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Navigating the Labyrinth toward College Student Government Presidency: A Phenomenological Study of Women who Run for Student Government President

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Navigating the Labyrinth toward College Student Government Presidency: A Phenomenological Study of Women who Run for Student Government President

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Hilary Zimmerman

2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Navigating the Labyrinth toward College Student Government Presidency: A Phenomenological Study of Women who Run for Student Government President

by

Hilary Zimmerman

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Professor Linda J. Sax, Chair

In recent years in the United States, women have been outpacing men on important college outcomes such as grade point average and degree attainment. While women have made strides in the last few decades, there are still important areas of higher education in which women are significantly underrepresented. In student government, women are vastly underrepresented in the top leadership role, the president.

This study examined the experiences of college women who ran for the student government president position. Using a combination of the leadership labyrinth and human ecological systems this study sought to learn more about women's leadership pathways into running for student government president and the contextual factors that impact that ways in which they navigate their pathways. This study took an in-depth, phenomenological approach in which data

was collected through a three-part interview process with seven women who were running for student government president at their respective institutions in spring 2017.

The findings from this study suggest that pre-college and early college experiences are important for women. Specifically, the women in this study gained important leadership insights from competitive sports in high school and experiences with activism early in their college careers. Interestingly, women did not necessarily see high school student government or involvement in college student government as a precursor to running for president. Further, findings revealed that women went through a process of validating their internal sense of self as a leader with others while navigating varying levels of confidence about their perceptions of themselves and external perceptions of them as leaders. Finally, findings also suggest the women were impacted by issues related to gender and politics that surfaced during the 2016 national election and struggled with social media bullying during their campaigns. This study provides important implications for theory, faculty, and student affairs professionals who work with women and/or student government in light of these findings.

This dissertation of Hilary Zimmerman is approved.

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2017

To Anaynda, Annika, Lauren, Nicole, Nora, Rose, Victoria, and all women navigating their pathways into political and civic leadership.

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As I sit here writing this final piece of my dissertation, it seems surreal. What started as an amorphous dream roughly four years ago, has slowly taken shape and ended at this conclusion. When I started my PhD program, if you were to ask me what today would look like, there is no way I would have guessed anything close to this. I would not have imagined that I would be married, living in Chicago, transitioning into a post-doctoral research position, and getting ready to embark on the adventure of parenthood. At the same time, I could not imagine this day any other way. There have been many people who have supported me that lead to this moment taking shape in reality. While the list of people who made this day possible could fill pages upon pages, I wish to acknowledge a few of them for the impactful ways in which they encouraged, supported, and mentored me through this process.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

"And to all the women, and especially the young women, who put their faith in this campaign and in me, I want you to know that nothing has made me prouder than to be your champion. Now, I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but some day someone will and hopefully sooner than we might think right now. And to all the little girls who are watching this, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams." (Clinton, 2016)

Those words were spoken by Hillary Clinton as she conceded her presidential loss. For me, her loss was about so much more than simply the Democrats losing to the Republicans. Despite the fact that women have made huge strides in many areas to achieve equality with men, many high-level leadership positions remain elusive. I like, Secretary Clinton, think this loss hurts too. This campaign offered two different candidates with two different approaches to leading America. One candidate ran on a campaign of inclusion and being "stronger together". The other candidate ran on a campaign of exclusion and boundaries. The platform of exclusion won out, and now I am left with questions. Where do I fit in? What is my place in this democracy—and I do believe that there is a place for us all? In this time of instability and questions, I have hope. I have faith in our college students, and I have faith in student government. I believe that student government leadership has the power to help women find their place in our democracy and help them learn to interact with systems and structures of power within our democracy. In many ways, I hope this dissertation will show us all how women are finding their place in our democracy now and for the future. I hope that this dissertation research will also demonstrate the hope that I have for the future—the hope that I get every time I see a college woman stepping up to lead in student government.

For the past decade, women have outpaced men on several key measures of college success. Women make up well over half of the students enrolled in higher education and earn

over half of the bachelor's degrees in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014). Further, women in college tend to earn higher grades and graduate at higher rates than men (Johnson, 2011; Vanderbilt, 2012). Despite their strong representation and evidence of success in today's colleges and universities, women are still vastly underrepresented in influential campus-wide leadership roles such as student government president. On many campuses, student government leadership is dominated by men, mirroring the gender gaps we often see in state and national politics (American Student Government Association [ASGA], 2013; Johnson, 2011).

Take Kalyani Hawaldar from the University of Florida, for example. She stated that, "When I ran for Student Body President, I was very aware that I was running against the odds—out of the 106 Student Body Presidents since 1909, only seven have been women and of those, only 2 have been women of color." Kalyani is part of a news feature from MSNBC called *Women in Politics: College Edition*. The feature seeks to highlight college women across the country who serve in student government leadership roles. Another woman, Celia Wright from the Ohio State University shared with MSNBC, "I was part of the first dually-female leadership team in Ohio State's history, and the first female student body president in seven years." Kathryn Edmunds from Florida Atlantic University also served as student government president and shared her sense of the underrepresentation of women in student government. She stated, "I am blessed to be one of the few females involved in Student Government leadership at Florida Atlantic University."

The underrepresentation of women in the highest level of leadership in student government is more than just anecdotal. Several researchers and associations are working to determine women's representation in college student government. These researchers estimate

that between 21% to 40% of student government presidents are women (ASGA, 2016; Miller & Kraus, 2004). These estimates vary based on factors such as regional location, institutional size, and institutional type (i.e. community college, four-year liberal arts college, etc.). Regardless of how researchers calculate representation, all of the statistics agree—women are underrepresented in the highest level of leadership in student government. This is particularly concerning given that the gender gap exists despite the fact that women now outnumber men at many colleges and universities in the United States.

College Student Government in the United States

Student government in the United States plays an important role in the fabric of our colleges and universities. First, student government, and the president in particular, serve as the student voice in institutional decision-making. Many student government presidents advocate on behalf of student concerns, champion causes related to tuition freezes, institutional textbook policies, and safer campus housing (ASGA, 2013, 2015, 2016). Second, student government leaders often serve as a connection to administration. In a time where student activism is on the rise at many colleges and universities, student government associations have worked with student protesters to advocate for policies and practices related to improving campus climate for marginalized groups (e.g., hiring of more faculty and staff who are women and/or people of color, establishing gender neutral restrooms and housing, or negotiating tuition freezes (ASGA, 2016; Columbia Daily Tribune, 2015). Additionally, student government leaders play a critical role in recruiting and retaining students by planning campus-wide educational programming and social events that create positive experiences for students. Student government leaders often participate in alumni engagement by planning parents' weekend, homecoming, and alumni weekends (ASGA, 2016). Finally, student government associations participate in lobbying

efforts at the local, state, and national levels. For example, many student government presidents lobbied against the Safe Campus Act proposed in 2016. The bill had many provisions that advocated for perpetrators' rights during sexual assault student conduct cases, and included a mandate that would remove sexual assault adjudication out of the educational student conduct system and into the legal system. (Kingkade, 2015; Cohn, 2015). Often, the student government president is the leader and face of all of these things.

While the student government president is important for the institution, there are many benefits for the students who serve in this position as well. Research finds that there are many important outcomes associated with student government presidency such as time management skills, increased leadership confidence gains during college, increased satisfaction with college experience, and increased satisfaction with peer group relationships (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1984). Additionally, student government presidents have access to a network of people and social capital (Sutton and Kimborough, 2004). Finally, serving as the student government president provides an important platform for future civic and political leadership. Hillary Clinton, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton all served as presidents of their student governments while in college, and roughly 56% of women in Congress started their civic leadership in student government (American Association for University Women [AAUW], 2015; Running Start, 2016).

Given the influence of student government, and the student government president, the underrepresentation of women in this position is concerning for several reasons. First, if women do not have the opportunity to serve as the student government president, they may miss out on the positive outcomes associated with being the student government president. Additionally, they do not get access and exposure to the same social capital and social networks. As one of the most

prestigious and influential student leadership positions on a college campus, the student body presidency affords a student access to college decision-makers, provides the opportunity to lead peers, and yields power and influence. Further, when women do not have the same leadership opportunities in student government as the president as men, they do not have the same pipeline into future political leadership as men. Engaging women in politics and electing them to office earlier in life are key to strengthening and increasing women's representation in government. Finally, the underrepresentation of women in student government leadership is an issue of representative democracy and equity. Ideally, democracy in society includes women. In practice however, women are not always equally represented. The lack of women serving as student government president highlights an equity issue in our institutions of higher education, and it reminds universities of the necessity for female students to have the same opportunity for out-of-classroom experiences as male students.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined the experiences of women who ran for their college student government presidency as a means to understand the leadership pathways of college women who seek high-level leadership roles in a political and civic sphere (college student government). While women are more likely than men to be involved in student government (Miller & Kraus, 2004), they are underrepresented in the highest-levels of leadership—the presidency. Learning more about how college women navigate leadership pathways related to student government in college provides an opportunity to gain insights into potential ways to recruit and retain women into a leadership pipeline. However, the literature base related to college students' own campaign experiences is limited. Further, few studies have examined the leadership experiences of college

women leading up to running for student government president and during the campaign for the position. Thus, this study was guided by the following research questions and sub-questions:

1) What factors shape the decision to run for student government president for college women?
    a) How do previous experiences motivate women to run for student government president?
    b) What choices do they navigate in making their decision?
    c) How do they make meaning of their student government leadership motivations?
    d) What are their perceptions of the role of the student government president?
2) How, if at all, do institutional contexts shape the way women think about running for student government president at their institutions?
    a) What role, if any, do mentors play in women's decisions to run?
    b) What other aspects of campus culture influence women when they think about running (during the period that they are running)?

This study employed a qualitative, in-depth phenomenological approach with a constructivist epistemology to answer these research questions. Using an in-depth phenomenological approach allowed for inquiry that centers the experiences of women who are running for student government president during the time in which it is part of their current lived reality (Seidman, 2013). To address the research questions, I conducted interviews with college women who were running for student government president during their campaign season. Utilizing Seidman's (2013) three-part framework for conducting interviews, I interviewed participants at the beginning of their campaign, in the middle, and shortly after the election. Semi-structured interview protocols were used to structure the interviews. While interview data was the primary data source, additional data sources that were used to aid in answering the research questions include campus observations and supporting documents.

Data were understood through a framework that combines work from Eagly and Carli (2007) and Bronfennbrenner (1994). Eagly and Carli (2007) developed a theory that examines women's leadership pathways as a labyrinth with twists and turns that women must navigate as they move toward leadership positions. The labyrinth is different from other frameworks that examine women's leadership (e.g., the glass ceiling) in that it does not focus on where women get stuck, but instead it examines ways in which women navigate the challenges of the leadership labyrinth. While the Eagly and Carli's (2007) work is helpful in examining individuals as leaders and the process of leadership, the addition of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) human ecological systems framework situates people and processes within a layered context. In this case, it means situating women's leadership labyrinths related to running for student government president within the institutional and societal context. The addition of this framework allowed me to examine different contextual factors that are more or less salient to participants' leadership pathways.

Significance of the Study

Significance for Research

This study aimed to expand research on women's leadership and participation in student government in several ways. First, there is little understanding about women's decision-making process related to running for student government president. This study provides important information about their decisions to run and their experiences leading up to that decision. Second, a large body of the literature that does examine female student government presidents does so during or after their time as president. In this way, the research focuses on individuals who decide to run and get elected by their peers. It also focuses much more on isolating their learning experiences to their time in student government. Instead, because it is unlikely that all study participants will win their elections, this study provides a potential opportunity to interview

women who are not elected by their peers; it reveals whether and how those women plan to continue navigating their leadership labyrinth. Third, much of the literature on college women's leadership focuses on women using deficit-based language and frameworks. This study, instead, focuses on the ways in which women do navigate the process to highlight success stories.

This research has theoretical significance as well. This study applied Eagly & Carli's notion of the labyrinth to a higher education setting, which has been done only in a limited way in previous research. Further, this framework allows for an examination of leadership through an asset-based framework as opposed to the deficit-based frameworks that dominate much of the foundational research on leadership and women's leadership in particular. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's framework incorporates an examination of contextual nuances in higher education for college students, answering a call from prominent higher education researchers to extend research by examining important person-environment connections during college (Renn & Arnold, 2003).

Significance for Practice

This study also has important significance for practitioners. Higher education professionals work directly with students and student government every day through student advising or institutional policymaking. The co-curricular experience in higher education, serves as a learning lab in which students learn how to navigate leadership experiences within the context of their colleges and universities. Practitioners are the teachers and mentors who help students process and learn from their co-curricular experience. Student government provides students with the opportunity to interact with political structures at a level that is local to them—their college campuses. For many, it is their first exposure to political leadership. This study

helps practitioners understand how women navigate their leadership pathways into student government leadership, experiences while campaigning, and leadership plans after the election.

This research helps practitioners learn how to be better teachers and mentors to women with student government leadership aspirations. The findings from this study potentially help practitioners understand how women make the decision to run and how to encourage more women to run for the position of student government president.

Other findings from this study highlight the campaign experiences of women as they run for student body president. Practitioners can benefit from understanding the experiences of women as they campaign to help support female candidates during the election. Finally, this study helps practitioners develop strategies for working with female college students after the election as they continue on their leadership pathways, despite the outcome of the election.

Significance for Students

Finally, this work also has important significance for students—particularly women who may run for student government. This study provides a deeper understanding of ways to set more women up on a pathway that leads to political leadership later in their lives. By listening and learning from women's stories, other women may be inspired to run for student government or pursue other high-level leadership positions.

Women make up a majority of the electorate, yet they have never been equally represented in high-level leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Closing the gender gap in U.S. politics can start on the college campus with women in student government. Higher education institutions provide a way for students to become engaged in elected office at a crucial age. Understanding politics, being engaged at a young age, and being in a leadership position are good ways to spark civic interest and encourage college women to run (Running Start, 2016). At

a time when the United States saw its first major party female nominee for president (and got close to electing its first female president), it is critical that women are encouraged to pursue political leadership roles at every level (college student government, local level, state level, or national level). Today's female student government president may just be the future first female president of the United States.

Outline of the Study

This study sought to understand women's leadership pathways related to the college student government presidency and addressed their pathways prior to deciding to run for student government, their experiences during their campaign, and their reflections and plans for the future following their campaign. This chapter discussed the underrepresentation of women in the student government president role and the importance of this topic. Chapter Two will provide more information about background literature related to gender, leadership, and student government followed by a discussion of the theoretical frameworks used in this study. Chapter Three will detail the methodology and research design that will be utilized in examining women's college student government presidency leadership pathways. It will also include information about data collection and analysis. Later, in Chapter Four will highlight the findings from of this study, and Chapter Five will discuss implications and conclusions for research and practice.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Higher education has a long history of developing educated leaders in society, and leadership and leadership development have long been seen as important outcomes of higher education. This study in particular seeks to examine the intersection between leadership in student government and gender. It is important first to provide the historical context of the connection between leadership and higher education before examining the literature related to college student leadership and gender differences in leadership development. Additionally, this chapter will also focus on the evolution and role of the student government president, literature that seeks to understand how women participate in student government, and potential factors that contribute to women's underrepresentation in the student government president role.

The History of the Study of Leadership

Since the founding of the colonial colleges, higher education has always had a connection to student leadership. The first colleges and universities in what would become the United States were formed in part to educate the future leaders of our country (Astin & Astin, 2000; Lucas, 1994). A college education socialized students to upper class, elite social norms and prepared its students for future leadership roles in organizations and communities (Thelin, 2011). Leadership started out as a by-product of a college education, however over the years there has been increasing recognition of leadership and leadership development as an important outcome of college (Komives et al., 2011; Owen 2012). While leadership and leadership development have a longstanding connection to higher education, leadership has not been seen as a part of formal academic curriculum. Instead, student leadership was recognized as a product of the co-curricular experience and often occurs through student involvement experiences (Dugan, 2011).

Leadership models that emerged in the early 20th century have come to be known as "traditional" leadership models. Scholars of the time period conceptualized and defined leadership based on values and characteristics that are typically attributed to elite, White, men (Kezar & Morarity, 2000). Scholars focused on "great men" theories, which examined men in society who served in leadership roles. These men were thought of as natural leaders, and therefore leadership was thought of as something innate to individuals (Bass, 1990; Rost, 1993). In this era, research often focused on people who were deemed "born to lead" and there was a fundamental assumption that leadership could not be learned (Bass 1990). Further, typically masculine characteristics or personality traits associated with leadership such as boldness, individualistic thinking, being aggressive, or being fearless were valued in society and research (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Northouse, 2013).

The years following World War II saw a massive increase in enrollments in higher education during a time period known as the "massification of higher education" (Thelin, 2011). This period of drastically increasing enrollments also brought with it a more diverse population of students in higher education. With this influx of new students, institutions were no longer seen as places reserved for upper class citizens, but instead higher education could be considered a place for all people to gain social mobility through education (Haverman & Smeeding, 2006). Leadership studies began to mirror this transition.

In the 1950s, leadership studies shifted away from thinking about the individual personality traits of great male leaders in society toward thinking more about leadership behaviors and contexts (Northouse, 2013). Researchers worked to identify broad behaviors that leaders tended to enact and contexts in which leaders tended to enact those behaviors. This line of research brought the relationship between the leader and the follower into the conversation

about leadership and situated leadership within the specific bounds of a context or contexts (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Northouse, 2013). This line of inquiry gave way to the identification of different types of leadership, such as situational, contingent, transactional, and transformational leadership[1]. Even though this line of study broadened notions of leadership beyond the "great man" theories, brought the role of followers into the picture, and provided nuance by placing leaders within situations, leadership studies were still by and large focused on the leader. Much of the literature during this period characterizes leadership as hierarchical, power-centric, and bureaucratic (Kezar, 1996; Lipman-Blumen, 1996).

More change was yet to come in leadership studies as the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation movements swept the nation in the 1960s and 1970s. As institutions worked to create space for women and students of color on campuses across the country, researchers began to study different ways of knowing and understanding the world that centered the perspectives of women and people of color (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Cross, 1978; Gilligan, 1977). At this time, a shift occurred in leadership studies often referred to as the industrial to post-industrial shift (Rost, 1993). Instead of focusing on person-centered leadership focused on traits and characteristics, scholars began to consider leadership in a process-oriented manner (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Northouse, 2013).

In the post-industrial paradigm, scholars let go of the notion that leadership could not be taught and focused instead on leadership as a teachable behavior that all people had the capacity to learn (Rost, 1991). Scholars began to see leadership as "a complex process involving the interplay of multi-faceted contexts, power, and problems," (Heifetz, 1994, p 98). Through this

[1] Situational leadership focuses less on good leaders and bad leaders, and instead believes that leaders are more or less effective given their ability to adapt their leadership style to the ability and willingness of the individual or group they are leading (Hersey & Blanchard; 1977).

broader definition of leadership, with its ties to influencing change, leadership development as a collegiate educational experience began to take hold. Scholars established that leadership was teachable, and it became possible for higher education professionals to think about how to teach it. At this point, student affairs professionals, with their eye on the co-curricular experience, entered into the world of leadership development. Institutions began establishing positions, offices, and programming dedicated to teaching students leadership education (Komives et al., 2011; Roberts, 1981).

As paradigms shifted toward the post-industrial definitions of leadership, more contemporary (or "non-traditional") forms of leadership emerged which tended to be more inclusive of women's styles of leadership. Researchers began to study gender differences in leadership, they found that female leaders tended to be more collaborative in nature, thought more about the relationships between leaders and followers, focused on empowerment, acted more egalitarian in nature, and focused on consensus-building and encouraging participation among followers (Astin & Leland, 1991; Komives, 1994; Whit, 1994).

In recent decades, higher education scholars have continued to enhance our understanding of leadership through a host of bodies of empirical research on different aspects of leadership and leadership development. Some scholars have focused on extending our knowledge about leadership and leadership development in college (HERI, 1996; Komives, Longerbeam, Owe, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 1998), while others sought to identify institutional factors that shape leadership development (Owen, 2012; Smart, Ethington, Riggs, & Thompson, 2002). Still others have focused on creating best practices and programs for leadership development (Cress et al., 2001: Dugan & Komives, 2007), and yet another group of scholars has focused on illuminating ways in

which social identities may influence leadership development (Arminio et al., 2000; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005).

In summary, leadership has played an important role in the higher education experience since the founding of the first institutions. However, our understanding of leadership during much of this time has been based on the characteristics, styles, and experiences of white, upper-class, men. As access to higher education has broadened in recent decades, our understanding of leadership has also expanded to include women and students of color. With the evolution of leadership studies in higher education in mind, this chapter now moves to highlighting work from the post-industrial time period. The following section highlights specific leadership research related to women's leadership processes and leadership studies that illuminate the importance of situating leadership within context.

Women's Leadership

This section provides an overview of literature related to gender differences in leadership among men and women with a special attention paid to women's leadership. Much of the post-industrial research related to gender differences has focused on three different areas or questions. The first area focuses on male and female styles and definitions of leadership honing in on individual contributions to conceptualizations of leadership. This section will address the question: How do women think about leadership, and is that different from men? The second line of inquiry focuses on gender differences in motivation and helps us think about pathways that women must navigate in order to make the decision to engage in the leadership process. This section answers the question: Do women want to serve in high-level leadership positions, and what impacts their decision? Finally, leadership exists within context. Therefore, the third area addresses contextual or environmental factors that shape women's decisions to engage in

leadership, addressing the question: What environments or contexts shape women's desires to lead and their experiences while leading? Further, leadership is not always about just simply deciding to lead. As this is a study specifically about student government leadership, we must acknowledge that the groups that students are representing must choose their leader. In the case of student government, leaders are chosen through a formalized campaigning and election process. Therefore, I will conclude with a section discussing literature that focuses on gender and electability.

How do women think about leadership?

There is a prolific body of literature dedicated to the study of leadership traits and styles, a subset of which is dedicated to examining women's leadership or gender differences in leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991; Helgesen, 1990; Lipman-Blumen, 1996). Within the college context specifically, a number of studies have been conducted that examine college student leadership traits and styles, and differences between college men and women (Komives, 1994; Leonard & Sigall, 1989; Offerman & Beil, 1992; Posner & Brodsky, 1994; Romano, 1996; Spencer, 2004; Whitt 1994). Despite the fact that scholars have studied gender and leadership for decades, the conclusions of this line of inquiry are somewhat mixed. Some researchers have found that there are few if any differences in the leadership practices and styles of men and women (Komives, 1994; Posner & Brodsky, 1994) while others suggest that there are actually more similarities between male and female leaders than there are differences (Offermann & Beil, 1992). On the other hand, some researchers have documented differences between men and women with respect to their leadership styles or specific traits (Wielkiewicz, 2000). They have also found that women's leadership styles are more in line with post-industrial/non-traditional paradigms of leadership (Romano, 1996). Still other scholars find themselves somewhere

between these two opposing sides in that their studies have found gender differences among some variables related to leadership but not others (Varwig, 1989).

