Queer & Trans Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC). Third, there is a need to increase women's representation in specific fields (Ganley et al., 2017) like STEM, which are better compensated. Fourth, there is the unfortunate reality of a larger proportion of women experiencing intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking (Breiding, 2015). Fifth, old world paradigms of "motherhood" still serve as penalty for women who parent (https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2020/02/Simple-Truth-Update-2019_v2-002.pdf). Globally speaking, U.N. Chief warned about the "backlash against women's rights [that] is threatening, and in some cases reversing, progress in developing and developed countries alike." (Lederer, 2024).

As a scholar-practitioner in higher education, it is essential to contribute to the minimal research centered on women center leaders. This sheds light on the understudied community of leader activists who need to be nimble given the changing needs of their students, faculty, staff, post-doctoral appointees, and the university community (Ashlee, 2019; Bethman et al., 2019; Davie, 2002). A key component is selecting leaders who come from hxrstorically marginalized groups and hold multiple marginalization. Utilizing an intersectional feminist lens, this study examined the navigation strategies of women WGSC leaders by honing-in on how their interlocking identity dimensions gives them unique and innovative insights and solutions to today's most complex problems. Campus administration and decision-makers often lack understanding about the value that women's centers and those who lead them provide beyond

just increasing participation of women in the college and university environments. This study is an effort to document that value.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore women's center leaders' navigation strategies and what they think about the future of WGSCs. It is essential to recognize the work of campus-based women's centers at 4-year public institutions of higher education. These strategies include: (1) the ways center leaders navigate campus climates and campus resources, (2) the tenets on which they base their decision-making, and (3) the systemic contexts in which these centers produce work. This study explored how a select group of leaders of designated feminist spaces made a difference in the campus experience and how these centers served as gateways for feminism (Davie, 2002; Marine, 2011; Wright-Nair & Marine, 2019) that focus on and advance the rights of all women and those feminized on college campuses. Moreover, it important to illustrate how these higher education leaders navigate policies that do not center the experiences and needs of women, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and gender expansive people. Finally, the study highlights feminist leadership where connections and relationships created by WGSC are valued.

Significance of Study

Bengiveno (2000), Bethman et al., (2019), Davie (2002), Kupo and Castellon (2018), and Marine (2011) acknowledged the imperative to expand research efforts concerning women and gender centers due to the existing scarcity of scholarly work in this domain. Additionally, there is little known about the organizational leaders who direct these centers and how they maneuver within the politics of higher education administration. The goals of women's centers are always

changing; even the choices that they must confront are constantly in the process of transformation (Davie, 2002). Priorities shift to keep centers open as leaders respond to the changing landscape in higher education. Understanding how women leaders navigate the continuously evolving terrain is crucial, especially in the context of higher education institutions, where leadership roles are predominantly occupied by men (Johnson, 2017). Furthermore, the contributions from this study can provide a guide for current women's center staff, those aspiring to be WGSC or identity center directors, as well as administrators who supervise these leaders to consider intentional practices (Nicolazzo et al., 2018) and alternatives to traditional and dominant leadership structures (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012).

Due to the contemporary hostilities towards marginalized groups in general, Wright-Nair & Marine (2019) point out that spaces like women's centers in higher education are urgently needed as hubs of feminist praxis, WGSC-centered reflection, and dialogue (Bethman et al., 2019). This study serves as a case for the enduring significance of women's centers in advancing the diversity and inclusion objectives of campuses, offering crucial opportunities for transformation to the broader campus community, as emphasized by Patton (2011). Furthermore, it aims to investigate the extent to which national trends, social movements, and changes in the higher education landscape influence: (1) the evolving needs of the communities WGSC serves and (2) the strategies and actions that leaders undertake to address.

Research Questions

To understand how women leaders navigate their experiences in higher education, this study asks the following research questions:

(RQ1) How do women leaders navigate institutions of higher education as leaders of campus-based women gender and sexuality centers (WGSC)?

(RQ2) How do women leaders view the future of campus-based WGSC in a changing landscape of higher education?

In the next chapter, I will expand on the current literature surrounding women's centers in higher education and research on leadership theories. I start with sharing operational definitions before giving background on women's centers. Next, I describe the theoretical frameworks that ground this study. Then, I move through a hxrstorical overview and then into a summary of the research on WGSC, specifically women in leadership studies. To conclude, I introduce leadership theories that inform the proposed leadership model for analysis.

Chapter 2: Relevant Literature

This study draws inspiration from feminist thought, intersectionality, and third wave feminism. This conceptual framework highlights the worldview (Saldaña, 2011) centering multiple marginalized voices. To start, I begin this chapter with operational definitions to set an understanding for terms. Next, I delve into the hxrstorical context around the status of women in American society along with examining research on (1) campus-based women, gender, and sexuality centers (WGSC or women's center) and (2) those who lead these spaces. Then, I will include a hxrstorical timeline of the evolution of these centers. The following section will expand on theoretical frameworks, summary of relevant students and concluding with leadership theories.

Operational Definitions

There are terms that will be frequently used in this study. It is important to acknowledge that there are many frames of thought around language. In this section, I define and operationalize these terms to establish a common understanding.

1. gender binary – going beyond the normative categories of man and woman (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)
2. cisgender – term used to describe people who, for the most part, identify as the gender they were assigned at birth (cis is Latin for "on the near side of", "on the same side of") (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019).
3. feminism – refers to the recognition of the systemic oppression against women (Griggs, 1989, p. 7); "(f)eminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression (hooks, 1984, 2000)

4. feminist leadership – refers to the theory and practice of leadership emerging from the Women's Movement of the 1960s. Although fluid and open to change and modification, feminist leadership is characterized by a non-hierarchical and participatory organizational structure (Griggs, 1989, p. 8)
5. gender – a socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of femininity and masculinity to people (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019). Gender characteristics can change over time and are different between cultures. Previously, "gender" was used as a code word for "woman" even before California's Proposition 209, a ballot measure that prohibited considering race, sex or ethnicity in public education, employment and contracting.
6. gender equity – a move to bring all genders to have same level of power (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)
7. gender expansive – Someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression expands beyond, actively resists, and/or does not conform to the current cultural or social expectations of gender, particularly in relation to male or female. (https://itgetsbetter.org/glossary/gender-nonconforming/)
8. gender nonconforming – term for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)
9. heterosexism – part of a greater institutional structure of social organization which results in the assumption that every person is heterosexual, further marginalizing persons who identify as LGBTQ+ by exclusion from spaces, legislature, etc. (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)

10. homophobia – discrimination against people who are either lesbian or gay. Bisexual and pansexual people may also face homophobia in particular contexts. (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)
11. hxrstory(ies) – term to reject patriarchal domination. With this alternative spelling, the author resists a tradition of our lives being written under a "his-story" of colonizing patriarchy. Hxrstories center stories as womxn of color as a process of decolonization and liberation. (Ashlee et al., 2017, p. 102)
12. intersectionality – term coined by Crenshaw in 1989; "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage" (Oxford English Dictionary, p. 1).
13. intersectional feminism – "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (Steinmetz, 2020, p. 2).
14. LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. The '+' signifies that one may identify with a sexual orientation or gender identity that is not represented within this acronym but would still be considered a part of the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., pansexual) (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)
15. nonbinary – term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)
16. second wave – feminism refers to the period of activity in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s when women's cultural and political inequalities were seen as inextricably linked to aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structures (Gender and Water Network Central Asia, n.d.)

17. sexism – Any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behavior based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the purpose or effect of: (Council of Europe, 2019)

    i. violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons; or

    ii. resulting in physical, sexual, psychological, or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or a group of persons; or

    iii. creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment; or

    iv. constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realization of human rights by a person or a group of persons; or

    v. maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes.2

18. SOGI – sexual orientation and gender identity
19. third wave – feminism beginning in the early 1990s seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle-class white women (Gender and Water Network Central Asia, n.d.)
20. third world feminism – The theory and method of oppositional consciousness in the postmodern world (Sandoval, 1991, 2005). ‘Sandoval argues that the third wave of the women's movement needs a “differential consciousness” that will provide “grounds for alliance with other decolonizing movements for emancipation’ (Sandoval, 1991, p. 5).
21. transgender – refers to individuals whose gender identity does not conform with what society has commonly associated with their biological sex. Yet not all transgender people fit into a

masculine/feminine binary. Instead, they may express multiple genders or express a unique gender that is neither completely masculine nor feminine (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)

22. WGSC – campus-based women, gender, and sexuality centers; this acronym is expanded from campus-based women's centers to acknowledge how center names and missions have evolved to recognize the broader work including gender and sexuality that many centers have taken on over time. Also, important to note is the evolution of the WGSC work to support a broader definition of gender.
23. women – a gender term to describe those who identify traditionally with femininity; in this study, all who experience life through the lens of woman in body, spirit, identity - past, present, future, and fluid (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)
24. women's centers – refers to the campus-based women's centers that operate mainly within one campus, offering a range of support services and programs to campus women and viewed as a campus nucleus for providing services to women (Stineman, 1984)
25. women's movement – refers to the most recent women's movement emerging in the United States in the 1960s (Griggs, 1989); sometimes, women's rights or women's liberation

WGSC as Identity Centers

Identity centers (e.g., women's centers, ethnic centers, LGBT centers) serve the needs of their intended constituents or the communities (Magolda & Baxter Magolda, 2011). As institutionally supported spaces, they not only serve as symbols of campus commitment to diversity and equity, but also, Renn (2011) and Patton (2011) shed light on their vital role on campuses in addressing campus climate. However, these scholars diverge around contested ideas of these centers as promoting separation and division, ownership and use of the spaces, and

barriers that further reinforce marginalization (Magolda & Baxter Magolda, 2011). Thomas (2011) added that identity spaces exist to address divisions that "leave students who fall outside of the definition of normal without a sense of community or a safe space on campus" (Magolda & Baxter Magolda, 2011). Further, Patton (2011) calls attention to the long record of discrimination against minoritized groups within higher education (from its inception until the 1960s) as a space controlled solely by white men (Magolda & Baxter Magolda, 2011). It is important to note that WGSCs over the years have been mostly led by women of varied backgrounds, with increased numbers of women of color, queer women, nonbinary people, gender nonconforming people, and gender expansive people. Equally important to recognize, leaders at the highest levels within universities have been typically composed of the most privileged individuals in U.S. society, rich cishet white men. Unfortunately, there is an additional reality that women's centers have been dismantled, closed or, for some, shifted their missions to serve a broader segment of the campus population. All these factors put into question the continued relevance of women's centers in today's higher education environment.

Hxrstory of WGSC

There are about 400 WGSC centers in the United States (Davie, 2002; Kasper, 2004; Marine, 2011; Marine et al., 2017) at public, private, 2-year, and 4-year institutions. While not all centers were created the same across the country, they typically originated by addressing women's needs around *safety, education, support, equity,* and *community* (Davie, 2002). Some of these spaces have their origins in the ongoing education efforts associated with the women's movement of the 1960s, which primarily focused on women, predominantly married white cisgender suburban women, who were returning to college to complete their degrees after extended hiatuses from academic pursuits (Blair-Medeiros & Nelson-Alford, 2021; Davie, 2002;

Eisenmann, 2006). During the postwar era (1945-1965), societal norms for women still emphasized domestic and private sphere roles. However, this period also witnessed a growing population of re-entry women and student parents who prioritized their personal growth and career development. This set the stage for "educational commissions, professional organizations, and continuing education programs [to build] innovative women's research institutes, women's studies programs, and women's resource centers that transformed collegiate campuses only a decade or so later" (Eisenmann, 2006, p. 8) Simultaneously, movements around women's liberation, civil rights, and gay liberation aspired to focus on rights and action. However, these were limited in terms of who the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) served - it was not broad and inclusive as it could be; it was separated along race and class lines. However, this diminished the participation of women of color to domestic workers and service workers. At the onset, spaces began with convening consciousness-raising groups to engage women in dialogue with each other and teaching each other. More contemporarily, centers have similarly expanded goals of creating empowering and community building spaces for hxrstorically marginalized groups, in particular, women, and for some, lesbian gay bisexual transgender queer + (LGBTQ+[6]) individuals, and even men (Bethman et al., 2019).

WGSCs ideally included a physical space where the intended constituents, namely, women gathered, built community, and in many cases, lived feminist values of agency and fostered empowerment (Bethman et al., 2019; Davie, 2003). Work in the women's center encompassed a variety of activities, including policy advocacy, safe/brave space, sexual and dating violence response and advocacy, education and awareness raising, and community

[6] LGBTQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. The '+' signifies that one may identify with a sexual orientation or gender identity that is not represented within this acronym but would still be considered a part of the LGBTQ+ community (e.g. pansexual) (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019).

building (Bethman et al, 2019; Davie, 2002; Kasper, 2004). Some centers primarily addressed programs to support women's students' experiences from persistence to completion. Certain centers, such as the University of Minnesota (Bethman et al., 2019), have mission statements that encompass support for faculty and staff. In such cases, they form partnerships with human resources departments to focus on the career development of employees, from the time they join until their retirement or departure from the university. This illustrates the educational role of WGSC in addressing the professional development needs of women across various age groups and levels of experience, from students to employees. Although women's centers across the United States differentiate themselves based on their specific university contexts and regional nuances, a common thread unites them all: a commitment to advancing gender equity. Marine (2011) identified crucial work of WGSC from a series of focus groups with women's center staff. Consistently, women's centers share three main feminist values around *w*omen's empowerment, safety, and enhanced access to educational equity. In addition, women's centers also served the larger campus community particularly at public universities. For instance, many women's centers educated the campus on important issues like Title IX, sexual violence and sexual harassment, gender equity, participation in academic and sports programs, and family friendly policies - to name a few (https://nwlc.org/issue/education-title-ix/). Partnerships with fellow identity spaces, such as, those focused on ethnic/cultural identities, gender identities/sexual orientations, immigration statuses, disabilities, transfer students, veterans, student parents, or if one is first generation, low-income, foster youth, formerly incarcerated, or undocumented validated the complexity of identity and community (Bethman et al., 2019; Davie, 2002).

Changing Landscape

Since the inception of women's centers, or WGSC, in the 1960s and 70s, the landscape of college campuses has and continues to change (Bethman et al., 2019; Davie, 2002). This meant that leaders needed to be responsive to both these shifting community needs and their contexts; generally covering safety, education, support, equity, and community (Davie, 2002). In the beginning, being adaptable meant having to learn about and address the needs of the campus women's community and continuing to navigate a majority male-led environment in higher education.

As the United States recently recognized one hundred years of the 19th Amendment and the women's right to vote in 2020, it is important to acknowledge the strides for women that have made along with the work around gender equity. In higher education, women's matriculation and completion rates surpass rates of men, especially men of color. Activists have fought hard to make changes in laws and policies that recognize women's rights and personhood informed by the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the Civil Rights Movement, and Gay Liberation (Blair-Medeiros & Nelson-Alford, 2021; Eisenmann, 2006). Just some time ago, more contemporary movements like the LeanIn Movement and Ban Bossy signal the continued lack of representation of women in leadership positions and the campaigns to address the inherent sexism women leaders face. Some centers incorporated these issues in their educational programming, invited speakers like Sheryl Sandberg, or began book clubs to provide spaces for much needed dialogue on voice and power. The #MeToo Movement and TimesUp ignited a global reckoning with sexual violence and gender-based inequality (UC Berkeley SVSH Annual Report 2018-2019). The persistence of sexual harassment and sexual violence in the 21st century in our communities nationwide continued to be an issue and the

spotlight provided a necessary spark to transform support and accountability (Alexander & McKendry, 2023; Blair-Medeiros & Alford-Nelson, 2021).

Center Challenges

Messages that women might not need WGSC spaces anymore crop up with the increased success of women students matriculating and graduating college at higher rates than men (Johnson, 2017). While some campuses have closed actual women's centers (Saucier, 2019) and closed campus identified women's spaces (Jaschik, 2016) often citing budget and resource issues, other schools have repurposed these centers, expanding services to all students of all genders (dela Peña, 2009; Jaschik, 2016; Saucier, 2019). Campuses without existing women's focused centers might see campus activists working to establish these spaces (Gould-Wartofsky & Troychansky, 2004; Santovec 2014).These actions exposed an implicit suggestion about how campus decision-makers either undervalued or underestimated the significance of WGSC spaces and their work. This stands in contrast to what Renn (2011) proposed, as campus administrators might be reluctant to associate their institution with the closure of a women's center or a similar identity, especially when the campus climate highlights ongoing inequities (Magolda & Baxter Magolda, 2011).

Patton (2006) illuminated the pressures that administrators for identity centers like Black Cultural Centers faced to make the case for continued or additional funding as institutional budgets tightened. In parallel, innovative and creative responses sprung from the philosophical and fiscal pressures encountered by WGSC leaders. For example, at the University of California, Irvine, their Cross-Cultural Center re-established the Womxn's Hub through shared goals (https://womenshub.uci.edu/about-us/herstory.php). In more recent years, men and masculinity

work have increased in prominence and have been added to the WGSC repertoire (Bethman et al., 2019). For some campuses, this has included addressing sexual violence and harassment by engaging men in the conversation and ultimately creating Men and Masculinity positions. These spaces, with a focus on addressing men's violence against women, embarked on an intriguing partnership facilitated by interest convergence. This approach involved deliberate collaboration with fraternities, athletic teams, and coaches to encourage cultural shifts addressing sexism and other forms of oppression within these predominantly male-dominated environments. Moreover, the highest donations consistently come from the Greek Life sector. Ironically, it is these spaces that have been labelled as hotspots for sexual harassment and sexual violence. Examples encompass programs such as the Coaching Boys into Men Playbook, an evidence-based initiative by Futures Without Violence originally implemented in middle schools and now adapted for college settings. Additionally, campaigns like It's On US, initiated by the Obama-Biden White House in response to recommendations from the White House Task Force to Prevent Sexual Assault, aim to engage everyone in discussions on sexual assault prevention (source: https://www.itsonus.org/history/). Educational efforts also include screenings and discussions of films like The Mask You Live In, which explores themes of masculinity and identity (source: http://therepresentationproject.org/film/the-mask-you-live-in-film/).

Expansion of Gender Discourse

Contemporary understandings about gender in the United States have shifted since the creation of WGSC in the 1960s/1970s. These have expanded with new and ever-changing language to recognize the complexity of gender, including agender, transgender, nonbinary people, gender nonconforming people, and gender expansive people to name a few. Gender was generally viewed and depicted in a binary way – man and woman. Moving beyond this gender

binary, the evolving understanding of gender, gender identity, and gender expression in American society has very much impacted what gender work looks like on the college campus (Marine et al., 2017). With the establishment of campus-based LGBTQ+ centers not far behind WGSCs, there have been questions about when the WGSC work ends and the LGBTQ+ work begins. One of the chapters in Bethman et al. (2019) expanded upon the relationship between women's and LGBTQ+ centers as informed by philosophical, structural, and institutional factors. Goettsch, McCauley, and Thompson (2019) also point out that both centers need to address changes in the relationships between gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality work. As a staff member of a former women's center, several women's center colleagues have shared that they have been questioned by their administrators about doing gender expansive work. Many times, the central concern is that the perception of this work as overlapping with LGBTQ+ centers work. As a scholar-practitioner, I find that these are the types of challenges that help higher education practitioners think about the future of higher education. Expanding conversations provide opportunities to learn from each other and address the everyday manifestations of sexism, cissexism, homophobia, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression. The approaches are complex. For example, a leader can utilize culturally relevant practices to help centers persist and advance feminist principles that lead to more diverse and inclusive environments.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study serves to highlight women leaders' experiences and strategies as informed by the multi-dimensional aspects of their identity. This lens helps the researcher set boundaries in order "to view the area of interest more acutely" (Roberts, 2010, p. 130). Being rooted in feminist theory, intersectionality, and third wave feminism prompted me to

consider systems of power, privilege and oppression and the interplay with positionality. This informed the research design by incorporating intentional questions for reflection and discussion. Applying these theories narrows the "goals of feminist educational research include dismantling systems of oppression, highlighting gender-based disparities, and seeking new ways of constructing knowledge" (Freeman, 2019, p.1). As the contemporary understanding of gender broadens, it is important to recognize how those who are gender expansive, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary may be impacted by these expectations.

Feminist Theory

One of the theories framing this study draws from hooks' (1984, 2000) works on feminism and feminist theory. *Feminist theory from Margin to Center* examined looking beyond the current understandings at the time of feminism where the focus was on gender only, a single dimension of identity; thus, distancing Black women and women of color from the feminist movement. A critique of feminism has been that it centers primarily or exclusively on white women's needs and experiences. These experiences were different from those of Black women and white women of different class backgrounds.

Next, hooks (1984) defined feminism as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. 1). By acknowledging the systemic problem, hooks provided an alternative way to look at the issue that did not pit women against men. Moreover, hooks named patriarchy as the central problem, and it looked to further education, solidarity, storytelling, and activism as a solution. While "feminism" is a limited definition, Black feminist thought shifted this framework on feminist theory by looking deeper and more critically at the everyday experiences of the broader women's population. hooks' later work, *Feminism is for Everybody*, illustrated the point of using accessible language to reach those who might not have had the benefit of an

extensive education, yet still experienced oppression and exploitation as a normal and expected part of women's existence.

hooks' analyzed and acknowledged the interconnectedness of gender, race, and class. In selecting the respondents, it was important to look at multiplicity of identity and how each leader brought their own unique perspective and innovation. Further, she not only served to illuminate the specific experiences of women of color, poor white women, and most American women who have been ignored by the academy, but also, encouraged other scholars and activists to shed light on the complexity of women's experiences beyond a monolithic archetype of feminism. This aligned with Crenshaw's (1989) later work on intersectionality.

Intersectionality

The second part of this study's framework is intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). As coined by a leading scholar on critical race theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw argues the need for an intersectional approach that focuses on a multiple-axis rather than single-axis framework when looking at equity. Using three court cases, Crenshaw (1989) illustrates the ways that Black women lose out because their unique positions are not considered within gender or race protections; there were no options for finding resolution that considered gender and race. Unfortunately, the analysis only used a singular lens of identity. As a result, Black women were often overlooked when examining the Black community, as the focus tended to prioritize issues faced by Black men. Additionally, Black women were not regarded as capable of representing the needs of white women when viewed from a woman's perspective; racism played a significant role in this perception. This set the stage for Crenshaw (1989) to offer a different framework that includes gender and race together. Of course, this meant looking at other dimensions of identity to highlight unique ways that communities were treated. Most importantly, Crenshaw (1989) also

encouraged moving beyond the status quo and considering the needs of the most disadvantaged would also benefit a greater number of people, specifically, those not as marginalized. Crenshaw described it most poignantly as "[w]hen they enter, we all enter." (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 167). Intersectionality illustrates the interplay between *any* kinds of discrimination, whether it's based on gender, race, age, class, socioeconomic status, physical or mental ability, gender or sexual identity, religion, or ethnicity (International Women's Development Agency, 2018). Incorporating a demographic questionnaire with open ended questions allowed for respondents to talk about their whole self. Applying this to feminism created intersectional feminism that broadens the ideas to include women of all identities.

Intersecting Identities

Using Black Feminist Thought as a starting point for analysis, Hill Collins (2006) sees intersectionality as "a crisscross system of oppressions" (p. 7) and this interacts with "matrix of domination" which is about "the organization of power in society" (p. 8). Furthermore, Hill Collins (2006) underscores the dynamic nature of experiences, emphasizing the concept of intersecting oppressions and how it can manifest uniquely for each individual while also remaining adaptable in its expression. There exist central themes that connect various groups in terms of shared experiences, yet these themes are flexible enough not to impose rigid conformity upon individuals.

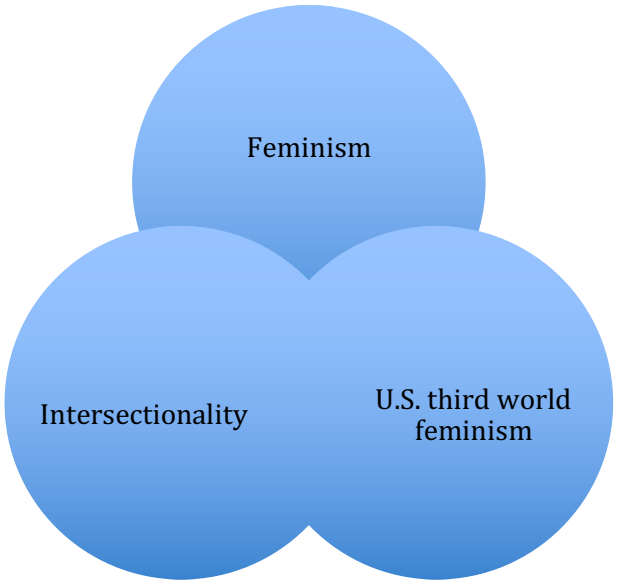
U.S. Third World Feminism

The third piece of the overall theoretical framework is U.S. third world feminism, which came to resist the white Second-Wave Feminists' focus on a singular dimension of analyzing gender oppression (Herr, 2014). Building on intersectionality, this theory recognized the complex and connected reality of how oppressions functioned in various locations (Davidson et

al., 1995). It started with women of color from different geographies finding similarities when they shared stories of oppression (Davidson et al., 1995). As Sandoval (2000) notes, “It comprised a formulation capable of aligning U.S. movements for social justice not only with each other, but with global movements toward decolonization” (p. 75). In summary, the chosen theories and methodology played a pivotal role in framing this study as they address the criticisms directed at Second Wave Feminism and work towards greater inclusivity. They also acknowledge the intricate nature of women's intersectional experiences. Hxrstorically, when viewed through a dominant lens, marginalized women leaders have often been underrecognized and undervalued. By selecting participants from this group, the study aims to shed light on these often-overlooked narratives and their problem-solving abilities. This research endeavor has the potential to illuminate the distinctive stories of non-dominant leadership.

