Women's Lived Experiences in their Pathways to Leadership Positions in Universities in the Dominican Republic

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WOMEN’S LIVED EXPERIENCES IN THEIR PATHWAYS TO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN UNIVERSITIES IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

by

Laura Sartori

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology
Western Michigan University
April 2020

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Marlene Kowalski-Braun, Ph.
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There is a significant gender disparity in the highest leadership levels in Dominican universities. Research argues that in traditionalist societies and in some developing countries particularly, it is increasingly challenging for women to make it to top leadership. To achieve a fuller understanding of the current context for female leadership within Dominican higher education, there is a need for research that can serve to establish an initial framework of information about the experiences of female leaders.

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of women who occupy leadership positions in Dominican universities. Feminist standpoint epistemology enabled the critical examination of society through women’s everyday experiences in their journeys into leadership. Through individual narratives, the study gives voice to women who have worked their way to positions of leadership, providing a better understanding of Dominican social dynamics, its culture and history. Study participants were five women occupying dean and vice-chancellor positions. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and through women’s visual and oral representations of their journeys, which they described using metaphors and analogies. Women in the study expressed being grateful for the
opportunities they have been given and described their journeys as a growth process. Participants reported facing obstacles mainly influenced by gender and age. The challenges reported by participants refer to female rivalry, constant proving of their capabilities, taking on leadership roles under challenging circumstances and the pressures and demands they face due to the many roles they undertake. The study found that patriarchy and machismo permeate organizational and social dynamics, affecting women’s progress to the highest levels of leadership in universities, especially the university presidency. Finally, an emergent finding from the study suggests there is an influence of religion particularly on women’s self-conception regarding their primary roles as caregivers. Research on the influence of religion and the social dynamics that continue to place men’s power over women in the personal and professional spheres is recommended for further understanding women’s experiences in leadership in higher education and Dominican society as a whole.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin by acknowledging my gratitude for having had the privilege to conduct this study. Leadership and feminism are both topics I am greatly passionate about. Since the beginning of my PhD endeavor, I was aware that understanding gender social dynamics, particularly for working women, was the path I was interested in pursuing. I hope this study serves as a framework for consciousness raising in my country and as groundwork for influencing systemic change. My wish is to inspire Dominican women and society as a whole to engage in reflective processes working towards a more inclusive and equal society for women and other marginalized groups.

These past five years have been a journey of growth, challenges, and achievements. Many beloved people have been a crucial part of this effort. I am grateful to my parents who have always supported and encouraged me to soar and pursue my dreams. The sacrifices you made to ensure I received quality education and the best learning experiences are always in my heart.

To my husband, son, and daughter. Your support and encouragement helped me make it through. Thank you for your patience and understanding. Thank you for cheering me on and believing in me always and at times when I doubted myself. Thank you for your gift of unconditional love and time. This PhD journey entailed the sacrifice of time and my presence away from the people I love most. You are an example of loyalty, selflessness, and of pure love. Without you, I would have not been able to achieve this. Anna and Eduardo, I hope you are...
Acknowledgments-Continued

proud of me and that this journey is an example of perseverance in your lives. To my husband, my primary cheerleader! Thank you for believing in me and for being my unconditional partner.

To all in my PhD group. It has been an honor to complete this voyage by your side. Sharing hardships, successes, growth of our families and many other important events in our lives through these past five years has made us become a big family. A sincere appreciation and admiration to my beloved syllabus decode group (Mary, Rossi, and Nids). For the endless peer reviewing, peer debriefings, laughter, and complaints! Your friendship is a gem I will always hold close to my heart. This journey has afforded me three sisters. To Mary, words cannot describe how grateful I am for having the privilege and precious gift of your friendship. Thank you for holding my hand all the way, for encouraging me to move on, and to always stay focused on the goal.

To my dear girls, thank you for the gift of your friendship. You supported me and cheered me on even while not completely understanding what and why I was doing this. Thank you for the laughter and tears. You are women who inspire and make me proud every day. The many roles you undertake gracefully are an inspiration to me and to the younger generation of women who depend on us for a better future.