One of the foundational, and often-cited, pieces on women's leadership was conducted by researchers Astin and Leland (1991). In their study, they interviewed 77 women who were leaders at some point during the first two decades of the women's movement. They asked women about their personal values, the context in which they were leaders, and how they went about creating change. They found that women characterized leadership as collaborative and non-hierarchical. Further, female leaders valued relationships and their role as a leader was to support their team. Additionally, their participants thought about the leadership process as focused on creating change within the bounds of an organization or system. It is important to note that the authors were clear that this was a leadership study that happened to be about women. It was not in any way a comparative study contrasting women's leadership styles with men's leadership styles; instead it was an effort to learn more about women's ways of leading (Astin & Leland; 1991).

While Astin and Leland (1991) focused on learning more about women's perspectives on leadership, some scholars did seek to make comparisons between men's and women's leadership. Sagaria (1988) found that women saw leadership from a broader perspective in a more holistic manner. From that finding she posited that women do not have the internal desire to serve in a top tier leadership positions. Instead perhaps women might see leadership opportunities in a variety of situations such as participating in student organizations, through academic programs, or by serving as a mentor to others. Additionally, Romano (1996) found that men and women exhibit different leadership styles. Female leaders described their leadership style as cooperative and group-oriented, often focusing on relationships with peers. Interestingly,

women in her study also reported many experiences in which they perceived that men were intimidated by their leadership styles.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that there are differences between men and women in the ways that they define leadership and how they think about going through the process of leading. They highlight more about the perceptions that men and women have about leadership and each other and how those are different as well. Further, these findings also help us think about the complexities that women may navigate along their pathways into positional roles that are typically male dominated- such as student government.

Shertzer & Schuh (2004) also studied gender differences in leadership styles by focusing on the perceptions that college men and women have of gender differences in leadership styles. They specifically focused on the idea of empowering and constraining beliefs related to leadership positions and how gender shaped those beliefs. They conducted interviews and focus groups with involved students and "unengaged" students. Involved students defined leaders as people with special qualities and skills while the unengaged students discussed leadership from a broader perspective, explaining that leadership can happen in various contexts by setting an example. They also felt that leaders could be quiet, introverted people. It is important to note that "women's ways of leading" have often been described as "non-traditional" or outside of the norm. Coincidentally, they also align with many of the things that the unengaged students shared with the researchers. Consequently, if a female students' leadership style is not represented in a traditional campus organization, like student government, women may not be motivated to run for office.

It is important to note that while research on women's leadership styles, draws a stark contrast to the ways that previous research has painted men's leadership, there is really no

definitive evidence that a certain type of leadership or certain gendered style of leadership is *better* than the other. The research simply highlights differences between men and women.

Do women even want to serve in the highest levels of leadership?

The previous section focused on differences between men and women in the conceptualizations of leadership that may cause them to think about leadership more broadly in many different forms. As this dissertation seeks to learn about women's leadership pathways into student government presidencies, it is important to also think about literature related to women's decisions to run. Therefore, this section will transition into learning more about motivations of female leaders and what it takes for women to decide to lead.

One study that focused on college women's leadership motivation was conducted by Boatwright & Egidio (2003). Their study sought to examine the underrepresentation of women in the highest levels of societal leadership by studying college women's motivational factors in seeking leadership positions in their future careers. They asked college women to provide information on their aspirations for being in the highest level of leadership in their chosen career field in the future. They found that participants reported both internal and external reasons for underrepresentation of women at the highest levels of organizations. Among internal reasons, Boatwright and Egidio (2003) found that women perceived themselves to lack the time to dedicate to a leadership role because of other priorities in their lives. In alignment with other researcher's findings (diCesare, 2001; Paglis & Green, 2002), this study also found that women reported lower levels of self-esteem and fear of negative evaluation by their peers. Finally, Boatwright and Egidio found that women's desires to be connected to others was associated with higher levels of leadership aspiration for women in their future career fields. Among external factors, Boatwright and Egidio (2003) found that women observed historically stereotypical

gender roles, which negatively impacted their leadership aspirations. Boatwright and Egidio (2003) examined college women and their desire for future career leadership, but what about college women and their motivations to hold leadership positions while in college?

Motivation is an often-cited construct in leadership development studies (Barbuto, 2005; Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Keating et al., 2014; Murphy & Johnson, 2011). In this literature, leadership motivation is often found to be a vital precursor for students' engagement in leadership activities. On college campuses women tend to be highly involved in clubs and activities, but underrepresented in co-ed organizational leadership positions. This leads some to believe that women lack the motivation to lead. However, it is not that simple. There is more to motivation, for women at least, than an internal desire.

One reason that women may be underrepresented in high-level leadership positions is due to their negative perceptions of the political nature of leadership and the competition involved in being chosen to lead. Leonard and Sigall (1999) conducted one such study and found that women do indeed have distaste for competition. Additionally, the women in their study also reported that fear of rejection also served as a barrier to wanting to seek out college leadership experiences. The student government president position is an elected position, and therefore one may come to believe that women lack the motivation to run because of perceptions of competition in campaigning. Other scholars have also found that fear of rejection and an aversion to competition serve as negative intrinsic barriers for women considering leadership experiences (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003; Leonard & Sigall, 1999).

Another potential reason for women's underrepresentation among high-level leadership positions may be due to differences between men's and women's confidence levels. For example, Kreuzer (1992) sought to understand differences in leadership motivation between men

and women. Kreuzer's study surveyed a group of randomly selected university seniors. She found that women tended to have lower leadership aspirations than men. What's more, she also found that both men and women had lower expectations for women's eventual leadership accomplishments.

Despite their potentially lower self-ratings, there are still women who pursue leadership positions and demonstrate motivation and a desire for leadership experiences. For example, Romano (1996) focused on female presidents of campus co-educational organizations at a single institution. In the study, Romano interviewed 15 female presidents. The findings of this study illustrated the importance of female role models, leadership styles of female presidents, and the importance of relationships with peers. Further, participants stated that their families and other strong female leaders were critical parts of motivation for leadership.

Looking at this literature from a high-level view, it is clear that women face negative perceptions, fears, and other obstacles that potentially dissuade them from engaging in leadership. While they appear to experience these things in different ways than their male peers, that does not mean that they have less motivation or desire for leadership positions. Perhaps it means that in order to want to engage in high-level leadership positions, women have to navigate a whole host of challenges and obstacles. Further, many of these studies cited strong mentorship as a way to combat some of the obstacles that women may face when deciding whether or not to lead. So perhaps it is not that women do not want to be leaders; maybe they simply need the proper role models and encouragement along their path to pursuing leadership positions.

Contextual Influences

This section of the literature review, highlights the important work that scholars are doing that helps us think about leadership within context and the environmental factors that impact

women's decisions about leadership. The findings on much of this work examines barriers that women face when deciding to lead as well as factors that promote women's leadership.

Beginning in the 1980s, a number of researchers documented the gender bias that existed on college campuses, particularly in the classroom (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). In this older research, college women reported being sexually harassed by professors and students, did not see themselves represented in their textbooks, and had to be very assertive in order to receive the same education as their male peers. These realities for women led to a "chilly climate" on college campuses (Hall & Sandler, 1982). Is it possible that this gender bias extended to the co-curriculum and discouraged women's participation in student leadership? Certainly, the notion of a "chilly climate" has created a legacy that colleges are still working to correct (Mink Salas, 2010).

Additionally, some researchers posit that women do not become leaders in traditionally male fields (i.e., politics or student government) as often as men because of the belief that women's styles of leadership are not congruent with the organization in which the leader would be leading (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003). For example, following this logic, women would not become student government presidents as often as men because of the belief that women's leadership style does not match the dominant style of leadership in student government. Whether it is that the "female"/non-traditional/post-industrial style of leadership is not valued in the organization or the belief that women do not see their style of leadership represented in such an organization and therefore choose not to participate, either view assumes two important things. First, that there is a difference in men's and women's leadership styles and neither are capable of adapting to different styles. Second, that environmental or external factors play an important role in women's pathways into leadership positions.

Boatwright and Egidio (2003) found that there were external factors that impacted college women's decisions to pursue the highest levels of leadership in their organizations. Among the external factors, they found that women cited "sexist promotional practices" that were still in place even in the 21st century. They also found that women often had more work-related or domestic activities than their male peers, and women often perceived that there was less time for them to dedicate to leadership because of these additional expectations. Further, the authors found that women are less integrated into dominant organizational coalitions, which decreased their chances of being selected or encouraged to pursue leadership positions (p 654). Finally, women were perceived as having less leadership potential or being too nice in the workplace, thus they were not considered by superiors for leadership positions.

Other factors that serve as environmental barriers for women's leadership include the perception that gender roles are incongruent with women as leaders; low integration into existing organizations resulting in a lack of leadership opportunities; lack of role models or encouraging mentors; and time constraints/family responsibilities (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003; Kreuzer, 1992; Leonard & Sigall, 1989; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Spencer; 2004). Conversely, one area of particular focus for research has been on the role of mentorship in women's decisions to lead or leadership process. Research has found that strong encouragement from others, including parents, peers, and student affairs professionals and the presence of mentors and role models had a positive effect on women's leadership (Astin, 1993: Kreuzer, 1992; Romano, 1996; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004; Spencer, 2004). This research points to the need for a significant other or "champion" being present in the life of the female leader (Mink Salas, 2010).

When situating leaders within contexts, research demonstrates that women must navigate a whole host of barriers on their pathways into leadership positions. Chilly climates, a legacy of

exclusion, and organizational cultures that do not see women as leaders are all issues that women must contend with as they find their way along those pathways. This paints a fairly dire picture for women in leadership. However, we know that mentorship, at critical times along their pathways, can help women overcome many of these barriers and help them find their way into high-level leadership positions.

Do women think about running for an elected position in different ways than men?

Before moving on to discuss research more specifically aimed at women in student government, it is important to pivot for a moment and discuss the important role that elections play in getting women to serve in the student government presidency. There is a growing body of literature in political science that examines the intersection of women in politics. A subset of this research looks at why women decide to run for office and why they win or lose elections (Carroll, 1994; diCesare, 2001; Folwer & McClure, 1989; Fox & Lawless, 2004; 2005; 2013; McGlen & O'Conner, 2002; Woods, 1999). Two of the major contributors to more recent research in this area are Fox and Lawless in their work on the topic of gender and the decision to run for office.

Fox and Lawless (2004, 2005, 2013) use data from the Citizen Political Ambition survey. In their study, they administered a mail survey to a national sample of 6,800 men and women who were considered to be people who would typically consider running for political office. The sample consisted of individuals from three career fields—law, business, and education—given that these fields tend to produce the most candidates. The researchers had a 60% response rate and they found no discernable demographic differences between men and women in their respondent sample. Respondents answered questions about whether or not they had ever considered running for office and whether they had discussed it with anyone. They were asked

about their political interests and any previous campaign experiences. The survey also asked respondents to indicate if they had received encouragement from others to run or solicited funds in any way to run their campaign.

Fox and Lawless (2004) identified a two-step process involved in deciding to run for political office. The first step is consideration. "Potential candidates will never emerge as actual candidates if the notion of launching a campaign and what that entails does not enter into their frame of consciousness," (p. 267). Step two is the actual decision, which spurs more concrete action to make that happen. Their initial study identified this process, and their later work found that gender differences exist at both steps of the decision making process (Fox & Lawless, 2005; 2013). Furthermore, their research has also found that when female candidates actually decide to run for office they do not lose elections in a disproportionate manner compared to men. In fact, one study found that 63% of women and 59% of men who ran for office launched successful campaigns (Fox & Lawless, 2005, p. 41). Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that women have just as much chance of being elected into high-level leadership positions as men. Thus, while women are just as likely as men to win an election once they actually decide to participate as a candidate, the decision-making process to get to that point is different for men and women.

Student Government on College Campuses

Turning back now to more centrally focus on the literature related to the topic of this study, the remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to looking specifically at the role of student government in higher education, the important role that the president plays, and some research related to the experiences of women in student government.

Background and Historical Context

The idea of student government as we know it today had its beginnings shortly after the founding of the colonial colleges in America. The notion of student self-governance, "a type of organization which by virtue of its composition and constitution is entitled to represent the student community as a whole" (Freidson & Shuchman, 1995, p 6), has ties to the first colonial colleges in the United States. Student self-governance stemmed from several needs and desires from students: 1) a need for students to have extracurricular outlets, 2) disengagement with the academic curriculum, 3) dissatisfaction with institutional rules and disciplinary procedures, 4) a desire for student empowerment (May, 2010). The earliest forms of student self-governance in higher education started in literary and honor societies, and adapted into student assemblies and class councils as enrollments in institutions grew. As higher education expanded and became increasingly more diverse, ultimately student associations formed and an official student government structure took hold on college campuses throughout the nation (May, 2010).

Today, student government is a vital part of the fabric of higher education. A healthy and strong student government is a critical aspect of higher education for both the institution and students at the institution. For the institution, a healthy student government can help recruit new students, retain existing students, and improve student and alumni involvement (ASGA, 2016). Student government leaders, and the president in particular, serve as the official student voice to

institutional governing bodies advocating for student-centered policies and practices (ASGA, 2016; May, 2010). Some student government leaders even organize and participate in lobbying efforts at the local, state, and national level.

There are a whole host of learning experiences and positive outcomes, which students who participate in student government benefit from such as increased overall institutional satisfaction (Astin, 1992), better time management skills (Kuh & Lund, 1994), increased humanitarian interests, and increased self-esteem (Ethington, Smart, & Pascarella, 1998). These benefits are even greater for people who find themselves in the student government president position (Kuh & Lund, 1994).

The position of student government president is particularly important. Much like student governments themselves, the position of president of student government has evolved over time. What started out as a mostly ceremonial role with little authority has over time evolved into a prominent and prestigious position chosen by campus-wide election to represent the entire student body (May, 2010). Furthermore, student government presidents have access to people and networks that provide them with social capital and place them on trajectories for future civic leadership post-college (ASGA, 2016).

Women have made great gains in many fields in narrowing the leadership gap between men and women in the highest levels of leadership. However, some fields remain stubborn with little change or increase in opportunities for women to lead. Politics and government is one of those areas where it seems that regardless of how much progress women make in society, leadership positions held by women are illusive. Women are vastly underrepresented in elected office at all levels- nationally, regionally, locally, and at the college level (Astin, 1993; Lawless & Fox, 2005; 2013; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Spencer, 2004).

Political leadership is still seen as a masculine environment incongruent with female styles of leadership. While trends in higher education have moved toward increased access and broadened participation for women, it seems as though not all areas of leadership and involvement have made such gains. Women are still underrepresented among key leadership positions like the student government presidency. Some believe that this is because women have to navigate non-traditional, often longer, pathways into leadership roles in male-dominated environments like politics and student government.

In addition, women have to confront and navigate environments that may no longer be overtly discriminatory but still have structures or climates that feel chilly or unwelcoming to them. This perception of sexism undergirds the political system and because it is unspoken, it provides additional challenges in confronting and navigating (Mink Salas, 2010; Spencer 2004). So now not only do women need to be ready and motivated to lead, society and their peers also need to be ready for their leadership.

Who Participates in Student Government?

Historically, women were excluded from higher education until much after its founding, so it is not surprising then that women were excluded from involvement in the earliest forms of student government. In fact, toward the end of the 1800s, after higher education became co-educational and the first women were admitted to colleges and universities, they often established their own, separate student government entities (May, 2010). However, the years following World War II ushered in an era of inclusion for women in the previously male-dominated aspects of student life. This included the merging of the men's and women's student government associations into one campus-wide representative body (Sansing, 1999). Some

institutions were quick to merge their organizations and include women into student government leadership while others were slow at gender integration (Peckham, 1994).

Today, it is difficult to pinpoint exact numbers of female student body presidents because it is not a figure that is reported annually to any database or overseeing body that keeps track of that data point. Instead different entities have made estimates based on various metrics. For example, the American Student Government Association (ASGA) is "the national organization that serves, trains, and supports collegiate student governments" (ASGA, 2016). They represent over 1,400 institutions throughout the United States. By their estimates, in recent years women have held roughly 40 percent of student government president positions. However, there is little information about how ASGA arrived at this figure.

There are also very few empirical studies that specifically examine that number of women in student government positions. One such study, conducted by Miller and Kraus (2004), surveyed student governments at 21 Midwestern comprehensive universities. The researchers sent a brief survey to student affairs professionals at each institution inquiring about the gender composition of the current student government and the gender composition of the student governments for the preceding five years. Results indicated that during the year of the study, 47.9% of student government officers were female. However, data for that same year indicated that 71.4% of the vice presidents and presidents were male. Further, when reviewing the data from the previous five years, Miller and Kraus found that there were 105 opportunities for women to serve as president. However, women were only elected into the position 25 times (24% of the time overall). Miller and Kraus did not ask about the number of women who ran for the position and were not elected. Therefore, we do not know if the underrepresentation is due to voter bias, a lack of women who choose to run, or some other factor. While different sources

may disagree about the actual percentage of women who serve as student government president annually in the United States, they do agree on one thing: there are fewer women serving as student body presidents than their male peers.

Reasons for the Underrepresentation of Women in the Student Government President Role

There is very little research that specifically examines the experiences of female student government presidents. There is some research that focuses on college students in student government at any level. This literature finds that women are actually more involved than men with student government at the lower levels in cabinets or on committees. Other researchers choose to focus on the experiences of both men and women in student government leadership positions (i.e., president, vice president, finance officer, historian, secretary, senate, etc.). However, very little research specifically focuses in on the success stories of women in the student government presidency. In my review of the literature, I found no literature that looks at women during their campaign season. This study stands to fill that gap as I plan on focusing on women during their campaigns for student government president.

For the purpose of this review, I will highlight two scholars who studied the underrepresentation of women in the student government position. Spencer (2004) sought to examine the experiences of college women who were elected into the student government president role. She conducted interviews with 16 women who served in the student government presidency role from 1977-2004 at Universities in the Big 12 Conference. Her intention was to learn more about the obstacles that women face in running for and being elected to the student body presidency. Additionally, she also explored experiences that might encourage women to run for office, the political interests of women, and traits or characteristics that would be helpful for college women to have if serving as the student government president. In her interviews, she

asked participants about their pre-college experiences, relationships with parents, mentors, and peers, academics, career interests, campus activities, work life, and potential political interests.

In her work, Spencer uses the interview data from current and past female student government presidents to draw conclusions about why there is a lack of female student body presidents across the country. Spencer identified many activities that participants cited as catalysts in pushing them to run for the presidency. She found that involvement in campus activities, encouragement from peers, role models and mentors, and participation in political internships all served as experiences that positively impacted women's choices to run. She found that many women had a passion for creating positive change on their campus and many of them were motivated to run after a peer or mentor encouraged them to do so.

Spencer also highlighted barriers or obstacles that women face when deciding to run or being elected to the student body presidency. Her work found that women perceive a lack of experience with or knowledge about politics and are turned off by "dirty campaigning". The women in her study also cited aspects of relationships with others, which may cause women to shy away from running for the student government presidency. Spencer found that women talked about relationships with significant others, perceptions that others are more qualified for the positions, and a lack of female role models as obstacles to women's choices to run for president. Further, she noted that one of the student government presidents in her study believed that "more women do not run for student body president because they do not think they can or are not willing to take the risk." In addition, women do not see the study body president or student government as a place for women to belong (Spencer, 2004, p. 132).

Interestingly, Spencer hypothesizes about reasons why women do not run for student government presidency. However, participants in that study consist of college women who do

run for student body president and are successful in their election. Thus, her findings represent ideas about why women do not run for the presidency based on the perceptions of women who do, and thus her findings and implications must be taken into consideration with that limitation in mind.

Mink Salas (2010) also explored the underrepresentation of women in the student government presidency in her dissertation work. She conducted interviews with nine current female student leaders who were involved in student government focusing on their self-efficacy, mentors, and participants' definitions of leadership. She found that many of the student leaders believed that they had the skills to do the job of student government president, but there was an elusive piece of knowledge that they felt like they did not have to be successful in the role. She also found that mentors played an important role in "championing" the women's decisions about deciding to run or not. This study did not necessarily seek to situate the leader within the context of the student government. She also did not specifically ask about background experiences leading female leaders to the point of leadership. Thus, we know little about what their pathways into leadership looked like and how they navigated obstacles. Finally, she interviewed female student government leaders, not solely women in the president position.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation sought to extend two broad areas of inquiry related to women and their leadership in student government. First, how do women navigate a pathway into student government leadership? Second, how do women's perceptions of the context in which they choose to run for student government president shape their decision to run? In order to explore these questions, I utilized aspects of two frameworks. One framework, developed by Eagly and Carli (2007), focuses on women's leadership pathways and uses the metaphor of navigating a

labyrinth to describe women's leadership. The other framework, Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) situates individuals and their experiences with in several layers of context to describe how contextual factors influence people and their decisions. In the following sections, I will describe these two theories and their applicability to my study.

Navigating the Labyrinth

Throughout the years there have been various metaphors or images used to depict women and their leadership trajectories. The most popular images are the concrete wall, the glass ceiling, and more recently, the labyrinth. The concrete wall elicits visions of strong, impenetrable, blockage meant to separate people, places, or objects. Walls often draw boundaries designating physical spaces of belonging and exclusion. Eagly and Carli (2007) characterize the period of the concrete wall as a time when there were explicit rules and clear-cut norms that prohibited women's leadership. During this time period, people believed that "the most effective way to prevent people from advancing is to block their path, with overt, absolute barriers," (Eagly & Carli, 2007; p. 27).

However, the Women's Liberation movement emerged and gave way to a different metaphor to describe women's leadership, which many women today are familiar with: the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is characterized by a clear, invisible, upper limit that stops women as they move upward in leadership roles. However, Eagly and Carli (2007) posit that the glass ceiling is not useful for examining ways in which women do find their way past the glass ceiling into high-level leadership roles. "[The glass ceiling] conveys a rigid, impenetrable barrier, but barriers to women's advancement are now more permeable," (p. 117). They note that women have made their way into high-level leadership roles in many areas. However, men have still

monopolized leadership roles, especially roles that are perceived to have more power associated with them.