Figure 2.1

Theoretical Framework



Theoretically, I drew from hooks (1984, 2000), Crenshaw (1989), Hill-Collins (2006), and Sandoval (2000) to examine the strategies that women leaders used to move through the higher education environment. Institutionally funded Women's and Gender Studies Centers (WGSCs) face increased vulnerability to closure or repurposing if they are perceived as not meeting the needs of the campus community. While traditionally serving a diverse range of affiliates at student, staff, and faculty levels, assessing the effectiveness of these spaces solely based on women's population statistics may no longer be appropriate in 2020.

Hxrstory of Women's Rights and Feminisms

Much of the hxrstory written about the struggle for women's rights in the United States initially centered on a specific community – white middle-class women (hooks, 2000). Unfortunately, marginalized groups were excluded from the historical record (hooks, 2000) and educational curriculum (Maurer et al., 2017). Understanding the historical context gives insight into the creation, interpretation and application of laws and policies (Woolcock et al., 2011). When history is incomplete or non-dominant perspectives are not considered, this can result in legislation that does not work for all or conditions that do not take everyone into consideration. To illustrate, using a single-dimension lens to identity resulted in discriminatory laws (Crenshaw, 1989). It is precisely a broader multi-dimensional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989) that this study argues for so that future generations can have a fuller and more complete understanding of the nuances and realities within multiple communities.

Changes in Legislation and Policies

In 1923, suffragists Alice Paul and Crystal Eastman introduced what they had written to Congress. What is not widely known is that Native American women and African American

women and African American men (PBS Votes for Women, 2020) influenced early White suffragists (Roesch Wagner & Steinem, 2019). However, it is also important to point out that race and gender played out behind the backdrop of racism and sexism (PBS Votes for Women, 2020). Crenshaw (2016) also lifts the notion the rationale for suffrage was, in fact, a tool of white supremacy. The larger question around progress for women getting the vote was really at the expense of Black women and by extension women of color (PBS Votes for Women, 2020). Tensions within the movement between white women and women of color continued.

Major legislation such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) shook the country in March 22, 1972 when the joint resolution amendment that was sent to Congress stated that equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex (https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-86/pdf/STATUTE-86-Pg1523.pdf). The next action was state ratification. In 2020, Virginia became the 38th state to vote yes on the amendment, meanwhile, five other states rescinded it. This lack of support for ERA, an amendment in the U.S. constitution, gave pause to the idea of achieving gender equity.

Next, Title IX is an educational amendment meant to address sex discrimination proposed by Hawai'i Congresswoman, Patsy Mink, the first woman of color in Congress, and Oregon Congresswoman Edith Greene. This thirty-seven-word law was signed in 1972. In 2022, the *Title IX at 50 Report* issued 9 briefs in the following areas: 1.) Sexual Harassment; 2.) Discriminatory Discipline Based on Sex and Race; 3.) LGBTQI+ Students; 4.) Pregnant and Parenting Students; 5.) Athletics; 6.) Gender- and Race-Conscious Programs; 7.) Sex-Segregated Education; 8.) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) & Career and Technical Education (CTE); and 9.) Title IX Coordinators (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, June 2022). For a period, the primary association with the law in relation to

women was often centered around women's athletics. However, around 2014, the focus shifted to the widespread issue of campus sexual assault, as survivors of violence across the country began to demand change.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment have gained tremendous media attention as survivors of all genders have come forward to tell their stories. The Association of American Universities (AAU) released their 2019 Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct report (Cantor et al., 2020) that build on data from their landmark 2015 Campus Climate Survey and 2017 Campus Activities Survey. The overall rate of non-consensual sexual contact (NCSC) was 13 percent, with the rates for women and TGQN[7] students being significantly higher than for men and graduate/professional students." (Cantor et al., 2020). In comparison to 2015 report, the rate of NCSC increased to 26.4% for undergraduate women, 10.8% for graduate and professional women, 6.9 percent for undergraduate men while the changes for TGQN students were 23.1% for undergraduate students and 14.6 % for graduate/professional students, respectively (Cantor et al., 2020). Many women's centers also focus on safety in their missions. With the recent expansion of gender discourse, this changing landscape is requiring leaders to respond to the ever-changing needs and reinforces the importance of WGSCs on college campuses. Some WGSC have strong partnerships with their campus violence response and prevention offices or even leading the campus in responding and supporting survivors of violence and harassment.

Rooted in Feminism

[7] TGQN students are those who listed as their gender identity as Transgender women, Transgender man, Nonbinary or genderqueer, Gender questioning or Gender not listed.

WGSC work is rooted in feminism. Marine's (2011) work was written about fifty years after the women's liberation movement (WLM) of the 1960s and 1970s that referred to second wave feminism. Further, Marine discusses the evolution of the purposes of women's centers to include issues of gender exploration, specifically attention to men and masculinities, and transgender identities (Marine, 2011). Equally, Kupo and Castellon (2018) expanded on the definition of gender beyond signaling women and girls, as well as acknowledged third wave or intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 2020). All of these might be considered controversial notions because they go beyond the traditional definitions of "woman." Some advances have been made relative to women's rights through laws, policies, and changes in educational curriculum. For example, the field of women's studies became part of the university curriculum and scholarship in the area progressed with a more complex understanding of women's issues and gender justice. Some centers are more explicit than others in employing a feminist, womanist, and/or intersectional framework to guide their work (Bethman et al., 2019).

Women in Higher Education

Higher education began opening its doors for women in the 1800s (Evans, 2008; Malkiel, 2018; Roy, 2019; Solomon, 1985). Colleges and universities were initially only open to white cisgender men going into the clergy. Thus, institutions focused on the needs of men students. Further, instructors were also men, primarily because there was no pathway for women to enter the workforce. Over time, women, as compared to men, have represented a lower percentage of college professors and administrators in the United States (Parker, 2015). As shared earlier, there has also been lots of growth and fields of study for women in all sectors of higher education, especially with the advent of Title IX and other non-discrimination laws (Alexander & McKendry, 2023; National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, June 2022).

Figure 2.2

Numbers of employees of degree-granting postsecondary U.S. education institutions by occupation and gender 2013 (Statista Research Department, 2016)

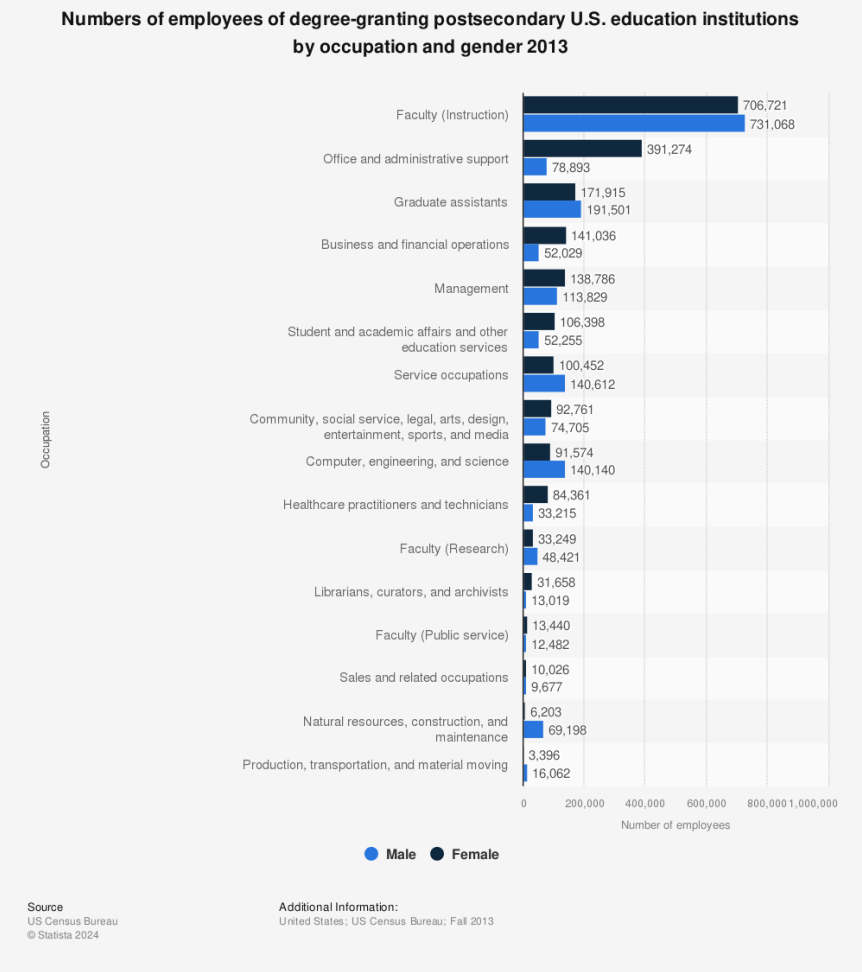


Figure 2.3

Undergraduate enrollment numbers in the United States from 1970 to 2031, by gender (in 1,000s) (Korhonen, 2023)

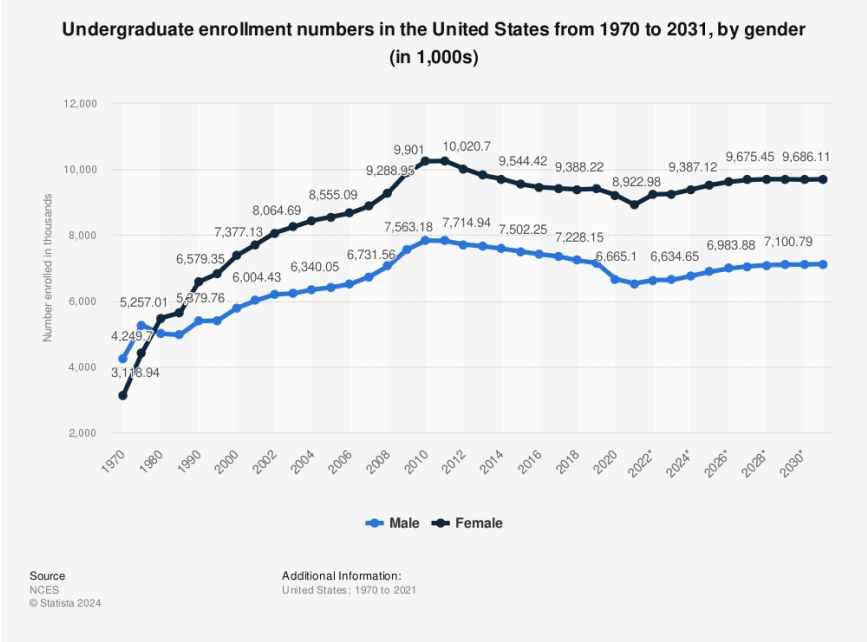
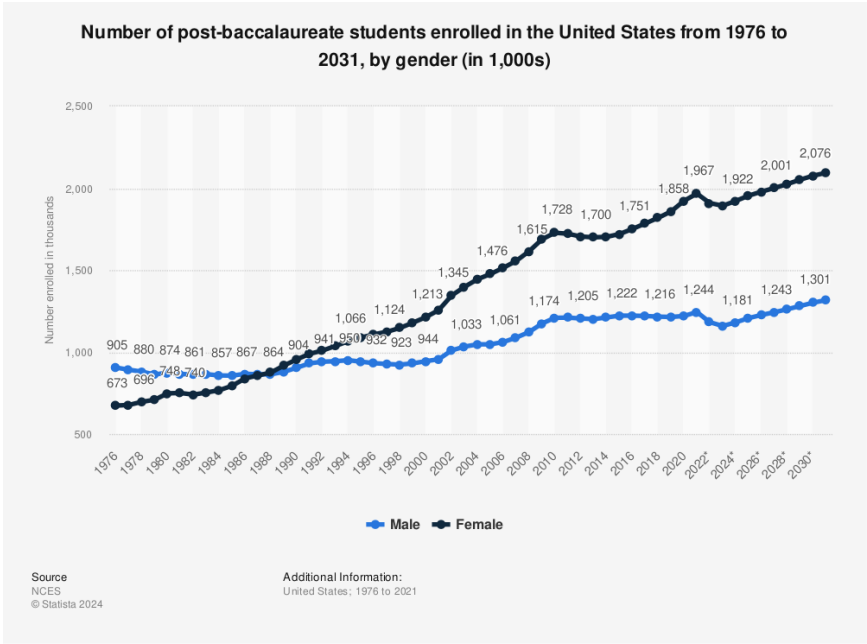


Figure 2.4

Post-baccalaureate enrollment numbers U.S. 1976-2031, by gender (Korhonen, 2023)



Dean of Women

Some campus leaders began to look at women students' welfare by creating Dean of Women positions in the 1890s (Schwartz, 1997). As increasing numbers of women students began to matriculate, their numbers sharply increased to 21% in 1870 (Parker, 2015). The college and university enrollment of women, once as high as 47 percent in the 1920s, declined to 31 percent in 1950 (Schwartz, 2015). In parallel, the number of women faculty fell from 28 percent in 1940 to 24.5 percent in 1950, dropping to 22 percent by 1960 (Graham, 1978). As we consider where these women were allowed to work; gender equity work was limited to what might be described as comfortable to those within the dominant campus culture.

Deans of Women organized earlier than Deans of Men because they looked to each other for guidance (Schwartz, 2015) due to their largely undefined roles. Chávez (2013) argued that women were not as valued as the men and not given much authority. Women were often thwarted if they aspired to positions of greater responsibility within higher education (Schwartz, 2015). The National Association of Deans of Women (NADW) organized amongst each other and invited colleagues like the NAAS to promote and develop the work of appointment offices throughout the country, emphasizing cooperation, research, and service (https://www.myacpa.org/history).

National Standards and Professional Organizations

To further the work of this growing number of WGSC, national standards were published by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), an organization that has published standards since 1988 (https://www.cas.edu). Previously named Women Student Programs and Services, the standards were revised in 2015, 2019, and 2023 along with a new name Women and Gender Programs and Services Standards (WGPS). In the contextual

statement of the 2015 WGPS standards, the focus is not only on students but also acknowledge how some programs serve faculty, staff, alumni, and community members in their missions (Council for the Advancement of Standards, 2023). Further, WGPS brings feminist and womanist community organization - and movement-based work to college and university settings, signifying the continued relevance of women and their many contributions to all aspects of higher education. Additionally, WGSC work has been recognized and discussed by knowledge communities and organization subcommittees, such as, Women's Center Committee (WCC) within the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA), Women in Student Affairs (WISA) within NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and Coalition for Women's Identities (CWI, formerly the SCW) within ACPA.

Summary of Research on WGSC

There is a dearth of scholarship on WGSC (Bethman et al., 2019; Davie, 2002). There are only two main reference texts focused exclusively on women, gender, and sexuality center work. They represent the wisdom, insights, and voices of current and former WGSC staff. First is the landmark volume, *University and College Women's Centers: A Journey toward Equity.* As the editor, Davie takes us on a journey from the beginning of establishing a center to presenting a road map illustrating practical actions to reach the goal of gender equity (Davie, 2002). Davie (2002) ends with a call to future directions for WGSC, including, leadership, internationalization, and technology (p. 448). Fifteen years later, Bethman, Cottledge and Bickford (2019) spearheaded the next anthology, *University and College Women's and Gender Equity Centers: The Changing Landscape.* The book is a follow-up focusing on the new circumstances in the settings of these centers, including, the professionalization of WGSC work, how the work gets done, challenges and threats, and finally successes and possibilities for the future (p. 6).

Both texts serve multiple purposes, namely, adding to the body of research, and serving as an avenue for center leaders to share their strategies and as a repository for promising practices for the field. Another valuable resource is the bibliography, Women's Centers in Higher Education compiled by Amber Vlasnik (2017). In addition to the two volumes mentioned above, Vlasnik (2017) organized a list of journal articles, book chapters, articles, reports, documents, documents that focus on women's centers. Furthermore, there are journals, namely, *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education* and the inaugural *Journal for Women and Gender Centers in Higher Education (2023)*, a peer reviewed open access journal published by the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women at Case Western Reserve University.

Moreover, there is a growing collection of dissertations that focus on leadership through staff programs (Bonebright et al., 2012) and feminist characteristics (Chávez, 2003; Griggs, 1989). The professionalizing of the field (Marine, 2011) gives hope for adding to the traditional canon of what campus services should include along with the possibilities for transforming the academy by adding missing voices. These were instrumental as a jumping point for thinking about leadership strategies by offering frameworks for comparison.

Lastly, there are a handful of empirical studies that focus on specific geographical locations of WGSC, leadership, and the community of WGSC staff. Bengevino (2000)'s study added to the "relatively little research on campus-based women's centers," by specifically looking at centers on the west coast. This focus on a specific geographic area highlighted realities that are not only regional in nature, but also explored a student-run center. Marine (2011) looked at experiences across the nation at various professionally staffed centers. Vlasnik & DeButz (2013) discuss competencies relevant to the community of leaders in WGSC spaces while Mitchell (1976) looks at personality factors of women's center administrators. Further,

Barnes (2012) centers their analysis on women in leadership. More broadly, Travers (2009) expands on leadership practices in higher education social justice centers. Finally, Ogle (2001) concentrates on transformational leadership.

Research on WGSC Purpose, Role & Function

Professional Feminists

In 2011, Marine conducted a qualitative study on "professional feminists," also known as, or referring to women's center staff, that elucidated further the work of these spaces. Through focus groups, these leaders shared their perceptions, experiences, and challenges. One of the findings is that these spaces are hubs of feminist engagement, and more resources are required to reach their goals within the larger context of higher education. Further, Marine (2011) concludes with the need for the unification of women's causes and concerns. One key motivation for increasing the visibility of women, gender, and sexuality studies across various domains is to enhance understanding for individuals who are not directly involved in such centers. Furthermore, leaders within these organizations can improve their communication strategies by considering the political landscape and their own perspectives and positions.

Masculinity Work

Work on masculinity has grown in some WGSC in order to address gender equity work broadly (Brown, 2021). Building on work engaging men in being part of the solution to violence against women, Brown's (2021) study highlights the incorporation of masculinities work in women's centers. Similarly, Kupo and Castellon (2018) wrote a book chapter describing ways that women's centers can broaden their focus to teach about masculinities. As an emerging tension, few WGSC have incorporated masculinity work (Brown, 2021; Kupo & Castellon,

2018) into their missions. On the other hand, some campuses have established Centers for Men or Masculinity Studies fueled by an outcry about the educational crisis for men, including how men of color are left behind. The Department of Education (DOE) estimated that in 2017, 2.2 million fewer men than women would be enrolled in college.

Who They Serve

WGSCs make a difference in multiple ways. These impacts can be seen at various levels – individual or personal, at a larger community level, and institutionally (Griggs, 1989). At the individual level, strategic programs and services support individual learning and growth in hopes that these efforts will boost individual confidence, empowerment, and capacity. The goal of WGSCs is to support those who use the center's space, offer educational programs, and to create havens of help and support. It is important to acknowledge that individuals' behaviors, beliefs, and dialogue also affect their neighbors/colleagues, and ultimately at a community level. Through educational programs and speakers, WGSCs also engage in community building and increasing the visibility of hxrstorically marginalized groups, thus, increasing campus awareness of the needs of women, LGBTQ+, and emerging communities (Bethman et al., 2019). These programs impact the institution. Upon further examination, campus-based women's centers were established in direct response to the concerns raised by the women's movement, and most centers, according to Kathryn Brooks, "have had as primary goals advocacy for women on campus and making both the institution and individual women aware of the changing status of women" (as cited in Davie, 2002, p. 47). Ultimately, the outcomes resulting from these actions affect different aspects of society. While much is still not known about the matriculation, persistence, and graduation rates for genders beyond the binary categories of women and men, additional scholarship and research will expand as our contemporary understanding of gender

broadens. The evolving language around gender is gaining recognition and acceptance through continued advocacy and activism in academia, policy, and laws. For example, twelve states have passed a third gender option for state identification documents (Brinlee, 2019). Furthermore, there is a trend toward integrating women's issues that were once considered taboo into the mainstream.

Women in Leadership Positions

In 2018, the American Council of Education (ACE) established its Moving the Needle Initiative to focus on advancing women's leadership in higher education. Informed by the ACE Infographic Brief - Update on the Status of Women in Higher Education (Johnson, 2017), the data noted the gender disparity within top campus leadership positions. For instance, only 8% of college presidents are women though many assume this number would be higher given that women are graduating at higher rates than their male counterparts. Further, much less is known about students and campus leaders who are nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and/or gender expansive since data is usually not disaggregated beyond men and women categories. It will take time for research to accurately represent the contemporary understanding of gender identity. As institutions consider diversifying leadership in higher education, it is imperative to focus on additional scholarship in areas related to campus leadership and supportive campus environments like WGSC.

Research on WGSC Leadership

When specifically looking at leadership in WGSCs, there is less research exploring center leaders and their professional leadership development. A few articles discuss leadership programs sponsored by women's centers, such as the University of Minnesota's Women's

Leadership Institute, which is a collaboration with their Office of Human Resources (Bonebright et al., 2012). While this program focuses on faculty and staff, there are more examples of student programs like WILL: Women in Leadership and Learning, hosted by the University of Cincinnati Women's Center and the University of Michigan at Dearborn. The reality is while current scholarship around women's leadership has grown overall, there continues to be an opportunity to examine campus-based WGSC leaders specifically along with their leadership practices.

DeLuz (2013) is one of the first scholars to study the leadership styles of women's center leaders, which the author identifies as a significant factor in assessing information, making judgements, and determining how to best accomplish organizational goals" (p. 79). Utilizing Bolman & Deal's (1990)'s Leadership Orientation Instrument, this quantitative work found that all women's center director respondents use the human resource frame. The human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 1991) uses family as the metaphor for organization. To explain the human resource frame even further, there are central concepts of needs, skills, relationships; empowerment as the image for leadership; and finally, the basic leadership challenge of aligning organizational and human needs (DeLuz, 2013). In comparing the two other frames, namely, the roles of motivator and facilitator, there are similarities to feminist leadership characteristics (Griggs, 1989): 1.) Non-hierarchical and participatory organizational structures & utilization of consensus decision-making; 2.) Reconceptualization of power, 3.) Procedures for handling conflict; 4.) Information and skills sharing; 5.) Supportive work environment; and 6.) Commitment to diversity & analysis of oppressions. DeLuz (2013) calls for a "qualitative study to be conducted [to] interview campus-based women's center directors regarding the academic,

environmental, external and internal support, economic and institutional forces that result in their perceived leadership styles (self and others)" (pp. 78-79).

Chávez (2003) described her study as one of two studies to address practice and influence of feminist leadership along with Griggs who completed their work in 1989. Most research conducted on leadership in women's centers and women's studies programs has been written by women doctoral candidates (Chávez, 2003, p. 4). Chávez (2003) concludes that while some components of feminist leadership are practiced, institutional culture might limit the extent to which feminist points of view are integrated. Consider large higher education institutions where hierarchy is the norm. The institutional organizational charts illustrate the relationships within many times going deeper than wide as limits are placed on spans and controls. Higher education institutions, especially large ones, are not flat organizations. This organizational design is meant to facilitate efficiency. Finally, a list of Chávez' recommendations evolved from the need for institutions to address women's needs and increasing women's campus population numbers to one of seeing the benefits and innovations possible due to their inclusion as non-mainstream types of leadership perspectives.

Board (2015) investigated what he identified as "feminine" leadership characteristics with women community college presidents. They found that most college graduates are women and make up a larger pool of talent today. Further, feminine characteristics and styles of leadership influence current higher education institutions and are also globally sought after in other fields. Traits described as feminine within extant literature include direct communication, low control, consensus building, collaboration, information, and skill sharing, and being team-oriented in a non-hierarchical environment. Board (2015) built on this existing literature by exploring conditions that either serve as barriers or promote growth in this non-traditional arena.