My sincere appreciation to the five women in my study who so courageously shared their impressive journeys with me. Thank you for the gift of your time and honesty. Your experiences helped me discover new ways of understanding women’s lives and my own experiences as a female leader and in the many roles I play.
Acknowledgments-Continued

To my advisor, Dr. Beach. Thank you for your wisdom, support and guidance. Thank you for encouraging me to never settle and to give my best even at times when I thought I could not pull through. To Dr. Reeves and Dr. Kowalski-Braun, my sincere appreciation for sharing your time and knowledge with me. Your mentoring granted me new perspectives and helped me engage in profound reflections in this journey.

Laura Sartori
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CHAPTER ONE

We are lucky. Our mothers and grandmothers lived in a time of social and economic marginalization for women. We are far from that reality; of that we are sure. Great social transformations have taken place since the 19th century when the fight for women’s rights began in the United States. Social movements throughout the era produced policy change, which supported women’s suffrage, as well as workplace, sexuality, family and reproductive rights towards gender equality (Soule & Olzak, 2004). In the twenty-first century, globally, women work outside the home and occupy leadership positions across diverse industries. But are we lucky?

Despite the worldwide increase in women’s work force participation, and despite the evidence that organizations with more women occupying leadership positions financially surpass the ones that do not have women in elite managerial positions (Noland, Moran, Tyler, & Kotschwar, 2016), there continues to be a disparity among the number of men and women in senior positions (Atlantic Council, 2017; Folk & Rickne, 2016; Novta & Wong, 2017). This problem persists especially in traditionally “male dominated” cultures.

Existing research on leadership and gender posits that women face more challenges and barriers to becoming leaders than do men (Cleaver, 2016; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Mishra & Mishra, 2016) particularly in traditionalist societies and in some developing countries (Hasan & Othman, 2012). Diverse issues cause the gender gap in leadership: Perceptions of role incongruity, gender stereotypes and biases, and organizational obstacles (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Regardless of women’s progress into leadership positions and participation in political, economic, and social sectors, globally, gender inequality continues to
be a reality across diverse fields. The higher education context is no exception, where women continue to be underrepresented in academic administrative positions (Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014).

As in most countries in the Latin American and Caribbean Region (LAC), the Dominican Republic’s colonial roots and patriarchal social structure are ingrained in its traditionalist society and cultural dynamics. Although female leadership in the country is starting to be noticeable, especially in the political and educational context, women in top leadership positions continue to be the exception. The purpose of this research was to examine female leaders’ pathways toward leadership positions in higher education in the Dominican Republic. Exploring women’s journeys to leadership positions is important to understand the way in which female leaders in the Dominican higher education context navigate leadership in a male dominated culture.

**Study Background**

Although there is an increase in the number of women in positions of organizational leadership, they continue to be underrepresented in the upper echelons of organizational structures (Pew Research Center, 2015). Hence, female leaders who make it to the highest leadership positions in organizations are an exception across diverse fields (Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, & Haslam, 2014). According to Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013), women’s underrepresentation in top positions underlines deep-rooted cultural beliefs and supports men’s opportunities for leadership, therefore, sustaining this stagnant scenario for women. As a consequence, the absence of women in high leadership positions exacerbates the gender gap in leadership.
Although numerous factors contribute to the gender disparity in top positions, a host of research emphasizes the obstacles caused by gender stereotypes and biases (Datta & Agarwal, 2017; Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Ellemers, 2018; Ibarra et al., 2013). Stereotypes are defined as traits or characteristics that are expected of a certain group (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015). Gender stereotypes assign gender roles to men and women, expecting them to enact specific social roles and act in a certain way. Studies have explored women’s experiences with prejudice caused by gender stereotypes when they behave differently from the expectations of their gender social roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008). These social expectations may account for the lack of women in top leadership positions because they influence societies’ perceptions of and assumptions about women’s capabilities of enacting leadership.

Based on the ideas mentioned before, when talking about leadership and gender, it is important to understand the cultural dynamics that manifest themselves among social groups, guided by traditional expectations of the roles that members of these groups should occupy. Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, and Ristikari (2011) explain that the characteristics that a society assigns to men, to women, and to a leader, contribute to the difficulties that women face in their progress to leadership positions; since leadership is traditionally associated with men. Existing research on leadership and gender postulates that women face more challenges and barriers than men to become leaders, particularly in traditionalist societies and in some developing countries (Hasan & Othman, 2012). Traditionally, it is expected that women assume the role of caregiver and that they are affective, characteristics contrary to those expected of a leader. Men, on the contrary, are expected to be strong and assertive, traits typically associated with
leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These social expectations that generalize the characteristics of men and women and their social roles, cause misperceptions about the abilities of women to undertake leadership roles.