Therefore, Eagly and Carli (2007) situate their labyrinth as an outgrowth of the glass ceiling. They contest that the glass ceiling metaphor is misleading for seven key reasons. Those seven reasons include: 1) it erroneously implies that women have equal access to entry-level leadership positions; 2) it assumes the presence of an absolute barrier at a specific high level in organizations; 3) it suggests that all barriers to women are difficult to detect and therefore unseen; 4) it assumes that there exists a single, homogenous barrier and thereby ignores the complexity and variety of obstacles that women leaders can face; 5) it fails to recognize the diverse strategies that women devise to become leaders; 6) it fails to suggest thoughtful problem solving that can facilitate paths to leadership for women; 7) and finally, it precludes the possibility that women can overcome barriers and become leaders, (p. 236). Eagly and Carli (2007) called for a different framework for thinking about the leadership process for women: the labyrinth.

The glass ceiling metaphor examines women's leadership from a deficit perspective focusing on what they lack or why they cannot move forward into the leadership. It highlights experiences, challenges, and obstacles that hold women back or keep them stuck below an invisible barrier. On the other hand, the labyrinth depicts women's leadership as a pathway in which women must navigate twists and turns in order to find their way into high-level leadership positions. Their framework assumes that women have the ability to overcome barriers or twists in their pathways and they recognize that women develop a plethora of strategies to navigate the labyrinth. The labyrinth captures the varied challenges that confront women as they traverse often indirect pathways into leadership positions. They believe that "women negotiate these

labyrinthine paths to positions of power, authority, and prestige, regardless of discriminatory impediments that they may encounter along the way. Some women find roundabout or discontinuous or nontraditional routs to authority," (p. 246).

The framework was developed through meta-analysis of empirical research in psychology, economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, communication studies, and management science. By using meta-analysis the authors believe that they have created a well-rounded theory based on the strengths and limitations of a broad spectrum of methodological approaches. Their analysis included data from representative sample surveys, government data, assessments of behavior within organizations, laboratory experiments, and personal interviews.

Additionally, they contend that their framework is a more practical and realistic approach to studying leadership as it currently exists (p. 346). They acknowledge that many other theoretical frameworks are just that—theoretical. They critique other models in that they are rooted in aspirational equality. Those frameworks make it hard to study women's leadership as it actually is today. They state that, "Ideally, there would be no labyrinth, and women and men would have the same paths to leadership. But currently, the male path is more direct and the female path is more labyrinthine," (p. 346). Therefore, it is important to learn more about women's pathways as something separate and distinct from men's pathways.

Application to this Study

Many other scholars have studied process-oriented aspects of women's leadership and how women make decisions about leadership positions (Dugan & Komives, 2011; Northouse, 2013). Eagly and Carli's (2007) framework for studying women's leadership pathways was ideal for this study for four important reasons. First, the labyrinth focuses on leadership as a process-oriented journey that occurs over the course of a lifetime. The image of the pathway that women

navigate allowed me to examine ways in which women navigate this pathway and the strategies that they use in making decisions. This is in opposition to other frameworks that focus on the areas in which women get stuck. Second, the labyrinth was derived as a way to combat deficit-based perspectives that other frameworks assume. The authors themselves describe women as "brave, resourceful, creative, and smart" and "capable of facing the most elaborate labyrinths on their path to leadership" (p. 382). This study focuses on women as capable actors in navigating their pathways instead of areas in which women get stuck. Third, in the development of their theory, Eagly and Carli (2007) specifically paid attention to research on women in typically male-dominated leadership roles; the position of student government president satisfies that condition. Finally, this framework allowed me to focus on the success stories (i.e., women who choose to run for student government president). The labyrinth focuses on the women who are successful, "the pathbreakers of social change" who have "figured out how to negotiate the labyrinth" (p. 382). Learning from women who have successfully navigated their labyrinth into running for the student government president will help chart the path for women who come after them.

Layers of Context

While the labyrinth allowed me to look at the leadership journeys of women, this study was rooted in a specific, unique context. Further, research on women's leadership points to the importance of understanding leadership within context (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003; Kreuzer, 1992; Leonard & Sigall, 1989; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Spencer; 2004). Bronfenbrenner (1977) rejected the notion that achievement and development can be measured outside of the context of an individual's life, time, and society. Instead, he believed that individuals interact within increasingly complex spheres of relationships, each of which is integral to development. Thus, I

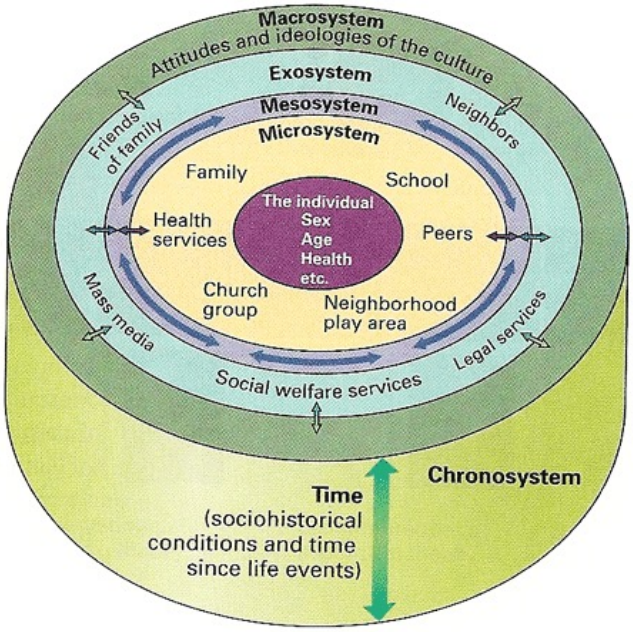
used Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Human Ecology Theory, or Ecological Systems Theory as it is sometimes called, to examine women's perceptions of contextual influences that shape their leadership pathways into running for the student government presidency.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), people exist within environments or contexts in which there is a reciprocal relationship between the individual and his/her environment. Said another way, development is a function of evolving person-environment interactions. Bronfenbrenner's human ecological theory (1989) states that:

> The ecology of human development is the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 188).

Bronfenbrenner (1994) posits that there are five different systems or layers of context that surround individuals and impact their development and decision-making process. Figure 1 is borrowed from Bronfenbrenner's 1994 publication and illustrates the layers of context. The five layers envelope one another and move from what is most proximal to the individual to that which is more distal. The most proximal system to the individual is the microsystem. The microsystem encompasses the direct environment in an individual's life. The microsystem includes the direct, face-to-face, social interactions with other social agents. For example, interactions with family, friends, teachers, and mentors occur in the microsystem. Thus, the microsystem is a co-constructed layer of context, which is influenced by the interaction between the individual and other direct social actors.

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Moving outward from the individual, the mesosystem is defined as the relationship between the microsystems in an individual's life. Said another way, it is a system of microsystems. For example, college students' home life is a distinct microsystem consisting of their interactions with family members. College students may also live on their college campuses and are involved in various campus activities at their institutions. Therefore, the college environment also creates a distinct context for the student. The mesosystem accounts for interactions between these two different microsystems. Continuing with the example, individuals' interactions with their parents (home life microsystem) may impact that ways in which they choose to get involved and the communities that they are involved with in college (college life microsystem). The mesosystem accounts for the ways that these two microsystems may interact.

The next three systems move further out from the individual. The exosystem provides a link between the layers of context in which an individual does not have an active role or active interactions and where a person is actively participating in the context. The exosystem accounts for environments or contexts in which individuals are not necessarily directly involved but which still influence them. For example, parental or family social networks are often described as part of the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cochran et al., 1990). While college students are not necessarily directly involved with their parents' friendships, that network potentially creates social influence on students. The macrosystem includes the actual culture of an individual such as their socioeconomic status, gender, or race/ethnicity. Cumulatively, this ecology model captures person-process-context interactions among individuals. However, person-process-context ecology changes over time for a given individual. Therefore, the chronosystem captures a time element which accounts for societal transitions and shifts over an individual's lifetime. This then creates a person-process-context-time model comprised of the socio-historical contexts that may influence a person. For example, the legacy of exclusion of women from higher education and student government leadership may shape the way women think about pursuing the college student government presidency.

Application to the study

Literature previously mentioned in this chapter discusses the importance of examining leaders and leadership within context. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) framework allowed me to situate the process of leadership within the complex context of institutions. Additionally, it acknowledged different layers of context that may be outside of the physical environment of the college but still impact the individual. This model is also appropriate as higher education researchers have called for its use as it aids in understanding "the reciprocal interacting effects of

various sub-environments, levels of environments, and students themselves" (Renn & Arnold, 2003, p. 264). Bronfenbrenner's model is an appropriate addition to the theoretical framework guiding this study for several reasons. First, ecology models hold great promise for understanding students' actions and choices, the process in which students make those choices, and then connect them to possible outcomes or achievements (Renn & Arnold, 2003). For example, I was able to look at women's decisions to run for student government president while also examining environments that influenced their process of deciding to run. Second, Bronfenbrenner's model sees the effect of contexts as interactive as opposed to additive. More specifically, I learned from students about ways in which their peer groups, home life, and larger sociopolitical environments, such as national elections work, together influence their decision to run for student government president. Finally, this model allowed for an examination of the reciprocal interactions between students and their environments that provided a lens for understanding individuals in multiple, layered, and interacting environments, only some of which they encounter directly. Thus, I was able to capture a more holistic understanding of women who choose to run for student government president that takes into account various influences—some more direct than others.

Taken together, Eagly and Carli's (2007) labyrinth and Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theoretical frameworks allowed me to examine the leadership journeys of women who have decided to run for the student government presidency and places their journey within the context of higher education. More specifically, I was able to ask women about who they are as individuals (person), how their leadership pathways led them to pursue the student government presidency (process), how different aspects of their experiences influenced their leadership pathway (context), and how their journey may have evolved or will continue to evolve over time

(time). The combination of the labyrinth as the process and human ecology theory as the person-context-time comes together for a well-rounded person-process-context-time framework. This allowed for the examination of how women navigate leadership pathways in conjunction with the salience of different contextual influences that impacted their decision to and experience with running for student government president. It allowed me to pull apart some of those complicated layers of context and specifically learn more about how all levels of context create twists and turns in the labyrinth and help women navigate the labyrinth.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a historical overview of the study of leadership and its connection to higher education. By looking at the history of leadership and leadership studies, one could see that as access to higher education broadened to include women, definitions of leadership also broadened to include perspectives that were more sensitive to women's social identities. Research on gender differences in leadership has found that women have a broader definition of leadership that often focuses on change within an organization. Additionally, they tend to lead in a less hierarchical manner focusing on relationships and empowerment.

Research on motivation demonstrated that the problem is not necessarily that women lack motivation to be leadership, but more so that there are major barriers in their pathways into leadership. Because women often take pathways into leadership that are dubbed "non-traditional," they are often perceived (by themselves or others) as less qualified or there may be confidence gaps. Women's pathways are often indirect and winding, whereas men take a more direct and step-like pathway.

Finally, we have also learned from leadership studies that environment and context matters. Becoming student government president is not as simple as just deciding that you want

to do it—women and men must be chosen by their peers in an election. Thus, the context in which women are running matters. It is also not as simple as just throwing one's hat in the ring; it is about getting women to a place on their pathway where they feel like they have navigated the personal and environmental/contextual factors holding them back from running. Some research posits that women are just as likely to be elected as men when they do run, but they need to get to the place of actually being motivated to run. Therefore, we learn a lot of from women who run for student government president about how they navigated their way to the point of running, how their background experiences got them to where they are at, and how their perceptions of the institutional context shape their motivation to run for student government president.

Thus, it is important to study women's underrepresentation in the student government presidency through a lens that brings leadership and the context in which the leader is leading into conversation with one another. In the following chapter, I will lay out a methodological approach and research design aimed at illuminating the experiences of women as they run for the student government presidency on their respective campuses.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In the previous chapter, I highlighted important literature that provides a foundational understanding for this study. In this chapter, I outline my research design and methodology for examining women's decision-making about running for student government president. After first reviewing my research questions, I provide more information about the qualitative approach I used for this study and its appropriateness for my research questions. Then, I will provide a description for data collection, analysis, and my plans to ensure trustworthiness.

Research questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership pathways of college women who are interested in serving as their college student government president by specifically examining the leadership pathways, campaign experiences, and personal meaning-making for women while they are running for the student government president position. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What factors shape the decision to run for student government president for college women?
    a. How do previous experiences motivate women to run for student government president?
    b. What choices do they navigate in making their decision?
    c. How do they make meaning of their student government leadership motivations?
    d. What are their perceptions of the role of the student government president?
2. How, if at all, do institutional contexts shape the way women think about running for student government president at their institutions?

a. What role, if any, do mentors play in women's decisions to run?
b. What other aspects of campus culture influence women when they think about running (during the period that they are running)?

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of women while they run for student government at their colleges and universities. The first research question and subsequent sub-questions focuses on how women arrive at the point of running for the student government presidency. It is specifically interested in their leadership journey up to the current time in their lives, and how they have navigated their pathway into student government leadership. The second question examines their perceptions of contextual influences on their leadership journey, and how they make sense of their campaign experiences. These questions gave voice to women running for student government president and situate their lived experiences as stories that we can learn from. Thus, I utilized a qualitative, phenomenological approach to examine these questions. The following section will provide justification for the qualitative approach and discuss phenomenology as a specific method of inquiry.

Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach is particularly suited to address this line of inquiry. Maxwell (2013) outlines five intellectual goals that qualitative research is particularly suited for addressing, three of which align with the goals of this study: understanding participants' meaning-making of events, situations, experiences, and actions that they are involved with or engage in; understanding the contexts within which the participants act, and the influence that

this context has on their actions; and helping us understand the process by which events and actions take place (p. 30-31)[2].

The first intellectual goal is particularly relevant to the present study as I focused on understanding how women who are running for student government make sense of how their lived history led up to the present time (events), their experiences campaigning for a high-level leadership position (situations), and how they decided to run for the student government president position (actions). Qualitative research is concerned with the qualities of individuals' lived experiences. According to Merriam (2009) qualitative research helps us "understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). Therefore, this is appropriate for the research questions identified in the previous section as they focus on how women who are running for student government president think about their leadership journeys up to that point, and the decisions and experiences that led them there.

The second intellectual goal of qualitative research highlights the way that qualitative research helps situate a phenomenon within the context that it is occurring. Qualitative methods are uniquely suited to answering research questions as they focus on a particular social setting and to understand the meaning of participants lives in their own terms (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Not only do qualitative inquiries consider the processes by which people derive meaning from experiences with particular phenomena, but they also acknowledge the broader context in which these phenomena occur (Creswell, 2012). I was interested in learning more about how women

[2] The fourth and fifth intellectual goals for which qualitative research is suited for are outside of the scope of this study. They focus on developing grounded theories and developing causal explanations (Maxwell, 2013).

make sense of different contextual influences (i.e., families, perceptions of attitudes towards women's leadership, role of mentors, etc.) that shape their actions and decisions.

The third intellectual goal focuses on the process by which events happen. I was interested in learning more about women's pathways into this leadership position. Is their pathway labyrinthine with twists and turns that women must navigate, and what process do they use to navigate their pathways? Process theory tends to see the world in terms of people, situations, events, and the processes that connect these; explanation is based on an analysis of how some situations and events influence others (Maxwell, 2008, 2011).

In summary, the research questions addressed in this study align well with Maxwell's (2013) goals of qualitative research making it an appropriate approach to studying women who are running for their college student government president position. However, there are many different approaches under the umbrella of qualitative research, including case studies, grounded theory, and phenomenology to name a few. Thus, in the following section I will provide more information on my chosen approach, phenomenology.

Phenomenology

For the purposes of this study, I employed an in-depth phenomenological approach (Seidman, 2013). Phenomenology is useful in describing what participants have in common with respect to the phenomenon of interest and is appropriate when one is looking to understand a phenomenon from multiple viewpoints (Creswell, 2013). Seidman (2013) developed a particular type of phenomenology called "in-depth phenomenology". In-depth phenomenology uses a three-part structure for interviewing participants that combines life-history interviewing (characterized by Bertaux, 1981) and focused, in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions characteristic of phenomenology (Seidman, 2013, p 14). It allows the researcher to explore

complex issues in a particular subject area by focusing on the experience of people in that area and the meaning that their experience had (in the past) and has (in the present) for them. The particulars associated with each of the three interviews will be discussed in detail later in this section. First, it is important to highlight the four phenomenological themes that Seidman (2013) identifies as foundations for this in-depth approach.

The first phenomenological theme that undergirds this approach is that it assumes a temporal and transitory nature of human experience (Seidman, 2013, p. 16). This means that this approach focuses on the experiences of participants and the meaning that they make of that particular experience. This occurs through the process of asking participants to reconstruct and reflect on past experiences and to search again for the essence of their lived experience. The second phenomenological theme that characterizes this approach is a belief in subjective understanding (Seidman, 2013, p. 17). The researcher seeks out and highlights the participant's point of view or perception of their experiences. This allows the researcher and participant to understand that the way one person experiences a phenomenon depends on their particular view of the world which may be different than someone else's. It also means that the participant focuses on their personal experiences and their perceptions of those experiences. The third phenomenological theme has to do with the lived experience as the foundation of the phenomena (Seidman, 2013, p. 17). Many elements that are part of our experience flow together; it is only when we take a moment to reflect and reconstruct the pieces of lived experience that those elements become "phenomena" (Van Manen, 1990). The lived experience is accessed through the language of the participant. Therefore, it calls for the researcher to honor the participants' words and take them seriously, following up on them when appropriate. The fourth and final phenomenological assumption concerns an emphasis on meaning and meaning in context

(Seidman, 2013, p. 18). This means that what people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience (Blumer, 1969). In doing this, researchers ask participants to reconstruct their experience and then reflect on its meaning, and participants are asked to put their behavior in context to understand their action.

It seems fitting at this time to address my epistemological orientation to the world which impacts the way I, as the researcher, interpret my relationship with my participants and my orientation to reality in the world. I align with a constructivist epistemology. This means that knowledge is constructed through the meanings that individuals make of their interactions with others and the world around them. Constructivism recognizes the existence of multiple realities: "different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9).

Additionally, I believe that it is important to acknowledge that what is a "research project" for me is, to a certain extent, an intrusion into the lives of the participants in my study (Maxwell 2013, p 92). Constructivism acknowledges that potential tension. It means that the research is co-constructed between participants' lived experiences and the researcher's interpretation of those to co-construct reality. Participants are the authorities in their experiences, and my interpretations as the researcher are also valid. Therefore, researcher "reflexivity" is important. Researcher reflexivity is acknowledging, "the fact that the researcher is part of the social world he or she studies, and can't avoid either influencing this or being influenced by it" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 90).

I wanted to highlight this epistemological orientation here because I think that it fits well with my phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach foregrounds the individual lived experiences of people, the processes that they go through, and their perceptions

of their context. Constructivism allows me to insert myself in as the researcher and acknowledge that different individuals will see the world differently. Individuals' stories will be told by them but interpreted by me; therefore, we have an important relationship as researcher and participant in constructing how and what people learn from the participants' experiences. In the following section, I will focus more specifically on the research design, highlighting important aspects of data sources, collection, and analysis that enact these theoretical orientations.

Research Design

Now that I have addressed the appropriateness of a qualitative, phenomenological approach for this study and discussed my epistemological orientation, I will outline my research design. In this section, I will outline my sampling and participant recruitment, data sources and collection, and data analysis.

Participant Recruitment

For this study, I employed purposeful (or purposive) sampling strategies (Palys, 2008; Patton, 2001). Purposeful sampling is used when researchers are interested in particular settings, people, or activities, and participants are selected deliberately to provide information that cannot be elicited from everyone in the population (Patton, 2001). Stated another way, purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study as I am focusing on a specific people (i.e., female student government president candidates) and specific activities (i.e., the leadership pathways of these women). Seidman (2013) states that, "because we seek to come as close as possible to a participant's lived experience, as we select participants for our study, we choose to interview participants if at all possible who are currently engaged in those experiences that are relevant to the study," (p 19). Therefore, my sample included college women who ran for student government president at their respective institution in the spring of 2017. Conducting interviews

during the time of their campaign allowed me to hone in on a specific time point (their student government campaign) and be as close in time to the phenomenon that I was interested in, as Seidman (2013) encourages.

This sampling technique was not without its challenges. Because I did not know who my eligible sample was until institutions begin their student government elections, and each institution had a slightly different time schedule for when that occurs, I employed strategic steps to recruit participants for my study.

One of the challenges in sampling women who are running for their college student government presidency is that there is no organization or entity that keeps track of this information. Therefore, I utilized several strategies to cast a wide net in recruiting participants for my study. I utilized a three-pronged approach getting connected to potential participants: national-level recruitment, institutional-level recruitment, and student-level recruitment.

On the national level, I utilized national, professional organizations that have connections to student government at college campuses. I established connections with individuals at the American Student Government Association (ASGA), as they represent a national organization specifically dedicated to supporting college student governments and their advisors. I also reached out to NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA), which is a professional association for student affairs professionals and higher education and student affairs graduate students who may advise student government at their institutions. Specifically, NASPA has a focus area of its membership dedicated to "examining issues relevant to women in higher education" (NASPA, 2016). Another professional organization for student affairs professionals and graduate students studying student affairs is ACPA College Student Educators International (ACPA). ACPA has a coalition dedicated supporting women and a commission on student

involvement (ACPA, 2016). Further, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) has a program that is specifically designed to help campus professionals get more women to run for college student government president. It is called ElectHER, and it is administered at dozens of colleges and universities around the country every year (AAUW, 2016). AAUW publishes the names of the institutions that participate in the ElectHER program. I used this list as well as an AAUW contact who was willing to help pass along information about my study to potential participants. At the institutional level, I reached out directly to institutions and student affairs professions or graduate students who advise student government. At the student level, I identified current student government presidents who were willing to connect me with people who were planning on running in their upcoming elections. I used each of these groups to put me in contact with potential participants. I asked them to circulate my questionnaire, provide me with contact information for potential participants, and/or participate in my survey if they met the sampling criteria. Please see Appendices A and B for examples of recruitment emails.

I created a short online questionnaire that I asked potential participants to fill out. This questionnaire captured background information about potential participants and also asked participants if they were willing to participate in my qualitative study. Please refer to Appendix C for the questionnaire. The respondents who indicated that they were willing to participate in the interviews created a pool of potential participants. The final sample was selected from this pool which helped to ensure that I have diverse perspectives in my study. Through this process I was able to recruit seven participants who will participate in three separate interviews for my study.