This study design sheds light on the ways that women leaders navigate their higher education context by asserting their centers' continued relevance in the changing landscape of higher education. How do these diverse women leaders ensure the survival of their centers by justifying its existence to upper administration? As Wright-Nair & Marine (2019) point out that student affairs professionals are experiencing increasing pressures to justify their funding, and by extension, their work (Bethman et al., 2019). These pressures certainly add to the women's center leaders' load. As an identity space for hxrstorically marginalized groups, these spaces are typically under-resourced (Davie, 2002; Patton, 2006) and become all things to everyone (Sweeney, 1978). The new normal has shifted as budgets have tightened.

"Feminine" does not necessarily equate to "feminist." The concept of "feminine" can be influenced by existing stereotypes, shaping how individuals are perceived and how they behave. Feminist theory provides a framework for understanding the world through the recognition of systemic forces that disadvantage women and other marginalized groups, addressing patriarchy, power dynamics, and privilege in society. Intersectional feminism goes beyond gender, aiming to consider a person's entire identity. This is where Applied Critical Leadership aligns with Intersectional Feminism, as it focuses on multiple dimensions of identity. It acknowledges non-traditional and non-dominant leadership styles and practices, placing value on perspectives that have traditionally been overlooked in leadership literature, which has predominantly centered on studies of men.

Opportunities for campus change

While Marine (2011) recognized women's centers' prominent place on many campuses, some have closed (Chávez, 2003, p. 115) or combined with other student service centers. Given the budget vulnerabilities in public higher education (Bok, 2015; Campaign for College

Opportunity, 2016), proving value to the institution and the campus population is a necessary part of the work of center leaders. Further, these decision-makers must look ahead to think about the financial health of their centers to survive.

To illustrate, funding limitations result in centers constantly justifying program costs (Kasper, 2004; Sweeney, 1978; Vera & Burgos-Sasscer, 1998) thereby requiring each center to defend the need for its continued existence. During budget season, tight resources highlight the idea of fighting for scraps while priorities are made to make do with stretched financial resources and human resources. A broad array of fiscal strategies might support their center's well-being like cost-saving approaches, fundraising, or engaging alumni (Davie, 2002, p. 91). Alumni engagement and fund development continue to be topics of interest with some campuses using anniversary events or naming a center to raise much needed dollars (Marine et al., 2017).

Another area of challenge for WGSC is the need to ensure that their missions and actions remain relevant to campus decision-makers. To make the work legible to campus administrators, center leaders utilize different strategies to tell the story of their centers. For example, data collection has been used to show ways that centers are making a difference on campus. Data also "yield[ed] important insights about student experiences that connect to feasible, actionable strategies for practitioners" (Cabrera, 2016). This data can serve as a foundation for tailoring programs and services to meet the specific needs of our students and communities. As women's concerns and requirements gain more visibility in society, policy adjustments become imperative. Institutions can respond by making changes to laws and policies in consultation with women's centers.

For instance, as Marine (2011) noted, despite the significant impact women's centers have had on today's American campuses, there is limited knowledge about how leaders within

these centers formulate and implement a vision to amplify women's voices and advance gender equity on campus. This knowledge gap underscores the importance of investigating the strategies employed by center leaders in this regard. Moreover, it can offer campus administrators valuable insights into the role and functioning of these spaces, how they can support them, and how to collaboratively work towards shared goals that promote gender equity on campus.

Amidst these milestone moments, leaders of these WGSCs understand that the needs of the intended audience can grow and change over time while campus administrators are tasked with balancing campus priorities through resource allocations. Higher education scholars have consistently identified leadership styles as being among the chief contributing factors to successful institutional change, especially as it relates to diversity agenda efforts (Adserias et al., 2017). Despite this, many WGSC and similar identity-based centers are left with reduced budgets and support. Some spaces have even closed, sometimes, leaving their campus without a space for feminist praxis (hooks, 1984, 2000). Over the fifty or so years that these centers have existed, many of the center leaders have been women and uphold feminist values (Davie, 2002; Guy-Sheftall & Wallace-Sanders, 2002). As women increase in numbers, it is imperative to maintain and expand WGSC work in an intersectional way. Leaders of all genders need to be nimble and creative in adapting to the changing needs of the communities they serve. Survival in this resource constrained environment has meant setting priorities given the realities of decreased budgets, increased campus populations, and decreased staff. Organizational leaders must adjust to these challenges daily.

Research on WGSC Outcomes/Accomplishments

dela Peña (2009) asserts that centers may not be able to make direct claims about student retention. However, centers can report the ways in which they create belonging and community

which, coupled with the research about retention and persistence, demonstrate ways in which Women's Centers contribute to a positive undergraduate experience (pp. 137-138). Building upon dela Peña's work, it is interesting to consider how it applies to other WGSCs. It is not a one size fits all and will require adaptation based on the specific community needs of the campus. It would be important to explore spaces for women of color, graduate students, staff , and faculty as well. Kasper (2004) notes that women's center professionals could benefit from "benchmark data that could enhance the future effectiveness of all centers" (p. 187). While this provides a baseline to help professionals who work in or support women's centers, more research could include further examination into leadership development programs that enhance effectiveness of these center leaders given that the survival of women's centers was a main issue identified by the study.

Leadership Theories in Higher Education

Scholarship around leadership began with management theories in the business field focused mainly on men (DeLuz, 2013; Griggs, 1989). While there are currently more studies that focus on women as the research subjects, prior to that, men's studies were generalized to women (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Subsequent research primarily examined women in relation to men, often suggesting that women should conform to male norms or highlighting their differences from men, thus positioning men as the standard for leadership. Consequently, the concept of leadership has become closely associated with male characteristics, and this has marginalized women in leadership roles.

Current studies and enrollment in business schools and colleges, for that matter, begin to show a different story in terms of women showing up more in educational and work-focused

spaces. This means that the existing literature might not apply to the growing number of women graduates and working women. This exploratory study serves to fill a gap in the leadership literature to expand notions of not only who is considered a leader, but also how leadership is defined. Previously, women would be judged or assessed relative to the men-focused norms. As the population changes, the research needs to also reflect the experiences of women, gender nonconforming, and gender expansive people. Further, the intersectional lens allows for different ways of being rather than a single monolithic way of being.

Martin (2002) argued that feminist theory and critical theory have two key similarities especially when looking at leading in the management context. First, both theories focus on social and economic inequalities. Second, they both strive to create systemic change. The author evaluated the six feminist change strategies that are not as effective in the end goal of altering the gendered inequalities that were highlighted. In comparing these two theories, Martin (2002) pointed out potential synergies that remain untapped.

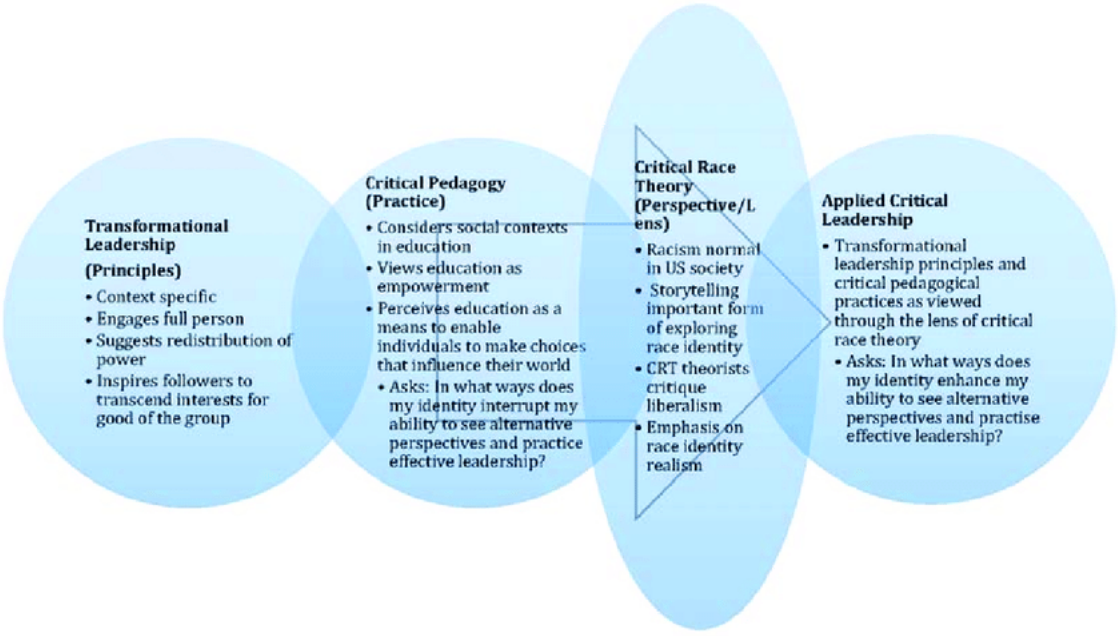
Applied Critical Leadership (emergent)

Santamaría & Santamaría (2012) contributed Applied Critical Leadership (ACL) in education as a leadership model arising from critical theory and critical pedagogy traditions to transform status quo educational practices. This volume included sectors of education from K-12 and higher education. The framework focused on the innovative leadership practices resulting from the experiences and perspectives of leaders from hxrstorically marginalized groups. By actively working against stereotypes, a Latina leader described how she (forged her own path using transparency, collaboration, and consultation (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012). She advocated for all students and developed a positive reputation working for more than just the Latino student population that was close to her heart. She found a “peer friendship that became

stronger over the years based on increased trust, interest convergence, and collegiality" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, p. 123). Further, she exercised forgiveness to foster coalition building to reach larger goals like their campus receiving HSI status to increase their campus eligibility for additional grants that not only supports the Latino community and the larger community campus community. ACL opens the leadership field to consider strategies beyond ones only informed by mainstream ideas and experiences. These unconventional times of a global pandemic require unconventional ways of thinking that allow practitioners to integrate more theory into practice. Some scholars have suggested transformative leadership for social justice as an approach to this fluid and uncertain educational landscape (Quantz et al., 1991; Shields, 2010). This serves as a foundational part of ACL's theoretical framework.

Figure 2.5

Santamaría & Santamaría (2012) Applied Critical Leadership Framework



Santamaría and Jean-Marie (2014) conducted a study aimed at investigating the impact of one's identity on their leadership practices. As women of color researchers, they emphasized the

utilization of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the epistemological basis for their study. Notably, participants in their research identified race as the most prominent identity marker (Santamaría and Jean-Marie, 2014, p. 335, para. 2). Applying this perspective to the current qualitative study further underscores the intricacies involved in how leaders adapt, change, prioritize, and make decisions to remain relevant to their target audiences.

Feminist Leadership

Griggs (1989) utilizes feminist leadership characteristics to describe practices in women's centers and women's studies programs as alternatives to traditional leadership or managerial theories that center the male lens. While many centers were initially created to provide resources and services for campus women, it is the task of center leaders to contend with the center's evolving role on campus now that the status of women has advanced since the first centers were established in the late 1960s/early 1970s. Additional frameworks include leadership literature in general. DeLuz (2013) writes that her inquiry provides opportunities for rethinking and reframing their leadership roles if they are to effectively exercise vision and implement actions that aim to cultivate leaders. Further, Bonebright et al. (2012) explains how women leaders in education are integrating their leadership styles into their roles.

Wakefield (2017) discusses Strategies for Building Transformative and Feminist Leadership in the OxFam America Research Backgrounder. This includes key developments in transformational and feminist leadership by starting with Great Man Theory in the 1840s to looking at gender and leadership in 2000s and more currently, servant leadership and more. Feminist Leadership is summarized in Batliwala's (2008) work on "Clearing the Conceptual Cloud." In comparing these strategies (Wakefield, 2017) to Griggs' (1989) Feminist Leadership Characteristics, there were similarities that streamlined the analysis. These feminist leadership

resources served as a guide or model to examine leadership practices of current WGSC leaders. To summarize, it made the most sense to focus on strategies and actions rather than qualities given that this research is on how leaders navigate.

Furthermore, the use of "feminist" by Griggs and Wakefield raises questions about what they each mean by "feminist" and by extension, their definition of feminism. Feminism has often been stereotyped as predominantly centered on white feminist perspectives. However, in a broader context, feminisms are intended to encompass a wide range of feminist principles. By recognizing the concept of multiple existing feminisms, we actively embrace an intentional, intersectional, and U.S. third world framing that seeks to be inclusive and expansive enough to incorporate the diversity of feminist perspectives.

Table 2.6

Side by side view of sub themes of Feminist Leadership Characteristics (Griggs, 1989) and Strategies, (Wakefield, 2017)

Feminist Leadership Characteristics (Griggs, 1989)

a) Non-hierarchical and participatory organizational structures & utilization of consensus decision-making
b) Reconceptualization of power
c) Procedures for handling conflict
d) Information and skills sharing
e) Supportive work environment
f) Commitment to diversity & analysis of oppressions

Strategies for building transformative and feminist leadership (Wakefield, 2017)

a) Modeling feminist purpose & principles
b) Inspiring shared vision based on personal and collective reflexivity
c) Empowering and enabling others to act
d) Challenging patriarchal norms and oppressive power
e) Encouraging integration of heart, mind, and body

A key feature of feminist leadership principles is the concept of adaptability; this allows WGSC to not only address the direct needs of those women and LGBTQ+ communities, but also be responsive to the changing political climate. Further, as we think about the adaptable nature of feminist leadership principles, Manning (2013b) notes that "[f]emale-leadership style… fits the interrelated and global environment of the 21st century" (p. 160). Since many organizational leaders of WGSC are women, it can be argued that many are successful leaders because they are equipped to handle the changing realities and challenges of the time.

Bensimon (1989), Chin (2004), and Manning (2013a) identify collaboration and connectedness as competencies typically held by feminist women leaders. Using the "web of inclusion" metaphor gives feminist leaders a visual to describe their work and their values. It is crucial for individuals to identify with the organization, as this recognition plays a pivotal role in

how center leaders acknowledge the broader influence of their efforts across the campus. This perspective becomes especially valuable in the context of large universities or bureaucratic settings. As highlighted in Chin's (2004) presidential address, leaders who prioritize relational and interconnected leadership styles, as opposed to traditional authoritative approaches, can be seen as assets. These leadership styles can, in turn, shape the various strategies employed by center leaders.

Moreover, Bensimon (1989) further explained that using a “frames model” to understand a woman leader was not as useful. Even though the framework was readily accepted, the author emphasized the gendered nature of the frame. It was a dominant tool based on studies of men. Feminist critique has likewise exposed the exclusion of women’s experiences in the conceptual models and methodologies that guide scholarship in the discipline. This acknowledges how systems of analysis provide an incomplete picture of leadership.

In examining Bensimon's re-interpretation, it is imperative to consider which conceptual frameworks are appropriate for the examination of women’s center directors leadership strategies. Chin’s (2004) address illustrates an example of ways to engage practitioners in looking at the intersection of feminist principles and leadership practice. A feminist framework allows individuals to use their own words in describing how they approach their work. Comparing this to the masculine dominant frames (bureaucratic, collegial, political, and symbolic) can serve to identify how their organization is functioning.

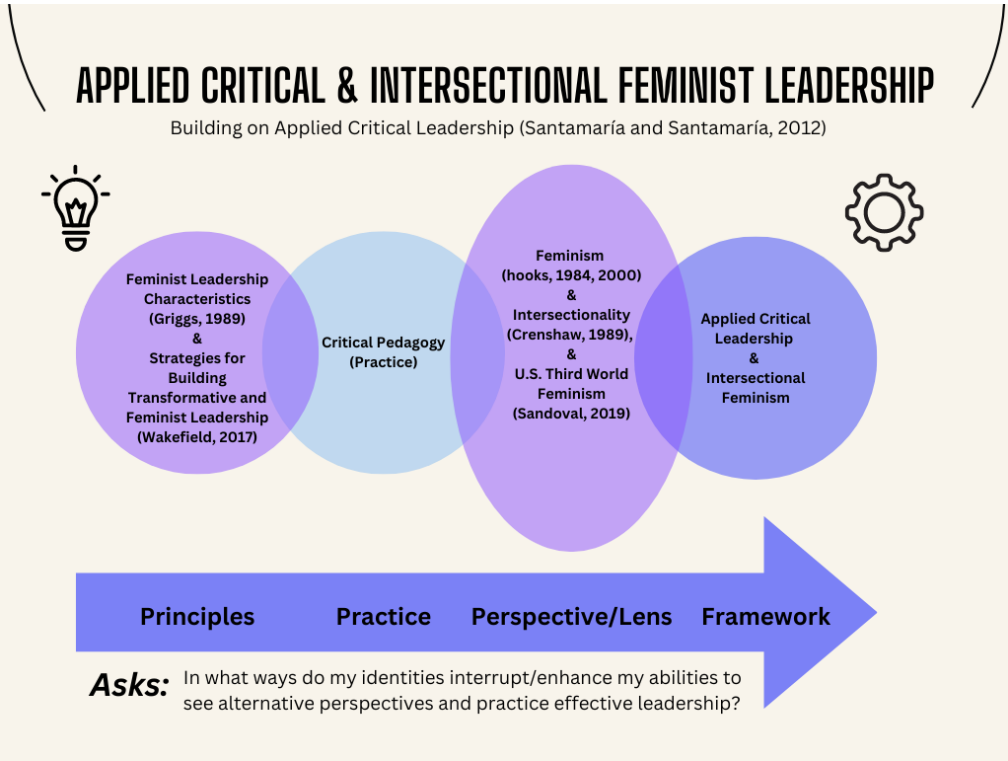
Proposed Applied Critical and Intersectional Feminist Leadership (ACIFL) framework

Building upon Santamaría & Santamaría's (2012) Applied Critical Leadership (ACL) model, I propose the development of an Applied Critical and Intersectional Feminist Leadership

(ACIFL) framework. This framework, rooted in feminist leadership principles, incorporates a gendered perspective into the realm of transformational leadership. Furthermore, it utilizes an intersectional feminist lens, which delves into the multifaceted aspects of identity and how they can either obstruct or enhance an individual's capacity to perceive alternative viewpoints and practice effective leadership. In this context, the analysis takes on an intersectional feminist framework that extends beyond the boundaries of Critical Race Theory (CRT). It not only examines power structures and relationships but also involves an introspective exploration of a leader's positionality and, ultimately, their subjectivity.

Figure 2.7

Applied Critical and Intersectional Feminist Leadership (proposed)



To recap, the goal of this qualitative study was to further scholarship on campus-based WGSC. After 50+ years of existence in higher education, there is little research on how these centers operate as hubs of feminism and how they remain relevant in an evolving sociopolitical

context and climate of higher education. Examining how women leaders navigate the challenges of addressing student affairs pressures while also demonstrating the value of their staff professionals, these hxrstorically marginalized leaders must employ innovation as a means of survival. Traditionally overlooked as leaders in the field, theoretical frameworks rooted in feminism, intersectionality, and third world feminism highlight the intricate interplay of oppressions and underscore how women leaders exert additional effort to employ innovative and creative problem-solving skills to secure their survival. It is noteworthy that the evolution of these spaces is rooted in the original structures of WGSCs. Consequently, there remains an opportunity to address the existing gap in the literature, shift the discourse, and provide recognition and legitimacy to these centers and the individuals leading them.

Furthermore, McMillan & Schumacher (2010) explain that "[c]ritical studies… are distinguished by the researcher's use of an advocacy role to respond to important themes of marginalized individuals or groups" (p. 347). Women's centers are largely led by women, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and gender expansive people many holding multiple marginalization within larger dominant society and thus, treated as less than. Innovative solutions come from people with non-traditional and non-dominant experiences (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012). Thus, as a cisgender Pilipina, I also integrated the Applied Critical Leadership (ACL) model because of its central premise to "transform status quo educational practices… in order to find solutions to complex problems making leadership for social justice accessible, feasible, and more practical for aspiring and practicing leaders alike" (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012, abstract, p. i). Moreover, the qualitative study delved into the context of WGSC work, which originally emerged to serve a marginalized group, specifically women, during the 1960s. Inherent in this work was an exploration of power dynamics. For instance, I

examined how WGSC leaders wielded their power and authority in guiding their centers within the framework of a patriarchal institution—the university.

Furthermore, it was crucial to highlight the intricacies of identity, recognizing that WGSC leaders possessed privileges while also experiencing various forms of oppression. These experiences paralleled the ongoing marginalization of women's/feminized/femme communities in society and on campuses, as these institutions were not initially designed with their needs in mind. Consequently, the ultimate challenge faced by WGSC leaders was the task of centering the narratives and experiences of their communities while simultaneously advocating for the recognition of their spaces within the broader context of the university landscape.

Chapter 3: Methods

In this section, I outline the methodology used for this qualitative study. I begin with introducing the research questions. Next, I explain my positionality as a researcher and how this informed the research design. Then, I explain the IRB process to maintain focus on fairness and confidentiality before detailing data collection and analysis. Finally, the limitations will conclude this chapter.

This study used a qualitative approach to better understand women leaders at campus-based women, gender, and sexuality centers. I focused on how hxrstorically marginalized or minoritized women leaders describe their leadership experiences, the challenges they face, and the opportunities they face in this changing higher education landscape as they envision the future for their centers. Overall, a qualitative design was appropriate for this study because of the following factors: (1) exploration was needed to understand complexity of an issue and (2) there was a desire to empower respondents to share their stories (Creswell, 2013).

While there were no prescribed methods to conduct Feminist research, Hesse-Biber (2014) discussed the range of using qualitative and quantitative methods and how they "lend themselves to the feminist research goals" (p. 364). This study lent itself to qualitative methods (interviews) because it yielded rich descriptions that helped make sense of the following: (1) the contexts in which these leaders operated, (2) the interaction of their own identities within the institution, and (3) reflexivity on their own position and their leadership practice. Below I list the studies research questions.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do women leaders navigate institutions of higher education as leaders of campus-based women gender and sexuality centers (WGSC)?
2. How do women leaders view the future of campus-based WGSC in a changing landscape of higher education?

Positionality

The identities I embrace are cisgender Pilipina, raised Catholic, straight, financially stable, educated, a partner, sister, aunt, daughter, granddaughter, cousin, family member, friend, helper/caretaker, educator, and advisor/listener. I am an older woman working in an elite four-year California public higher education institution, specifically, in student services for over twenty-five years. I was born in California, raised in the Philippines in the mid-70s during martial law, and moved back to California during after 6th grade.

As a leader in education, my style is very relational along with being very focused on helping and caring for others. I was taught to anticipate people's needs and ensure that people were comfortable and happy. Seeing my leadership as service to others is also informed by these values. I also did not realize how deeply ingrained traditional gender roles were until I was struggling in my own career. Ironically, I had to find my voice and place value in my experiences to increase my own self-confidence. My leadership practice is evolving, and I feel that I need to role model this to my family, my students, and my colleagues. My goal was to help future students, who like me, needed to find voice and direction. Working in Student Affairs and later, Equity & Inclusion, my worldview and perspectives changed dramatically. I gained language and frameworks to make sense of my socialization as a girl/woman on a personal and systemic level. Self-defense programs as empowerment tools have shifted my understanding of personal power. Admittedly, my work initially focused very heavily on the topic of sexual/dating

violence, including raising awareness and resource referrals. Now, my work has shifted to look at the experiences, needs, and ultimately, the retention of women, nonbinary people, gender nonconforming people, and gender expansive people by reducing barriers to their advancement.

The last twenty-five years in higher education has been a period of socio-political change in the United States, and the survival of women and gender equity and fellow identity-based centers is unclear. My goal is to use data to inform, as well as tell the stories of communities and transform our campuses into inclusive and welcoming spaces where students thrive and in turn, work towards making change in their communities. As a researcher, I bring all this to my work and hope to make change in my own campus community.

I have a dual role as a researcher and as a women's center leader. As a Director of Women's Resources at UC Berkeley, my job duties include ensuring that programs and resources are available to the campus women's communities. I engage in this social justice work by advocating for systemic change, focusing on women's empowerment, and community building events, and providing resource referrals. Additionally, it is important to note that I had a collegial relationship with the majority of the participants prior to this study. Therefore, the rapport I built with them facilitated their decision to participate in this study. My positionality within this research means that I must be intentional about my methods in order not to compromise the research. As someone who has over twenty years of experience in this field, I aimed to be intentional and reflective about not making assumptions based that would distort the findings. I kept researcher memos to address bias. Further, I used these memos to triangulate my findings. Aligned with feminist underpinnings, I recognize (and practice) the need for centering the stories of the leaders who will be interviewed as part of this study.

Research Design

This is a qualitative study grounded in feminist research methodology with an applied critical leadership analysis. The study focuses on how center leaders navigate the higher education terrain. Specifically, the study hones in on the ways women's center leaders make decisions about their centers, programs, and services and the tenets that inform the choices they make to ensure that their centers continue to be relevant in the 21st century. Drawing from the tradition of feminist research practice (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Kelly & Gurr, 2020; Letherby, 2003), this study provided a space for these women leaders to talk about their experiences. The characteristics of feminist, womanist, and transformational praxis include voice, agency, and self-definition.

Data collection began with a document analysis of publicly available material, such as the center website and related social media to provide a picture of the context of the centers in which the leaders are working. Next, virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted on the Zoom platform with a select group of organizational leaders who were part of the WGSC network.

The Context for this Study

In 1987, the National Association of Women's Centers estimated that approximately 2500 Women's Resource Centers (WRCs) were in operation across the United States (Saucier, 2019). These centers, initially known as Centers for the Continuing Education of Women (CCEW), were established in the late 1960s. Surprisingly, there has been very limited scholarly exploration of these spaces, even during their peak years. It took approximately 15 years for what Marine (2011) refers to as "professional feminists" to produce the first two significant texts on this subject, namely Davie (2002). It then took an additional 17 years before the Bethman, Cottledge,

and Bickford (2019) book emerged, both of which offered valuable perspectives, guidance, and best practices.

As resources have shifted over time, some centers have closed their doors or adjusted their missions. Therefore, it is increasingly vital to contribute to existing literature by amplifying the voices and narratives of these influential leaders. The landscape of higher education remains dynamic, with new students and employees joining each year. The year 2020 was particularly transformative, marked by the global pandemic and pivotal shifts in the U.S. political landscape. Women's centers adapted alongside many other campus departments. Given the ongoing work of Women's and Gender Studies Centers (WGSCs) and the strain experienced by many center staff due to limited resources, this study aims to illuminate the experiences of leaders within these centers.

Site and Setting

In this section, I describe the study's participants and the site, specifically the setting, the actors, and the process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The setting for this study was campus-based women, gender, and sexuality centers (WGSC, or women's centers), specifically located at large public higher education institutions (4-year) in the United States. I will be looking specifically at leaders of these centers as the actors within this setting.

WGSCs across the nation are situated within varying campus organizational structures ranging from mainly student affairs, student engagement or an equity, diversity, and inclusion area (Bethman et al., 2019). Based on its mission, each center focuses on specific campus communities (Davie, 2002; Patton, 2011). Thus, services at these centers can address the needs of a range of constituents - academic appointees (senate and non-senate faculty), staff, and/or students (graduate, professional school and undergraduate).

According to IPEDS 2019-2020, there are about 147 large public universities. Depending on the source used, there were upwards of 400 women's centers (Davie, 2002) and on the lower end, 260 entries on the Women and Gender Centers list (2020). This list was maintained by the Women's Center Committee (WCC) of the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA). Not all WGSC or their campuses have maintained membership with NWSA, but the WCC is the closest equivalent to the relevant professional organizations like the National Association for Women in Education (NAWE) and National Association of Women's Centers. National Association for Women in Education (NAWE) disbanded in Summer 2000.

Leaders were recruited from the Women and Gender Centers list (2020) maintained by the Women's Center Committee (WCC) co-chairs. The National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) was established in 1977.

> Beginning as the Women's Centers and Services Caucus, the Constituency's first meeting was at the 1984 NWSA Annual Conference, eventually becoming the Women's Centers Committee in 2006. The WCC held its first Pre-Conference at the 2002 NWSA Annual Conference. NWSA recognizes that "women's studies" is broader than what happens in the classroom. NWSA acknowledges women's centers as chief out-of-class feminist educators and encourages participation in the national organization.
>
> Campus-based women's centers have a long history of working together with women's studies to transform the curriculum, the campus environment, and society at large.
>
> The Women's Centers Committee of NWSA provides an opportunity for women's center directors, staff, and others to gather and share information, ideas, challenges, successes, and support. (NWSA 2023 Pre-Conferences, 2023, p.1)

Participants' Criteria

This study looked at the experiences of women leaders from hxrstorically marginalized groups who work as a director (or equivalent leader) of women, gender, and sexuality centers (WGSC). Initially, my goal was to interview 6-8 leaders. I utilized the contact list from the

NWSA Women's Center Committee (WCC), which I am a part of. This included a total of about 260 centers that are still open across the United States. I systematically applied the following selection criteria.:

(1) department employment (i.e., working in a WGSC or equivalent)

(2) type of campus (i.e., large 4-year public institutions),

(3) title (i.e., organizational leader, ideally, director level),

(4) status as current career staff, specifically during the 2016-2020 Presidential elections, and

(5) woman* from a hxrstorically marginalized background.

The first part of screening involved taking the WCC list and highlighting WGSCs from large (20000+) 4-year public universities, which I did by using a list generated from IPEDS. From this list, I looked for centers that employed career level professional staff with director titles or equivalent. I utilized the terms "organizational leader" or "leader" to describe individuals with titles at the director-level who have fiscal and budgetary decision-making responsibility. Furthermore, position titles ranged from director to coordinator with a professional career staff member or a student at the helm. A few centers were student-run, and I excluded them from the list. Next, I looked on the WSGC websites and publicly available information to confirm that these leaders were employed by at least 2016. This led me to a smaller group of centers remaining. I decided to start with the first seven by making sure there was representation geographically across the U.S. Because I am also a center leader, I started with directors who I had met previously at the WCC business meetings to help with rapport building. One invitee declined, and I sent another to someone in the same geographic region.

After a total of eight direct outreach emails, seven ultimately agreed to participate in individual virtual interviews via Zoom, including completing their consent form and filling out the demographic questionnaire before their appointed interview time. The final sample consisted of seven (7) respondents who were current leaders of a campus-based WGSC across the U.S. employed within the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections.

In *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, Foley (2012, p. 305) discusses an aspect of selecting who to interview.

> [R]esearchers work to construct the respondent through the selection of participants, in the course of the interview, through the analysis of the transcripts, and in the production of manuscripts. Finally, [Foley concludes with] interview respondents as engaged in their own project of constructing self and interviewer.

To add, the author also names how respondents for in-depth interviews can be thought of as "teachers" who speak from their lived experiences. Further, DeVault and Gross (2012) noted that "[m]uch qualitative and feminist research has been based on a relatively straightforward commitment to collecting and representing the perspectives of informants, and those projects have often had powerfully liberatory effects." (p. 206). Throughout this work, I mostly refer to this group of interviewees as respondents and WGSC leaders, or simply, leaders. To a lesser extent, I used informants and participants.

IRB

Prior to data collection, the Institutional Review Board approved the study (IRB) to ensure that human subjects would not be harmed or negatively impacted by their voluntary participation (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program, 2020). IRB guidance required me to follow appropriate process and protocol including explaining participant's rights and answering any questions as part of getting their informed consent (Collaborative Institutional

Training Initiative Program, 2020; Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 193). After IRB approval was granted, the list of invitees was selected using a convenience sample due to the researcher's direct personal experience working in a large four-year public institution in the United States.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the most important tenets in conducting research (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program, 2020). The identifiable information in the questionnaire was handled as confidentially as possible. However, individuals from UC Davis who oversaw my research could access participant data during audits or other monitoring activities. Respondents were asked for a pseudonym, and the list was kept separate. The interview date was used to identify the interview transcripts.

To minimize risk of a confidentiality break, all data collected for this study, such as interview audio files and transcripts, were kept in the Google Suite via Google Drive which is a secured cloud storage space via UC Davis Kerberos credentials. The data and data analysis notes were both kept behind password protected security. Additionally, I used a VPN to protect the data from being viewed by hackers. Further, I maintained exclusive use of my computer with the security tied password and TouchID fingerprint. Finally, the data and related data analysis was deleted once the study concluded, meaning when the dissertation has been signed by all members of the committee and the degree has been conferred.

Participants

Due to the study's focus on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and non-traditional and non-dominant forms of leadership (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012), I wanted to ensure that respondents held multiple marginalizations, other identity dimensions that marginalized or

minoritized them in the community of women, including expansive definition of gender, with special attention to BIPOC leaders of various sexual orientations, religion, class, size, ability, and more.

Participant Recruitment

Utilizing the systematic procedure outlined above, I applied the above five (5) characteristics to a membership list maintained by the Women's Center Committee (WCC) of the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA). WCC serves the purpose of bringing women's center professionals together, and the current co-chairs of the WCC maintain the Women and Gender Centers List that served as my sampling frame. I chose centers according to four features explained above related to size, location, type, and title. The interest in public institutions stemmed from my experience and familiarity with these types of institutions. A snowball sampling strategy was considered as a back-up but was not utilized.

Ultimately, I sent out a total of eight email invitations, and seven leaders agreed to participate in the study. The recruitment process began in Spring 2021 (March-May) which included contacting WGSC organizational leaders directly over email with follow-ups with the goal of answering questions and, ultimately, scheduling an interview via the Zoom Meeting platform. A copy of the Sample Recruitment Script is included (see Appendix A). Given the shelter in place orders that were issued in March 2020, remote meetings were a necessity. In the months following, there were changes in CDC guidance, as well as varying state and county requirements for re-opening. Additionally, potential respondents were given the option of choosing a phone meeting. Ultimately, no one selected that option. The email invitation contained comprehensive information from introducing the study, describing how confidentiality was maintained, requesting for consent to conduct the study, planning follow-up and finally,

setting-up the interview. Study participants were asked to set up an interview within one to two weeks. For convenience, confirmation emails and Google calendar invitations were sent to finalize the interview times. These included a copy of the consent form, the demographic questionnaire on Google forms, and copy of interview questions. A reminder email was sent a few days after until the interview time was finalized. A confirmation email was sent the day that the interview time was confirmed and then a reminder email was sent a day before the scheduled interview. A copy of the "Thank You for Participating and Next Steps" procedures is listed (Please see Appendix B).

Access

As acknowledged earlier, I had an emic perspective as a member of the group being studied (Hatch, 2002), namely, women leaders of WGSC. Having over 25 years' experience as a WGSC leader at UC Berkeley, I had insider knowledge of navigating a large four-year public institution and the WGSC field. This provided me access to relevant knowledge, resources, and structures for a WGSC professional. Most importantly, I had personal connections with leaders that initially raised concerns around recruiting. Overall, I found that invitees were open to participating. During the interview, one commented that they were excited that I was doing this research, and another shared that they had been an admirer of my work. I was not expecting these personal comments and was humbled by them. Their words really encouraged me as I conducted the study.

Criteria of Trustworthiness

To ensure the study was credible, I used the following methods: triangulation (use of multiple data sources) and member checking (respondent validation). For the interviews, I took

notes by hand in addition to utilizing the Zoom recording feature that also auto-generated transcripts. I also utilized an audio recording on a secondary device. At first, it was meant to only be a backup to the Zoom recording, but it ended up being another source to help with when I was cleaning-up transcripts and coding. I listened to the audio while reviewing the written transcripts as part of the transcript clean-up in addition to cross-referencing these notes and edited them as needed before sending each transcript to the leader. In all, six out of the seven interviewees/respondents reviewed their transcripts.

Data Collection

I conducted a qualitative study consisting of semi-structured interviews with seven WGSC leaders. Utilizing a convenience sample, I narrowed down invitations to leaders working at large four-year public universities and colleges across the United States. After piloting the questions, the interview protocol was finalized. The hour-long interviews were conducted virtually (Zoom) over a three-month period where the respondent leaders were sent a consent form, demographic questionnaire, and copy of the interview questions. Zoom interviews auto-generated transcripts (except for one) that were cleaned up and then sent to the leaders for review and corrections (member checking).

All data were collected roughly over an eight-week period between May 20, 2021-July 9, 2021. This study included two sources of data: demographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The demographic questionnaire provided me with much needed background and context around the women leader's positionality; thus, serving as preparation for the interviews. This case study design was further supported by feminist research praxis where there is a focus on the balance of power and authority between the researcher and researched (Hesse-Biber,

2014, p. 3), and it relied on the researcher to utilize methods that work best for their needs (Hesse-Biber, 2014 p. 238). The overarching idea was for feminist perspectives to serve as a guide to how a method was utilized and did not require specific methods to be used (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 10).

Demographic Questionnaire

Data collection included an online demographic questionnaire via Google forms. As shared earlier, the recruitment email introduced the study and invited the leader to participate as a respondent. Once the leader agreed to be interviewed, participation was confirmed via email (or phone) that included the written consent form and questionnaire with the calendar confirmation. The goal of the questionnaire was to provide additional insight into the leaders' salient identities and positionalities.

Piloting the Interview Protocol

Before finalizing the interview protocol, I conducted a pilot with a former WGSC leader who worked in a private university for several years. While she has now moved into a faculty role on a different campus, she continues to work in the education field and is affiliated with their campus women's, gender, and sexuality studies department. The goal of the pilot was three-fold: (1) evaluate the 12 proposed questions for understandability; (2) have a real time practice to see if the estimated 60-minute time was reasonable; (3) get feedback on questions, my interview technique, and any other portion of the interview[8].

[8] Despite the technical issues of this audio only interview, it was invaluable to get the practice and reflect on the experience from set-up and overall interview design. I received direct

Interviews

Interviewing, according to Seidman (2013), is a "powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives reflect those issues" (p. 13). My goal was to collect exploratory data and gain an in-depth understanding (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Adding a feminist approach meant focusing on feminist research goals (Hesse-Biber, 2014). This was important because feminist research is too often ignored in texts (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 9). Generally, these include: 1,) spotlighting women's diverse experiences, especially since gender is ignored as a point of inquiry (Devault, 1990; Eichler & Lapointe, 1985); 2.) exploring women's issues and standpoints (Harding, 1992), 3.) ensuring study across differences in race, class, gender, and other aspects of identity (Hill Collins, 2006); 4.) focusing on social change and social justice for women and other marginalized groups (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005); and 5.) understanding of relationship between researched and researcher, for example, acknowledging the power and authority the researcher has over the interview session and agenda (Hesse-Biber, 2014), and the researcher practicing reflexivity to be mindful of positionality in order to be on the "same plane" with the researched party (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

Utilizing semi-structured interviews with a specific interview guide (Hesse-Biber, 2014), I scheduled 60-minute interviews with purposefully selected individuals in the fall of 2020. I

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feedback about asking the respondents if they had questions before we began the interview. The pilot interviewee commented that the questions were good overall, and she could not think of additional questions, and that I was an easy person to talk to, so that helped with the interview.

chose the semi-structured interview type to allow for some flexibility and some spontaneity given what the respondents shared.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures, one-on-one interviews were conducted remotely. One of my concerns was my ability to build rapport or even miss body language cues, which comprise a large portion of communication. While technology exists to support these online meetings with a video component, it was important to recognize that in the ideal world I would have conducted these interviews in a location of convenience and comfort to the center leader. This could have included traveling to their location.

Interviews were all conducted via Zoom - a technology which I quickly learned given the COVID-19 health crisis. Given this virtual environment, there were items like type of platform, internet connection, and security that were addressed. Since technical issues arose during the pilot, this prepared me to have back-up options as well as to keep a calm demeanor while resolving unforeseen issues. When two technical issues did arise, I had a plan in place and options that were instrumental in moving forward. For instance, I turned-off video for one of the interviews due to Wi-Fi bandwidth issues. When issues persisted, I switched to a hotspot. Fortunately, there were no power shut offs or rolling back-outs that were realities in California for reducing the load on the energy grid during the warmer summer or wildfire risk reduction. Utilizing unique Meeting IDs and passwords added to having meetings without disruptions like Zoom-crashing.

During the interviews, I took notes by hand. At the conclusion of each 60-minute interview, memos were written to document any additional observations, questions, and insights. Items of note include, pauses, questions asked, probing questions, and any order change order of

questions. Two recording devices (e.g., utilizing the Zoom Meeting recording feature with audio transcription, and a phone or computer recorder as a back-up). Post-interview, the resulting Zoom transcript was downloaded and cleaned up for errors. While one transcript was lost, the file was transcribed by a professional transcribing service (e.g., Happy Scribe). Once I completed the interviews, I cleaned up transcripts utilizing a combination of referring to handwritten notes and re-listening to the interviews several times. Afterwards, these were shared with interviewees for their review. Most of the leaders had the opportunity to review and send in corrections to the transcripts. This return of corrected documents occurred from a little over two weeks to 5-months period. Once member-checked, the files were uploaded onto AtlasTI, a software used for coding.

I offered a $50 electronic gift card to respondents after the completion of the study in appreciation of their participation. Only three of the seven participants accepted it. A copy of my interview protocol is included in Appendix D, and respondents were given a copy of the interview questions for their convenience as seen in Appendix E.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included open coding, axial coding, and memo writing once the transcripts were checked by respondents. A code book was built with codes based on interesting quotes/insights and theoretical frameworks (e.g., Applied Critical Leadership and Intersectional Feminism). Next, I utilized word frequencies and concept tools, and later the word search queries for (feminism, social justice, leadership, etc.) to make sure that relevant items were coded. After this initial coding, axial coding was employed to group codes into families/patterns and reword existing codes to reflect themes more accurately. Some codes were deleted while others merged

into subcodes and category codes. Key themes aligned with feminist leadership subthemes named by Griggs (1989) and Wakefield (2017). Furthermore, it became evident in analyzing the codes that WGSC leaders shared strategies that were informed by their personal experiences, which are directly tied to their identities and positionality.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the COVID context, an unprecedented worldwide health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic due to "more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries and 4,291 deaths" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). The Trump Administration declared a national emergency on March 13, 2020 (White House, 2020). States and counties in the United States established their own orders and restrictions to help reduce the spread of the virus. On March 18, 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom issued a stay-at-home order for the State of California (Newsom, 2020). Three years into the outbreak on May 5, 2023, WHO declared the global emergency over, however, the focus would be on long-term management of the virus moving forward. As a researcher in California, I had to adjust as to the continuously developing situation, including conducting seven interviews virtually.

Lastly, the experience of sheltering at home had a profound impact not only on education at all levels, from K-16, but also on the work environments of educators and individuals involved in the daily functioning of schools and universities. Additionally, it has reshaped our perceptions of family and community life, altering our previous understanding of these aspects. With the spread of the coronavirus, both university and school administrators had to quickly shift to virtual spaces online, thus increasing reliance on technology at an exponential rate. This

transition highlighted existing inequities like access to technology and lack of local infrastructure for Wi-Fi connections to name a few. This also changed and continues to affect the higher education landscape. Prior to COVID-19, higher education already experienced increasing concerns, such as issues of mental health and wellbeing, basic needs, and rising costs beyond representation of women students. Since the first colleges and universities were built, the landscape has changed to include increasing numbers of students, a customized education, decreased reliance on state funds, online education, and increased needs for mental health support, student housing, and the privatization of higher education.

Chapter 4: Participant Profiles

In this chapter, I present demographic information about the study participants. I begin by restating the purpose of this study, the two research questions, and describing the demographic characteristics of my respondents. Next, I present a table that provides an overview of the respondent's demographic information and institutions. I conclude with the respondent profiles that focus on leaders' backgrounds and current work.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how women leaders of women, gender, and sexuality centers (WGSC, or women's centers) navigate the changing landscape in higher education in the United States. This study engaged a group of leaders from these designated feminist spaces about their leadership experiences. As these centers continue to serve as hubs of feminism (Davie, 2002; Marine, 2011), this study makes visible the strategies these WGSC leaders employ in the higher education context; a space/place that does not always center the experiences and needs of women, nonbinary people, gender nonconforming people, and gender expansive people. The findings can be broadly classified as follows: (a) understanding the decision-making and prioritization strategies employed by these leaders in their campus environments, (b) identifying the core principles guiding these leaders' decision-making processes, (c) analyzing how these leaders prioritize within the campus environments, taking into account the systemic contexts in which these centers operate, and (d) examining the significance of connections and relationships in the roles played by these leaders. In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of feminist leadership, which places a strong emphasis on nurturing connections and relationships.

Research Questions

This study makes visible the experiences of current women leaders working in university feminist spaces. To focus on their leadership practices and perspectives, the study asked two questions:

(RQ1) How do women* leaders navigate institutions of higher education as leaders of campus-based women gender and sexuality centers (WGSC)?

(RQ2) How do women* leaders view the future of campus-based WGSC in a changing landscape of higher education?

For the first research question, findings indicated that respondents embarked on their roles as WGSC leaders having benefited from these (or similar) spaces during their undergraduate and graduate student experiences. These leaders were steeped in studying feminism, social justice, and equity work, making them highly experienced in applying gender equity and social justice centered approaches. Most importantly, they read the world and analyzed challenges in their environments prioritizing values and beliefs that center hxrstorically marginalized groups. The second research question illuminated the multitude of possibilities available to amplify the transformative work of WGSC centers. As leaders reflected on their own personal experiences of multiple marginalization, they expressed the sense of validation when they were introduced to WGSC as students. As participants or former beneficiaries of these and similar spaces, literal worlds opened for each of them as they learned about gender equity work, higher education, and student affairs.

WGSC Leaders

I interviewed seven WGSC leaders from across the United States who all met the participant criteria. The table below (Table 4) provides an overview of their responses to the demographic questionnaire. In alignment with a feminist research approach and intersectional feminist principles, it was important for me to understand who these leaders were, bring their perspectives to light, and amplify their voices in their own words.

Table 4.1

Profile of WGSC Leaders

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Race/ Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Generation	Additional demographic information or salient identities	Years at WGSC	Parent	Public Institution Type
Olivia (she/her/ hers)	woman	Multiracial	straight	Gen X		20	Y	Four-Year, Large, R1, Urban
Mae (she/her/ hers)	cisgender woman	Black	lesbian	GenX		9	N	Four-Year, Large, RI, Urban

Ruth (they/them/ theirs)	genderfluid	White	queer and under the bi/fluid area	gen x, on the millennial line, but relate more closely with gen x.	invisibly dis/abled, middle class, U.S. citizen, English as first language, perceived as a cis woman frequently	6	N	Four-Year, Large, R1, Urban
Riyo (they/them/ theirs)	gender queer	Multiracial	queer	Gen X	1st gen, transfer student	13	N	Four-Year, Large, M1, Urban
Juno (she/her/ hers)	cisgender female	Biracial	lesbian	gen x	Raised by single parent, low ses upbringing, first gen	5	Y	Four-Year, Large, R1, Urban
Julianne (she/her/ hers)	cis woman	Black (biracial)	queer	Millennial	Below poverty line	4.5 4	Y	Four-Year, Large, R1, Urban

Riley (they/she)	genderqueer woman	White	queer	Xennial	parent	7	Y	Four-Year, Large, R2, Urban

* The author intentionally kept the respondents' words as was submitted in the questionnaire.

The last column provides an overview of the large, public, research institutions where these leaders were employed. This includes Carnegie classification, size, level of urbanization, and setting of these land grant institutions. This provides a general understanding of the environments where WGSCs operate.

Respondent Profiles

These respondent vignettes provide a snapshot of the WGSC leaders' backgrounds, as well as contexts for their work environments. The following names are pseudonyms that were selected by the respondents to ensure their confidentiality. These aliases were requested as part of the demographic questionnaire. Given the small niche inherent in women's centers, I purposely left out demographic details that could potentially disclose the identities of the participants. Collectively, the group included newer professionals who ranged in years of tenure in their positions - from as few as four years to 20+ years

Olivia (she/her/hers)

Olivia is a long-time administrator with 20 years of experience at her university, a "persistently white institution." As the Executive Director of the WGSC, she sees herself as an "assistant to

the staff." One of her priorities lies in ensuring that the staff members have what they need to succeed in their work.

In addition to being classified as White, she is a "daughter of a first-generation immigrant and specifically of someone who has come from the Middle East and also someone whose faith system is not from the dominant faith system." She points out that her parents' life experiences and frameworks have had a "powerful impact" on her own lens. Further, Olivia has also benefited from both formalized and informal learning opportunities in the fields of "communications, human development and family studies, women's studies, and sociology of education."

Mae (she/her/hers)

Mae is a director who moved up within the organization after being assistant director for several years. During her undergraduate years, she volunteered at her college women's center. When she started there, she did not even know what a women's center was, but by the end of her volunteering experience, she realized what a huge impact it had on her college experience including her introduction to feminism and more. She realized that she wanted to work in a women's center later in life.

As a Black cisgender woman who is queer and a GenXer from a poor working-class background, Mae focuses on "who's being left out of a conversation or process or in who's being included." Because of these observations, she also "pay[s] attention to [the] subtext."

Ruth (they/them/theirs)

Ruth is a director who also moved up within the university working in almost all the positions within their current center. Prior to working in their center, they had a variety of jobs,

including serving as an RA (resident assistant) during their undergraduate years. Their experience as an RA opened their eyes to considering Student Affairs as a profession. Through the support and encouragement of mentors and icons, they completed their graduate degree in this field.

They are a white genderfluid and queer person who is "perceived as a cis woman frequently." Additionally, they are an "invisibly dis/abled, middle class, U.S. citizen" who learned English as their first language. Further, they have a "complicated relationship with the term - leader."