Sample

The sample for this study was purposefully chosen in order to identify participants who provided the most useful data from diverse perspectives. During participant recruitment, potential participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix C) providing background information and indicating interest in participating in the study. In total, 14 women completed the questionnaire and indicated that they would be interested in participating in the interview portion of the study. From that initial pool of 14 potential participants, I selected seven women to continue on with interviews. Participants were chosen to capture different viewpoints related to the experience of running for student government president and at different institutions across the United States. On the individual level, I utilized the women's racial/ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and first generation status as selection criteria for interviews. Furthermore, I utilized institutional region of the United States and state-level political affiliation from the 2016 national election as macro-level selection criteria. This approach to preference a diverse sample helps create a more complete and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

In total, I selected seven participants representing diverse individual and contextual perspectives as participants in this study. Anaynda is a junior at Suburban University, a midsized, private university located in the Midwest. She identifies as Middle Eastern and comes from an upper class background. She attends college as an out-of-state student as she was born and raised in the South where her mom, dad, and sister live today. Anaynda's mother has been a role model for her. Her mother is a medical doctor and instilled in Anaynda values related to hard work and pursuing an education. Anaynda is particularly interested in working on issues related to sexual assault policies on college campuses and standing up for survivors' rights. She is also politically active and identifies as liberal.

Annika also identifies as Middle Eastern. She attends Mid-Atlantic Private University, which is a midsized, private institution located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Annika was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, therefore she also identifies as an out-of-state student at her institution. She was attracted to Mid-Atlantic University because of a leadership program at the institution that admits first-year women as a cohort and exposes them to various leadership opportunities, education, and programming during their time as undergraduate students. She is a first-generation college student, and both of her parents immigrated from the middle east. Annika spoke at length during our interviews about the importance of seeing herself as an educated woman and leader because it is something very different than women who are from her parents' countries of origin.

Lauren attends the University of Mid-Atlantic Public, a midsized, regional, public university located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. She identifies as African American and middle class. She decided to go to University of Mid-Atlantic because her mother went there for her undergraduate degree as well. Lauren has a tight knit group of female friends from her first-year of college who she uses as her sounding board. She also identifies as Christian, and her Christianity guides the way she sees herself as a leader in service to others, fulfilling God's purpose for her.

Nicole attends North Regional State University, which is a midsized, regional, public institution located in the Midwest. She identifies as Caucasian, and was raised in an upper middle class family. Nicole's family has a history of civic and political engagement attending political rallies, debates, and get-out-the-vote drives as a family. She is cautiously optimistic about her political aspirations, and she wants to work on getting more women to run for political

leadership at some point in the future. She describes herself as a Christian, conservative, but she's a self-reported "Hillary Clinton fan".

Nora attends Middle American Flagship University, a large, public institution in the Midwest. She identifies as Caucasian and grew up in a lower middle class household. Nora grew up in a small, rural town before moving with her family to the suburbs of a larger city in her state following a job opportunity for her father. Her parents did not go to college, and they are not as supportive of her, as a woman, getting a college education. She is politically engaged and identifies as a Democrat. In the 2016 national election she was also a "Hillary supporter". In general she sees herself as an advocate for Democratic women in political office.

Rose attends Northwest Private University, which is a small, liberal arts college in the Northwest region of the country. She identifies as Chicana/Latina. Her father left the United States when Rose was young to return to Latin America, and she grew up with her mother and sister. Her mother is an undocumented immigrant. Rose is interested in social justice issues and passionate about calling out systemic oppression when she sees it around her. She is motivated to earn her degree because she is the first in her family to receive a college education, and she hopes to provide mobility and stability to her family through her college education.

Victoria attends University of the Southwest, a large, public university in the Southwest. Both she and her younger brother are transracial adoptees from Asia, and her parents identify as white. At the University of the Southwest, Victoria is involved with Asian American and Pacific Islander student organizations and causes. She has had exposure to several different leadership programs at her institution.

All of these women ran for student government president in the spring 2017 when they were juniors in college. Overall, three out of the seven women won their election. Four of the

women ran against male opponents, two ran against other women, and one ran unopposed. Table 1 provides a list of participants along with some important background information.

Table 1. Participant Information

Participant Name	Institution	Race/Ethnicity	Socioeconomic Status	First-Generation Status	Major
Anaynda	Suburban University	Middle Eastern	Upper Class	Continuing Generation Student	Economics; Legal Studies
Annika	Mid-Atlantic Private University	Middle Eastern	Middle Class	First Generation Student	Public Policy
Lauren	University of Mid-Atlantic Public	African-American	Middle Class	Continuing Generation Student	Sociology
Nicole	North Regional State University	Caucasian	Upper Middle Class	Continuing Generation Student	Political Science; Public Administration
Nora	Middle American Flagship University	Caucasian	Lower Middle Class	First Generation Student	Policy Analysis
Rose	Northwest Private University	Chicana/Latina	Working Class	First Generation Student	Interdisciplinary (Political Science, Sociology, and Latinx Studies)
Victoria	University of the Southwest	Asian	Middle Class	Continuing Generation Student	Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences

All participant names listed are pseudonyms.

All institutions lists are pseudonyms.

Data Collection

In this section, I will discuss my process of data collection and highlight three different data sources: interviews, observations, and documents.

Interviews. Interviews served as the primary data source for this study. I conducted three semi-structured interviews with each participant in alignment with Seidman's (2013) in-depth phenomenological approach. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher the "freedom to interact in a meaningful way with participants, encouraging and assisting them as they construct their own history of their lived experience," (Seidman, 2006, p. 87). A semi-structured approach also allowed me to honor a constructivist epistemology as it allows participants to "construct the meanings that become 'data' for later interpretation by the researcher" (Olesen, Droes, Hatton, Chico, & Schatzman, 1994, p. 166).

In Seidman's (2013) structure, each interview has a specific purpose. The three-part format focuses on centering participant's voices, validating their perspectives, and emphasizing the physical and temporal contexts in which their lived experiences occur (Seidman, 2013). The first interview focused on the participant's life history. My goal was for participants put their experience in context by asking the participant to share as much as possible about herself that is relevant to her leadership pathway and student government. This interview took place as close to the beginning of the student government campaign season as possible. The second interview took place at a time point roughly in the middle of the participants' campaign seasons. This interview focused on learning about details of participants' current experiences. As the researcher, my goal was to have participants focus on concrete details of their present lived experiences relating to student government and running for the position of president. The third and final interview took place following the election. The goal of this interview was to gain insight into their sense-

making of their experiences and thoughts about their future. In the final interview, I asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience running for student government president. Seidman (2013) cautions that this interview is not necessarily about participants' levels of satisfaction or reward, although those things may be important. Instead he states, "it addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participant's experience and life," (p. 22). This is particularly important to note in my study, as some of the participants won their elections while others did not. However, the focus of this interview was not on whether or not they won or lost, but instead on a larger picture about what the totality of the experience means for their leadership journey.

Interviews were conducted through a combination of in-person and online mediums (i.e., skype, Google hangout, zoom, etc.). I conducted at least one interview in-person with each participant. The other two interviews were conducted through online mediums. Each interview lasted roughly 45-60 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview protocols can be found in Appendix D. During the interview, I used a researcher journal to take notes. After each interview, I reviewed my notes and utilized longer memoing strategies to reflect on data saturation, my researcher positionality, and other observations.

Observations. While interviews seek to understand the perspectives and goals of participants, observations are used to describe settings, behavior, and events (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, observations served as another data source for this study. Observations are an important data source as they offer "firsthand encounters with the phenomenon of interest…in the setting where [it] naturally occurs" (Merriam, 2009, p. 117). I conducted at least one interview per participant in-person. I used this in-person time with my participants to conduct observations of different contexts on their college campuses. I examined in the spaces in which

students spend time such as the campus center, the student activities center, student government spaces. I also observed spaces where students campaign. Interestingly, the vast majority of campaigning occurred outside of physical spaces, in online spaces and social media platforms.

Documents. Having multiple data sources facilitated both the triangulation of evidence during data analysis and the creation of rich narrative (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, documents served as another important data source. I reviewed documents such as campus newspapers, student campaign materials, websites, and social media accounts as a way to gain more insight into contextual influences on the college campuses. These additional documents helped facilitate holistic and comprehensive understanding of the ways in which multiple layers of context influenced women's decisions to run for student government president.

Informed Consent and Privacy. Fontana and Frey (1994) outline important areas to consider when conducting qualitative research: informed consent and right to privacy. First and foremost, it is important to state that I complied with all UCLA Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures. As my participants were located at different campuses throughout the United States, IRB considers this "multi-site" research.

In addressing informed consent, I was transparent with my participants about the research goals of this project, their rights as a voluntary participant, and the continual nature of consent. I was open with my participants about the nature of my research questions and my interest in the underrepresentation of women in the student government president role. Additionally, participants had the right to answer or decline to answer any of the questions I posed.

Because conducted interviews both in-person and via online mediums, I utilized a combination of signed and oral informed consent. For in-person interviews, I provided a copy of the study information sheet with a written consent form to my participants, which I asked them

to sign and date. A copy of the study information sheet with signed consent can be found in Appendix E. For interviews that took place online, I provided a study information sheet to participants prior to our interview. At the beginning of our interview, I reviewed the information with them and obtained oral consent. I have included a copy of the study information sheet for oral consent in Appendix F.

In addressing participants' rights to privacy, participant names and institutions were I kept confidential. Prior to the first interview, participants asked to provide a pseudonym for themselves. I referred to them by this pseudonym in all of our interviews, in the saving and storing of documents, in data analysis, and in the dissemination of research. An additional layer of protection of privacy is the assigning of pseudonyms to the institutions. As part of protecting privacy, I refereed to places (e.g., student union, campus quad, residence hall, etc.) and events (e.g., student government meeting, campaigning, etc.) in broad terms so as to protect confidentiality as much as possible. Interviews were recorded and immediately transferred to a password-protected folder on my secure UCLA Box account, a web-based storage system. After interviews were saved in Box, I immediately deleted them from the interview recorder. Interview recordings were saved using pseudonyms and sent to a transcription service. Once I received the transcripts, I saved them in a password-protected Box folder. I used Nvivo for data analysis; therefore, the transcripts were saved in that program on my personal, password-protected computer. My researcher notes were also saved in a folder on Box.

Data Analysis Procedures

In this section, I will outline the process I utilized for data analysis. Data analysis strategies included coding and thematic analysis. The goal of coding is "to 'fracture' (Strauss, 1987) the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the

same category that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). Said simply, coding is identifying units or segments of data that seem important or meaningful. Saldaña (2016) outlines a process for data analysis procedures. He states that, "the reverberatative nature of coding—comparing data to data, data to code, code to code, code to category, category to category, category back to data—suggests that the qualitative analytic process is cyclical," (Saldaña, 2016, p. 67). Therefore, he discusses the coding process using two different cycles: first cycle coding methods and second cycle coding methods. First cycle coding consists of methods used during the initial coding of data. There are seven different subcategories that encompass first cycle coding methods: grammatical, elemental, affective, literary and language, exploratory, procedural, and theming the data. For the purposes of this dissertation, I utilized a combination of grammatical, elemental, and affective first cycle coding methods.

The grammatical coding methods refer to those techniques that highlight "the basic grammatical principles of a technique," (Saldaña, 2016, p. 82). Within the grammatical subcategory, I specifically utilized attribute coding. Attribute coding highlights basic descriptive information and is appropriate for studies that include multiple participants and sites. Elemental coding methods provide a "basic but focused filter for reviewing the corpus and they build a foundation for future coding cycles," (Saldaña, 2016, p. 97). Specifically, I employed a type of elemental coding known as in vivo coding which highlights a word or short phrase in the actual language of the participant. This coding technique is appropriate for research studies, such as in-depth phenomenology, that center participant voices. Finally, affective coding methods consist of those techniques that highlight subjective qualities of participant experiences. I utilized two different affective coding techniques: emotion coding and values coding. Emotion coding is a

technique that labels the emotions or experiences shared by participants and is appropriate for use in studies that investigate social relationships, decision-making, judgment, and risk taking. Values coding features participants values, attitudes, and beliefs connected to his/her perspective. Values coding is appropriate for use in studies that explore belief systems, identity, and intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences.

Second cycle coding methods are a way of reorganizing first cycle codes into larger categories. Saldaña states that, "your first cycle codes…are reorganized and reconfigured to eventually develop a smaller and more select list of broader categories, themes, concepts, and/or assertions," (p. 234). For this study, I utilized pattern coding which organizes data into groups and attributes meaning to those groups. Pattern coding "pulls together a lot of material from the first cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis," (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236).

Further, memoing served as another important part of data analysis in this study. Memos include "reflections on goals, methods, theory, or prior experiences and relationships with participants" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105). This analytic technique allowed me to capture my thinking about my data and facilitated analytic insights. Memos were an important aspect of the entire research process. Memo writing occurred throughout data collection and analysis and were a continuous part of the data analysis process.

Trustworthiness

An important consideration in qualitative research is ensuring trustworthiness. For this study, I am the instrument and the student is the unit of analysis, and as with any research there is the potential for researcher bias. Therefore, it is important to utilize strategies that can ensure trustworthiness in the data. One way I addressed potential bias is by listening to the interview

recordings while reading the transcripts. This ensured the accuracy of the transcripts on which the actual analysis occurred. I also utilized multiple data sources, interviews, observations, and documents, to triangulate between those. This "reduces the risk of chance associations" (Fielding & Fielding, 1986), and helps account for bias that may exists in any single form of data. Maxwell states that sharing findings with participants is the "single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and so and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying our biases and misunderstandings of what you observed," (Maxwell, 2013, p. 127). Therefore, I shared my findings with my participants and elicited their feedback.

Positionality

I come to this study with a variety of background experiences, beliefs, perspectives, and interests that potentially influence the way in which I interpret the data for this study. Like my participants, I am a woman. My interest in politics, and specifically representation in politics, began in high school. However, while in college, I did not for student government president preferring to support other women who pursued political leadership positions. In many ways, the women in this study are braver than I was in college. They represent a path that I have always been curious about. Since my time as an undergraduate, I have worked with college women in various capacities through fraternity and sorority life, campus leadership programming, academic advising, and student government. Because of my experiences, I have a long-standing interest in women's political leadership and specifically how the role of student government can set women up on a pathway for future political leadership.

I was further impacted by the 2008 and 2016 national elections in which the conversation about gender and politics took center stage. In 2008, Hillary Clinton campaigned for the

Democratic Presidential nomination and Sarah Palin ran for the position of Vice President of the United States. While neither of them were successful in their bids for political leadership, two women began to push against the glass ceiling of women in politics. Between 2008 and 2016, I was critically aware of the lack of female representation in political leadership at the national, state, local, and even campus-levels. I began to wonder about women's leadership pathways and how they find themselves in positions of leadership. Then in 2016, Hillary Clinton became the first women to run for President of the United States endorsed by a major political party. As she was running for president, I continued to see gender gaps in political leadership, and I grew more committed to wanting to learn about women who successfully navigate their pathways into political leadership at the college level. That is how I came to this research, and that is how I am personally connected to the topic of increasing the representation of women in the student government president role.

Summary

Utilizing an in-depth, phenomenological approach, I interviewed seven women who were in the process for running for their student government president position at their institutions in spring 2017. Each woman participated in three separate interviews over the course of their campaign. This study utilizes that data to learn more about the leadership pathways of women who pursue student government leadership and the contextual influences that impact how they navigate their pathways. In the following chapter, I will present the findings of the data analysis. The final chapter, Chapter Five, will conclude with a discussion of the findings in light of current research, implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of interviews with seven women about how they navigate leadership pathways into the student government presidency and the contextual factors that impact the ways they navigate those pathways. The findings provide information about women's pre-college and early college experiences, motivation to run for student government president, their perceptions of the role of the student government president, how they make their decision to run, and contextual factors that influence their decisions. The first research question guiding this study examines how women decide to run for student government president. It includes four sub-questions, which are concerned with women's motivations for running, the choices they make as they navigate their leadership pathways, and their perceptions of the role of student government president. The second research question draws attention to learning more about the contextual influences that impact women as they decide to run. It includes two sub-questions related to mentorship and campus culture.

As previously outlined in chapter three, participants were interviewed at three different time points during the spring semester of 2017—the time during which they were running for student government president. They were interviewed first shortly after they declared their intention to run for president. The second interview took place during their campaign, and the third interview took place after elections at their various campuses. The findings in this section have been organized thematically with quotes from any of the three time points presented together. In order to be clear about which time point the quotation originated from, I will include that along with the quotation for context.

Pre-College and Early College Experiences

The interviews with participants revealed insight into how pre-college and early college experiences impacted the ways in which they navigated their leadership pathways. Specifically, all of the women discussed the impact of competitive sports, high school student council experiences, early college involvement, and their advocacy or activism work.

Competitive Sports

The women in this study participated in a range of activities prior to entering college. Some of them were involved in school-sponsored clubs while others found their place in activities outside of school. One commonality that all of the women shared was their involvement in competitive sports in high school, or for some, from an even earlier age. For example, Lauren, a junior at University of the Mid-Atlantic, majoring in Sociology who identifies as Black, discussed how she was not involved in clubs in high school but sports provided her with a space to find her niche:

> I wasn't really much involved in my high school clubs and organizations, and things like that. Really, the only thing I participated in was athletics, so I was really passionate about track and soccer. That's really what took up the majority of my time in high school. (Interview 1)

For Lauren, track and soccer unlocked a passion inside of her. Because of this passion she was willing to dedicate a large amount of her time to athletics. Rose, an Interdisciplinary major at Northwest Private University who identifies as Latina, was also drawn to soccer, however she found soccer at an early age as a result of needing to be involved in after school programs while her single mother was working. She ended up playing on elite traveling teams in her home state and even entertained playing competitively in college:

> I was a really busy kid. I think it primarily happened because of the fact that my mom worked a lot, so she obviously really wanted me and my sister to be doing activities, so that we wouldn't be sitting home alone. I've been playing soccer since I was four years old. (Interview 1)

Beyond being something that she dedicated a lot of time to, soccer served as a place where Rose and her mother knew that she would be taken care of and participating in something productive.

Victoria considered herself a two-sport athlete participating in both track and dance. She planned on competing in track at the collegiate level for a small Division III school but decided against it two months prior to leaving for college. In addition to being involved in track in high school, Victoria was also involved in elite competitive dance.

> My mom would pick me and my brother up and we'd go straight to dance. I always did homework in the car, so it was just kind of crazy, but that was my every day routine. Get up at 5 o'clock, be at school by six, go to class, leave school early and then go dance. So I am used to being really busy. Being judged also kind of gave me a thick skin. (Interview 1)

While all of the women in the study participated in competitive sports, these three women demonstrated the critical importance that competitive sports played for them in their pathways to the student government presidency. Many of the women in this study credited competitive sports with developing their work ethic, time management, and teamwork skills through sports. Additionally, competitive sports, particularly at elite levels, taught them how to perform under a microscope and develop resiliency in the face of competition.

High School Student Council

Five of the women in this study were involved in student government early on in their college or even high school careers. Nora, Nicole, and Annika were all involved in high school student council for various amounts of time during high school. Nora is a White woman from Middle America Flagship University majoring in Policy Analysis. Nicole is from North Regional University, identifies as White, and is majoring in Public Administration and Political Science. Annika identifies as Middle-Eastern, is from Mid-Atlantic Private University, and is majoring in Public Policy. For the women who were involved in student government, or student council, in high school, they remarked that their high school experiences did not really serve as a platform for their college student government involvement. They saw high school government and college student government as two very different things. High school student council was seen as something social that involved pep rallies, dance planning, or having a large group of friends. Nicole shared, for her, high school student council was a reflection of peer approval and a large friend group:

> I was pretty well liked in high school. I made an effort to be friends with everybody. I was student body president for two years. So, I felt like it was important for me to change who I ate lunch with, things like that. But three days out of the week, I would eat lunch with my core group of friends. It kind of changed throughout high school, but I liked to be friends with everybody. (Interview 1)

Annika also shared that high school student council was less about making large decisions that impacted the student body. Instead it was, "really more of an event planning thing. I went from planning prom and homecoming, to doing other social stuff" (Annika 1). She also

felt that there are differences between her high school student council experiences and college student government. Here she gives more insight into the differences between the two:

> Because I never thought I would get involved with student government in college, because it becomes much more political, and much more for people who wanted to be political. (Interview 1)

Later in the interview, Annika shed light on why her perception of the political nature of college student government was off-putting to her:

> I guess I thought of politics as an old, white man's game, and just didn't see my role in that, and didn't know how I could fit that. I thought it was things that people who go to law school would be interested in. (Interview 1)

Nicole also agreed with Annika in that the tasks that a college student government performs are much more politically-based than the tasks that a high school student council completes:

> In student government in college, we actually do things that are going to change people's college experiences. We handle money. We budget out to student organizations. We work with state legislators and help lobby on [the college's] behalf. We do real things, and that's not to discredit anything that high school student councils do, but I don't know. It's a bigger impact, I think.

College student government seemed inherently political to the women, and that caused them to feel apprehension about being involved or taking on major leadership roles. The political aspect of college student government seemed to turn them off as they did not see themselves as politically experienced enough. Thus, high school student council did not seem to serve as a

necessary part of the leadership pathways for women to be involved in college student government.

College Involvement

Given that all of the women in the study were deeply involved in various activities prior to college, it was surprising to learn that many of them struggled to find the right involvement opportunities early on in their college experiences. Nicole described her initial struggles to feel engaged early on in her college career:

> My freshman year, I was involved in very little. I was very upset and sad all the time. I didn't enjoy college up until about the end of my freshman year when I had been planning on transferring to a school in [a different city]. (Interview 1)

For Nicole, and several of the other women in this study, the lack of participation in campus activities left her feeling unconnected at the institution with an overwhelming number of opportunities to choose from. Luckily for Nicole and the other participants, a friend connected her to a student government opportunity in the spring of her freshman year before she transferred.

Interestingly, only about half of the women turned to student government involvement early on in their college careers. In fact, fewer than half of the women in this study participated in student government prior to running for president. Nicole described how she became involved:

> The current vice president at the time had a class with me. And he came up to me, and he's like, "Nicole, I think you're smart. I think that you should think about joining student government." And I was like, "I would really love that. I actually really want to do that." And so he brought me into the student government office, and got me involved, and I decided to stay. It was really hard for me to transition freshman year to being someone

who was known really well in her [high] school and liked going somewhere where nobody knew me. So when he suggested I join student government, I was like, "Alright!" So, we went to the office and he got me involved in a committee. I thought it was super fun, and I really enjoyed getting to know all the people. So, he kind of helped me figure out ways to become more involved and I ended up staying at [the college]. (Interview 1)

On the other hand, half of the participants in this study were not involved with student government prior to running for president. That caused doubts and anxiety in some of the women as they navigated their decisions about whether or not to run for president. Victoria, a Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences major from the University of the Southwest who identifies as Asian, talked about her apprehensions because of her lack of involvement in student government:

> It was nerve-racking because I didn't know what kind of response I was going to get. I was really afraid people were going to be like, why? You've never been involved in student government. Where the heck did this come from? But, I got a lot of support, surprisingly. People were very excited. Of course, there were the people that were like, you can't do this. But, overall, it was a very exciting time for me, because I finally felt I could just come out and be like, I'm doing this and this is happening. (Interview 1)

For the women who were not involved in student government prior to deciding to run for president, they focused on other significant leadership opportunities that they had and how those provided transferrable skills that would help them be successful presidents. For example, Rose, who was not involved in student government prior to running, discussed her most formative leadership experiences during college:

> At the end of my freshman year we had a [students of color group] here. It was only made up of three students. I was like I need to find more of us, and be able to bond about

> being at home, and stuff, so yeah. When I was president [of the students of color club] my sophomore year we were able to grow into 30 students, and I also ran [for president of the club] my junior year, and we now have around 50 students. So I knew that I could lead a group of people. (Interview 1)

The fact that Rose felt successful during her time as a member and the president of another student organization on campus, gave her the confidence to feel like she could lead groups of people. She had a sense that to some degree leadership and who she was as a leader were set parts of her. In her mind, the things she learned about leadership through being a leader in another organization would carry over to student government. While the context of the two groups may be slightly different, they were closely related enough for her to feel like her skills would be applicable.