Riyo (they/them/theirs)

Riyo "fell into women's centers through the LGBT community" and has been at their center for about 13 years. Before taking their current position, they worked at a center that focused on culture, gender, and sexuality. The idea of working in a gender and sexuality center was on their radar since graduate school.

As a queer, multiracial, and first-generation transfer student, they led their college LGBT club and later a feminist group. It was not until these college leadership positions that they were introduced to the idea of women's centers and LGBT centers by a professor. Growing up holding different identities heavily informed their social justice lens. Intersectionality is very important to them. They also noted that they learned a lot about how to think about issues through their mom. At home, it was through PBS that they learned more about racial justice and movements that inform the ways they look at the world today.

Juno (she/her/hers)

Juno celebrated her 20th anniversary at her institution. This is where she also completed her doctoral studies where her primary research interest was about women in STEM. It was through the support of a prominent woman faculty member who conducted research on women at the university that her passion was ignited for supporting marginalized groups of women.

As a first generation, low SES student, she did not know the hidden curriculum at the university. Mentorship and encouragement from her faculty network "who see potential in [her] that she did not see in herself" helped her take positions that she would otherwise not have considered. Additionally, it was through values instilled by her hardworking single mom that she learned that value of persistence and "never giving up". Now, as a parent in an LGBTQ+ family, she is very aware of how she is perceived in different areas of her state; sometimes, she feels her racial/ethnic identity more, while other times, her lesbian identity is more pronounced.

Julianne (she/her/hers)

A newer director who has served in this role for five years, Julianne previously worked as an assistant director in a different institution. As an undergraduate, she worked in the cross-cultural center and EOP where she "discovered student affairs" while doing equity-based work supporting first-generation low-income student athletes and students of color.

As a "youngish Black biracial woman, coming from being queer, coming from a family that was on the poverty line, being a young mom," she describes herself as an "includer" who centers those who are being left out. She emphasized her passion for her work by saying: "I really wanted to be in a women's center because I had encountered as a woman of color whenever I was in spaces where we were really trying to build racial justice and racial equity. It

felt like gender and queerness and all these other identities and experiences were not being centered. And so, I wanted to continue to do racial justice work and economic justice work, but through more of a gendered lens."

Riley (they/she)

Riley completed their undergraduate studies at a small women's college, and this background informed how they used gender as a lens through which to think about education, thinking about higher education, and how they made meaning of [them]selves in the world." Going to a large research institution for graduate school and interning at the WGSC, they "started to see cultural resource centers as a way to make large institutions feel small, to be a place of community, a place of social change."

As a white person who grew up culturally Christian and middle class, they work to be aware of their "internalized dominance." Now, they are a parent, and this work has really shaped/changed [them] as a person in a lot of ways or the way they think about themselves in the world. Always striving to be relational in their leadership, she describes "the relationships that [they] had with other leaders, folks' investment and mentorship in [them], the way [they] strive to mentor students, that it's really relationship driven."

Summary of Respondent Demographic Characteristics

This qualitative study focused on women leaders who experienced multiple marginalization through the intersection of their identities. As part of the participant recruitment, I invited colleagues who worked at large public research universities across the U.S as center leaders during the 2016-2020 timeframe to participate in the study. To recap, the overall respondent selection criteria included women, which sought out to include people from

marginalized genders, specifically those under the larger umbrellas of cis or cisgender, nonbinary, and trans or transgender. Guided by feminist research methodology (Hesse-Biber, 2014), I used the verbatim descriptors provided by the respondents rather than group them under imposed terms or categories that might not have reflected their identities. The goal was to empower participants to self-identify rather than be categorized in the conventional, prescriptive manner often employed by traditional research methodologies. To illustrate the breadth of ways that individuals identified, for example, no one used the same terminology when responding to the gender question (woman, cisgender woman, genderfluid, gender queer, cisgender female, cis woman, and genderqueer woman). In terms of race/ethnicity, there was one Black respondent, two white respondents, and four mixed-race (two specifying biracial and two specifying multi-racial). With regards to their sexual orientation, most of the participants identified as queer, two identified as lesbian, and finally, one identified as straight. Other salient identity markers included being parents, coming from poor/low SES[9] backgrounds, invisibly dis/abled, and first-generation college students. These leaders' experiences were nuanced as each person held marginalized identities while also possessing aspects of privilege. This combination of experiences gave WGSC leaders a unique outlook on certain issues. This complexity in their point of view served as a foundation for innovative solutions and approaches to leadership.

[9] SES (socioeconomic status)

Chapter 5: Findings

The aim of this chapter is to present the insights shared by the seven WGSC leaders. As people who held multiple marginalized identities as well as privileged identities, similarities arose from their interviews. These patterns fell into three major themes, namely, (1) values and feminist beginnings; (2) survival skills, strategies and superpowers; and (3) resisting status quo.

These key findings are discussed within the context of the two research questions (RQ):

RQ1. How do women leaders navigate institutions of higher education as leaders of campus-based women, gender, and sexuality centers (WGSC)?

RQ2. How do women leaders view the future of campus-based WGSC in a changing landscape of higher education?

Utilizing a feminist research lens, the interviews revealed three emergent themes to describe ways the WGSC leaders navigated the university setting and their views on the center work. The first theme concentrates on the frameworks and values that led leaders to cultivate a feminist identity, engage in social justice values-based leadership, and/or recognize the influences and impact of family on their professional and personal development. The second theme focuses on intersectional identities as a foundation for action through an intersectional feminist praxis and intentional space-making. The third theme revolves around resisting the status quo. This theme explores ways to empower others to act, challenging conventional leadership models, and developing relevant strategies to prioritizing holistic health (See Table 5.1) Although the themes were distinct, it proved challenging to entirely separate them into discrete categories due to the presence of overlapping ideas and concepts.

Table 5.1

Themes and subthemes

THEMES	SUBTHEME
1. values and feminist beginnings	family influences (home) development of feminist leadership (college) social justice values-based leadership trajectories (career)
2. survival skills, strategies, and superpowers	engaging in intersectional feminist praxis intervening and space making observation skills
3. resisting status quo	embracing feminist leadership oddball as resistance (equity work)

Theme 1: Values and Feminist Beginnings

The first theme focuses on the participants' feminist beginnings and where their values and feminist principles stemmed. When asked about the values or philosophies that informed their work, leaders collectively referred to feminism, social justice, and/or equity work. Subthemes included recognizing family influences, the development of feminist leadership, and practicing social justice values-based leadership. Building from what they learned at home, the theme moves through their college experiences, their leadership development to the present, and beyond, preparing for the future

The missions of their centers are to reduce barriers, question/interrogate power, and uplift the communities they served, especially, women, nonbinary people, gender nonconforming people, and gender expansive people. Leaders collectively referred to the various lenses, frameworks, and values that influenced and informed their work. I found that respondents

experienced their campus roles as being steeped in advocacy work for various communities. Some centers focused on the student community while other centers focused on staff and faculty communities as well.

Subtheme: Family Influences

The first subtheme focuses on lessons learned from family influences. Overall, the coded list of values shared by the leaders included: accountability, asking questions, questioning systems, equity, humility, justice, fairness, transparency, intersectionality, and care. When asked where these values came from, respondents relayed examples from home like family (e.g. mother, parent, child) influences. A couple of the respondents spoke of parental influence, specifically, of their mothers. Juno (she/her/hers), who was also a first-generation college student, shared that,

> [her] mom - was.... a single mom and she worked many jobs at a time and so from her I learned things like how, you know, how to work for things that are core to your values like making sure her kids had health insurance. Like these were all things that I learned growing up, but I never learned like the - how universities work.

Similarly, Riyo (they/them/theirs) recounted their mother's appreciation of PBS (Public Broadcast Television) in their younger formative years.

> [I]t was always my mom that talked about the things being, well, you know, right and wrong and all that kind of stuff and she very much was a believer in the civil rights movement and supporting that and we watched a lot of programming around that and so that really like it formulated my perspective on it also being multiracial…

Riyo discussed their own journey of values development and their growing understanding of hxrstory which began at home and expanded in college as they became involved in campus activism. Comparatively, Olivia (she/her/hers) pointed out how religion and parental experiences influenced her lens. She shared,

> So, you know, one of my parents was a Christian, but one was a Muslim. So, these are things that have had a powerful impact I think on the lens that I have. Then also even the experiences that my parents have had, and kind of their frameworks and experiences, and the work that they have done professionally and personally have impacted me.

Olivia recognized how living with her family, their experiences, made a difference in the perspectives she holds. To add, Julianne (she/her/hers) also spoke of her children's influence. She shared, "[t]hat power has been really important to the way I show up as a leader. I think that a lot of that, like I said, comes from my upbringing comes from my parents. It also comes from my kids." Mae (she/her/hers), in a similar manner, discussed the women in her family who imparted valuable lessons to her. Mae explained,

> I've learned from colleagues and mentors and, sort of, my own trial and error pieces of things that I found that work and don't work, but I think some of that is honestly very early influenced by the women in my own family, so I think before I knew terms like feminism and you know I had all these incredible women in my family who, as far as I'm concerned, kind of, were everything and so watching their example of how they really built community, connected with folks, but also took charge and were the decision makers… So, I think, having some of their examples is - still impacts me and influences how I do my work.

As quoted above, Mae recognized that women in her own family served as her starting point for learning about feminism prior to college.

In all, these respondents drew from their own personal experiences and personal relationships to inform their leadership approaches as a multiply marginalized and minoritized center leaders. These leadership approaches stand in contrast to the prevailing conventional notions of leadership which are usually based on white cisgender men.

Subtheme: Development of Feminist Leadership

While not all leaders explicitly identified themselves as feminists or discussed the use of a feminist lens, there was a shared awareness around power dynamics and a mindfulness toward individuals occupying positions of authority. They each shared their approaches to leadership,

including the many definitions of leadership, the origins of leaders' approaches to leadership, and the evolution towards feminist leadership practices.

One leader, Olivia (she/her/hers), described what informed her leadership approach and questioned the definition of leadership itself. Olivia posited,

> …putting those in conversation with lived experiences and the informal learning that I've had. So, all of those things impact the lens in which I approach "leadership." That word is used in so many ways… that can mean lots of different things, so then we need to say like what is leadership? How do you understand what it means to be a leader?

Olivia demonstrated the thoughtful practice of examining the meaning of leadership reinforcing the importance of reflexivity.

Taking this further, Ruth (they/them/theirs) offered another perspective on a definition of what leadership looks like. Ruth explained,

> When we share the term, "leader," there's often this idea of like one single figure and they're up a podium and they're like leading people…[I]t's often tied into like, the rhetoric of like one voice and everyone's following [the leader] and that's like not always the most feminist pursuit, you know, if it's just like a unilateral one person, one voice sort of way of leading… You don't have to be a leader like that, but I think that's the message of like. I got… I never wanted to feel like I was… It feels like a not great way to use positionality… I never wanted to feel like I was steamrolling other people.

They challenged the notion of the conventional leader as the proverbial sage on stage, inferring that they would never want to abuse their power in that way.

Again, Olivia (she/her/hers), in a moment of self-reflection, posed the following questions to herself about the foundations of her leadership practice.

> What frameworks are you using? What assumptions do you have about who you are, and who others are, what you want to achieve? So obviously, feminisms and those frameworks, and I say plural, because there's many different things that can mean. So, feminisms and those frameworks are some of the things that has informed my work, specifically

Olivia pointed to the ways in which the broader feminisms framework opens up the possibility of various definitions of feminism and in turn, expands the ways in which women's centers might hone their definition of feminism to be as inclusive as possible.

Further, Mae (she/her/hers) added on these feminist frameworks by including critical masculinities. She explained,

> …one is thinking more expansively about gender equity in different folks and their roles within gender equity work. And so, before the pandemic, our office had started doing some things around critical masculinities. And really, there are some other stakeholders on campus that have sought us out and said, okay, we really think this is a need.

Expanding the frameworks to include masculinity work is an area where campus partners and community members are requesting support and insight from WGSC centers.

Further, Riyo (they/them/theirs) shared that people who use their center are trying to find community like in feminist consciousness raising groups around trauma, gender awakening, or understanding sexism as an example. Then they expanded further, "So, like you know the names of things have changed, but the idea of like what people are going to these spaces for has not changed." Creating more spaces to explore gender, including dialogue across genders and examination of one's own relationships to power, recognizing positionality, feminisms, can expand leadership practices.

Subtheme: Social Justice Values-based leadership career trajectories

While participants did not always use the same terms when asked about the values that informed their leadership, they all used language that spoke to social justice tenets. This subtheme focuses on leaders' quests to align their professional leadership approach with their personal values. In the process of embodying feminist purpose & principles, all leaders were

asked about the values underpinning their work and the sources of these values. Without exception, they referred to the use of feminist principles, gendered lens, equity lens, critical, and/or social justice.

All the leaders shared their frameworks that guide their work. While distinct, these lenses relate to one another by falling under the larger category of social justice. This proved fundamental to how they assessed issues of equity. Olivia (she/her/hers) shared, "I think social justice framework is important. Because, then it acknowledges that there are systems of oppression." Multiple leaders referenced social justice work and acknowledged the need for this work to be conducted not only in higher education but across all sectors of society. Another leader, Riley (they/she), expressed, "my background as a woman's college graduate really informed how gender was like a lens through which I was thinking about education, thinking about higher education, how I made meaning of myself in the world." This lens was a crucial part of their growth and development as a leader and member of the community.

Not all these leaders, however, went to women's colleges or even knew that this type of work existed. Once they found WGSCs, many described the meaningful and profound experiences working at their college women's centers, or similar centers such as: identity-based centers, cross cultural centers, and even community-based centers addressing interpersonal violence. A similar thread ran through their introductions to WGSC work. Multiple leaders described how they "fell into" or "stumbled into" the work as undergraduate or graduate students; it was not something they sought out or "even knew existed."

Mae (she/her/hers) recounted how she first became involved at a WGSC through a volunteer fair where she was introduced to official feminist work,

> One of the significant periods or the significant involvements for me. I was an undergrad when I was doing my undergraduate degree and was volunteering at my campus women's Center… And was learning so much about feminism and things like that... I think so much of what I learned in college, I think, in a women's Center informed so much of my interest.

This experience made a major difference in terms of her pursuits during college and beyond. She also drew inspiration from other possible careers, contemplating how to narrow/choose her choices to higher education because of the profound impact to their identity development at a critical time like college. This volunteering experience opened up the possibility of working in higher education into a viable option, including leading her to consider a path towards becoming a WGSC director. As a niche field, these types of director roles were very uncommon and highly competitive. After obtaining work experience outside of the WGSC field, she decided to pursue a director position. Mae described her excitement around the opportunity to achieve a life goal. She said, “I was like, it’s time, it's the moment, so you know I feel like I kind of finally got around to my dream job as director of a women's center.” The opportunity to learn about feminism was pivotal in her decision to choose this career.

Motivations for this work are around the possibilities of bringing your whole self into the workspace. Julianne (she/her/hers) shared,

> I felt like by the end of this, I really wanted to be in a women's center because, as a woman of color, whenever I was in spaces where we were really trying to build racial justice and racial equity it felt like gender and queerness and all these other identities and experiences were not being centered. And so, I wanted to continue to do racial justice work and economic justice work, but through more of a gendered lens. So, it was just kind of like shifting. It's all part of the same kaleidoscope, but it's just kind of like tilting it, right?

The interconnectedness of parts of Julianne’s identities - race, gender, and sexuality were central - and other spaces were forcing her to choose one aspect at a time. Centering gender in WGSC work in a way that aligned with the justice work she wanted to do was her inspiration.

By the same token, Riley (they/she), shared how they had completed an internship at their center as a graduate student and their motivation for considering a permanent career position. As someone who went to a women's college, Riley shared,

> I started to see cultural resource centers as a way to make large institutions feel small, to be a place of community, a place of social change. I felt some of the similar ethos that I had in my undergraduate experience, and so I felt like this was the position that would keep me at my institution.

Most of these leaders shared similar experiences before they came to this work. Six of the seven respondents worked at WGSC as students where they experienced for themselves the transformative nature of the work in these feminist spaces (Marine, 2011). I discuss this further in Chapter 6.

Using another entry point, Olivia (she/her/hers), came to the WGSC space by working in "community organizing and community work in nonprofits." Similar to fellow leaders, she noted how she embedded her personal values into the professional core operations in WSGC work. She stated,

> I saw this as an opportunity to make my profession align with my personal value systems and not experience kind of the code switching and this understanding of like dualisms and things that I think do not exist. I think we are our whole selves, um, if we are, and that is allowed in all of those places.

The lens through which leaders viewed the world, the respondents shared that, for the most part, they navigated spaces by relying on and abiding by their values and beliefs. They resisted traditional leadership approaches that failed to align with those values. When describing how they moved through their university contexts, the WGSC respondents spoke about "values" and "ethos" in their work to implement change in their environments.

While Olivia was one of the leaders who did not share a direct student experience working at a WGSC, her equivalent experience at a center that focused on interpersonal violence, similarly provided resources and educational programs, as well as empowerment opportunities to their constituents. In her words, "the thread that interested me in this [WGSC] role was the thing that is shared is the advocacy and social justice framework in all of the professional roles that I've had." As she considered this career move, the opportunity to make a difference in the higher education by utilizing frameworks centering at all identities, especially marginalized genders, was key to her taking this role in the university context.

Theme 2: Survival Skills, Strategies and Superpowers

This theme centers around survival strategies leaders learned over time and the superpowers they developed from these strategies that stem from an understanding of their environments and their individual power. A prominent insight that emerged from the interviews was an emphasis on intersectional identities. This is informed by theoretical frameworks of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) along with Black feminist perspectives (hooks, 1984, 2000; Hill Collins, 2006), and U.S. third world feminism (Sandoval, 1991, 2005). Overall, this theme encompasses a commitment to including marginalized genders and identities, as well as engaging in intersectional feminist praxis, space making, and survival strategies like observational skills and having difficult conversations.

Riyo (they/them/theirs) described their thoughts on social justice frameworks and the future of intersectionality. They shared their insights with a member of their staff. Riyo explained,

> Also, you know, contemplating the social justice issues that I mean, what's changed is how they're talking about it right, like the intersectionality is becom[ing] a big thing… I

> kind of laid out for [our education programmer] like this whole idea that I had a fourth wave feminism and where we're doing that, we're moving beyond the third wave and into the fourth wave of this idea of intersectionality - is that our oppression is wrapped up in other people's oppression. For lots of different reasons, and that includes the oppression of men.

Seeing the interconnectedness of the oppression of all genders is foundational to intersectionality. Engaging in discussion and dialogue about topics like how patriarchy functions to put people in rigid boxes without flexibility to be who you are can be limiting. This sets the stage for seeing how power and privilege shift and interact. Including gender as a point of analysis is central to the ways leaders make sense of their environments and work.

Subtheme: Engaging in intersectional feminist praxis

This subtheme focuses on leaders' descriptions of actions that were guided by an intersectional feminist lens. Central to this subtheme is an examination of power, privilege, and oppression and constructing new knowledge based on unique perspectives. For example, Riley (they/she) shared an appreciation of the expansiveness of WGSC work, "But I really do this as like a center of feminist praxis of doing feminist social change work. Right? And that there's a space for folks across gender identities to show up and do that with us." Having a broader understanding of gender and a corresponding vocabulary to use allows us to speak to specific communities and make visible their experiences and needs. Within this framing, there is a level of humility as individuals honestly addressed their identities, positionality, and subjectivity to understand their interactions with other groups or systems.

One component of intersectional feminist praxis is reflexivity and introspection. This action of self-reflection demonstrates humility. In analyzing category codes from the data, the emphasis is on how one's position can influence the perspective/lens through which they enact

their power or privileges is prominent; it is important to note that identity is distinct from positionality. Olivia (she/her/hers) explained,

> So, this is important, I think, to say is that I really use the framework of subjectivity even more than I do identity. Because it's kind of a queering of identity in a way, if you think about it, because it's self-in-relation. And that we are constantly shifting and that might even shift depending on who we are engaging with. There's a temporality you know. Like we are not static beings, and so basically, I think part of it is there's a lot of things that inform who I am.

Subjectivity is another way of grounding one's perspective that is feminist in its orientation because it is not static. Olivia acknowledged the fluidity of different power relationships relative to who she is interacting with; different connections made with different people.

Some leaders spoke about the privilege associated with their dominant/majoritarian identities. The practice of acknowledging one's privilege or places where one has power or unearned benefits is a strategy informed by humility and social justice values. To illustrate, Ruth (they/them/theirs) shared the importance they placed on not wanting to take up space as a white person. Ruth explained,

> …Which is really helpful because I am mindful of how much I try to be, I am always – to do better on how much space I take up as a white person who's also a leader but also just as a white person. I'm often the only white person in the meetings that I'm in and I never want to be like the first person to jump in. I don't want to talk over other people I just um I try to be aware of how my whiteness shows up.

Similarly, another leader spoke about their familiarity with Christian culture and how Christian dominance remained a point of privilege even though they did not practice this faith. Riley (they/she) said,

> I don't have a current faith tradition, but because I think about identities, I identify as culturally Christian and the ways in which, like that upbringing, I have access to the language of Christianity and Christian dominance. But even if I don't practice it, I do have dominant access through those backgrounds. So those are things that just, I think, as far as the fullness of me and how I move through the world.

This awareness of one's own social position (e.g. whiteness, Christian culture) can significantly influence how people enact their power. In the case above, it gave the leader an understanding of the level of access they had that was not available to others. Both leaders above recognized their privilege like exposure to Christian frames of reference (i.e. they were not practicing Christians but were familiar with the religions language, concepts, and rituals) and their ability to take up space as a white person. They both shared that they had to be mindful of those who did not have the same access. This checking of their privileges was another strategy to enact intersectional feminist leadership and allyship.

On the other hand, Mae (she/her/hers) was surprised by microaggressions she received from colleagues who were also from hxrstorically marginalized groups. Mae explained,

> I do think there I've been really aware of some of the microaggressions, and how I'm perceived and how that shows up I think sometimes as a Black woman. There are a lot of assumptions made about what kind of labor I'm going to be available to do. And sometimes the things that people ask of me. I'm just like… you would not ask my colleague or my counterpart, who has a completely different identity. You would NOT ask them to do this, or you would not communicate to me in a certain way, or you would not attempt to undermine my leadership in this way.

In terms of expectations, Mae shared her disappointment by the actions of another colleague. This disappointment stemmed from her hope and belief that this colleague, who also held marginalized identities, would not act in an oppressive manner.

Subtheme: Intervening and Space making

This next subtheme is focused on the interventions leaders make to create space for marginalized voices and perspectives. This is about leaders taking their power to the benefit of another. Participants shared their experiences of being marginalized and their desire to prevent others from enduring similar experiences of exclusion. All the leaders spoke about how their experiences were transformational in giving them a gendered lens, a critical lens, social justice

lens to see the world and make sense of what they were experiencing as a marginalized subject. Julianne (she/her/hers) confessed,

> And so, I think I have a really - I like to think I have a very empowering style where I don't embody some of maybe the stereotypical qualities you would associate with a leader. And it's taken a long time to get to a place where I feel more comfortable being a little more directive. But I don't know, I just tend to show up as very authentic and honest with my team. I really value collaboration and collectively building. I think because I experienced being left out so often, I'm an includer.

The quote above is so simple in its message and reinforces the idea that WGSC leaders draw from their personal experiences to drive broader campus inclusion work. These experiences of being treated differently had such a significant impact on their lives that they actually sought out positions where they could make changes in ways that people were treated in their spaces. Julianne was creating this for her team and campus partners.

Similarly, Riyo (they/them/theirs) shared that they wanted to make sure students had positive coming out experiences. Riyo explained,

> I think, you know, what's always driven me to do what I do is so that people didn't experience the kind of experiences that I had when I was younger. And I technically had it easy compared to a lot of stories that I hear from other students. So, I think that still continues to be my driver is that I want people to be able to not have to experience hardship in their coming out process, I want to make it as smooth and positive experience as I possibly can.

Although Riyo does not say how they achieve this explicitly in the quote, what they share is an intention, an approach, and a mindfulness to cultivate a supportive environment, etc.. While informed by their own personal experiences, Riyo expressed wanting to make things better for the next generation of LGBTQ+ students. This signals to students that the center space is also for them. Leaders' experiences of multiple marginalization served as inspirational reference points for them to actively work to ensure more uplifting and desirable outcomes.

Subtheme: Observation skills

Intersectional feminist praxis centers around ways hxrstorically marginalized groups have learned to move in the world, including in higher education. Some leaders learned these skills as part of survival. Observation skills, paying attention to what is included and not, and letting in less common sentiments were key strategies of exhibiting political savvy. By utilizing these key strategies, leaders were able to make nuanced decisions based on their assessment of multiple points of information. Mae (she/her/hers) shared,

> There is a lot of politicking, and so I actually think that often living at the intersections of many different systems, kind of makes, sets a lot of women of color up, a lot of queer folks, a lot of QTBIPOC folks up for being really good at politics, even if we hate it, but I think we know how to sort of read the room, and so for me that's something that I really try to pay attention to, um, reading the things that are said and unsaid, but also making sure to bring in voices that are not often brought in.

Mae pointed out that marginalized people's politicking/observation skills were well-honed for due to their consistent use as a survival mechanism. The "reading the room" strategy involved taking an observational and cautious approach to situations. Mae continued,

> I think those identities make me aware, I think, whenever you're kind of embodying multiple marginalized and privileged… a lot of marginalized historically underrepresented identities, for me, that makes me really pay a lot of attention to who's being left out of a conversation or process or in who's being included and really paying attention to those identities, as well, so I think it gives you this, it gives me a sense of being really focused on observing what's happening and observing the dynamics that are happening in in situations and also paying attention to subtext because I think a lot of things in our field and in many organizations are not overtly spoken or communicated but there's a lot of subtext.

Leaders who hold multiple marginalities "read the room" and leverage what might come naturally in terms of an attentiveness to what is said and unsaid, things that can be seen, including subtle and non-verbal cues. These heightened observation skills or having antenna up enhances leaders' understanding of their environments or contexts to be able to communicate across and between communities and bridge a variety of needs. Adding an equity and justice

mindedness means understanding current context in relation to hxrstorical context and power. This social awareness can help leaders meet multiple needs to be more inclusive/communicate effectively – leading to buy-in for change.

Juno (she/her/hers) shared that her experiences as a first-generation student extended even to her role as a first-generation professional administrator. She learned later that there was language to explain what she had experienced as someone who was not exposed to the culture of higher education. Juno explained,

> So, I went to school because I got a scholarship, and then I went to graduate school because I got a scholarship with not knowing the game of higher education or what you know now I know is called the hidden curriculum or anything like that and it feels like the hidden curriculum for first gen students; it never ends. So, it doesn't matter if you get promoted, the level of leadership… that hidden curriculum still exists as an administrator.

The first-generation experience extended for Juno as she moved from college student to WGSC director. Being the first in her family to reach a campus administrator position, she was not exposed to the campus inner workings and culture. As an outsider, as in underrepresented and hxrstorically marginalized, there are things one would either not know about or even to pay attention to or observe.

Another strategy is for leaders to have a network of support or inner circle for survival. Some shared how people "believed in me." For example, this was evident when mentors and colleagues expressed confidence in them while they simultaneously grappled with not trusting their own individual judgment. Calling in trusted colleagues involves the humility to ask questions and be okay with not knowing it all.

To explain the significance of a network of support for WGSC leaders is about disrupting the idea that leaders are a singular sage individual who knows everything. Leaders emphasized the value and advantage of a trusted colleague "who would tell you if you have overstepped or

need to speak up more." Participants spoke to the importance of creating a network of support to serve specific roles such as a moral compass, a cheerleader, a coach, or a guide. Juno (she/her/hers) shared,

> That's the part where [my faculty] have really helped me understand what the hidden components of different pieces of the university are that otherwise, you know, it'd be really embarrassing to have to ask somebody. Like I can ask them questions, who are now no longer my boss, that I can't ask my current boss, because it just feels awkward. Like there's this constant sense of I should know that, and, you know, and who do you ask when you think that everybody else knows something, but that you don't.

Similarly, Mae (she/her/hers) shared that she has a group that she reaches out to for advice. Mae described,

> There might go to folks for things I would say this or that like kitchen table group of… Okay, I need to process something. I need to run an idea by you, so I get a lot of I think strength and inspiration from those folks and I think about the places in my job that I really love the most.

Overall, leaders spoke about the benefits of having a support community or inner circle who can share more about assumptions or expectations of being in this director leader level, especially for those who might be first-generation.

Moreover, WGSC leaders shared about collective vision, workload concerns, and related stress. One of the leaders, Olivia (she/her/hers), recalled the following:

> … 'a saying in Spanish called "mil usos", which is "1000 uses." In some ways I think of myself as an assistant to the staff that I work with. My title is executive director, but, really my role is to support the staff so that they have the resources that they need, so that they feel supported. And then I would say a piece of what that I do is help us articulate our collective vision because I think there is a collective vision, helping us articulate a mutual shared goal.

"Being an assistant to the staff," or to the people she supervises, resists the conventional leader-subordinate status quo by proposing an alternative to the dynamic within workspaces. "Many uses" also aligns with the ways in which WGSCs (Davie, 2002) end up being "all things" to

many people, subsuming the countless needs within the campus. To extend the metaphor further, center leaders by extension wear multiple hats, including, how the leaders placing themselves in a non-traditional and non-dominant leader role as providing support of their staff.

These skills, strategies, and superpowers were informed by leader experiences and how they navigated higher education. It is about appreciating their perspectives and acknowledging the power of their identities and how it positions them to bring innovative insights to higher ed administration.

Theme 3: Resisting status quo

Theme 3 focuses on ways in which participants in this study resisted the status quo and interrogated existing societal conditions. Status quo focuses on patriarchal and white supremacist norms and conventionally accepted majoritarian behaviors and ways of being. In higher education, this looks like top-down hierarchical structures. To persist in these environments, participants shared their experiences including embracing feminist leadership approaches and resisting as "oddballs" in their institutions. "Oddballs" refers to two leaders' experiences as an "oddball," "odd," or outsider in reference to the ways in which leaders felt in comparison to traditionally accepted leaders. This questioning of power and power structures is a feature of feminist work and social justice work.

Because dominant voices and experiences are the norm, WGSC leaders defaulted to the judgment of others instead of their own. Self-doubt crept in as WGSC leaders thought about their own skills, and knowledge regarding their role. Impostor Syndrome, coined by Dr. Pauline Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes in 1978, refers to the phenomena of high-achieving women feeling

like a fraud or impostor despite being accomplished. This certainly contributed to leaders' feelings of inadequacy.

These messages often revolved around questions of trustworthiness and perceptions of who possessed superior judgment or skills in particular domains (e.g., faculty in relation to educational roles). Many of them grappled with self-doubt regarding their own competencies and their potential for success in their director roles. This self-doubt led to reservations about their abilities and not always trusting in their judgment.

Center leaders made comments that underscored this feeling of impostor phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978). Riley (they/she) expressed how they did not feel "on par" with other leaders. In a similar vein, Juno (she/her/hers) recounted how she did not apply for the director position that she eventually got because she thought she "would not be selected" anyways; it was not until her mentor encouraged her that she applied. Some center leaders seemed to "have a complicated relationship with leadership." Ruth (they/them/theirs) described not feeling like "leadership material." Building upon the concept of "complicated relationship," as discussed above, it becomes evident that many individuals may not perceive themselves as leaders in alignment with traditional or dominant definitions of "what it means to be a leader" or "who can be a leader." This phenomenon is closely intertwined with the prevailing conventional notions of leadership and how leaders reconcile these with their individual interpretations of leadership, which are often influenced by role models such as mentors, scholars, and supervisors.

In essence, this dynamic invites us to explore various leadership styles that are often marginalized or considered non-traditional and non-dominant, as highlighted by (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012). This perspective on leadership can lead individuals to see themselves through a deficit lens. Even the language of "on par" reveals a certain level of knowledge or a threshold

confidence that leaders have to reach in order to be worthy of the "leader" title. As discussed in leadership literature, many studies focus on white cishet men as research subjects or as the conventional, traditional, or dominant model of a leader.

Subtheme: Embracing Feminist Leadership Approaches

This subtheme on embracing feminist leadership approaches is steeped in challenging patriarchal norms, and by extension, different forms of oppressive power. In this section, I will discuss empowering others to act and prioritizing holistic health. Looking at Wakefield's (2017) feminist leadership strategies, these are specifically listed. It further explores individual's relationship to power and their critical questioning of power structures by challenging conventional leadership. Further, participants expressed an awareness of personal power and power structures of the university. For most, this showed up in the ways that they saw their own leadership and their own power.

Building on humility, Juno (she/her/hers) described her outlook, "And I think the other one that people appreciate is that I don't pretend to know it all. And so, I'm often looking for feedback and asking for guidance and willing to adjust as things happen in response…" By inviting input and listening to the communities and constituents, leaders practice ways to actively engage and co-create environments and solutions.

To take this further, Mae (she/her/hers) laid out her critical lens and her courage to question and survey current practices,

> I'm sometimes – that will often – that person, particularly as I get older, who is not afraid to question. "Okay, why are we doing this like this? Are we thinking about how power structures are operating in our center in other spaces?" Being able to really question things and interrogate and have sort of a critical lens is a value that I bring.

As someone with time on the ground and time in the institution, Mae described how she used her age as a privilege and to be established as a longer-time staff member who can ask the tough questions. Similarly, Riyo (they/them/theirs) echoed these sentiments but added an additional perspective around longevity on campus. They pointed out,

> I'm also willing to push questions on campus. I'm not afraid to ask certain people like people is in positions of power questions, whereas other people are afraid to do that and I and maybe they're afraid to do that because they don't feel like they have the history behind them and the experience.

Both leaders used their campus tenure to be able to interrogate practices with the purpose of making change and challenging norms and ways of being that call for evolution.

Others like Juno (she/her/hers) and Ruth (they/them/theirs) described an unconventional type of power as a leader. Juno explained,

> Sometimes we run into conversations, even among the leadership team where they're getting me to try and exert more power in situations. And like, that's not who I am. Like I don't need to be some dominant force, who comes in and stomps on everybody with decision making.

She described how she used her power in ways that more authentically aligned to her approach as a leader that may seem counterintuitive to leadership.

On the other hand, Ruth (they/them/theirs) described their honest thoughts around their perceptions of being a leader. They confessed to "hav[ing] a complicated relationship with the term [leader] itself." This might have been due to their great respect and admiration for the founding director of their center. In fact, they shared that their goal was to be the assistant director. They concluded, "I think I never saw myself as a leader." Yet they were in the director role in an interim capacity and in the role during the time of the interview now for at least six years. The reason this is significant is that the dominant ways we think of leaders, center men in

these roles. Thus, embodying patriarchal norms. Some leaders still contend with internalized sexism, misogyny, and other oppressions that challenging patriarchy is something not associated with conventional notions of leadership.

Many of the interviewed leaders spoke about their center's mission along with their roles and responsibilities. By the existence of women's centers, there is an inherent "anti-patriarchy" position stance built into the WGSC positions. Put simply, center leaders are responsible for building more equitable spaces and advocating for their communities due to the real nature of campus inequities. Riley (they/she) shared,

> I feel like I'm here to serve and support students first and foremost. And part of that is through direct service to them. And part of that is advocacy with other administrators. And like, I think the [our] centers in general were positioned really uniquely to hold a mirror back to the institution to say, these are the things you value. Yet here's how myself or the students I represent or work with

Overall, campus equity work was centered at keeping an eye on the overall climate for all campus community members. For those leaders who had worked in a WGSC as students, their role as a WGSC director represented a continuation of their efforts to raise consciousness, engage with issues around power, and actively work towards making spaces more equitable. As Mae (she/her/hers) noted,

> And one of the things I love is our leadership institute for faculty and staff. I'm usually co facilitating that with another colleague of mine and that's probably one of my favorite pieces of my job because it brings together so many of the things that I, I really love. So, examining leadership - there's a real education and training piece, but there's also a huge community building component to that… I feel like there's so much positive feedback and positive impact on our faculty and staff community, so it feels really awesome, but yeah, I would say, largely it's people, it's through relationships. Yeah, I get a lot of inspiration from that, I think.

Providing opportunities to examine leadership allowed staff and faculty to engage in important conversations and dialogue centered in a hierarchical institution as the university context. The

‘trainings’ offer an opportunity for leaders to reflect on their leadership praxis, learn from one another, and build community.

Higher education institutions maintain a hierarchical power structure, and more recently, some have taken on characteristics akin to corporate organizations, to a greater extent than in the past. For instance, Mae (she/her/hers) sought guidance from her institution regarding a human resource issue she was facing. She expressed the feeling that the university operated like a large company, and as a result, she had to navigate her situation while ensuring her actions aligned with her values.

Another leader emphasized the need to approach situations with respect and humility, acknowledging that they shouldn't assume the role of expert. Juno (she/her/hers) shared,

> I don't pretend to know it all. And so, I'm often looking for feedback and asking for guidance and willing to adjust as things happen in response and… I think that the three, those three values really played out strongly back [in] March [2020], when campus closed. Because, you know, I, you know, we worked on policies that were fair, that were transparent, communicated as soon as possible… and open to feedback if something didn't seem right to staff

This leader underscored the importance of showing respect to the community by refraining from making unwarranted assumptions and avoiding the imposition of solutions without directly consulting the groups impacted. In the same vein, Riley (they/she) explained,

> I think it's good to question ourselves, because then we're constantly learning, right? Maybe there's times that I'm, like envious of people who have a little bit more confidence. I think that that questioning has helped me stay, like, humble and in ways that honor who I am and how I show up to lead.

Here, Riley pointed out how humility allowed them to be more authentic in their leadership practice. While conventional or dominant prototypes of leadership are associated with maintaining patriarchy and power structures in a top-down dynamic, center leaders who view themselves as feminists and activists may contradict these existing notions around leadership;

thus, grappling, and thereby, questioning their own internalized beliefs of who a leader should be. Santamaría & Santamaría (2018) discuss Applied Critical Leadership (ACL) and highlight non-traditional and non-dominant leadership styles informed by unique perspectives held by hxrstorically marginalized leaders.

Relationship building is a key strategy that emerged from respondent interviews. These new models of leadership, like the intersectional feminist model, provide innovative practices for engaging a larger sector of campus. Thus, increasing reach for campus DEI efforts. WGSC leaders shared stories about ways they shared power or empowered others to act. Some described how they sought input and feedback to help inform decision-making or build a shared collective vision. The subtheme speaks to inviting community members, including staff supervisees and student workers and interns to take part in giving input, addressing conflict, and sharing information and knowledge.

To illustrate, Juno (she/her/hers)recounted how she set up “one on one interviews with everybody across the organization” immediately upon beginning her role as director. These meetings yielded information about what the staff experienced prior to her getting the role.

> I think it was a lot of response to some of the common threads that I was hearing about previous leadership or about the university's relationship with the Center before me, and how they there was a lot of uncertainty and they weren't sure how decisions were being made, and so**,** I think a lot of it was to try and demonstrate that that same pattern wasn't going to continue. That, you know, we could try something different, and, you know, I was willing to make sure people felt like they were included along the way of decision making.

By asserting that the same pattern would not continue, Juno illustrated their challenge of the status quo. Ultimately, having these listening sessions helped create a community-informed plan under the new director’s leadership. This collaborative approach resulted in transparency, a

component that was sorely needed to effectively engage the center's staff. Juno leadership style centered on being more inclusive and transparent about decisions being made affecting the center.

Fellow leaders, Julianne (she/her/hers) and Olivia (she/her/hers), both brought up the importance of staff input and direction. Julianne explained, "I want to hear the ways that other people see this work." In a slightly different frame, Olivia discussed earlier, "in some ways I think of myself as an assistant to the staff that I work with." Leaders who considered themselves as "an assistant to the staff" in terms of their role and responsibilities reflected a very unorthodox power orientation. Whereas, in a traditional power structure, leaders tell their subordinates what to do, leaders like Olivia and Julianne saw themselves as "taking direction" from their staff. Asking for input or feedback from staff puts them in a position of "having a say" and contributing to the next steps or solutions. Ultimately, the staff feel valued.

Another example of empowering others to act revolved around establishing a workspace that included a focus on addressing conflicts in a relationship-centered way Riley (they/she) highlighted a valuable strategy,

> …it's like when we have conflict when there's moments where our knee jerk reaction is to dive in, that we continue to reinvest with each other. And these colleagues, specifically that we came together in this most recent round of activism. There's been rifts in our units, right? Like both histories and lineages of prior leaders in our areas, as well as where we'd stepped on each other's toes. And we said, this work is important enough. Like, let's listen to that pain and let's reinvest and get to know each other, right? And so, I think that the hard work of it is that it's long game…

Riley pointed out that in moments of conflict where our initial instinct may be to confront the issue head-on, ongoing collaboration and communication should be prioritized in order to strengthen the relationship.

On the other hand, Mae (she/her/hers) recounted a personal experience where she sought guidance from administrators on how to handle a situation involving an employee. During this process, she encountered difficulties in determining the appropriate course of action and accessing the necessary resources. Mae expressed her desire to understand her available options, but she felt that the institutional response failed to adequately prioritize important values.

> You have these feminist principles that you're working with, and you know HR [human resources] just feels like "the man" a little bit. It just does and so you're like I don't want to feel like I'm, you know, bringing in "the man" into this, but there are some real concerns here and so just trying to balance all of that was tough.

Mae revealed some difficulty in holding feminist values while working around larger HR processes. As DeLuz (2013) and Griggs (1989) pointed out that the majority of the scholarship on leadership has its origins from men's perspectives, industry standard business practices did not align with what Mae had envisioned, hoped, or even imagined for her staff member by wanting an alternative solution.

In the same way, part of understanding options is about sharing knowledge and skills. Mae (she/her/hers) also spoke about making connections or connecting the dots for people around systems, such as feminism and abolition. She explained,

> I've always been a fan of doing programming or having educational opportunities around gender equity in ways that people don't about around topics that people are like, I didn't really think of that as a gender equity issue, um, what did we do a few years ago - something about abolition and really sort of drawing the connections between, you know, abolition, feminism, you know, ending patriarchy, you know, in a white supremacist context, and so I think. I really like, sort of, having those moments, where people are like I don't really see - how is this a gender equity thing? and then we're like, oh, let's show you what that means.

This is part of the consciousness-raising work or political education work of WGSC that was discussed in Chapter 2. In the same vein, Ruth (they/them/theirs) described a successful bystander intervention program that was balanced with racial justice. They shared,

> We have a bystander intervention program that is campus wide and multi-disciplinary. So, it's not just like let's just talk about sexual assault. It's like sexual assault, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia. You know, like if a student is having a mental health crisis, like all of the things that feels really awesome because. You know, if you just look at one of those issues, you're not catching the intersections there, and the way bystander intervention can be framed is really problematic in some ways if it's not also sort of balanced with like racial justice and so, those are some things. We're also looking for like gender inclusive housing, um, we used to have a bias response team.

By incorporating an intersectional lens into this intervention program, the topics were imbued with complexity, acknowledging the multifaceted manifestations of oppression across various identities and the interconnectedness of these issues. On the flip side, Riyo (they/them/theirs) explained how they shared information proactively that others might not have.

> There's still an instability that has existed and still trickles down and still continues to this day, because we've had such instability in the past, so that lends itself to like anybody who has any sort of stability, I think people kind of gravitate to. Like I have institutional knowledge that other people don't have, and so I can share that and I'm willing to share that.

Having longevity on campus led leaders to acquire critical institutional knowledge. Riyo possesses the ability to discern changes over time, offering valuable context essential for grasping the complexities and nuances underlying past decisions and the present state of needs.

This harkens back to the original WGSC role of doing feminist consciousness raising work. When answering the question about opportunities for their work in the WGSC, Riyo (they/them/theirs) shared "that there are more students that are energized to want to do [WGSC] work." Similarly, Riley (they/she) described the impact of different cycles of political activism on his role:

> I have noticed different cycles of political activism amongst students. I think when I started, there was a little more political apathy than living through the Trump presidency. I think that there are students who are craving, like, a feminist orientation. That when I started in the position [several] years ago, I didn't sense. So, I think that's actually a real opportunity. Like, people there are students who are excited to do activist work, and that that is a real opportunity.

Aligning with broader societal movements was discussed by a few leaders as they saw shifts in ways students want to become involved. This work for engaging social change was informed by what was going on in communities as ways to resist various manifestations of oppression as in violence and silencing across the nation. Seeing the current moment as a window of opportunity was important to imagine future possibilities and potential transformations.

Juno (she/her/hers) pointed out an innovative practice that her staff practiced to help staff address self-care needs during shelter in place.

> [We had] self-care Fridays, and so regardless of what was happening, the rest of the week, everybody was mandated to take, to define what self-care meant to them and then take Fridays to do it. And, for some people that meant checking in on their elders. For others, it meant grocery shopping and taking that risk when it seemed risky. Others, it meant…you know, practicing yoga online or mindfulness sessions, but up to everybody to define it for themselves and trusting them to just do it so that next week, when they came back, they'd be refreshed. So, stuff like that, and staff really appreciated that, and you know it came from a couple of staff member conversations, and then it's just trusting that, you know, it's going to be the best thing for the organization and being willing to do it despite the university possibly not being happy with that decision.

A couple of the leaders spoke specifically about practices during the COVID-19 health crisis but were anticipating having to push their campus leadership to maintain these priorities as they move back to pre-pandemic ways of being. Olivia (she/her/hers) explained,

> [O]ne of my staff members who is still not able to [work in person], but still is doing meaningful remote work... Services and programs were still being provided. The fact that I was able to take a moment and say these are not mutually exclusive, right? We can have loving, nurturing environments, and also meet the needs of our center and communities. So, to me that felt good, because it did involve a lot of thinking through, a lot of meetings with a lot of folx, a lot of ongoing conversations… but I think just knowing that we could shift at a time of vulnerability and care for ourselves and others felt very good to me.

Most of the leaders shared successes related to how they managed during COVID shelter in place. Central to their stories were the values they guided them to support their staff and student

communities. Providing an approach that was responsive in a compassionate way that honored their communities' humanity and needs were paramount.

The leaders shared that their leadership praxis was rooted in intersectional feminist principles and challenged conventional leadership models. This sets the stage for looking at the future of WGSC by resisting dominant frameworks around leadership. What is unique is that WGSC are positioned to question the status quo by the very nature of their center.

Subtheme: Oddball as Resistance

The subtheme, "oddball" as resistance, shifts away from majoritarian stories and narratives about conventional leadership models. Within this subtheme, there is a discussion about aligning with broader movements/justice work, cultivating relationships, and expanding coalitions, and centering our narratives. This prepares leaders for the future by enlisting strategies and practices to do equity work that is ultimately about resistance to the status quo. Finally, two leaders shared their experiences as being an "oddball," "odd," or outsider in reference to the ways in which leaders felt in comparison to traditionally accepted leaders.

Two leaders' reflected as being seen/felt as an "oddball" or outsider. The notion and expectation of being an "oddball" came up at the first interview and feeling "odd" came up in the last interview. Given that notions of leadership are dominated by patriarchal stereotypes, reclaiming oddball/odd makes sense because WGSC leaders do not fit that mold. So, their initial perceptions of their stories or even leadership practices do not align, thus, they are oddballs/odd. Reclaiming the oddball/odd-ness that is unique and positive rather than it being deviant or out of place is a form of resistance. Reframing oddness as innovation allows leaders to own, promote, and share their narratives without having to feel as if they have to fit certain leadership norms

outsiders to conventional notions of leadership by non-WGSC counterparts. Olivia (she/her/hers) shared, “How am I read? I think I am read a little bit like an oddball but expected to be so, because I work at an equity center.” Another leader, Julianne (she/her/hers) shared she felt “odd”, which was being judged in some way. As Julianne noted,

> I follow the platinum rule rather than the golden rule; treat others how they want to be treated because we all have different needs, which has been really important to me, especially again, as like my different identities and feeling so odd for so long.

Different needs because of different identities stands out along with feeling so odd. Overall, these descriptions speak to not fitting expectations and not belonging in the category of leader. Rethinking the notion of “oddball” is key to celebrating those identities (and related leadership practices) that have been hxrstorically marginalized.

As previously discussed in earlier chapters, WGSCs were originally established to address the needs of women and to reduce obstacles faced by women students, as well as academic appointees and staff. While the primary focus remains on women, there is also a commitment to inclusivity, particularly to marginalized genders. Generally, WGSC missions initially concentrated on straight cisgender white women and has since expanded to encompass a broader spectrum of identities, including nonbinary people and emerging gender identities especially as the understanding of gender, including language and study on related topics, has evolved since the establishment of women’s centers starting in the 1960s.

Julianne (she/her/hers) spoke about opportunities and challenges in higher education today given the broader understanding around gender. She explained,

> And that our work is shifting and the way that folks experience their gender is shifting. Many are questioning, right? Like, do we need women centers anymore or do we need gender equity spaces that are not LGBT centers? And so, as our work is more and more queer and trans and intersectional, it's a beautiful thing. And then kind of comes the challenge of, like, so how are we different from the cross-cultural center from the LGBT

> center, from all these other spaces? So, I think that's been an opportunity to rethink our work and really be in collaboration with particularly our partners at the LGBT center.