Leadership through Advocacy and Activism

Another interesting theme that emerged from the data was that many of the participants in the study felt confident about their ability to be a student government leader because of their previous experiences with advocacy or activism. Several participants got involved with certain causes or issues as advocates or activists. For the women in this study, this involvement and greater understanding of issues spurred their consideration for involvement in student government and often grounded their platforms during their campaigns. For some of the participants their advocacy was related to specific issues, such as undocumented immigrant support, sexual assault prevention, or racial accountability connected to police shootings. Others however, talked about their passion for social justice in general. Annika, for example, talked about her advocacy work in broader terms unconnected to an issue, policy, or event. She said, “I have always been kind of passionate about general social justice, social activism in general, in a

way that impacts directly the community that I'm in. So, that definitely got me interested in [student government]," (Interview 1). Victoria also discussed her advocacy work in more general terms when she stated, "I think during that time [college leadership in Asian American cultural center] I found my passion for social justice. I was put on the social justice committee and I always was really interested in it" (Interview 1).

However, some women spoke of experiences that directly connected to their activism or specific issues that they focused their advocacy towards. Lauren described her involvement organizing a campus response to the shooting of a Black man by a police officer in their state:

> Another thing that has really been something I'm proud of and I talk about a lot, is the protest that the Black Student Union put on at our school after the [victim's name] shooting. I think that that has been a proud moment for me; just because we came up with event and the protest the night before and it hadn't even been 12 hours yet. Then just the way that it unfolded made me really proud and just being able to see all of the students and faculty and staff that participated in it, and knowing that I was a part of bringing that together made me really proud. (Interview 1)

Lauren continued on later in the interview to talk about how that incident and her involvement in the protest was connected to a feeling inside of her of something much bigger than just that singular incident. It led to her taking on more of an activist role in general:

> I knew that something had to be done because the shooting affected so many students, and being in a black community, it affected a lot of our students of color. I knew that we had to do something. I didn't know what to do, but I knew that we had to do something and that was kind of the start for me, because it's been long overdue for these things to be addressed. I guess what made me get involved. People say, "You can't complain about

things if you don't do anything to fix it or if you don't try to change it," so that's really why I got involved. I feel like that's a big part of why I'm involved because while people do see problems, you can only talk about it if you try to have a hand in fixing it. (Interview1)

Rose shared a personal connection to her activist efforts. Rose's mother is an undocumented citizen. In the passage below Rose discussed how learning about immigration issues related to her mother's undocumented status spurred her to get involved with the issue closer to her institution:

> I also started a club on campus called Advocate for Detainee Voices. A lot of people don't know, and I didn't know until I got here. But there's an immigration detention center here in [the city that the college is located in], and it's like three miles away from campus. I was learning about the detention center in one of my Latino studies classes, and I was just like, we were reading personal narratives and grievances of people. I talked to my professor afterwards, and I was like, "Is there any sort of advocacy, or community service that I can do after learning about this atrocious thing that's three miles away from campus?" My professor had absolutely no idea if there was any sort of advocacy, so that was definitely a wake-up for me in realizing why isn't there anything being done on campus even though we're like 10 minutes away from this detention center that is caging in 1,000 individuals here. (Interview 1)

That was just the beginning of her leadership through activism. Rose also went on to work with groups that support students of color and survivors of sexual assault on her campus. She stated:

> I think there are a lot of unfortunate experiences that I've had to go through on campus that weren't too positive. That have really led me to sort of advocate for other students

> who don't really have a voice on campus. Then trying to address them with the administration, and institutionally has been another inspirational point for running, because it's just absolutely so hard to get any sort of advocacy from the institution, or any sort of support. Also just I have so many friends who have been sexually assaulted on our campus, and seeing them go through the conduct process, and seeing them reliving their assault basically. It's just completely disgusting to me, and seeing the fact that our university does not support their students, and really tries to hide all of its flaws is definitely sort of why I had become so inspired to address these issues at a larger, higher level. Which is unfortunate to say that they happen to be negative, or things that I've experienced that have not been so great that I want to change, but obviously being critical, and being aware of larger systematic issues I think is super important with being at an institution that has so much power, and so much influence. (Rose 1)

There was a sense among the women in this study that they turned to student government as a platform for enacting their advocacy on a large scale. Student government, and the president in particular, is able to create structural change through policies and practices that impact the entire local context of their institution.

Perceptions of the Student Government President

The interviews with the women who participated in this study illuminated important findings related to the perceptions that women have about the role of the student government president. Findings related to this topic include building relationships with others, creating a family-like community, and confronting issues.

Building Relationships with Others

One theme that emerged as the women in this study were discussing their perceptions of the student government presidency or the role of the president was the idea that the president's role is that of a relationship builder. Participants hoped to represent students by serving as advocates for students and student issues, but they realized that they could not do this without taking the time to build relationships with other students and find out what those issues were. Nicole talked about her strategy for building relationships with others:

> Meeting with student organizations happened every single day during campaigning. We would go into their student organization meetings and just kind of talk with them, figure out what they were looking for in a president and what we could do to kind of help them out. (Interview 2)

For Nicole, student organization meetings served as a space for her to get her message out, but also to connect with students that she would not necessarily see on a daily basis. She got to know the needs of different groups of people in a time effective way by visiting student group meetings.

Rose took a slightly different approach. She recognized that there were many students outside of student organizations who she would be responsible for representing. Therefore, she decided to find a more individualized way to connect with other students and learn about student issues:

> We have this coffee shop on campus that every student gets their coffee at in the morning or at some point in the day. I set up a three hour, come ask me any questions or any suggestions or concerns that people have had. A couple of students came that had really great questions and we were just talking about how I would address them or what my

> priority was. It was really productive and I definitely got to meet some students that I normally wouldn't talk to so it was cool. (Interview 2)

For many of the women in the study, building relationships with others whether through student group meetings or individual conversations was a critical component of demonstrating their support for others. Anaynda, a Middle-Eastern Economics and Legal Studies major at Suburban University, discussed how that was an important part of how she saw herself as the president of student government:

> I think for me, the bigger thing was not who was our biggest supporter, but honestly, who did we support the most? We made a point to reach out to the communities that we one, were not part of. And two, could absolutely never actually even begin to pretend to understand, or know the experiences of. (Interview 2)

Anaynda viewed being supportive of others as an essential aspect of gaining approval from the student body and gaining their vote as their choice for who should represent them. She explained:

> To me the idea was, a campaign based on supporting others is such an opportunity to receive this political mandate from your voters, that this is what they want, and this is what they want in terms of if I'm a leader. I actually do want to enact what my constituents want, and I am a true representative of the student voice. That means that I need to know what the students want, and I need them to know that I am willing to become representative. (Interview 3)

A few of the participants in this study felt that building relationships was critically important, but they also shared the perception that this was a different strategy than their opponents enacted. Some of the women felt that their opponents were not listening to voters but

instead were just pushing their taglines and telling others to remember to vote for them. Instead of building themselves up, they also focused on spreading rumors to degrade public opinion of their opposition. The women felt that other candidates relied on name recognition or "dirty campaigning" to win instead of finding ways to represent student voices. Victoria shared her perception:

> I've always kind of been just that people person but I'm very much more a connecting and building relationships person and when I chose to do my campaign, I was like I could play it dirty too just like my opponent. I easily could have gone that route, done the whole social media blasting, and of course I used social media to promote things but to me, it was more important to stay true to myself and not lose myself in the process and to really get to know the students that I would be working with because if you don't know the students, I feel like you really can't advocate for the students. (Interview 2)

Victoria believed that her perception of the role of the student government president and the way that shaped how she campaigned set her apart from the other candidates.

Family-like community. One important aspect of building relationships that all the women discussed was the idea of building relationships in an effort to create family-like communities on their campuses. They believed that the student body president was responsible for creating this family-type atmosphere. Lauren shared her thoughts on this idea:

> I'm also a sister to everyone on this campus. I see everyone on this campus as family, and so I think that'll help me lead in a better way, because taking care of family and taking care of people that you don't really know are two different things and they look very different. When you see people on your campus as family, then I think that you can be a better advocate for them. (Interview1)

For Lauren, the ability to create a family feeling on campus was connected to her ability to be an impactful leader. She cared about her peers and because of that care was able to better advocate for them because she thought of them as brothers and sisters. Nora also discussed this idea of an institution feeling like a family. She stated that:

> I approached everything like I was building a committee of people of all ages, and of all backgrounds to help fabricate a support network. A family type thing. It worked out great. That's what the president should do. (Interview 1)

For the women in this study, it seems as though creating a family-like culture broke away from some of the more impersonal, hierarchical leadership models. The women seem to embrace a more relational and connected leadership structure based on care through advocacy. They seem to stress the idea of family because of the tight, long-lasting bonds that are created among families and the ability of families to work through problems.

Confronting Issues

Another important role of the student government president in the minds of the women in this study was to confront inequity in various ways. Rose shared:

> So it's definitely made me reflect on, how to equitably represent student voices. Like, how to really find ways that I can accurately do that. So, by reaching out, like, to different clubs and just being able to feel like students are being listened to. So, not necessarily in agreement with those feelings, but also feeling like they could just approach me and be able to express any sort of frustration (Interview 3)

For some participants, confronting inequitable practices was something that the participants did not think had been done by previous student government presidents. Victoria shared her perspective:

> I think it's a very broken system. I don't know if that's the case for every student government on college campuses, but from what I've seen, it's very toxic, and it's definitely a broken system that needs a lot of work. A lot of people are starting to realize that now just based on when I ran, because when I specifically ran with my attitude of "I'm going tell you how it is," it opened a lot of doors and it made people aware of things that were going on. Because no candidate has really ever spoken up about what's been toxic in it just because they've either been a part of it or it was a system built against them so they never really had the opportunity to. (Interview 3)

Nora thought about her practice of confronting the issues that have historically been ignored. For her, she saw it as a way of unmasking fear and getting it out into the open:

> People are scared because they don't understand what's going on. That is on every single end of the political spectrum. I think listening to, and acknowledging that concern and that fear, and just starting with dialogue has been the most important element of our campaign. Our ticket name, all of our logos, and everything, our speech bubbles. We're really trying to remind people that you can't get anywhere, you can't do anything unless you talk about it. (Interview 1)

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how the women thought that college student government was political in nature and questioned their place in what is traditionally seen as a space for white men. Interestingly, their perceptions of the role of the student government president suggests a leader who is less political and more communal which perhaps allows them to envision themselves in the role.

Motivations

In addition to highlighting the importance of pre-college and early college experiences and perceptions of the role of the student government president, the interviews with participants also revealed nuanced findings related to women's motivations to run for student government president. Motivation has been categorized into three themes: running for the right reasons, the bigger picture, and equity and social justice.

Running for the Right Reasons

When asked about their motivation to run for student government president many of the women in this study spoke about the idea of running for the right reasons. This implied that in the minds of the participants there are acceptable reasons to run for student government president and then there are other reasons. For many of the women, the right reason was divorced from the title and notoriety that comes with the prominent position. As Anaynda shared in her first interview, "I never considered, "Oh, I want to be president, or I want to be vice president." It wasn't something that I was doing for personal agenda, or personal gain, or the title." Here, wanting the position for the title is connected to the idea that there is a personal agenda that benefits the holder of the title. Nicole echoed this idea of running for president for the right reasons when she reflected on her motivation to run as well:

> We talked about why I wanted to run and if there was any way that I could accomplish these things by not being the student body president. We talked a lot about why I was doing this and making sure that I was doing it for all of the right reasons, things like that. (Interview 1)

Instead of thinking about the title or influence that comes with being student government president, several of the women talked about wanting to run for more altruistic reasons or

reasons that benefit the larger community. Annika described her motivation to run as part of a larger desire to make campus better:

> So I think that the importance of student government, the fact that student is part of the word or the phrase, and I really care about what students want, and what students care about. Just what students feel and are going through on my campus, and like difficulties they are having, things that are going well in the community that we have, I care a lot about that and helping build that and helping lead that community. I think that is what makes me a good president, and I'm willing to listen to others. (Interview 1)

Annika framed her motivation in the terms of an ethic of care. Anaynda also discussed caring about others as her motivation for wanting to run for student government president:

> I hope they realize how much I care, because I think that's the only reason that I really did eventually run, and so I think that's the most important thing that I'm like centering, is like I do this because I care about the wellness and the happiness and experience of the students on this campus, and I wanted it to be better, and every decision I made was to further that message, and not for any other reason. (Interview 2)

While some of the women felt like an ethic of care was the right way to approach this elected leadership position. Other women saw it through a lens of personal service to their community. Nicole, a self-described future government worker with a “heart for public sector work”, is motivated by her family culture and upbringing. She described how her family is the type of family who pays attention to their representatives and engages with the political process. She recalled from an early age attending town halls and political rallies in her home state with her parents and grandparents. For her, her family had instilled in her ideas about how to make the world a better place through civic and political involvement:

> My big reason for running, and kind of the big thing that I pushed in my campaign is that growing up I was taught to leave my place better than when I arrived. And based on the things that I put on my platform, the things that had mattered to me while I had been at this university, I felt like this was the best avenue for me to do most of those things. (Interview 1)

The idea of improving her community not only motivated her to run, but also formed the foundation for her platform and policy ideas. Nicole's reasons for running moved beyond personal philosophy into more altruistic reasons as she was committed to the growth of her campus community in a positive direction.

The Bigger Picture

For several of the women, another aspect of their motivation to run for student government president was making an impact on a larger scale or doing something significant that was larger than themselves. They wanted to make an impact on campus, and while there were several ways they could do this, they saw being president as one avenue for making the changes they saw necessary. For Victoria, the idea of running for president was not about winning, but instead about standing up for a socially just platform that was missing from the larger dialogue about student government:

> I think in the long run it wasn't always about the win. It was about making a difference, and there was so much awareness that at the end was brought to our university's attention and things started happening. Good changes started being made. It was more than just about the win. I think because of that, that's why I say it was one of the best things that happened to me in college. (Interview 3)

Lauren's motivation aligned with Victoria's in that they both talked at length about how it did not matter to them if they won or lost. For them, it was not about the act of winning at all. Lauren's motivation was rooted in her religious belief and the notion that she felt called to live a life of service. She felt, to some extent, that the role of student government president would be one avenue for helping her live in service to others which to her was much bigger than any single thing she could do in college:

> I never felt like I needed that title in order to accomplish things. I think it would have made it easier to do but I think that I can still get those things done. The bigger picture is: How I can be of service to people and what I'm good at and how I can use that to help people. Where I am right now, where can I use my skills to help others succeed as well? I think that's what I mean by the work that I still have to do. I don't think I need a title in order to accomplish things and I don't need that position to get things done because I'm a leader with or without it. It'll make things harder to get done, but I can still get those things accomplished without it. (Interview 3)

Lauren also rejected the desire for the title of student government president—and any title in general. For her it was about gaining the influence to make changes that served the best interests of others.

Prior to running for student government president and the election, Nicole was the only participant who had future civic or political aspirations. In part, her future aspirations for public service motivated her decision to run for student government president. In her first interview, Nicole shared what she saw as her future career path:

> I really do want to do public service. I'll probably run for something someday. I'm going to go to grad school after college. I'm a planner, but it's really hard for me right now I

think to visualize exactly my path, so I'm trying to just be okay with the question mark. (Interview 3)

After the election, several of the other participants noted that they had not ruled out a future in public service. A few of them even stated that because of their student government campaigning experience, they were considering running for elected positions in the future. Because the research questions specifically focused on running for student government president, I felt that it was outside of the scope of the research questions to include in-depth findings on their future political aspirations. However, it is important to note that for many of the women the student government presidency was not just a title to gain in the pursuit of the larger goal of elected office in the future. The presidency was a way for them to contribute to their current community in a significant way. In fact, most of the women did not connect their student government campaign to future civic goals at all.

Equity and Social Justice

Several women discussed feeling motivated to run because of issues related to social justice or even fighting for equity for identities that they themselves held. Leading up to and during the campaign, Lauren talked at length about her perceptions of what other students thought of her as a Black woman running for a high-level leadership position on campus:

> I think I shocked a lot of people because people have misconceptions about what they think a black woman speaks like and what they think Black women care about or how they think black women carry themselves or appear to be or their competence. I think this whole entire election has been really eye-opening for them. (Interview 2)

She continued on to discuss how she thought that her ability to be something beyond what people expected would make her a good representative for the students on campus:

> I think that our school is very diverse, but it's not inclusive. I think students struggle with that a lot in our organizations or an organizational level. I also feel that the administration struggles with it as well… I think it's important because I think all students need to be represented, so that the people at the table can be able to give a perspective of those students. When people haven't gone through or lived what other students have lived, they don't resonate with it as much and as well, and they may not be able to communicate the need of the students, unless they have lived it. I think that's why it's important, just to make sure that you represent who you're serving. (Interview 1)

Lauren's desire to challenge stereotypes and people's expectations of her in addition to her ability to understand student struggles because of her identity, gave her the drive and the confidence to believe that she would be a good student government president that would represent the student body well.

For Annika, running for student government president was about challenging people's expectations of her because of her race and gender. Additionally, she wanted to "prove her difference" and show others that women of color are not a monolith. At her institution, the current student government president shares the same gender and racial identity as Annika. When deciding to run, not only was Annika faced with many questions about how she was different from the people she was running against (two white men), but also how she was different from the current president. She shared that part of her motivation to run was to prove that just because someone shares the same racial and gender identities that does not make them the same person:

> The two things I remember being asked is one, when I was thinking this is why we need to have more female presidents. There was like one question about sexual assault policy

> and the two boys answered it first and they're like the policies good, we just need to work on more preventing material. And I was like the policy is not good. Survivors are not allowed to get the justice they deserve. They saw the difference between having the male versus the female. (Interview 2)

Annika's response to questions about sexual assault set her apart from her male opponents. The second question she got asked a lot was how was she was different than the current student government president. While she had an answer prepared, this pervasive question motivated her. She shared that, "part of [running] was definitely that motive of wanting to prove my difference," (Interview 1).

Victoria also shared that running for student government president was motivated by her identity as a woman of color but also being a transracial adoptee. This excerpt comes as Victoria discussed how several voters told her that they did not think she would win because she is a woman and a person of color:

> It was hard and I'm not going to lie. It hurts a lot just because given my identity, the fight will always be there and the struggles will always be there; it's just part of it, but to actually finally hear that in words, it hurt a lot at first. But at the same time, I definitely acknowledged those feelings but then I also used that to fuel me to want to win and try and win even more. Being adopted and my background growing up in high school, I never really felt confident or that I was this empowered person, but in that moment through the whole election I kind of feel like I found myself and I defined who I was and I just became very confident in myself. (Interview 3)

It is clear through the interviews that the women in this study faced instances of racism and/or sexism related to them and their campaigns. It is encouraging to see these women take something

negative and use it to better themselves. They overcame persistent prejudice turned that into motivation for running for the presidency.

Navigating the Presidential Pathway

The women in the study seemed to navigate a variety of internal and external issues that impacted their decisions to run for student government and to keep running during campaign time. In this way, the decision to run is not necessarily a singular time point marked by the beginning of a campaign period or the assembling of a team. Instead, these women thought about the decision to run as something that they wrestled with through their campaigning period and into the actual day(s) of voting. Thus, they continually make the choice or decision to run and keep running. When navigating the presidential pathway, one theme and two sub-themes, external validation and their perceptions of their sense of self, emerged as characteristics of the process that the women go through. Additionally, feeling qualified and navigating an on-going cycle self-confidence appeared as sub-themes influencing the larger theme of external validation and sense of self.

External Validation of Internal Sense of Self

On the surface, the participants in the study all shared that their decision to run was in part spurred by someone in their lives encouraging them to think about running for student government president. On a deeper level, their decisions to run were more complicated than simply encourage them to run and they will. For these women, they often had some internal desire to run for president or some thought that it could be something that they would be good at before anyone spoke to them about running. As Lauren shared in her first interview:

> Well, [running for student government president] was always an idea and a thought in the back of my mind. When getting involved in student government, I started off in the

executive branch, serving as the Secretary for Diversity Affairs. I think that in that role, I just interacted with a lot of students and saw a lot of things that were problematic within our university's administration. That made me passionate about change for the students. As far as running, I think that it kind of was just an idea that started. (Interview 1)

For many of the participants, they had the sense that being the student government president was something they could be successful at, but they were weighing that against fears or doubts that they had about how others saw them. Therefore, they turned to others to test out their internal sense of themselves and sought external validation of their capabilities and desires. As Lauren continued to share:

I talked to a couple people about it, and seeing if people would feel comfortable with me running and if I would be a good fit, and kind of checking in with my friend group to see, "Am I capable of doing this?" When really inside I knew I was, and it's really something I've always wanted to do, just never took the steps to do it until now. (Interview 1)

Anaynda also had that same sense inside of her that she could be capable of serving as student government president. She further elaborated:

This was back when I was still not really convinced that I wanted to run. The idea was on my mind, but it was very much so more of a, "I'm stressed about this, and I don't really want to embark on this journey that could potentially very much so be hurtful and harmful to my self-worth, and my emotional strength, and all of that. (Interview 2)

For Anaynda, her perceptions of the negative aspects of running and eventually serving as student government president caused her to try to dissuade herself from her desire to run for the position. In the follow exchange, Nicole shared a similar sentiment, but it seemed divorced from her actual abilities and more connected to not wanting to appear entitled:

Nicole: I mean, I was happy to serve on the cabinet and other ways in student government, but being the president was something that was a little much.

Interviewer: Why did it feel like a little much to you?