As the contemporary understanding of gender has shifted and the meaning of gender equity work has broadened, there are perceived overlaps with work in other identity spaces. Because WGSCs still remain true to their mission around gender equity, incorporating gender inclusive practices overall for those who do not experience life through the lens of woman continues to be key. Plus, it is an opportunity to work beside LGBTQ+ centers and strengthen partnerships between spaces that do equity-based work.

There is continued need for increasing research and scholarship on WGSCs. For leaders to learn from each other and build a community of practice, narratives need to be shared. Based on the questions leaders would want to ask their peers, there's great potential for information exchange and working through problems and difficulties. Julianne (she/her/hers) pointed out the challenges of doing WGSC work. She stated,

> Oftentimes, the metrics for success on campus are not clear, or they're super narrow. And it's often time to degree and graduation rates... How does the University see success? How do I see success and what is better? It's not always bigger. But then I see who wins the awards and who gets shouted out. And it's often units who had programs with 10,000 people.

To further this point, Riley (they/she) shared that "…and that transactional things are what's rewarded in the institution." Typical metrics in the university lean towards the quantitative and transactional; things that can be counted in some way. They expressed, "I think there's ways that in my whiteness that feels comfortable to play into those dominant metrics, and that I've had to sit in the discomfort of, like, why that felt like that was a good success." There is an investment in data-driven strategies that sometimes overlook the human condition.

Another practice in challenging the status quo was prioritizing holistic health and encouraging integration of heart, mind, body, and spirit. Participants reflected on the importance of balance in terms of holistic health in making spaces work for the people who inhabit the space. Julianne (she/her/hers) shared,

> And so, I try to be really aware of who I'm working with and what they need… and then also needing [my own] accommodations around being a parent and being pregnant in school. I also have issues with chronic pain and mental health. So, I try to be just really forgiving. To me, I feel like work and healing should be intertwined, and you shouldn't have to go and recover somewhere from the place where you spend so much of your time, that should be integrated. And it's really hard. Sometimes, I fall short of that. We fall short of that. But I think healing has been really important to me and getting to know people I work with. Integrating astrology and tarot practices with self-exploration and community exploration has been really important to me and kind of a reclamation.

They used their own experiences as points of empathy with other people's experiences. Further, she spoke about using astrology and tarot, non-academic practices to engage the community in conversations and self-reflection to help support understanding the whole person and healing.

In the interviews about the future of WGSCs, leaders spoke about building relationships, trusted colleagues, broader social movements, and WGSC stories. Additionally, insights were practical and current in terms of strategies like talking with students, asking questions, and, of course, listening. When asked what questions leaders would want to ask their peers at different institutions, the list ranged from practical day to day operations, prioritizing and decision-making, to career advice.

Another way to resist the status quo is to break down barriers, work on cultivating relationships, and expand coalitions. This strategy emerges from the coding related to relationships that leaders may seek to cultivate or explore. The goal was to strengthen existing and new collaborations, partnerships, and coalitions at individual levels or at larger levels to prepare for the future. The predominant patterns fall under relationships, starting from within,

and then engaging in conversation, especially outside of the campus or new partners. Mae (she/her/hers) shared her perspective,

> I think nurturing your relationships is important, is important [t]o not hav[e] one sided relationships where you're just asking people to, you know, come do something for your center like come present something, come serve on a committee, come do this. But it's also, what are you giving back to some of those folks that you're in relationship with? So, how do you show up for them?

Fostering relationships with campus and community partners is multidirectional in terms of ways of supporting each other. Along the same lines, Riley (they/she) pointed to the importance of building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships. These relationships can help inform programming and services by being a place to gather information about a topic, resources, and contacts. Being one of the campus identity spaces, partnerships are essential especially given the campus realities about limited budgets and increased workloads. Riley shared,

> But I also think being expansive about who you want to be in relationship with I think all women's and gender equity centers have sort of our usual suspects. Whether that's, you know, the gender women and sexuality studies department or you know other sort of women's and gender equity focus things, focused offices, or groups. [B]ut, you know, what are some different partnerships that we might want to build?

Identifying new partnerships across campus and beyond opens up the work by bringing intersectional feminist work outside of the typical WGSC ecosystem. Possibilities for collaboration extend broadly to work of DEI focused on justice and belonging. These can open doors to new partnerships, thus, extending the reach of WGSC.

Expanding collaborations can help infuse the campus with intersectional feminist practices. With the rise of DEI efforts, Riley (they/she) shared observation and suggestion to leverage the small changes happening throughout the campus to help facilitate shifts in the campus climate.

> I would say in the last couple of years, we're seeing more diversity equity inclusion initiatives pop up in our colleges. So that's feeling like where we used to be like, THE resource. Now we're A resource. And like, how is that helpful? And then also, how is that hard? Because then stuff continues to be decentralized. So, we're not actually seeing institutional change. We're seeing small changes in little places. So how can we better leverage those siloed efforts? And then since I've been here, we don't report through them. But we have an office of Institutional Diversity that's doing more. They're charged with doing more institutional level work. And so that also impacted where the student facing centers used to be doing the institutional and the student facing that's kind of freed us up. But at the same time, I think those are conversations that we still need to be a part of.

Further, as the age gap between campus leaders and the current generations of students widens, it becomes crucial to consider how staff access information to ensure their work remains relevant. Mae (she/her/hers) shared a serendipitous thing she noticed about their applicants to center positions,

> I don't know why we always attract people like pop culture social media types of folks which is great for us, but that also helps us then figure out what's next because folks who are listening to this podcast over here following this person or this activist or this organizer on Twitter or Instagram or TIKTOK and they're like you know I'm hearing a lot about X, Y and Z. From college students that I follow, or you know from organizers and we're like Oh, we didn't even think of this, or they bring in their community involvements into that and that into the work and we're like that's amazing.

Overall, WGSC leaders navigated the campus with care, centering feminist leadership strategies and principles with a particular emphasis on the examination of power and ways to shift power more equitably. Leaders shared what brought them to the work. In particular, they revealed how aligning their work with their personal values made their experiences as center directors more meaningful and community oriented. This set the stage for how leaders perceived their own leadership which was almost always filled with doubts. However, through external validation, leaders received the encouragement and advice to propel their trajectories forward, including contemplating the future of WGSC work.

As campus Subject Matter Experts (SME), center leaders are sought out on campus for advice, educational training, and consultation. A few participants highlighted instances when they were approached/consulted by decision-makers. This type of consultation helped to establish trust between center directors and university administrators which, in turn, laid the foundation for mutual support and calculated risk-taking. Riley (they/she) provided an example.

> [a]nd then when that moment happened, we had those relationships to lean on and really leverage. Our activism grew out of the relationship we had been building. That allowed us to support each other, and to take risks together. We probably didn't feel like we have the cultural capital to do. It's like, let's be risky together and that felt really kind of powerful.

Strengthening existing relationships and investing in new relationships within the campus and beyond can help bring communities together. The reality in large research institutions is that competitiveness can pit colleagues against each other. One example is being careful with language to build and maintain relationships. Olivia (she/her/hers) advised,

> Even the language that we use in our university asserts that we are kind of the "gem of the community." But being respectful about that we don't come in as the experts. We honor many different knowledge frames, and we encourage dissent also.

Mae (she/her/hers) added,

> In these types of roles that we all underestimate how much time, effort, and energy it takes but it's, it's a significant part of what we do. So, I think actually doing the like, the care and feeding of those relationships.

Part of the advice that leaders gave about the future was about "Be[ing] in relationship." Maintaining connections helped leaders keep current on the pulse of the community as it changed over time. This orientation imbues WGSCs with a sensibility around continuing to learn, grow, and evolve.

Leaders focused on the power of the collective through nurturing relationships and connections rather than just focusing on individual accomplishments or needs. Riley (they/she)

shared how an opportunity to write a collective response presented itself during an unexpected time of crisis. Luckily, they had already initiated connections that made it natural to take collective action. “And then when that moment happened, we had those relationships to lean on and really leverage. Our activism grew out of the relationship we had been building.” Their already existing relationship allowed these campus departments to work together on this issue that was making an impact on their respective centers.

Building coalitions is another example of fostering relationships with the goal of working together towards a united goal. Riley (they/she) shared, “I think our power is in coalition building. And so that's with my colleagues in the other centers with the colleagues I mentioned, who we rallied together and wrote some statements and solidarity with.” Opportunities present allowed leaders to gain multiple perspectives to better execute their work. Mae (she/her/hers) explained,

> and then we just kind of had to pause [critical masculinities work] because of [the] pandemic and capacity, but I think that's going to be an area that we, we've increasingly over the last few years have been getting more questions and interest about. You know, I'm a man, I'm a masculine of central person, what does this mean for me, and so I think it's important for us to do some of that work in coalition.

The evolution of feminism - in order to be inclusive of feminisms, critical masculinities, and intersectionality - goes beyond the single perspective of what began as feminism only focused on white women’s experiences around career development. Coalitions (Boux, 2016) are powerful examples of movement building and advocacy. By aligning with broader social movements, WGSC fulfill their consciousness-raising mission and actions. In terms of thinking about the future of WGSC, respondents were asked two questions “What would you share with others about how to remain vital to campus life? How are you preparing for what is next?” One piece of advice that participants shared with others was to engage in feminist activist work. Two leaders pointed to a shift in university practices to access WGSC to conduct feminist activist work as

compared to the past several years. The rise of feminist icon Ruth Bader Ginsberg and the increased backlash against women, especially during the Trump presidency, contributed to this shift.

Summary of Major Findings

The findings of this study focused on the experiences of WGSC leaders who belong to hxrstorically marginalized and minoritized groups, honoring various aspects of their identities while engaging in work that challenges systems of hierarchies. This qualitative study, conducted through a series of interviews, shed light on these leaders, their strategies for navigating their roles, and their perspectives on future endeavors. These leaders drew inspiration from their own personal transformational journeys as a driving force behind their commitment to equity and inclusion work. As pivotal hubs for gender equity initiatives, WGSCs also serve as platforms for fostering connections and facilitating collaboration.

With only about 260 WGSC existing today from the 2000+ that existed at the height of women's center support, the field has shrunk after all the strides made to support women in higher education. With recent attacks on women's rights and 50th Anniversary of Title IX, Alexander & McKendry (2023) provide a foundation for campuses to reinvest in WGSC. With this potential for growing centers and supporting current WGSC professionals, it is important to take initiative around being in conversations and relationships that would support the women's center field. Leaders spoke about their career trajectories and futures. Expanding a WGSC staff pipeline and professional development opportunities through professional staff organizations or student affairs organizations would be a welcome addition.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

In this chapter, I begin with an overview of the study, a discussion of the findings, followed by the implications section. Seven leaders were interviewed, and they shared insights about their leadership practices along with their views on the future of their centers. Based on the leaders' responses, three emergent themes rose to the surface that answered the research questions. Overall, major themes emerged around navigation strategies of hxrstorically marginalized women leaders that pointed to ways that their experiences enhanced their problem solving, decision making, and overall leadership practices within their higher education environments.

Overview of Study

WGSC leaders are under-studied, especially relative to their contributions to the larger student services field and even further, the larger leadership literature. "Professional feminists" (Marine, 2011) and their work have evolved since the founding of WGSC. While each center has a unique structure depending on its campus environment, the breadth and bones of these centers take shape in the form of the CAS Standards Women's and Gender Programs and Services (CAS, 2023). The most current version was updated and revised by center leader practitioners. Overall, center priorities have shifted over time and sometimes also conflict with the needs of campus administration, the institution, and center constituents (Davie, 2002). Leaders have had to be nimble and adapt to these changes in innovative and unique ways to be aligned with the needs of the communities.

This qualitative study was designed to explore women leaders' values and navigation strategies that inform otherwise neutral, or spaces dominated by men within higher education

administration. This qualitative study centered on women leaders of hxrstorically marginalized identities who work as WGSCs. Two research questions framed this study.

RQ1. How do women leaders navigate institutions of higher education as leaders of campus-based women, gender, and sexuality centers (WGSC)?

RQ2. How do women leaders view the future of campus-based WGSC in a changing landscape of higher education?

Summary of Findings

Three key findings emerged based on the interviews of seven WGSC leaders at large public research institutions across the United States. Within each theme, subthemes covered the ways that leaders saw these play out in their everyday work. The majority of interview respondents member-checked the transcripts for accuracy before they were analyzed with an intersectional feminist perspective.

Table 6.1

Themes and subthemes

THEMES	SUBTHEME
1. values and feminist beginnings	family influences (home) development of feminist leadership (college) social justice values-based leadership trajectories (career)
2. survival skills, strategies, and superpowers	engaging in intersectional feminist praxis intervening and space making observation skills

3. resisting status quo	embracing feminist leadership oddball as resistance (equity work)

WGSC leaders employed strategies for feminist leadership of a gendered and/or equity or social justice lens: for most, this was informed by previous transformational experiences working at a women's center or equivalent identity center or care center. As each shared, it was clear that these values grounded them in their roles and led them to adapt to practices of reflecting and reframing. By employing these perspectives, center leaders strived to promote equity for all by acknowledging systemic oppression, which goes hand in hand with addressing individual needs. This broader approach was instrumental in creating change that could last for generations. With these frameworks, leaders discovered themselves not only surviving their workplaces but also employing strategies that fostered resilience.

Leaders were also driven by values: for most, they navigated spaces by aligning their leadership praxis with their values and beliefs rather than subscribing to status quo concepts of leadership practices. With values lens as a foundation, another theme arose around an awareness of their personal power as a center leader along with a mindfulness about the power structures and systems that exist on campus and in their communities. Due to their own agency in the context of occupying decision-making roles, the center leaders were clear and intentional about space-making for marginalized voices and perspectives.

Discussion of Findings

After transcribing, member-checking, and coding the interviews, I scrutinized the discernible patterns, guided by my theoretical framework, which drew from feminist

perspectives (hooks, 1984, 2000), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), U.S. third world feminism (Sandoval, 1991, 2005), and Applied Critical Leadership (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012). Through an examination of these leader interviews, I identified emerging themes that illuminate how women leaders navigated their roles within institutions of higher education. Additionally, I explored how these leaders, who oversee campus-based women, gender, and sexuality centers (WGSC), envision the future of their centers within the evolving landscape of higher education. Furthermore, I elaborated on these data-derived themes and their significance within the context of leadership literature, emphasizing the value of non-traditional and non-dominant forms of leadership as previously overlooked areas of expertise.

Application of Theories

The theoretical frameworks in this study served to highlight women leaders' experiences and strategies as informed by the multi-dimensional aspects of their identity. This lens helped me set boundaries in order "to view the area of interest more acutely" (Roberts, 2010, p. 130). Rooted in feminist theory, intersectionality, and Third Wave feminism, this study considered systems of power, privilege and oppression and the interplay with their positionality. The application of these theories to my data analysis aligned with the "goals of feminist educational research [which] include dismantling systems of oppression, highlighting gender-based disparities, and seeking new ways of constructing knowledge" (Freeman, 2019, abstract). As the contemporary understanding of gender broadens, it is important to study how nonbinary people, gender nonconforming people, and gender expansive people are also impacted by these "feminist" expectations. When WGSC started, women were the hxrstorically marginalized group. As language and ideas around gender evolve, new and emerging communities will have their unique needs. This does not mean, however, that women are no longer impacted by

oppression. In the next section, I explain how Center leaders described the ways in which their identities might have informed their leadership strategies.

Engaging Feminist Frameworks

Contrary to my own expectations, most of the leaders did not use the term “feminist” to describe themselves. Upon further reflection, hxrstorically, feminism and feminist have long been associated with white, straight, cisgender, heteronormative, and able-bodied women. Considering these conventional images that come up when one envisions a leader, it makes sense for these WSGC leaders from hxrstorically marginalized groups not to identify directly as “feminists.” While there is not a direct self-identification with "feminist” (the noun), there was an across-the-board usage of feminist (adjective or descriptor), in relation to the frameworks, actions, and orientation.

In engaging feminist frameworks, leaders also noted the various lenses (e.g. social justice lens, gendered lens, and critical lens) to analyze the world. Overall, I utilized an intersectional feminist lens in conducting this study to examine the strategies that multiple women leaders used to assert their centers’ mission. WGSC centers need to be relevant to continue to get campus funding and dedicated space. If WGSC were not seen as relevant or useful to the campus population, then these women’s centers would be more vulnerable to closure or to being repurposed. It is not only about the quantity of women on campuses; but more importantly, the quality of experiences is an indicator of the change in women’s experiences overall in US society (Bethman et al., 2019).

The Oddball Phenomenon/Oddballin'

One of the novel phenomena that arose during this study was that of being an "oddball" - the feeling or sense that center leaders were somehow out of place or alone in their opinions. To examine this unique term further, the etymology of "oddball" yielded two meanings (Harper, 2017). One reference from https://www.etymonline.com/word/oddball#etymonline_v_30951 explained the following:

> **oddball (n.)**
>
> "eccentric or unconventional person," 1948, American English colloquial, from **odd** + **ball** (n.1). Earlier (1946) as an adjective, used by aviators. The phrase appears earlier in descriptions of modified pin-ball type games (1937) as an extra ball to be played as a bonus.

The second description has a more interesting meaning related to pin-ball games and gave an alternate meaning to consider since the term was used not in the negative, but as a "bonus" - something additional as in the "an extra ball" to mean another chance or opportunity. This framing proposed a departure from the typical definition of "oddball" which embodied a value-added meaning. Thus, this alignment with Applied Critical Leadership (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012) and its central tenet of expanding beyond status quo leadership models and seeking innovative models of being by looking at non-traditional and non-dominant leadership attributes and strategies is vital to expanding current understandings about leadership. Feeling like an 'oddball' reflects the deep and complex ways patriarchy and heteronormative ideologies continue to be entrenched in P-20 systems.

Considering the imperfect beginnings WGSCs, these spaces originally aimed to provide support to those who were considered non-traditional students at that time. This aligned with the broader mission of creating inclusive environments for hxrstorically

marginalized and oppressed individuals, especially those for whom the institution was not initially designed. While contemporary understandings of gender have evolved and expanded, the largest group - women continue to face challenges in certain aspects, particularly regarding the quality of their educational experiences in the university setting, despite increased representation in higher education.

Themes Emerging in the Data

As shared above, the analysis of WGSC leader interviews revealed elements of that aligned with the proposed Theory and Praxis of Applied Critical & Intersectional Feminist Leadership (ACIFL) in describing ways they moved through their higher education environments. ACIFL is built off Santamaría & Santamaría (2012) Applied Critical Leadership Framework with a focus on intersectional feminist lens. In this section, the discussion is each separated by each research question.

In answering research question 1, Themes 1-3 comprise the navigations strategies of WGSC leaders. Through shared narratives around resisting status quo and in a way being an "oddball" culminated in the proposed Theory and Praxis of ACIFL. Below there are principles and practices that inform "oddball" or non-dominant ways of leading and navigating. As noted, there is a component of reflexivity through the questions around how intersectional identities, and by extension positionality and subjectivity, enhance or interrupt leaders' abilities to consider additional, novel, or beyond typical viewpoints resulting in meaningful and purposeful actions. This mirrors information in Figure 2.7.

Feminist Leadership (Principles): Take inspiration from previous transformational experiences at WGSC or equivalent (as those from hxrstorically marginalized backgrounds) and having a commitment to social justice work; values driven.

Critical Pedagogy (Practice): Asks: In what ways do my intersectional identities INTERRUPT my ability to see alternative perspectives and practice effective leadership?

Intersectional Feminism (Perspective/Lens): Calling in trusted colleagues/advisers – Mae (she/her/hers) referred to her "kitchen cabinet" while Juno (she/her/hers) spoke about mentors. Riley (they/she) and Julianne (she/her/hers) spoke about colleagues in the Women's Center Committee (WCC) and identity centers.

Innovating through Applied Critical & Intersectional Feminist Leadership: Doing things differently and rethinking the way do things (process, success markers, etc.) that are informed by politicking/observation skills/attention to subtext. (Asks: In what ways do my intersectional identities ENHANCE my ability to see alternative perspectives and practice effective leadership?)

Leaders shared the benefits of exploring alternative power structures or configurations rather than adhering strictly to traditional top-down models.

For some of the respondents, this perspective on power dynamics permeated their understanding of the director roles within WGSCs. As an example, when Mae (she/her/hers) assumed her role as a new director, she aimed to support the staff member she was collaborating with, rather than resorting to escalating the situation by involving the Human Resources (HR) department, which seemed to espouse traditional patriarchal leadership roles. By choosing not to conform to conventional leadership norms, Mae described her leadership approach as an

expression of a non-traditional and non-dominant style (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012). In this context, the emphasis is placed on prioritizing the well-being of the staff member (or subordinate) rather than solely focusing on the department's bottom line, and consequently, the broader interests of the campus.

Values and feminist beginnings

Within this theme, these seven leaders exhibited elements of what I am describing broadly as Feminist Leadership Practices and Strategies. While these reflections were examples of ways they navigated situations on their campuses, they also fell within the five subthemes that Wakefield (2017) described as Strategies for Building Transformative and Feminist Leadership. All leaders experienced multiple marginalization as seen in their demographic questionnaires as they embarked on their collective work that spanned from those newer to their positions with four years to longer into their tenure at 20 years. Upon hearing their reflections via the interview process, the researcher was struck by the similarity of their transformational experiences interfacing with WGSC (or equivalent center/space) as a student or professional. Finally, guided by feminist research methodology (Hesse-Biber, 2014), the researcher kept the words and descriptors provided by the respondents.

Theory and Praxis of Applied Critical & Intersectional Feminist Leadership

In considering Santamaría & Santamaría (2012)'s Applied Critical Leadership (ACL), the study's framework, grounded in Applied Critical & Intersectional Feminist Leadership, includes an intersectional feminist lens that extends beyond race as the sole focus of analysis. Santamaría & Santamaría's (2012) ACL model emphasizes a process beginning with transformational leadership principles, followed by the integration of critical pedagogy where interruptions in leadership occur as leaders reflect on their identities. Leaders also rely on Critical Race Theory

(CRT) to examine issues related to race and finally conclude with the enhancement of leadership through ACL principles. In short, this framework encourages the exploration of diverse non-traditional and non-dominant leadership styles (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2018), particularly evident in the experiences of minoritized women leaders within women's centers.

The women leaders' experiences underscore the need for an applied critical and intersectional feminist leadership framework, one rooted in Intersectional Feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 2006; hooks, 1984, 2000) building off the Critical Race Theory lens that Santamaría & Santamaría (2018) laid out for ACL. They frequently shared instances when their identities interrupted their leadership practices, causing them to question or doubt themselves. As women, it can be difficult to own your power as a leader, especially when there are patriarchal messages in society that focus on men as leaders. As Johnson (2017) writes moving up the campus administrative ranks, there are less women; and thus, there are less role models. Further, the leadership literature is heavily focused on men and hierarchical top-down approaches, even less scholarship on women leaders, and even less than that on women's center leaders (Board, 2015; Chávez, 2003; DeLuz, 2013). Given that the respondents are also multiply marginalized, these messages about belonging in higher education are compounded so it causes leaders to question themselves. However, this is reframing through the use of the oddball metaphor to see what they offer as assets rather than as deficits, especially if there are no role models or literature on it. Moreover, they provided examples of successful strategies, such as, pivoting programs and services during shelter in place, collective letter of concern regarding a campus leader, in this regard.

Participants in this study shared their encounters with multiple forms of marginalization, largely stemming from their identities. These experiences significantly influenced how the

women leaders were perceived and treated within their roles. This points to the need for inclusive and intersectional spaces for gender advocacy in higher education campus administration beyond just increasing numbers. This is a crucial point of consideration because it allows us to identify practices and strategies that can address these challenges and contribute to more inclusive and effective leadership within WGSCs.

Foremost, leaders practiced feminist leadership principles as described by Griggs (1989) and Wakefield (2017) even when the majority did not name it as such. Coming from hxrstorically marginalized groups, most leaders benefitted from WGSC or equivalent spaces. Grounded in the values that they embraced from family members and institutions like their schools, WGSC leaders emerged as "includers" as leaders who amplified the voices of the marginalized. These values - transmitted from elders, trusted colleagues, their children, and people within their inner circles - were foundational in grounding themselves and in their ability to advocate for others. They proved to be advocates at heart because they have had to advocate for themselves even before coming to their positions. Learning from elders and trusted colleagues, leaders practiced navigating their environments.