Nicole: I don't know. It's a big position. It's the biggest position that a student can hold here at my university. It's hard for me to think of myself as someone who deserves to be the best or at the highest level of anything. (Interview 1)

Nicole was aware of the influence and power that potentially accompanied the position of student government president. She tried to discourage herself from running by envisioning herself in other positions within student government that would allow her to blend in to the background.

While the women had an internal sense of the leadership abilities and believed that being the student government president was something that they could do well, their commitment to running came when others validated the internal notions that they had about themselves. The encouragement could not come from just any person, however. It had to come from an individual whom the women felt like knew them well and knew their leadership capabilities. For several of the women, this encouragement often came in the form of the previous student government president or other student government executive officers. This was the case for Nicole who shared what it was like for her when a student from the current administration approached her:

I'm really close with this year's president and vice president. They're two boys, and I think the world of them. And the vice president and I were actually at a volleyball game. He had known that some people were putting the bug in my ear. And we were at a volleyball game, and he kind of sold me on it. I remember I was nervous. It was something I decided to do partially for democracy because I knew that people believed in

me, and that the right people believed in me, and I knew I'd be good at it. It was scary, but I was excited to get started. (Interview 1)

As Nicole referenced in her quote above, the vice president was not necessarily the first person who encouraged her to run, but in her mind he had the necessary perspective to provide valid encouragement because she had a good relationship with him. He also had seen first-hand what the position would take and believed that she was qualified for it. Those things taken together made him the "right person" to move Nicole from thinking about running to taking steps toward actually running. Nicole further elaborated:

> I think it was the right people saying that I should. People that I respected and admired and looked up to were telling me that they thought I could do this. And then, kind of my own personal reflections. And then, kind of talking with my mentors, my professors. I think that just that encouragement kind of gave me my final push. (Interview 1)

While some of the women in the study received encouragement from current student government officers, others found more value in validation from one or more individuals in their close peer groups. For Lauren, the critical point in which she decided to run was accompanied by input from her very close female peer group from her residence hall. She described why it was so important for them to provide external validation of her desires to run for student government president:

> For them to know who I was then and now, I turn to them and look to them for feedback because they've known my whole struggle and my whole journey and process, so they can give me more accurate viewpoints since they have established that relationship with me. (Interview 1)

Lauren highlights the importance of encouragement from the right people. She believed that her close friend group had an accurate picture of her as a leader. This made their opinions, and thus their encouragement, more valid and motivating.

For the most part, the women in this study seemed to be aware of their need for external validation. Nora was one of the participants who spent a significant amount of time reflecting on her need for validation from others. As she stated, "I need personal validation and big picture validation, like this can be done and it can be you. And it will be you. I just need that." Much later in the interview, she elaborated on her need for external validation:

> I don't have anyone giving me validation in this process right now, and I need people to constantly be like, we're getting great feedback, this is going well, but no one tells me these things. Nobody tells me it's going well. And I just freak out sometimes…I'll do the work but I want to be able to look over my shoulder and have someone nod and be like, yeah yeah yeah. You're good, keep going. I need that. Now I'm just internalizing it and I feel alone in this fear and I don't know how to deal with it… I had to straight-up ask. I was like, am I doing this stuff right? And then after that, I was like, okay, I can take ownership. But it kind of took that permission, which was sad. But it took someone telling me that, that it's okay to be a fierce leader and to own up and be like, I'm good at this. (Interview 2)

Nora was almost unconsciously aware of the process that she went through in needing external validation. She needed to have the space and freedom to try things on her own, but she wanted a network of people whose opinions she trusts to agree with her. Then, when she felt like she had a critical mass of people who saw her the way that she saw herself, she was able to take ownership and move forward.

Feeling qualified. The idea that the women needed to feel qualified emerged as a sub-theme related to their perceptions of their sense of self. Whether the women were involved in student government prior to deciding to run for president or not, all of them struggled in some ways with feeling qualified to run for and hold the position of president. All of the women in this study were in the spring semester of their junior years of college. By this time, many of them had developed a view of themselves as leaders with particular sets of characteristics and behaviors that made them strong leaders. Oftentimes their sense of self as a leader tied to productivity led them to overcome their feelings of being unqualified and feel more qualified to hold this prominent campus leadership role. Nora described herself as a leader as someone who gets things done:

> There's a reason people asked me to run, and it's because they know I can get shit done. And that's good. I trace it all back to people know I can get shit done; I can make people believe in things. That's why I was asked to run. Not because I'm cute, not because guys like to talk to me because they think I'm bro-y. No. I'm good at this. That's why I'm running. I'm a good leader. (Interview 2)

Other women in the study also described themselves as leaders as "people who get things done." Nicole also thought that her ability to accomplish tasks made her an appealing candidate. Here she described the way she went about getting things done:

> I think that I work really hard to lead by example. I always feel like the leaders should be doing more work, and I don't know, leading by example. I like to inspire people and I like to grow other people. I think that's really important. I think a lost characteristic of leadership a lot of times is that when you lead, if you're doing such a great job, but you haven't taught anybody else, you haven't been bringing other people along with you, then

> you've actually left your organization worse than when you arrived. I think that the team aspect of being a leader is important. So that helps me feel like I'd be a good president (Interview 1).

For these women, their ability to accomplish tasks gave them things to point to, a track record, when talking to potential voters about why they were qualified to serve as the student government president. At times, their track record of success also internally validated their decisions to run for president as well. Nora shared:

> [The first meeting of the candidates] went really well. And honestly, we left the room knowing it was evident to us, to the election commission, and to everyone else that we were the most qualified ticket and I'm the most qualified person to be president. (Interview 2)

She further described how overcoming the obstacle of feeling qualified gave her a sense of optimism about her chances of being elected:

> We are the most qualified to win, and we might lose. There's a chance we will. I don't believe that we will because we are the most qualified and we're doing a great job of reaching people and connecting people. (Interview 2)

In order to feel qualified the women needed to find tangible experiences that they could point to related to success in efficiency and productivity. Additionally, the women went through a cyclical process associated with their levels of confidence that impacted their need for external validation.

Cycle of self-confidence. In making their decision to run for student government president, the women in this study went through ongoing cycles of high and low levels of self-confidence. The women went from feeling doubt, self-critique, and disappointment to feeling

empowered, supported, and optimistic during various times in their campaigns. While this theme cut across all of the participants in this study, Nora's interviews were particularly illustrative. Therefore, I have chosen to highlight several quotations from her in this section. Nora first described the positive feelings that she had when she was first asked to run:

> When I was first approached to run, I was so flattered. I couldn't believe that people were paying attention to the work that I was producing. I couldn't believe that. Random strangers had heard my name, and had seen my work, and wanted to rally behind me because they believed in me. That was truly one of the biggest honors of my life. (Interview 1)

Those feelings of flattery quickly subsided as Nora worked to assemble a team of people to help her get her campaign off of the ground. She faced some difficulty in getting the right people to be part of her team. She attributed some of that difficulty to gender dynamics associated with past campaigns. The broader issue of sexism in politics compounded her frustration because it felt like an issue on a systemic level that Nora could not personally or immediately change:

> There are so many good people on campus who want to do these things and see this work, but they're refusing to get involved with the campaign, and that broke me down yesterday. And I just identify with these women fully, because it's been so consistent in the past election cycle, that the good-willed, working hard, educated woman loses to the dude that comes out of left field with no experience. (Interview 2)

Nora eventually assembled an excellent team. In her view, her team functioned well together and put together a media and marketing campaign that made Nora very proud. This brought her back to a high and feeling like her team was capable, and she was proud to represent them:

> When we finally announced, I sat on my couch and refreshed all of our social media platforms from one to four p.m. and just giggled, and danced, because I was so proud. I was so proud! It was the craziest thing. Looking at the insane website, being like, "We built this from nothing." This isn't a class where you have to do this, or guidelines that you're following. We built this by ourselves. This is a reflection of who I am. That was so cool to have your work finally come in deliverables. It feels good. It feels really good. (Interview 1)

Shortly after this experience of feeling confident, Nora experienced a decline in self-confidence. Soon after she became an official candidate and more candidates entered the election field, people began to see her as strong competition. Some of her opponents engaged in negative campaigning tactics aimed at bringing her down. Nora described what it felt like to have to combat the negative campaigning from her opponents:

> I was just so tired of feeling like I had to walk around, and defend myself in every second of the day. While I was defending myself, also sell myself. After coming back from a semester in Washington, where I was working on an Obama initiative, I felt like my world was upside down. I'm in a long distance relationship too. Coming home, and feeling that way for so long definitely had me second guessing my priorities, and if I was doing the right thing. (Interview 1)

This down period, spurred in part by rumors being spread about her, was compounded by the fact that Nora felt like her support system was far away and she was not enjoying life as much as she was before she decided to run for student government president. At this point, Nora tried to talk herself into feeling confident again by highlighting, for herself, all of her assets and capabilities. However, this positive self-talk was accompanied by statements of self-doubt:

> Even just last night, I was like, "Why do people ask me? Why me? Why am I viewed as a leader?" That's something I still really struggle with. I know I am really good at public speaking. I know I'm very good at getting people to care about things. I think I still just pretend I'm not a leader. I just keep my head down. I work really hard. I get my feelings hurt pretty easily." (Interview 1)

Nora went deeper into a negative place because of the questioning of her abilities as she started to think about all of the pressure she perceived that was placed on her to win the election. It seemed to get to a point where she was able to snap herself out of the negative headspace that she was in and use her feelings of pressure to "re-energize" herself. By the end of this cycle she seemed stabilize and appreciated the balance between the highs and the lows:

> If I don't win, then the student government is just going to continue to be stupid student government that's not really doing anything. It has the opportunity to do something substantive, and valuable, and people are begging for that. That's what re-energizes me. It's also the same pressure that beats me down too. It's finding that balance. (Nora 1)

This appreciation for balance ushered Nora into the election where she found out that she lost. I spoke to Nora a week after the election, and her optimism had turned to a feeling of jadedness and questioning of her belief system:

> I'm so jaded over the whole thing. It's really broken my faith for civic engagement and my trust in people that they want what's best for the school. I would have happily lost to a ticket that won the most votes because students wanted them to be in office. I would have happily lost. I respect the popular vote. But that's not what happened. We lost to people who have been caught cheating and being malicious on just so many friends and receiving no repercussions. (Interview 3)

The tumultuous cycle of high self-confidence and low self-confidence was difficult for Nora, and the other women in the study, to handle. It often left them feeling unstable or inconsistent. The final period of low confidence for Nora extended beyond the student government campaign and started to impact her larger worldview. She began to question her beliefs in civic engagement as a whole. Eventually, Nora did experience an uptick in her level of self-confidence related to her student government aspirations. The increase in self-confidence was spurred by going back to the tangible outcomes of feeling qualified. When she experienced low levels of self-confidence she returned to lists of accomplishments running through her head to solidify her perception of her sense of self. This in turn caused her confidence to increase, which then led her to continue to solicit external validation related to her already defined sense of self.

Mentors and Mentorship

For the participants in this study, mentors often provided support and guidance at various times during their campaign. Previously, I discussed how several women in this study decided to run after encouragement from the current or past president of student government. This finding on mentorship goes beyond encouragement to run and stretches into long-term, continuous support and guidance. For some of the women in this study current or past student government executive officers took the time during the campaign to mentor them. Victoria talked about how the current student body president helped her navigate some challenging issues and why that was particularly impactful for her:

> I also did have the support of the current student body president. He actually wanted me to win but he wasn't allowed to endorse anyone that year so it was tricky too but he also mentored the candidates that were running so a lot of times I reached out to him and I'd be like, "Hey, how did you deal with things like this happening?" Because he also went

> through a very similar thing. And so a lot of it was just that and him saying that people are going talk; it's just part of politics. (Interview 2)

The current student body president provided an important message that many people could have provided to Victoria. However, his message carried more weight because he had been through the same process that Victoria went through. Thus, his guidance came from a place of experience and empathy that many others in her life could not speak from.

Annika also talked about her relationship with a previous student government president. Before Annika even considered running for student government president, this woman connected Annika with opportunities and resources to get involved. This woman was considered a mentor for Annika because of the length and depth of their relationship in addition to the fact that she was a few years ahead of Annika in school:

> It was definitely the president from two years ago, actually. She was part of the pre-orientation program that I did. She took me under her wing, and it was definitely seeing her choose another Middle Eastern woman ... So, seeing her, I was like, "Oh, my god, like if she can do it, like I can do it," so I definitely did it because of that. So I didn't think I would do it, but it was definitely her encouragement while I was deciding and during the campaign that got me. And she helped me join a committee. I ended up joining a committee that was more focused on social issues that [college name] students face, so it was a very good fit for me. (Interview 1)

The relationship with an older student, former student government president, and Indian woman that had been sustained over time, provided support and stability for Annika. In addition, the woman connected her with student government opportunities that helped build Annika's network on campus and set her up to succeed.

While some of the women in the study received mentorship from other students, others received mentorship from people who had long since graduated college. Often times these mentoring relationships came in the form of family members, other politicians, or campus faculty, staff, or administrators. For the most part, when asked about mentoring, the women often discussed one individual in their lives. Both Nora and Rose received mentorship from other women at their institutions who worked for the university. Nora discussed her relationship with her mentor:

> She is the director of engaged learning for [the campus]. I met her because I went abroad with her this past summer to meet incoming international students, and since then she's truly been the closest thing to a mother that I've had. And I come to her all the time. She's like a sassy, gay British lady who will not take your shit. And she throws me back into perspective all the time, and that's great. We text all the time. She thinks it's bullshit. She thinks it's crazy. She thinks these people shouldn't even be running. She's confused as to why they think they can. She'll text me if she sees stuff on Facebook and be like, this person's involved with this campaign? Really? And I'll be like, yeah. So she's good. (Interview 2)

Nora's mentor was important to her because she was at her institution and embedded within the culture. Therefore, she had the ability to understand the nuances of Nora's experience. However, she was not a student and did not vote or get involved with the student government election. Therefore, she was at an arm's length away and could provide a broader view of the campaign that could "throw Nora back into perspective" when she felt like she needed it. Like Nora, Rose's mentor was also someone who worked for her institution:

> The director of the [campus writing] program, she's also my academic advisor so she knows me really personally and knows about my family and about my growing up and obviously I had her as a professor and now she's an advisor so she helps me in a variety of different ways. I think she was actually the student vice president when she was in her last year of undergrad. So she actually just told me right out that I should become the president too because it opened up so many opportunities and doors for her and skills that she never really thought that she would be able to have just being a student. So she actually has been a huge influence since then too. She lives like 45 minutes from campus so I don't really see her too much but she keeps encouraging me through Facebook and she keeps writing me emails and figuring out ways that she could be of support to me too. So she is huge emotionally and helping me figure out ways to expand my campaign and figure out ways for other students to be able to be able to learn about me and my campaign. (Interview 2)

Rose's mentor had some understanding because during her undergraduate time, she was also part of the student government executive team. However, Rose appreciated the parts of their relationship that went past encouraging her to run for president. She found that it was important for her to hear from her mentor often. She felt particularly supported when her mentor was able to speak about the campaign and gave suggestions or provided ideas for connecting with other students.

Victoria's mentor also worked at her university. However, he was both a PhD student and a campus administrator. Therefore, he straddled the line between student and administrator. She discussed him here:

> With APASA, being on the board of directors, I met my mentor there. He was my advisor at the time. He took a very strong interest in me and saw the potential in me and that's something I never really experienced growing up. He's a PhD student here so he was allowed to vote and be a part of the process so it wasn't like against the rules. (Interview 1)

She explained what was so valuable about her relationship with her mentor:

> He's like, "You gotta focus on yourself, you have to remain grounded, and keep remembering why you're in this process, and why you're doing this. So that really helped me. I admire him so much. He's just the type of person that no matter what, he will always put someone else before himself. No matter how much sleep he's losing, no matter what happens if he has an assignment due, if he's finishes dissertation, he will always be that type of person that will be, "This is for the students and I'm going to be there for the student." I think that's such a selfless thing to do. For me, just thinking about it's like, how can someone just be that selfless? It's not a significant other, it's not a family member. He just genuinely cares. I definitely look up to him a lot as a leader and tried to, again, embody a lot of how he carried himself. (Interview 2)

Victoria found value in her relationship with her mentor because she was aware of his commitment toward helping her. She was aware of other priorities he had in his life. However, when she needed him, she became the priority.

Of all of the women in this study, Nicole was the only woman who mentioned mentors who were outside of the institutional context. Additionally, Nicole's mentoring relationships stood out as she readily named several people in her life whom mentored her in various ways related to her campaign. It is almost as if Nicole created a team of mentors to help her. As I

mentioned before, Nicole's family prided itself on being politically aware and engaged. This goes back generations. Nicole's grandpa provided a great deal of mentorship as she decided to run for student government president and during her campaign:

> So no one in my family was inherently political, but they were always very involved, very engaged. It was dinner talk. I think the earliest person I remember hearing about was George Bush. It was something that we were always very involved in. My grandpa always encouraged us to know who our state representatives were and who our local legislators were and things like that. So, I've always been very, very passionate about it. I thought my grandpa was the coolest person in the world, and I wanted to impress him more than anyone else in the world. So he was someone I talked to a lot about running for president. (Interview 1)

Nicole also had two additional mentors who worked in politics—one of them a politician and one of them former politician who is now a board member for a non-profit that works on political issues:

> [Our state senator] is actually, is someone that I modeled my campaign after quite a bit. I worked as his summer campaign manager intern, when he was running for reelection this last fall. So, things I did for him as a manger, I tried to do for myself. He helped a lot, in terms of crafting our message and our slogan, things like that. So, I modeled a lot of it after him. He cares about people and he doesn't run a party coordinated campaign, which I've always thought was really cool. His whole thing is he works for us. So, having that message of, "It's not about me, it's about you. It's about the constituent here and doing this for you," is really inspiring. I think it connects with a lot of people. (Interview 2)

Working for her state senator, Nicole gained knowledge and political capital that helped shape her campaign. Her other mentor who worked in politics provided more general support and encouragement:

> She was a state representative for a few years. Her resume was stacked. I was so impressed, and she just kind of took me under her wing, and she's become my mentor, but that was kind of how it started. She talked to me a lot about her experiences and things like that. She did a lot of reminding me about why I was doing this, reminding me about my strengths and the things that I brought to the table. She's just really great and it's nice to know that she ... if she can get through it, we can do it. (Interview 2)

For the women in this study, mentorship was a relationship with other individuals characterized by continuous support and encouragement before and during their campaigns which provided the women with a sense of stability and guidance when they were feeling challenged or like they needed validation of their decisions.

Contextual Factors

As stated previously in this chapter, the second research question focuses on the impact of contextual factors on women's decisions to run for student government president. The data revealed noteworthy findings related to social media, the 2016 national election, participants' perceptions of gender and politics, and the impact of campus-level elections.

Social Media

One aspect of running for student government president involves thinking through how women were going to share their platform with their entire campus. While all of the women did take part in passing out flyers and talking with people, the largest aspect of campaigning took

place online through social media platforms. Social media platforms were beneficial for campaigning for a variety of reasons, as Lauren explained:

> A really big part of campaigning for student body elections now is running an online campaign or social media campaign just because it connects you to so many different people that you may not meet on campus. (Interview 2)

Social media eased the burden of feeling overwhelmed by having to meet thousands of students at their institutions. It provided immediate and unimpinged access to their platforms and broad level name recognition. However, social media campaigning also had its challenges as well. Some of the women got caught up in the metrics of "likes" and "reactions." Nora talked more about that:

> I was just freaking out because the other supporter's ticket has 600 more likes on Facebook than us. And I was like, is this indicative of where we're at? Do more people like them? And I was freaking out about this, crying, and I was like, why don't people care? Like, is this a Hillary-Trump thing? Why don't people see it that way? And I was having that episode for an hour, and then my roommate came home, and she was like, "Last year, [a losing ticket] had three times the likes as the winning ticket." And [the losing ticket] got, like, 150 total votes. (Interview 2)

The competition between tickets for Facebook likes potentially provided an inflated sense popularity or an artificial metric regarding approval that the women had from other students. Additionally, it was not an accurate measurement of student support, agreement, or knowledge of a ticket's platform. Nora felt like the emphasis on social media during campaigning allowed student voters even more latitude to be uninformed voters. She explained:

> I kind of knew not many people knew about student government or cared, but when everyone was out on campus flyering and tabling and stuff I realized how few people were educated voters. That really sucked to me because I know you personally and I don't think you align with the candidate you're supporting at all. None of you did your research kind of thing. That was kind of tough. And I think it was because people just saw their social media page and liked it. (Interview 3)

Another negative aspect of the social media-heavy campaign strategy was that it provided a platform to facilitate negative campaigning and bullying. Nicole shared her experience with her opponent and his negative online campaign:

> So, the person I ran against was the opponent of the century, let me tell you. Every single person on this campus knows him. And for a point in time he had wanted me to run with him and I didn't feel comfortable doing that. And then, when I announced that I would be running against him, he took it very personally that I wouldn't run with him, but I wanted to run. And he ended up going online and kind of saying some really horrible things about me, talking about how I don't have the experience, I don't have the drive to do this job, that I was kidding myself. The rhetoric was that I was the weakest member of the campaign team and it would've been better if somebody else would've run as president. (Interview 2)

Nora also had some negative experiences on social media in which her opponent attacked her. This lasted through the election and after voting had taken place:

> I was absolutely devastated the night of the election, though, because the presidential candidate that came in first, the Trump guy-- he's an asshole. He made his Snapchat story a bunch of videos of me. Like nothing to do with our campaign material. Personal stuff of

me that he captioned and was making fun of me. That was soul crushing. It had nothing to do with our campaign material. I had never spoken to this guy before. Come to find out that there were a bunch of people involved with his ticket that I thought were friends, acquaintances, classmates of mine who liked me, had kind of facilitated that and helped that happen. That was truly devastating. I was upset and shocked for days that they were such sore winners. (Interview 3)

The women in this study who felt attacked in online spaces often felt like there was nowhere to turn to hold their opponents accountable. Most university officials wanted to stay out of the elections process because it is a student thing. This often left the women with no one to turn to who could make the bullying stop or hold their opponents accountable. Nicole shared more about this feeling of frustration toward her opponent and the administration:

> We worked really hard. We didn't engage in any of the pettiness that their team did on social media, like tweeting at us or making jokes at our expense. We really wanted to take the high road. We did the whole, "When they go low, we go high" thing. Their ended up being a huge scandal that came out after the election and then that was kind of was the final straw for our administration. And our administration sat the boys down and a couple members of their campaign team and talked about how this isn't how we treat each other. They'd seen messages, they'd seen the things they'd been saying about me. So, our administration did end up stepping in and saying that this was not okay. However, it was just after the election because they didn't want to meddle. That's frustrating. (Interview 2)

Many of the participants discussed the negative nature of campaigning as something that was off-putting to them. The "dirty campaigning" made them want to avoid the political nature

of college student government altogether. Therefore, many of them prided themselves on their choice to be respectful and courteous to their opponents. However, that same level of respect was not always returned. Their interactions with bullying did not serve as motivation to prove people wrong. They did not really move past the way that their fellow students treated them and even into the days following the election, whether they won or lost, the way they were treated was not something they could easily shake off and forget.