Embracing Oddball identity for Expanding Intersectional Feminist & WGSC Futures

In answering research question 2, theme 3 discusses the ways WGSC leaders resist the status quo in relation to how they view the future of their centers. During the interviews, all leaders shared that at different points and time, they questioned their leadership and had doubts about the effectiveness of their work. Part of this showed up in ways that they received messages about belonging in the university. They innovated through Applied Critical & Intersectional Feminist Leadership in their everyday interactions and ways they worked to fulfill their center missions. Continuing their leadership practices rather than questioning and conforming to

behaviors that do not align with their values is part of the future of WGSC. Respondents' narratives pointed to the need to respond to the changing landscape in higher education. Leaders spoke about the challenges with the expansion of gender discourse, funding centers, and continuing to fight for a space on the college campus.

More specifically, leaders described investing and expanding in relationships internal and external to the center and university to build strong partnerships and understandings across organizations. Further, as things change in our society and world, there is a call to align with broader movements and help campus community members connect the dots and participate in changing their communities and worlds. Finally, there is continued support and call for clarity around the telling WGSC stories and the journeys of people who lead them to add to scholarship but also to community understanding about the transformative work of WGSC.

Summary of Discussion and Analysis

I discussed and analyzed the findings in relation to my theoretical frameworks and through the lens of the Applied Critical Leadership model with an intersectional feminist lens. The first theme related to the theory and praxis of the Applied Critical and Intersectional Feminist Leadership framework that encompasses Themes 1-3 focusing on principles and practices that inform leadership strategies. The second theme outlined the future of WGSC work with an eye toward larger social justice movements, broadly investing in relationships, and continuing to tell the story of WGSC through further research in the WGSC field.

These findings matter because they point to innovative ways of practicing leadership different from the conventional understandings that have a patriarchal and top-down power structure. If we do not begin to teach about and value these new leadership models that center

hxstorically marginalized experiences, we risk losing great people because they and their experiences will not be valued. The issues of retention will affect WGSC, identity centers, and throughout the campus as the university will miss out on keeping their employees engaged.

These findings contribute to a toolset that helps in fostering more inclusive spaces - including enacting more compassionate, humane practices - things that may seem obvious and basic but are rarely enacted. Some of these practices include truly listening to stakeholders, aligning with contemporary social justice movements, building trusting relationships with campus peers and partners to address issues as a coalition rather than individually. These WGSC leaders' experiences are central to the DEI conversation and compel institutions to assess their DEI efforts. These findings allow us to imagine possibilities for leading, doing the work that are grounded on feminist principles and with their own values.

Aside from women's center leaders themselves, young professionals, students, and senior level administrative leaders in general could stand to gain insights and open up possibilities from these findings to address potential blind spots, misperceptions, and/or assumptions of women's center leaders. The newer landscape for women's centers is a shift in campus demographics including having women slightly represent more than half the campus population, but still be underrepresented in STEM fields. The experiences of women continue to improve since the 1960s when women's centers began being established and the Women's Liberation Movement. "Given the historical legacies of exclusion and discrimination and ongoing, contemporary, and distinctive patterns of inequity and harm that women continue to experience (Cardona, 2022), the need for women's and gender centers on university campuses persists" (Alexander & McKendry, 2023).

This brings a hopeful outlook to women leaders because they are not alone and echo one another's concerns. The findings highlight the importance of innovative leadership approaches as higher education continues to change. There are other approaches to leading that can be as effective as the ones that have been documented in mainstream literature. The findings support Griggs (1989) and Wakefield (2017)'s feminist leadership characteristics and strategies. While the leaders did not all identify themselves as feminists, what they described around being values based and social justice oriented in the way they approached their work, honoring intersectional identities, and resisting status quo aligned with what Griggs (1989) and Wakefield (2017) described.

Limitations

During the data collection, my position as a WGSC colleague may have impacted how and what information was shared. As Creswell (2013) explains "researcher presence may bias responses" (Table 9.2). Given this familiarity, a second limitation are short-cuts, meaning that participants may not have spoken in depth or as detailed with someone not familiar with the work. Trustworthiness may have also come into play especially when acknowledging common values around feminist principles, namely, treating their narratives with care. By the same token, it is possible that they may not have elaborated on their stories as they may have assumed that we were already on the same page, and therefore required no explanation. To mitigate this, I encouraged details, including what might seem repetitive, and follow-up for clarity. Third, the findings may not apply to other institutional types, such as private four-year institutions or community colleges.

Implications of this Study

These findings extend the body of evidence regarding feminist leadership traits and the evolving nature of WGSC work. Three key implications are outlined below, focusing on supportive practices, metrics, and campus transformation.

1. **Supportive Practices**: Campus-specific implications reveal that WGSC leaders embody equity-centered values as they navigate within institutions influenced by white supremacy. These leaders often serve as exemplars of effective leadership, advocating for students who share similar experiences.
2. **Metrics**: It is essential to develop specific metrics to assess the impact and effectiveness of these centers in promoting gender equity and inclusivity on campus. This would help in sharing the narratives of these centers and how they make space for the university community.
3. **Transforming Campuses**: WGSCs can serve as catalysts for broader campus transformation by challenging traditional notions of leadership and embracing feminist leadership approaches that are unconventional in nature to help foster an inclusive and diverse university environment.

However, these centers face challenges in gaining the recognition and support they need to thrive as one of the campus identity spaces. Efforts should be made to address these challenges and promote their visibility within the institution. Further, it might be useful to also challenge our own colonial mindsets in terms of expectations of women and what our leadership should look like.

Implications for Supportive Practices and Processes

Sometimes, leaders are challenged with responding to news happening in the world or in the community. For instance, streamlining practices for creating Solidarity Statements is a point

of being responsive and showing support for issues and communities that align with center values. In practice, one leader pointed out the red tape and thus the time to get a statement drafted. In this example, many questions arise particularly in a large bureaucracy such as a university around what the message is, who helped draft the message, who gives input and feedback, who makes the decision on the final content. Working to balance a campus response when working with the administration can be challenging not only in terms of timing and content, but also even with having specific protocols and suggested timelines in place, the reality is that sometimes the message gets diluted, sanitized, or some senses, institutionalized to the point of being neutral. WGSC leaders contend with the balance or merely being performative, holding a mirror to the institution, and speaking out as part of their center mission.

Implications for telling story of WGSC (metrics)

One of the implications of this study lies in the importance of learning more about the stress that center leaders experience to justify their work (Kasper, 2004). This stress can have potentially negative consequences. Further study could include exploration of: 1.) how to quantify WGSC work in a meaningful way, 2.) how to develop measures or assessments that accurately evaluate the benefits of these centers particularly as they relate to the retention of communities and student success, and 3.) further utilizing qualitative measures as an equally valid form of data. Manifesting WGSC and WGSC leader stories and bringing their narratives to life or to the forefront will provide non-dominant and innovative solutions to the problems of tomorrow.

Implications for transforming campus environments (hybrid Third Space)

While the CAS Standards highlight commonalities, the work carried out in many centers is deeply influenced by the unique culture, environment, and evolving needs of their student populations (dela Peña, 2009). dela Peña's (2009) work takes a user-centric approach, acknowledging its cultural dimensions and sparking a thought-provoking debate when considering the center's purpose and mission within a public research institution. This debate revolves around the tension between the traditionally private realm (often associated with women's work) and the historically male-dominated public sphere (dela Peña, 2009). In addition to highlighting the binary perception of gender, dela Peña makes a compelling case for embracing the concept of a "hybrid third space," which allows for a more intersectional lens and analysis (dela Peña, 2009). Ultimately, these complexities challenge our understanding of how campus-based centers operate and emphasize their unique and vital role in supporting hxrstorically marginalized communities.

Despite potential internal tensions, such as divisions between staff and faculty/administration, or external challenges posed by policymakers and practitioners, expanding conversations presents valuable opportunities for mutual learning and addressing the everyday manifestations of sexism, homophobia, and oppression. Furthermore, the development of culturally relevant practices is pivotal for the sustained advancement of feminist principles, ultimately contributing to more diverse and inclusive educational environments. Collaborating with a variety of stakeholders throughout the education pipeline actively promotes support for women's and LGBTQ+ communities.

Implications for Policy and Practice

A second significant implication involves conducting research that prioritizes hxstorically marginalized communities, such as women, as well as nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and

gender expansive people. Regardless of the prime goals of education, whether it's to foster global citizenship or to prepare individuals for the workforce (Bok, 2015; Carnevale, 2016), it is essential for post-secondary institutions to integrate resources that cater to underserved segments of our community, including women of color and LGBTQ+ students in higher education, as a standard practice. This inclusivity is crucial for the success of all students.

The third implication centers around potential tensions within (staff and faculty/administration divide) or external to (policy makers and practitioners) these centers, expanding dialogues presents opportunities for mutual learning and addressing the daily manifestations of sexism, homophobia, and oppression. Moreover, the development of culturally relevant practices is pivotal to the persistence and advancement of feminist principles, ultimately leading to more diverse and inclusive environments. Actively partnering with multiple stakeholders throughout the education pipeline can effectively support women's and LGBTQ+ communities.

Future Research

Future research on WGSCs and the people who lead them has rich untapped potential. The literature around the WGSC field is lacking. Conducting more research in this field would amplify the invisibilized transformational work of WGSC leaders and the centers they lead. In this study, leaders shared what they would like to ask their peers. The group collectively shared various topic areas like authority, career, connection, supervision, knowledge & action, reflexivity, hope, what you wished you knew, self-care, storytelling, strategies, and their successes. These serve as potential research areas for future scholars to examine.

Moreover, Ashlee (2019) writes that "[c]ollege women's and gender centers have a powerful secret to teach educators about pushing back against the dehumanizing effects of

neoliberalism in higher education by staying grounded in the greater *why* of what they do and how they do it" (p.2). Future research might include replicating this study to incorporate focus groups and document analysis as initially planned, expanding to a national study to those not in large four-year public institutions.

Focus groups

Incorporating focus groups would add an important element in studying the experience of WGSC leaders. In addition to being "an important tool for triangulation" (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 235), this method is "appropriate in exploratory research where little is known about the topic" (p. 172). McMillan & Schumacher (2010) pointed out the importance of creating "a social environment in which group members are by one another's perceptions and ideas… [This] can increase the quality and richness of data through a more efficient strategy than one-on-one interviewing" (p. 363). Hatch (2002) adds that this method is beneficial when trying to gather perspectives from a particular group on a specific topic. Focus groups across different campuses would create counter spaces for WGSC leaders and facilitate a discussion about issues that are relevant across campuses in the various contexts.

Further document analysis

Future research endeavors could encompass a comprehensive document analysis of WGSCs. In addition to scrutinizing center-specific elements such as values, context, characteristics, target audience, and offered programs and services, this analysis can draw from both internal documents like annual reports and external reviews, as well as externally facing materials like flyers and social media content. This multifaceted approach can provide valuable insights into how WGSC narratives are constructed, examining both the content and presentation

methods. By doing so, researchers can uncover essential lessons regarding the types of programming and services offered, the intended audience, and more, all of which can contribute to fulfilling the center's mission. Furthermore, exploring what the center does and how it communicates information, through various channels, can facilitate more effective storytelling about WGSCs.

Highlighting these transformational practices not only adds to the existing body of research but also offers valuable guidance for those working within WGSCs, enabling them to excel in their roles. Additionally, it serves to acknowledge the practical challenges and barriers that WGSC leaders encounter in collecting and analyzing data and scholarship. Overcoming these challenges is essential for increasing the visibility of their centers and advancing feminist work within higher education.

Expansion Beyond Large Four-Year Public Institutions

Another area for future research could include expanding studies beyond large four-year public institutions to provide a more accurate picture of how WGSC leaders navigate different campus types and contexts. This would offer an opportunity to compare and contrast the types of support, resources, and services offered in public, private, and community college settings. It could also reveal how WGSC leaders move through different institutions in terms of their career trajectories in these niche fields.

Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations include providing spaces for WGSC leaders and across identity center spaces to connect regularly. WGSC leaders spoke about the importance of support networks and trusted colleagues to seek advice and talk through opportunities and challenges.

These could take the form of rotating opportunities within center spaces and academic partners, other identity spaces, and other segments of campus. These could be spaces within a campus, as well as regional and national convenings for support as well as strategy sessions.

At the leadership training level, it is beneficial to implement feminist leadership modules or classes presented in case study formats regularly, enabling leaders to share and learn from one another's experiences. Additionally, these modules can incorporate mentorship opportunities, facilitating connections between newer directors and seasoned ones. Consider introducing time-limited fellowships or internship programs to encourage collaboration and the exchange of strategies not only within WGSCs but also across other identity center leaders. This approach fosters an environment where leaders from diverse backgrounds can interact and collaborate effectively.

Based on the transformational impact that WGSC leaders have on their campus community, an intentional space for institutions to create pipelines/programs for undergrads and grads who want to continue in WGSC work could be a way to increase the pool of leaders in WGSC spaces, fellow identity spaces, or other campus departments. Increased opportunities, such as retreats or professional development for outgoing directors to enter into/transition to campus leadership and administration or faculty would further their work of inclusion beyond their centers. These transition opportunities beyond higher education would expand intersectional feminist work to the rest of campus.

Conclusion

WGSC leaders are dynamic and innovative campus administrators who engage in very personal, life-enhancing work. This study adds to the leadership literature by highlighting

intersectional feminist praxis as non-dominant leadership practices that were informed by their experiences as being part of hxrstorically marginalized groups. The leaders described how they were influenced by their elders, mentors, and colleagues to center important values and work authentically. Working from a place of centering values, their identity and perspectives, and ways they showed up in the work, leaders navigate the campus in ways not always aligned with the larger campus or dominant narratives around leadership. McManus (2018) challenges us to use our imaginations to lead with the central motivation of making things easier for future generations. By knowingly or unknowingly adopting the Applied Critical and Intersectional Feminist Leadership framework, leaders from hxstorically marginalized identities innovated and lifted communities from the place of inclusion and not leaving anyone behind.

Drawing upon the richness of their intersectional experiences to shape their feminist leadership principles and strategies, leaders who navigate multiple layers of marginalization offer unique perspectives rooted in their lived experiences. These perspectives serve as compelling real-world demonstrations of the tangible benefits derived from the work of WGSCs. In the face of daunting challenges such as structural discrimination, the persistence of meritocracy and white superiority, and the prevalence of deficit thinking, it can be understandably overwhelming. Nevertheless, WGSC leaders remain steadfast in their commitment to effecting positive change that extends beyond privileged individuals. They prioritize the cultivation of relationships and alignment with broader social justice movements to underscore the center's value within the institution and the wider campus community. The narrative of WGSCs revolves around the reduction of barriers, enhancing access, and fostering success for hxrstorically marginalized groups, all while navigating the complex landscape of campus priorities, including addressing budget constraints. This entails the design of programs that reflect the genuine needs of our

communities, engaging in educational exchanges with students, faculty, and staff, and advocating to upper administration for institutional change, not only for their center but for similar centers as well.

As a 20+ year WGSC leader, it has been challenging to balance taking the time for reflection, soliciting feedback, and self-care. Over the years, budget cuts and limited resources have forced many educators like me to fall into conforming to traditional expectations of leadership, which has typically been focused on dominant leadership styles usually focused on scholarship focused on men. Through deep transformative reflection and working more sustainably, WGSC leaders can continue to tell our stories, and make visible our center's stories and our communities' stories to expand leadership and student service literature to highlight non dominant leadership practices.

Consequently, our goal is to shape our programming to align with the specific needs of our students and campus communities. I've often found myself pondering the question, "Am I a leader?" because the traditional definitions and teachings of leadership don't always resonate with my values. My personal understanding of leadership has always revolved around the concept of serving others, drawing inspiration from the examples set by my elders and my early education in Catholic schools, where leadership was synonymous with selflessness and sacrifice. As I reflect on my role as a director for over two decades, I've realized that I'm not alone in questioning my effectiveness.

What has become evident through discussions with my colleagues is that, especially during these challenging times in higher education, they have tapped into their creativity and imagination. They have harnessed all available resources to remain authentic to their social

justice values, nurturing relationships at all levels of the institution. Their goal has been to amplify voices and communities, ensuring that no one is left behind in this collective journey.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Sample Recruitment Script

Leading & navigating: a qualitative inquiry on women[10] leaders, gender equity and sexuality center work

SECTION	CONTEXT & QUESTIONS
Salutation and request	**Sample Recruitment Script** *(To be adapted for email and phone)* Dear Colleague Name, My name is cici ambrosio. I am doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of California, Davis (UCD), and I am a staff member of the Gender Equity Resource Center (GenEq) at UC Berkeley (UCB). The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how women leaders navigate their experiences in higher education. As part of my dissertation work at UC Davis, I am currently interviewing a diverse set of both current and former WGSC women[11] leaders from hxrstorically marginalized groups. I am interested in WGSC leaders' own identity and experiences shape their leadership practices and strategies. My research questions are as follows: ● How do women leaders navigate institutions of higher education as leaders of campus-based women gender and sexuality centers (WGSC)? ● How do women leaders view the future of campus-based WGSC in a changing landscape of higher education?

[10] women - all who experience life through the lens of woman in body, spirit, identity - past, present, future, and fluid (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)

[11]

	I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss the study with you and learn more about your experiences ensuring that your centers continue to be relevant in the changing higher education landscape. Participation is voluntary and any information you provide will be kept confidential. Please let me know if you have any questions about me or the study. I look forward to hearing from you.
Phone call/email follow-up script	Dear Colleague Name, I am following up on my email from [DATE] regarding the possibility of interviewing you for my study. I would appreciate the opportunity to tell you more about the study. I will also try and contact you by phone.

APPENDIX B

Thank You for Participating and Next Steps

Leading & navigating: a qualitative inquiry on women[12] leaders, gender equity and sexuality center work

SECTION	CONTEXT & QUESTIONS
Salutation and request	Dear Colleague Name, Thank you for agreeing to be part of my interview sample. In order to prepare, I have attached the Consent Form, Demographic Questionnaire and Document Request of your center's most recent program review (or equivalent, including publicly available material such as website, social media, etc.). Before the interview, I want to make sure all of the necessary forms have been completed. Please see the links to the online forms: (1) Online UC Davis Consent Form (Google Form) (2) Online Pre-Interview Demographic Questionnaire (Google Form) (3) Online Document Request (Google Form with file upload) Additionally, I need to confirm the interview date and time via Google Calendar and confirm. My research questions are as follows: ● How do women leaders navigate institutions of higher education as leaders of campus-based women gender and sexuality centers (WGSC)?

[12] women - all who experience life through the lens of woman in body, spirit, identity - past, present, future, and fluid (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)

	● How do women leaders view the future of campus-based WGSC in a changing landscape of higher education? Please take a moment to complete the consent and demographics forms along with sending your signed informed consent form. Thank you for taking the time and please let me know if you have any questions.
Phone call/email follow-up script	Dear Colleague Name, I am following up on my email from [DATE] regarding the forms and finalizing the interview date for the one-on-one remote interview. I will also try and contact you by phone.

APPENDIX C

Pre-Interview Demographic Questionnaire

Leading & navigating: a qualitative inquiry on women[13] leaders, gender equity and sexuality center work

SECTION	CONTEXT & QUESTIONS
Pre-Interview Demographic Questionnaire	Thank you for participating in this study on how women* leaders navigate their experiences in higher education, specifically in a women's, gender, and sexuality center (WGSC). *women - all who experience life through the lens of woman in body, spirit, identity - past, present, future, and fluid (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019) The answers will remain confidential. If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact the investigator, cici ambrosio, at ccambrosio@ucdavis.edu, 510-393-2222. 1. Pseudonym 2. Email 3. Please share your racial and/or ethnic identity(ies)? 4. Please share your gender/gender identity? (e.g. nonbinary, transgender woman, etc.) 5. Please share your sexual orientation (e.g. gay, straight, lesbian, etc.) 6. How would you describe the generation are you part of? (e.g. Baby Boomer, etc.) 7. Please share other demographic information or identities that are important to you?

[13] women - all who experience life through the lens of woman in body, spirit, identity - past, present, future, and fluid (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)

	8. How would you describe your current role or title at your women's center? 9. In total, how many years were you in a leadership role or position at the women's center? 10. How many other women's centers (or other identity centers) have you worked? Please specify the number of years and position/title. 11. What additional questions, if any, do you have about the study?

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Leading & navigating: a qualitative inquiry on women[14] leaders, gender equity and sexuality center work

SECTION	CONTEXT & QUESTIONS
Welcome, General Housekeeping Items, and Forms	Welcome. My name is cici ambrosio. I am a doctoral student at UC Davis and a staff member at the Gender Equity Resource Center (GenEq). I will be conducting this interview. Thank you for taking the time to share your views and experiences. As part of my dissertation work at UC Davis, I am currently interviewing a diverse set of both current and former WGSC women[15] leaders from hxrstorically marginalized groups. I am interested in how women leaders navigate their experiences in higher education, specifically in a women's, gender, and sexuality center (WGSC). WGSC leaders' own identity and experiences shape their leadership practices and strategies. Before we begin, I want to make sure all of the necessary forms have been completed. You should have received the following via email. Please take a moment to complete the consent and demographics forms. Since I will be audio recording the focus group discussion for research purposes, I need your informed consent before we begin. Please let me know if you have any questions.
Consent and Ground Rules	Please remember your participation today is voluntary and you should only discuss things you feel comfortable discussing with me.

[14] women - all who experience life through the lens of woman in body, spirit, identity - past, present, future, and fluid (Gender Equity Resource Center, 2019)

[15]

	I will keep all information you provide today confidential. To protect your confidentiality, your comments will not be linked with personally identifying information. I will be audio taping our discussion so I can listen to your comments later. These audio files and my notes will be destroyed at the end of the study. To protect your confidentiality, please use a pseudonym. Additionally, your personally identifying information will not appear when I present this study or publish its results. Do you have any questions before we begin?
Purpose of Interview	The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how women leaders navigate their experiences in higher education. I would be happy to answer any questions before we start. Our discussion will last approximately 60 minutes.
Introduction	**First, we will start by having each of you tell us about your professional context.** 1. Tell me about how you came to this position. What were some of your own experiences that led you to seek a position in a women's center? 2. Tell me more about how you identify? 3. How does your identity affect your leadership practices? How you are perceived as a leader 4. Please briefly describe your center. 5. What values do you bring to your work and leadership practice? Where do these values stem from? 6. Please recount a time in the near past that you've felt successful as a leader 7. What would you say are some of the opportunities? Challenges? 8. Talk about a time when you have questioned yourself as a leader of a women's center 9. When you are at work, from whom or what do you draw your strength and inspiration?

	10. What words of wisdom would you share with me about how to remain vital to campus life? 11. What questions would you want to ask your peers/women leaders? What would you want to know about? 12. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Closing	I appreciate you taking the time to meet with me and share your experiences. Your input and participation are critical to this project, and I value your perspectives, insight, and experiences. Here is a card with my contact information. Please feel free to contact me if you think of anything else you would like to add.

APPENDIX E

Leading & navigating: a qualitative inquiry on women leaders, gender equity and sexuality (WGSC) center work

cici ambrosio, CANDEL, UC Davis, ccambrosio@ucdavis.edu, 510-393-2222

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how you came to this position. What were some of your own experiences that led you to seek a position in a women's center?

2. What values do you bring to your work and leadership practice?

3. You filled out the demographic questionnaire already, what else would you like to share with me today about how you identify?

4. In what ways does your identity affect your leadership practices? How are you perceived as a leader?

5. How would you describe the main responsibilities of your current role?

6. Please recount a time in the near past that you have felt successful as a leader.

7. What would you say are some current opportunities for your center? What are some challenges?

8. Talk about a time when you have questioned yourself as a leader of a women's center.

9. When you are at work, from whom or what do you draw your strength and inspiration?

10. What would you share with others about how to remain vital to campus life?

11. How are you preparing for what is next?

12. What questions would you want to ask your peers/women leaders?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX F

Table of Research Questions & Interview Questions

Leading & navigating: a qualitative inquiry on women leaders, gender equity and sexuality (WGSC) center work

Background/identity/positionality	1. Tell me about how you came to this position. What were some of your own experiences that led you to seek a position in a women's center? 3. You filled out the demographic questionnaire already, what else would you like to share with me today about how you identify? 5. How would you describe the main responsibilities of your current role?
RQ1: How do women leaders navigate institutions of higher education as leaders of campus-based women gender and sexuality centers (WGSC)?	2. What values do you bring to your work and leadership practice? [VALUES] 4. In what ways does your identity affect your leadership practices? How are you perceived as a leader? 6. Please recount a time in the near past that you have felt successful as a leader. 7. What would you say are some current opportunities for your center? What are some challenges? [+/-] 8. Talk about a time when you have questioned yourself as a leader of a women's center. [?self] 9. When you are at work, from whom or what do you draw your strength and inspiration? 12. What questions would you want to ask your peers/women leaders? [?]
RQ2: How do women leaders view the future of campus-based WGSC in a changing landscape of higher education?	10. What would you share with others about how to remain vital to campus life? 11. How are you preparing for what is next?
Closing	13. Is there anything else you would like to add?