National Election

The women in this study all ran for student government president in during the first half of 2017. This was in the wake of the 2016 election in which the United States saw its first female candidate, Hillary Clinton, win the nomination of a major party and compete for the highest leadership role in our country. Hillary Clinton lost. While it was never the intent of this study to focus on women's political aspirations in the wake of what was for millions of women (and men) a traumatic electoral process, many of the women in this study were deeply impacted by the national election. Many of the women drew parallels between the national election and their own campus elections. Annika, for example, saw a parallel between the field of candidates:

> I was afraid. I was definitely running against two very, less qualified men. So it was kind of a situation where I was like, the national election just happened, where I would say a very over qualified woman lost to an under-qualified man. (Interview 2)

Others worried about the ways in which the disrespectful discourse around elections had trickled down to the student government election level. Nicole shared her perspective on that:

> There was a lot of "going low" on the other side and what we wanted to do is protect the brand of student government and show people, especially after what had happened in the fall with the presidential election. We wanted to show people that it is possible to engage

> in a respectful discourse. Because at the end of the day, we all have the same goal. We all want to make [our campus] better. We all want to make our country better, whatever it is. We just have a different way of getting there. So, we really wanted to be a model for students and show them that it's not all negative all the time. (Interview 2)

For Nora, the national election served as a cautionary tale about how to communicate with voters and get her message out. She described this:

> I think that's exactly what went wrong in the national, and state, and local elections, as well. We're not meeting people where they're at. I think that, that's shaped the way that we fill out diversity and inclusion in our student government platform. That's been my approach. To recognize that people voted for Trump for a million different reasons. They still found something he said meaningful enough that they voted for him. Listening to their concerns, and what those things are, and incorporating that into a campaign that works towards a broader mission towards equality. Trump vs. Hillary "How did the woman lose to an unqualified guy?" It comes down to how digestible and easy is your message. In the presidential election no one could understand ... Like, "I'm With Her," didn't have a message. "Stronger Together," came too late in the game. But, "Make America Great Again," was something that just inspired people. (Interview 3)

Regardless of their political party affiliation, Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign resonated with them in profound ways. Many of them saw issues with their campus elections as a microcosm of the larger national election that played out just months before they decided to run.

Perceptions of Gender and Politics

Women's perceptions of gender and politics, while somewhat shaped by the national election, are a separate theme that emerged as a contextual factor that impacted women's

decisions to run for student government president. During her campaign, Victoria faced a lot of overt sexism from other student voters. She described an interaction that happened repeatedly to her during her campaign:

> During the process, I got a lot of backlash from people that are like, you're crazy. You can't do this. I got comments like, you're just a girl. It's not going to work. You're running against two very qualified men. A lot of it came down to a lot of people just did not want a woman being president. I got that comment a lot. Like a woman of color specifically is not fit to be the president of the [university]. (Interview 2)

When asked what she thought caused students to think and say that to her. She shared her thoughts:

> I think, especially what I've noticed at [the university] is like people fear what they don't know. A lot of it is there hasn't been a woman president in a very long time. In my time here, I've never seen a woman president. It's kind of just like how oppression is built, the stereotypes of how women are the homemakers or they shouldn't be doctors or whatever. So I think a lot of it is the stereotypes that come with it that like a woman shouldn't be president. We've never even had a woman president of the United States. I think a lot of it was that too and I think a lot of people just maybe were scared to have something different because pretty much it's always been white, straight males that have been president. People are uncomfortable with what they're not used to and unless it's by the book, by the status quo, people don't want anything to do with it. (Interview 2)

While the women in this study were aware of larger societal perceptions of gender and politics, they wanted to push back against those stereotypes. Nora talked about her personal perceptions of women in politics and how that diverges from larger societal views:

> Women struggle. They do. People don't take women in politics seriously. However, I think a woman's place in politics is exactly wherever she wants it to be. I want women everywhere. There aren't women in even like student government campaigns like there aren't women in many leadership roles at all. It trickles down into everything. Women's rights are equal rights for everyone. They're human rights. Why is that still not a thing? I think until we have women in high offices everywhere we're just going to keep seeing these policies that are so backwards and it's just a bunch of white guys taking a swing and a miss at solving problems because they don't understand and they don't listen. (Interview 3)

Despite their awareness of society's perception of women in politics, some of the women found strength and support in surrounding themselves with other strong, female leaders. Anaynda viewed her female running mate as a point of strength in her campaign. She shared:

> Running for president, it would have been so much more difficult for me had I ran against a man and I had not had [running mate] as a very strong independent woman who knew exactly what she wanted, and was as brave and courageous as she was standing next to me all the time. Just like that, like having other women in communal leadership positions and like seeing their, like representation matters, but it's about like also the interaction with that representation. It meant a lot. (Interview 3)

More than just surrounding herself with strong, female leaders, Anaynda felt that women should not be in leadership roles for the sake of numerical representation or tokenization. They actually need to be good leaders.

Campus-level Elections

Much like the national election had an impact on women in this study, previous student government elections or the legacy left by past administrations left an impact on the women in this study. Many of the participants in this study had either been involved with or known about previous elections on campus. Many of them spoke about the impact that their perceptions of those other campaigns had on their desire to run for student government president. Nora talked about how, at her institution, there is a specific and generally accepted, pathway into becoming the student government president:

> And [previous elections] kind of taught people that if you're a freshman intern, and you're a sophomore and you work on someone's campaign, your junior year, you're the most qualified person to be president. I did not take part in that internship program, I'm the only person running for president that didn't. (Interview 2)

Nicole has been involved with student government in various capacities since the spring semester of her freshmen year. She has had an insider's perspective on student government through two different administrations. One of the previous administrations painted a particularly negative image of student government for Nicole. This was especially difficult for her to deal with since two women led the administration. She discussed:

> So, the year before the boys were elected, we had an all-female ticket who won. And unfortunately, they tried to impeach each other. So it gave student government at our school a really bad reputation. It made us look really bad. It made us look like we had a lot of internal fighting and a lot of internal conflicts. Not only did those two try to impeach each other, two of their cabinet members resigned. There were a lot of rumors and just very negative things going around about the student government. So what the

> boys did in their administration was rebuilding that [student government] brand and showing that we can do good things. We can do this without argument. It was really hard. Both of those women expected everybody to take a side, and I was on the impeachment court. So, I couldn't take a side. It was really hard for me to watch because there is that stereotype of women will fight with each other. Women are emotional. And I felt like that was playing out right in front of us, and it was a really negative thing to happen in our organization. (Interview 1)

In addition to their experiences with other student government campaigns, some of the women in this study also dealt with issues related to their own campaigns—specifically, the race and gender of their opponents and the historical legacy of White, male leadership. Victoria talked more about the candidates whom she was running against:

> I actually knew the two other people that were going to run. I went to high school with one and I was friends with the other. Our student government does not have a good reputation at all. It's known to be run by white men. They had a woman president I think five or six years. It's been a long time. (Interview 1)

She described her feelings when she found out who else was running for student government president:

> I knew who was running and I was so frustrated, because at that point in my junior year, I knew what I was passionate about. I was very much more aware of what was going on in the world and structure and oppression and all of that stuff and how the system was built against people of color, specifically, and women. I am so frustrated and, I just cannot imagine one of these two being our president… In my eyes and from knowing both of them, it seems like they were running for the wrong reasons. One was definitely running,

> because he was president of the resident's hall association and he thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. He also would make very racist and suggestive comments and I didn't like that. The other guy, he had a lot of experience in our student government, but I knew his intentions weren't really there. It was a lot of talk, talk, talk, talk. I think just knowing him and growing up and high school, I was like, you are not going to do that and you are ... You have no competency about what's going on around campus… I was the underdog. (Interview 2)

The historical lack of women, students of color, and women of color as student government president combined with the candidate pool created a sense for Victoria that the system was built against her:

> I knew I was walking to a system that was very much built against me and was not made for a student with my type of identity and background to be in. I knew the odds were against me especially because my opponent had been very involved just as much, but the people he had been involved with, they also helped him cheat as well and so a lot of it was you have to put that aside and I did the best I could to get as many votes as possible, to go out and talk to student groups. (Interview 2)

Both Rose and Nora also talk about feeling like student government at their campus is run by White men and there is not really a place for them as women who want to lead. Rose shared her thoughts:

> There are two white upper middle class males and me. So I was like how are we going to just allow a white heterosexual, cis, white man to run for school president. I obviously did not agree with many of their platforms. That was also another inspirational point

where I was like, okay, if no one else is going to do it, and people are telling me to do it, like I might as well just try. (Interview 1)

For Rose, the historical lack of female student government presidents served as a rallying point to get her to run. For Nora, it ignited confidence in herself but also fears about making other people "mad and confused." She shared:

> I think people were really surprised because usually the people that run are white guys who were [student government] interns in the past. I think I'm the first woman to come along and be like, "Nope. I know this campus better than all of you." I'm frustrated because that's making a lot of people really mad and confused. (Interview 1)

Summary

This study focused on the pathways that women navigate to become the student government president, their decisions to run, and the contextual factors that impact their pathways and decisions. In this chapter, seven women who ran for student government president shared their insights in order to provide a better understanding of what challenges women face and potential ways to overcome those challenges. From their experiences, we can see that women face a myriad of internal and external obstacles when deciding to run.

We learned that pre-college experiences with competitive sports, college level leadership, and advocacy and activism all provide women with experiences that positively contribute to their pathways and decisions to run. While one may expect that high school student government provided a direct avenue for college involvement, the women in this study highlighted how they viewed college student government as markedly different from high school student council. When describing the ideal student government president, women in this study often used words such as caring and family-like. Their motivations were tied to running for altruistic reasons and

aligning the student government presidency with the larger picture that they had for their lives. The women also dealt with navigating various issues related to feeling qualified and working through cycles of self-confidence. Additionally, the women shared that they had an internal sense of themselves as good student government leaders. However, they still sought approval and encouragement in deciding to run for president from people who had a solid sense of their abilities and capacities.

This study also illuminated several contextual factors that had positive and negative impacts on women's leadership pathways. Mentorship was a critical component of women's decisions to run, and mentorship came from a variety of spaces: previous student government presidents, campus administrators, and other political figures. Further, social media played a large role in spreading information to student voters. It also opened up the doorway for negative campaigning and bullying. Finally, the national election, women's perceptions of gender and politics, and dynamics involved with sexism during their campus elections all had an impact on women's decisions to run and continue running. In the next chapter, I provide a discussion as to how the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of women who run for student government president and some implications for researchers, faculty, staff, and administrators who hope to use this work.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter of this dissertation begins with an overview of the study including the research questions, purposes, theoretical framework, and research design. Next, I will provide a discussion of the key findings followed by implications for researchers, faculty, and staff in higher education. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of limitations and suggestions for future research.

Study Overview

Over the past decade, women have made great strides in narrowing gender gaps on several important college student outcomes, including degree attainment and academic achievement. However, despite their upward trajectory in the world of higher education, women are still underrepresented in prominent student leadership positions on college campuses, one of the more notable being the student government president. Researchers, national associations, and practitioners are working to learn more about this gender gap and ways that it can be remedied. However, limited knowledge exists on the pathways that women take into the student government president role. Further, little is known about particular contextual influences that women face on their pathways to serving as student government president.

In order to better understand the underrepresentation of women in student government and their pathways into the presidency, this study sought to examine the experiences of college women who ran for student body president. By highlighting stories of women who persisted along their pathways, this study sought to speak to these gaps by addressing the following research questions and sub-questions:

1. What factors shape the decision to run for student government president for college women?
    a. How do previous experiences motivate women to run for SG president?
    b. What choices do they navigate in making their decision?
    c. How do they make meaning of their student government leadership motivations?
    d. What are their perceptions of the role of the student government president?
2. How, if at all, do contexts shape the way women think about running for student government president at their institutions?
    a. What role, if any, do mentors play in women's decisions to run?
    b. What other aspects of campus culture influence women when they think about running (during the period that they are running)?

In order to investigate these questions, I drew from two different theoretical perspectives: the leadership labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and human ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Eagly and Carli's (2007) leadership labyrinth is a framework that uses the labyrinth as an illustration for the often-indirect pathways that women take into prominent leadership roles. Unlike the "glass ceiling" or "brick wall" philosophical frameworks, the labyrinth does not focus on places where women get stuck. Instead, the labyrinth framework allowed me to take a non-deficit perspective to focus on the ways in which women navigate pathways into the presidency and all of the aspects of their pathways that caused challenges and opportunities. The addition of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) human ecological systems model allowed me to examine specific layers of contextual factors that influence women's leadership pathways as they run for student government president.

This study utilized an in-depth, phenomenological approach. In the spring of 2017, twenty-one interviews were conducted with seven women who were in the process of running for their college student government presidency. Each woman participated in three separate interviews over the course of their campaign. The first two interviews took place while women were actively campaigning for the position, and the third interview was conducted shortly after their campus elections. Women were asked questions related to their previous civic and leadership experiences and their initial decisions to run (first interview), their perceptions of the campaign process (second interview), and their overall insights about the electoral process and their own leadership post-election (third interview). Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed. Additionally, I conducted observations and document analyses to sensitize myself to the context surrounding each participant's lived experiences.

The analyses in this study sought to shine a light on the ways in which women navigate their pathways into running for college student government by learning about their motivation, their perceptions of the role of the student government president, decision-making processes, and previous leadership experiences. The data were analyzed in two cycles using a combination of grammatical, elemental, and affective coding methods (Saldana, 2016). Attribute coding is a form of grammatical coding, which provides a basic descriptive accounting of information from the participant's point of view. Emotion and values coding are both forms of affective coding, and were used to analyze the data. Emotion coding explores participant experiences and actions related to relationships, decision-making, and risk-taking. Values coding explores identity, belief systems, and values held by participants. In vivo coding is a form of elemental coding which preserves the exact words of the participant to honor participant voices and perspectives. This process resulted in a number of findings, which are reported in detail in Chapter Four.

Discussion of Findings

Chapter Four provided insight into how and why college women decide to run for student government president and their perceptions of the contextual factors that shape their decisions. Findings revealed several themes that influenced the way women navigate their pathways: pre-college and early college experiences; perceptions of the student government president as part of a family; motivations related to social justice, equity, and running for the right reasons; and a process related to external validation in navigating their pathways. Further, the analyses revealed contextual factors such as the importance of mentoring, the role of social media, the impact of the national election and gender and politics.

Broadly speaking, research question one focuses on the ways in which women navigate their pathways into running for college student president, drawing attention to aspects of their pathways such as previous experiences, motivations, perceptions of roles, and decisions to run. Chapter Four provided an in-depth analysis of several important themes related to these areas. In this discussion section, I will further expound upon how the findings align with, provide nuance to, or diverge from prior research on women's political aspirations and women's leadership.

Women's Political Aspirations

This study provides important data related to the complexities with which women think about political leadership in the college context. Lawless and Fox are two of the foremost scholars studying the gender gap in politics. Through their multi-year study on women's political aspirations, they have honed in on factors that contribute to gender gaps in political aspirations among men and women post-college. While their work focuses on men and women outside of the college context, they make the case that there are critical early childhood and high school experiences that potentially increase women's political aspirations. Through their work they have

found that in high school boys and girls report equal levels of engagement with high school student government (Lawless & Fox, 2013). Lawless and Fox (2013) find that gender gaps in political aspirations start to emerge in college. Some of the findings in this study align well with aspects of Lawless and Fox's work while others complicate some of their results. Three areas in particular are the role of high school competitive sports, high school student council, and parental encouragement.

High school sports. All of the women in this study cited the important role that competitive team sports played for them in their leadership pathways. The women in my study added more complexity to the way we think about sports, competition, and political leadership. Lawless & Fox (2013) found that women who played varsity or junior varsity sports were more likely to have considered running for political office as an adult. Some researchers posit that competitive sports teach women to work on a team toward a common goal and how to work through success and failure (Lawless & Fox, 2013). Interestingly, the women in this study discussed the importance of both team and individual competitive opportunities. Additionally, Lawless and Fox highlight the importance of high school level sports involvement, but the women in my study were involved in sports beginning at much younger ages. Since they were involved in such highly competitive aspects of sports, the pipeline into sports activities began for them much earlier than high school. This also contradicts some leadership scholarship, which finds that women tend to shy away from leadership roles because they view them as competitive and they have distaste for competition (Leonard & Sigall, 1999).

High school student council. Only half of the women in this study were involved in high school student council. Of the women who were involved in high school student council, all of them viewed high school student government as something very different from college-level

student government. Thus, findings from this study point out that high school student council does not necessarily serve as the sole training ground or gatekeeping experience for future student government leadership in college. Lawless and Fox (2013) also found that in high school boys and girls report almost equal interest in politics and they are equally likely to participate in student council. They discuss the important role that high school student government plays in socializing girls to political leadership. The findings from my study diverge a bit from this idea providing some nuance to their findings around the role of high school student government. The women in this study seemed to share the perception that high school student government was a fun social opportunity for engagement in their schools. It seemed as though they perceived college student government to be less social and much more political. Because of the distinction between the social purposes of high school student council and the political nature of college student government, the two were related in that they were both leadership opportunities but they were not so intimately connected for the women that they served as a direct pathway to the college student government presidency.

Parental encouragement. In my study, only one woman, Nicole, shared her experiences of being encouraged by her family to run for campus office. Nicole also had a significant amount of political experience and mentorship from representatives in politics compared to the other women. Additionally, Nicole spoke about the culture of political engagement present in her family from a young age. Lawless & Fox (2013) find that college age men and women both report being encouraged to run for student government at nearly equal rates, but family and friends were far more likely to encourage men to consider a run for political office later in life. Thus, it appears that, for some women, the need for encouragement could also come in the form of mentorship from political figures, older peers, or student affairs professionals on college

campuses. Regardless of where encouragement comes from, it is critical for women to receive encouragement from individuals whose opinions they value.

Leadership

Another interesting theme that emerged from the findings relates to the leadership experiences and perceptions of leadership of the female participants in my study. For the women in this study, their advocacy or activism work served as an impactful leadership building opportunity. Additionally, they held perceptions of leaders as communal and relational. Finally, they sought validation related to leadership by testing out their internal sense of themselves as leaders with other individuals.

Advocacy and activism. Many of the women in my study were involved in advocacy or activism work related to macro-level social justice issues on their campuses and in their communities. This is an interesting finding and adds complexity to areas of student government research. First, there is a body of literature that discusses the pipeline that exists in student government wherein students get involved early on in college and stay involved with student government over their college careers. Much of the previous literature on student government leadership paints the picture that students get involved with student government and work their way up into larger leadership roles over-time. Thus, students are qualified for the presidency because of their involvement with student government. That was not necessarily the case for the women in this study. Several of the participants in my study were not involved with student government prior to running and often drew confidence in themselves as leaders from their advocacy and activism work.

Additionally, women's advocacy and activism work served as a place for them to find their passions and served as a learning lab about leadership. Spaces of advocacy and activism served as a place for the women to see leadership practiced by people all around them—not just those with positional authority. This allowed them to divorce the practice of leadership from

positional leadership and take part in it. Leadership theories and scholarship can be broken down into people, process, and purpose (Dugan, 2017), and the women in my study shifted away from thinking about leadership solely as the people in positions who do things and more about the process and purpose related to how people come together to make an impact related to equity or social justice causes. This aligns with many of the post-industrial theories of leadership, which are much more focused on the process of leadership and the purpose behind what leadership accomplishes. Interestingly, recent studies have revealed that women are socialized to develop traits, skills, and behaviors that align well with how people define good leadership in the post-industrial paradigm (Dugan, 2017). However, while women have the perceived qualifications to be good leaders in the way that people say they want to be led, men are still more likely to see themselves as leaders.

Perceptions of leadership. The second area of student government research and literature focuses much more deliberately on positional leading as opposed to grassroots-level leadership. Advocacy or activism provided a pathway for women to see themselves connected to a group of people in an effort to make an impact on the greater good. In some ways this supports theoretical models of leadership such as the Social Change Model in which college students exhibit leadership through a connection between individual, group, and societal areas that all come together to impact change (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996). The findings from this study also support Astin & Leland's (1991) foundational work on women's leadership, which found that women thought about leadership as a process aimed at creating change within the bounds of an organization or a system. While the work of Astin and Leland and the Social Change Model do not specifically focus on student government leadership, they

do focus on the people, processes, and purposes in which college students or women engage in leadership.

The findings from this study also revealed that women had more communal and interconnected perceptions of leadership roles, specifically the role of the student government president. This supports much of the leadership literature related to gender differences in leadership that finds that women tend to adopt more collaborative and non-hierarchical practices of leadership. Further, research has found that women are significantly more likely to indicate a desire to volunteer in their communities and to rate working for a charity as the best avenue for improving the world (Lawless & Fox, 2013). Adding to that, researchers also posit that women do not have the same internal desire as men to serve in top leadership roles, but see many different avenues for making an impact (Sagaria, 1988). This aligns with the ways in which women in this study thought about future political aspirations post-election on their campuses. It also connects to women's motivations to run in the first place. It is not that women do not want to make a large impact or do not think about engaging with politics. They see multiple ways to achieve their impact and the political position has to be deemed the most appropriate way to make their impact in order to motivate them to run.

Validation

There is a large body of literature dedicated to the study of college student self-efficacy, self-concept, and/or self-confidence, particularly the gender gaps that exist between men and women on these domains. Numerous scholars cite women's lower self-confidence as reasons they are not involved in high-level leadership positions- particularly related to student government (Kreuzer, 1992, Romano, 1996, Lawless & Fox, 2013). This study revealed something more complex than simply a lower level of self-confidence.

The women in this study viewed themselves in a particular way when it came to their leadership. For them, it was not that they lacked confidence. Instead, they had high-levels of self-efficacy and confidence in relation to their leadership abilities generally. Many of the women had seen themselves as leaders or practiced leadership for many years, and they had an internal sense of themselves as leaders. That confidence in who they were as leaders is what led them to believe that they could be good at being the student government president in the first place. Their confidence in their sense of themselves as leaders is what drove them to test out the waters with external sources (i.e., garner validation from others) when telling others that they were interested in running. They were testing the waters to see if their sense of self matched the ways in which external individuals saw them. This does not mean that the women in my study did not struggle with confidence at times. In fact, many of the women struggled with feeling low levels of confidence connected to feeling more or less qualified to run for and hold office. They went through ups and downs in their levels of confidence over the course of their time running. However, these were often temporary shifts brought on by dissonance they experienced when their sense of self did not always match what the external environment had constructed about them.

Contextual Influences

Research question two focused on the contextual factors that impact the way in which women navigate their pathways into student government. As stated previously, I utilized Bronfenbrenner's (1994) human ecological systems theory as part of the framework for this study in an effort to capture the context in which participants were experiencing their pathways. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss how the findings in Chapter Four related to contextual influences such as social media, the national election, and participants' perceptions of

gender and politics.

Social media. The structural ways that students connect with each other have changed rapidly in the last 20 years with the advent of social media applications and websites. Bronfenbrenner's model was conceptualized in 1994, before the rise of social media. Therefore, he does not explicitly attend to social media in any of the contextual layers of his model. Findings from this study would suggest that social media spans multiple layers of context beginning with the microsystem and extending through the mesosystem and exosystems out into the macrosystem. All of the participants in this study talked at length about social media strategies for promoting their platforms to large numbers of students with little direct contact and effort. Many of the women had specific people on their campaign teams who were dedicated to the dissemination of knowledge through various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Social media served as a valuable, free tool to broadcast their message far and wide to students on campus. However, not all social media interactions were positive. Many of the women experienced downfalls of social media during the course of their campaign as well. Social media also served as a space where people felt a sense of protection and entitlement to say whatever they wanted. Many of the women in the study experienced "dirty campaigning" and bullying from their opponents and other students on campus through online social media platforms. While previous research finds that women are often discouraged from running by the thought of "dirty campaigning" (Spencer, 2004), this study builds on that notion and points out that the Internet and social media have ushered in a new space or environment in which bullying can occur with little to no accountability or way of monitoring it.

National election. Bronfenbrenner's (1994) human ecological model posits that events happening in society or within the societal layer of context are often seen as distal experiences to

individuals and therefore have a smaller impact on individuals than events located within more proximal layers of context. Because national elections would fall within the macrosystem layer of context, I was intrigued to learn more about how profoundly the national election impacted the women in my study. All of the women spoke of Hillary Clinton's run for U.S. President as an impactful experience that made them more aware of the lack of female political leaders they saw on many levels in their lives. The story of Hillary Clinton's campaign served as both warning and motivation. It was a warning in the sense that they saw very clearly the challenges that she faced because of being a woman aspiring to political leadership, and they saw her lose. However, at the same time, it provided them with motivation and determination to see things turn out differently for themselves and other women.

Perceptions of gender and politics. The 2016 national election, and Hillary Clinton's role in it, also related to the ways in which participants in this study thought about gender and politics. In some ways, Hillary Clinton served as an example of a woman traversing her pathway, while sexism and politics served as a stark reminder of how far these women had to go in their efforts to become their student body president. Several of the women in this study faced overt sexism among students at their institutions who did not think that women were capable of leadership. For some women, this enforced (or re-enforced) their personal perceptions of the challenges that women face in politics and their feelings about being "outsiders". This is consistent with other findings on women in student government who face barriers to leadership such as sexist promotional practices and lack of opportunities because of their out-group status (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003).

Summary

Given the findings discussed above, what can be concluded about women's pathways into the student government presidency and the contextual factors that impact the ways in which they navigate their pathways? First, for the women in this study, their pathways into the student government presidency have some expected and unexpected aspects. The women in this study were able to look back on their journey to see the importance of competitive experiences in preparing them to run for president at their institutions. However, they did not always take what some would consider a "traditional" or "expected" pathway into running for president. High school student council did not necessarily serve as a direct pathway into college student government and early college student government involvement was not a necessity. Some of the women were involved in neither high school nor college student government prior to running. Instead, many of the women found that other leadership experiences and work around social justice, advocacy, and activism prepared them for running for president.

Second, women thought about the role of the student government president as a communal leader and saw the need for the student government president to build relationships across different groups of people. Additionally, the women in this study had a sense of who they were as leaders and that they wanted to run for president. Instead of waiting for someone else to see these qualities in them, they instead decided to test out their ideas by seeking external validation of who they believed themselves to be as leaders and potential candidates.

Finally, the findings from this study revealed that context matters and that women are paying attention to the social and political environments around them. Social media, the impact of the 2016 national election, and their perceptions of gender and politics combined to impact the ways in which the women in this study navigated their pathways. They felt that they had to be

realistic in their beliefs about how others saw them and how others perceived the role of student government president, but they also had to believe that they themselves could overcome some of these challenges and embrace their determination and creativity in navigating their pathways.

Implications

This study has useful theoretical implications for future research. Additionally, the findings from this research are valuable for faculty, student affairs professionals, and women with future student government leadership aspirations. The following section outlines specific implications for each of these categories.

Theoretical Implications

As I previously mentioned, this study employed a combination of two frameworks—Eagly and Carli's (2007) leadership labyrinth and Bronfenbrenner's (1994) human ecological systems theory. The findings from this study suggest a few important theoretical considerations for researchers and scholars. Eagly and Carli's leadership labyrinth draws largely on empirical work on post-college women. My study, however, applied their theoretical framework to the college context. This was a fitting application given that Eagly and Carli posit that women begin traversing their leadership pathways before they find themselves in professional roles. Thus, this study extended Eagly and Carli's work to the college context. Further, the leadership labyrinth is an assets-based approach to looking at women's leadership. Instead of focusing on the places in which women get stuck or fall out of the pipeline, it draws attention to the unique and indirect pathways that women take to accomplishing their leadership goals. This study highlights the need for more asset-based or anti-deficit thinking when it comes to studying women and leadership. The asset-based framework allowed me to see nuances in women's leadership self-

confidence and the unique ways in which women navigate their leadership pathways instead of the places in which they face barriers or simply get stuck.

Additionally, higher education scholars have called for the use of contextual frameworks in the study of college students. Scholars have highlighted the need to account for context in the study of college students in a deeper way than simply stating that "it matters." To that end, this study utilizes Bronfenbrenner's (1994) human ecological systems theory to learn more about how context influences women's leadership pathways into the college student government presidency. Through the incorporation of this theory, I was able to learn more about the critical ways in which the national election and gendered politics impact women's leadership aspirations and behaviors. Additionally, I was able to see how women navigated the emerging frontier of campaigning in an era of social media. This allowed for a deeper understanding of college women's interactions with sexism and politics. This study serves as an example of how qualitative work can unearth rich findings about how phenomena interact with environments for college students.

Implications for Faculty and Student Affairs Professionals

Faculty members and student affairs professionals have the opportunity to work with women who want to, or are, running for student government president in various capacities. Most importantly, they are situated in a space where they can serve as role models or mentors to women who are thinking about running. Therefore, it is important that faculty and practitioners understand the leadership pathways that women navigate into the student government presidency. Faculty and practitioners should be encouraged to provide programs and mentorship that helps women learn about who they are as leaders and to trust in their own internal sense of self. Additionally, they can help women navigate their pathways when they experience

dissonance between who they believe themselves to be as leaders and what their external environments are telling them.

Student affairs professionals are in a unique position in that they work with student government leaders. Thus, not only can they help support women who may be considering running for president, they can also use their role as student government advisors to mitigate some of the contextual factors that impact women's pathways. Student government elections on college campuses are a complex environment and process. The student government president, and the election of that individual into office, represents the student voice and thus, it should be a student-led and student-centered process. However, the women in this study provided examples of social media bullying and inappropriate behavior from other individuals involved in the campaign process. Even more interesting was that student affairs professionals remained largely hands-off in this process. Student affairs professionals should work to find a balance between allowing students autonomy in their elections processes while still ensuring that students are held accountable for their actions. I would suggest that student government advisors implement a code of conduct during campaigns and that students who do not live up to certain standards are held accountable in meaningful ways.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides important insights into college women's leadership pathways and the contextual factors that impact how women navigate their pathways, it is not without its limitations. Some of these limitations also pave the way for future research considerations for individuals who wish to study this topic. This section will address three of the most significant limitations and provide suggestions for future research.

First, I approached the research questions through a method of qualitative inquiry. Thus, the study was never meant to provide broad generalizations about the gender gap in student government leadership. It was meant to focus on generating a deeper understanding of the unique experiences of women who are running for college student government president. Through that investigation, I wanted my research to provide nuance to our understanding of women's pathways into these roles. Future research could focus on ways to gather data from a larger pool of women or find ways to extend this line of inquiry by utilizing quantitative methods to provide more broad generalizations or shed light on predictability of experiences. This would allow researchers to learn more about narrowing the gender gap in women's representation in student government leadership on a broad level across different background categories and experiences.

Second, this study examined the experiences of women who did navigate their pathway into running for student government president and, in some cases, won their election. This research does not address all aspects of the gender gap in student government leadership, as I did not focus on women who chose not to run. While it is challenging to identify and study a group of women who choose not to run, they are nonetheless important to understanding the underrepresentation of women in the college student government presidency. Future research should focus on ways to study women who decide not to run and their decisions for doing so.

Additionally, the findings from this study revealed important contextual factors that impact how women navigate their pathways to running for college student government president. It is important to note two things. First, this study focused solely on women. Men were not included as part of the research design. Thus, future research could examine the leadership perceptions, pathways, and contexts of men to serve as a comparison point to the women's experiences. Further, it is important to note that these contextual factors focused on women's

perceptions of their context. Women do not run for student body president in a vacuum. They do so in an environment in which other candidates and voters come together to influence how women experience their campaign. Others perceptions of the contextual factors could differ from the women in this study. I did not include student voters or other candidates in my data collection as a way of comparing their perceptions with the perceptions of others. This is an area open for future research. Future research could focus on including other groups of people who are involved in student government elections—elections committees, other candidates, members of campaign teams, or student voters-- to learn more about a multitude of perspectives of contextual factors that influence student government elections.

The women who participated in this study come from different racial/ethnic backgrounds that influence their leadership perspectives. While some of the nuances related to race, gender, and intersectionality emerged from the data in this study, future research should more explicitly investigate how the women's social identities influence their leadership pathways and contexts.

Finally, interesting findings emerged related to how the women think about leadership through a gendered lens. They thought about approaching leadership roles from the perspective of building community, creating family-like bonds, and feeling motivated to run because of their altruistic desires toward their peers on campus. This suggests that instead of assimilating to the masculine nature of politics, the women adopted views on leadership that are distinctly different and female. Given their non-hierarchical views and their desires to build relationships through leadership, future research could utilize the Social Change Model of Leadership as a framework for understanding how the women in this study think about leadership. The Social Change Model (HERI, 1996) is a leadership model that focuses on individual, group, and societal leadership practices aimed at creating systemic change. It challenges the notion of hierarchical, positional

leadership roles and instead focuses on how individuals come together as groups to impact society and create change.

Conclusion

Not every college woman is destined to run for the college student government president at her institution. However, no woman should feel like she cannot run simply because she is a woman or that she has no place in campus political leadership. The participants in this study—Ananya, Lauren, Nicole, Nora, Annika, Rose, and Victoria—all bravely navigated their pathways into running for college student government president. Their stories provide examples to other women who are traversing their own pathways. Moreover, their stories were all undergirded with a sense of hope, determination, and support. They had hope in a future where college women feel capable, empowered, and confident in their leadership abilities. They were determined to help other women navigate their pathways and narrow gender gaps in college student government leadership, and they provided an understanding of the critical role that support plays along the way.

This study provides information about the leadership pathways of women who run for college student government president and the contextual factors that impact the ways in which they navigate those pathways. The findings suggest that women have complex, often indirect pathways into the presidency and gain valuable experience through competitive sports and leadership through activism and advocacy. Additionally, mentorship and encouragement from a wide variety of individuals proved vital in helping women navigate different twists and turns in their pathways. Further, this study also revealed that women might engage in a validation process in which they seek to see if their internal perceptions of their sense of self as leaders matched up with other's perceptions of them. Finally, social media bullying, sexism in politics, and female

political role models serve as contextual factors that impact the way that women navigate their pathways.

Finally, on a personal note, I hope this research empowers college women to be their own force in closing gender gaps that exist in student government leadership. I hope this research reaches college women and encourages them to take part in programs that develop their leadership through social justice, advocacy, or activism and that through those experiences they learn to develop their internal sense of self as a leader. I hope that this research teaches college women that there will be times when they experience varying levels of confidence related to their leadership abilities, but that they can find healthy ways to navigate those parts of their pathways. Finally, I hope that this research helps women see the world around them in realistic ways knowing that they may face sexism and challenge patriarchal notions of leadership on their pathways, but that they can look to mentors and support systems to help them navigate those twists and turns.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STUDENT PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello! My name is Hilary Zimmerman, and I am a PhD student in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA. I am seeking participants for a research study entitled, *"Navigating the Labyrinth toward College Student Government Presidency: A Phenomenological Study of Women who Run for Student Government President"*. The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership pathways of college women who are running for the student government presidency.

To participate, students must meet all of the following criteria: 1) be at least 18 years of age or older, 2) identify as female, 3) be running for the student government president position at their institution in spring 2017.

The study will be conducted between March 2017 and June 2017. Participation will involve three separate 1-hour individual interviews over the course of your student government campaign. Participants will meet with me one time toward the beginning of their campaign, one time during the middle, and one time after the election has concluded. You will be asked questions about your leadership journey, your current student government campaigning experiences, and your future plans. Interviews will be audio-recorded and kept confidential without any personal identifiers.

If you would like to participate, please complete the short interest form linked here: (INSERT LINK). Those selected for the study will be contacted to schedule a convenient date and time for the interview. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at hzimmerman@ucla.edu.

APPENDIX B

STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL EMAIL

Hello! My name is Hilary Zimmerman, and I am a PhD student in the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at UCLA. I am seeking participants for a research study entitled, *"Navigating the Labyrinth toward College Student Government Presidency: A Phenomenological Study of Women who Run for Student Government President"*. The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership pathways of college women who are running for the student government presidency.

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The study will be conducted between March 2017 and June 2017. Participation will involve three separate 1-hour individual interviews over the course of the individual's student government campaign. Participants will meet with me one time toward the beginning of their campaign, one time during the middle, and one time after the election has concluded. Students will be asked questions about their leadership journey, their current student government campaigning experiences, and their future plans. Interviews will be audio-recorded and kept confidential without any personal identifiers.

If you know of any women who would be willing to participate in this study, please send them this email asking them to complete the short interest form linked here: (INSERT LINK). You can also send me their email addresses, and I would be happy to reach out to them personally. Those selected for the study will be contacted to schedule a convenient date and time for the interview. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at hzimmerman@ucla.edu.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your interest in participating in the research study, *"Navigating the Labyrinth toward College Student Government Presidency: A Phenomenological Study of Women who Run for Student Government President"*. The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership experiences of women who are running for their college student government president position.

Please answer the questions below. Your responses will remain confidential. If selected for the study, you will be contacted to schedule a convenient date and time for your interviews. Your name and email address will then be unlinked from the rest of your responses and deleted. If you have any questions, feel free to email Hilary Zimmerman, PhD student at UCLA (the researcher conducting this study) at hzimmerman@ucla.edu.

1. Name
2. Email address
3. Institution
4. When did your student government campaign begin?
5. When are your campus student government elections?
6. Age
7. Racial/Ethnic identity
8. Religion/Spiritual background
9. Socioeconomic status
10. Are you the first in your family to attend college in the U.S.?
11. Year in school:
    a. First-year
    b. Sophomore
    c. Junior
    d. Senior
    e. Fifth-year or more
12. Academic Major(s):

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

First Interview

Introduction

- Introduce myself and personally thank participant
- Explain the purpose of the overall study
- Explain the purpose of this interview: the goal of this interview in particular is to learn more about your life up to now and how your path has lead you to run for student government president
- Review confidentiality processes and complete informed consent
    - Ask for participant's chosen pseudonym
    - Share with her the institutional pseudonym
    - Participation is voluntary
    - Ask to record the interview and take notes
    - Any questions for me before we begin?

Guiding Questions for the Interview

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

- Your background
- What was life like for you growing up?
- Where did you grow up?
- What was school like for you growing up?
- Can you tell me about the people you consider family?

What made you decide to come to school here? How did you make that decision?

What are some things that you've been involved in while a student here?

- How did you decide to be involved in those ways?
- What drew you to those avenues of involvement?

What would you consider to be some of your most impactful experiences in leading you to run for the student government president position?

If you can, think back to the time when you officially decided to run for the student government president position…

- What were you feeling?
- What made you decide to do it?
- How did you go about making the decision to run?
- What were the steps that you had to go through to publicly share that you were running?
- Why did you think you would be a good candidate?

Before you decided to throw your hat in the ring, what were some of the things you thought about in thinking about deciding to run for student government president?

What makes you want to be a student government leader?

What do you hope that being the student government president does for you?

- Personally and professionally

Is there anything else that I should know about you and your life up to this point?

Wrap-up

- Thank you!
- Following-up with a copy of the interview transcript in case they'd like to review it
- Schedule next interview
- Follow-up email
    - Thank you
    - Transcript
    - My contact information
    - Next interview reminder

Second Interview

Introduction

- Hello again…
- Explain the purpose of the overall study
- Explain the purpose of this interview: the goal of this interview in particular is to learn more about your current experiences with your student government president campaign
- Review confidentiality processes and complete informed consent
    - Remind participant of their chosen pseudonym
    - Remind her of the institutional pseudonym
    - Participation is voluntary
    - Ask to record the interview and take notes
    - Any questions for me before we begin?

Guiding Questions for the Interview

How have things been since our last interview? What have you been thinking about and doing with your time since then?

I can imagine that you've been doing a lot of campaigning since we last spoke. Can you tell me about a typical day for you campaigning for student government president?

- What do you imagine a typical day would be like for you as president?
- Where do you talk to student voters?
- What do you tell them?
- Do you have supporters or people who help you out? Can you tell me about what they do?
- What has been the most unexpected part about running?

Now I'd like to transition a bit to learning more about your support system and your thoughts on leadership. Do you have a person or people who you would identify as your encourager(s) or champion(s) in this process? Who are they?

- What is your relationship like with them?
- How do they play a role in your leadership journey?

Who do you look up to as a leader? Who are some of the people who shape how you think about leadership?

You're running for student government president, which is a pretty prominent leadership position, so do you consider yourself a leader?

- Why?
- What does leadership look like for you?
- Why student government president?

Is there anything related to your current life that I missed or you think we should talk about?

Wrap-up

- Thank you!
- Following-up with a copy of the interview transcript in case they'd like to review it
- Schedule next interview
- Follow-up email
    - Thank you
    - Transcript
    - Confirm my contact information
    - Next interview reminder

Third Interview

Introduction

- Hello again…
- Explain the purpose of the overall study
- Explain the purpose of this interview: the goal of this interview is to put it all together- to learn from you about how you're processing your leadership journey, the campaign, and what does that mean for your future?
- Review confidentiality processes and complete informed consent
    - Remind participant of their chosen pseudonym
    - Remind her of the institutional pseudonym
    - Participation is voluntary
    - Ask to record the interview and take notes
    - Any questions for me before we begin?

Guiding Questions for Interview

How have you been since our last interview? Have you been thinking about anything in particular from either of our previous interviews?

How do you feel about the election overall?

- What are some of the biggest moments that stand out to you? Why do you think those stand out?
- Would you have done anything differently?
- How does that shape how you go forward?

Now that the election is over, what's next for you?

- Do you plan to pursue other leadership positions, even after college?
    - Why or why not?

Given everything we've talked about over the course of our interviews – your past life history and the more current campaign- where do you see yourself going in the future?

- How do you think about leadership?
- How do you think student government?

What are your hopes for the rest of your time in college?

- What about your hopes after college and into the future?

Given everything we've talked about in our interviews, how do you think it all comes together to land you where you are now?

- What do you think your leadership journey has been like?
- What do you think it will be like in the future?

As always, is there anything else about your leadership pathway/journey and your experience with running for student government president that you'd like to share?

Wrap-up

- Thank you!
- Following-up with a copy of the interview transcript in case they'd like to review it
- Once I analyze the interviews, I will also provide a brief overview of my findings and ask for any feedback that you may have
- Follow-up email
    - Thank you
    - Transcript
    - Confirm my contact information

APPENDIX E

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET WITH SIGNED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Navigating the Labyrinth toward College Student Government Presidency: A Phenomenological Study of Women who Run for Student Government President

Dr. Linda J. Sax, PhD and Hilary B. Zimmerman, MA, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a women who is running for student body president at your college or university. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is being conducted to learn more about the leadership pathways of college women who are running for their student government president position at their respective colleges or universities. Through this study, we hope to learn more about college women and their decisions to run for student government president, their experiences with campaigning, and their future plans after the election.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Review and sign this consent form.
- Answer questions related to your past and present experiences related to student government leadership.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about three, separate hour-long interviews.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

- There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with this study.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

Benefits from the study include the opportunity to be a part of research that examines women's leadership in student government and potentially helps more women decide to run for student government president on their college campuses. Additionally, participants have the opportunity to reflect on past and current leadership experiences that may help further their development.

The results of the research may help practitioners better understand the leadership experiences of college women and ways to support them in pursuing leadership opportunities. This study may also help researchers learn more about college women's leadership and the connection to past experiences and future aspirations. Therefore, ultimately, it may help researchers and practitioners to increase the number of women who run for, and serve as, college student government president.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning pseudonyms to both you and your institution. Pseudonyms will be used during the interview, in the saving of any electronic files, and during data analysis and dissemination. Any connection of your pseudonym and your real name will be stored on a password-protected laptop which only the researcher will have access to.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

  Dr. Linda Sax
  (310) 206-5875
  lsax@ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant | Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent | Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent | Date

APPENDIX F

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET FOR ORAL CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Navigating the Labyrinth toward College Student Government Presidency: A Phenomenological Study of Women who Run for Student Government President

Dr. Linda J. Sax, PhD and Hilary B. Zimmerman, MA, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

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Benefits from the study include the opportunity to be a part of research that examines women's leadership in student government and potentially helps more women decide to run for student government president on their college campuses. Additionally, participants have the opportunity to reflect on past and current leadership experiences that may help further their development.

The results of the research may help practitioners better understand the leadership experiences of college women and ways to support them in pursuing leadership opportunities. This study may also help researchers learn more about college women's leadership and the connection to past experiences and future aspirations. Therefore, ultimately, it may help researchers and practitioners to increase the number of women who run for, and serve as, college student government president.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning pseudonyms to both you and your institution. Pseudonyms will be used during the interview, in the saving of any electronic files, and during data analysis and dissemination. Any connection of your pseudonym and your real name will be stored on a password-protected laptop which only the researcher will have access to.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

  Dr. Linda Sax
  (310) 206-5875
  lsax@ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

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