Although the persistent gender gap is a global phenomenon, countries in the LAC region are marked by colonial roots and patriarchal social structures, where women’s “natural” job are caregiving and unpaid work (Lamas, 2007). Hence, the author argued that in these societies, discrimination towards women is an economic, cultural and social trait that surfaces from the gender work division caused by traditional gender role expectations. Understanding how these societies function, aids in contextualizing the deeply rooted social dynamics that place women in a more challenging position than men when aspiring to become leaders.

Eagly and Karau (2002) developed role congruity theory to explain the incongruity between the female gender role and the leadership role, which produces descriptive and prescriptive biases. The authors argued that descriptive biases are caused by the mismatch between the female role and the leader role, and that they result in assumptions that women do not possess the necessary features to occupy leadership positions. Prescriptive biases appear when a woman enacts a masculine leadership style, contradicting her female role expectations. Both men and women continue to hold biases that stereotypically masculine behaviors are required for effective leadership, and these biases impact men’s and women’s behavior and actions (Isaac, Griffin, & Carnes, 2010). According to Koenig, Eagly, Smith, and Eliot (2014), “social role theory postulates that social perceivers’ beliefs about social groups in their society derive from their experiences with group members in their typical social roles” (p. 371). Therefore, the gender stereotype that expects women to be sensitive and nurturing is caused by
seeing women more often than men in roles such as caring for children (Eagly & Heilman, 2016). Eagly and Heilman (2016) argued that despite women’s increased participation in the labor force, gender stereotypes based on role segregation for men and women continue to affect women.

Over three decades ago, the glass ceiling phenomenon described an invisible barrier that prevented women from reaching leadership positions (Carli & Eagly, 2001). Recent studies continue to explore the experiences of women who achieve elite leadership positions (Bruckmüller et al., 2014). Across scholarly and public conversations, other metaphors, such as the glass cliff describe women’s experiences when they break the glass ceiling, but are set up for failure due to the precarious circumstances in which they have to enact their leadership roles (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). They posit that the leadership positions occupied by women tend to be more challenging than those occupied by men. Metaphors such as the glass ceiling and the glass cliff have played a major role in describing the many obstacles and demands that women face trying to reach top organizational positions (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012). The traditional glass ceiling may have been shattered since our mothers’ time, but it definitely still exists.

Stereotyping of emotions is another barrier that hinders women’s progress to elite leadership positions (Brescoll, 2016; Fischbach, Lichtenthaler, & Horstmann, 2015). The emotional characteristics of successful leaders, such as aggressiveness and fearlessness (Fischbach et al., 2015), are generally associated with men (Heilman, Block, Martell, Simon, & Schmitt, 1989). This stereotype causes prejudice towards women leaders based on the belief that women are not capable of controlling their emotions.
The unequal distribution of men and women in leadership roles is not an exclusive phenomenon of the corporate field. Multiple studies show that, as well as in the corporate field, there has been an increase in the number of women occupying leadership positions in higher education (Dunn et al., 2014; Pirjan, 2016; Morley, 2014). Still, as of 2016, in the United States, men continue to widely outnumber women in the highest levels of leadership (American Council on Education, 2016). Dunn et al. (2014) argue that male oriented norms and leadership models affect women by limiting their ambitions to achieve leadership in higher education.

In the LAC region, women’s education levels are rising, which is usually associated with their higher labor force participation. Although women are increasingly occupying managerial positions and participating in politics, they are absent in senior management (Atlantic Council, 2017). In the Dominican Republic, the presence of a few women at top political and organizational positions in the past decades, is evidence of contextual shifts for women in the country. Although data show that there are more women attaining academic degrees than men in the DR, there is an unequal distribution of men and women occupying administrative positions in Dominican higher education institutions (Ministerio de Educación Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología [Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic], 2017). Among the 32 Dominican universities, only three women have held positions of university presidency. Overall, over 70% of the senior ranks within the Ministry of Higher Education are held by men (Ministerio de Educación Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología, 2017). These scenarios highlight the gender gap in Dominican higher education leadership positions.
There is a lack of research that addresses women’s career pathways to leadership positions in higher education institutions in the country. Understanding female leaders’ experiences throughout their careers and the way their experiences have influenced their enactment of leadership, informs the current context for women in leadership. This study serves as a framework to further understand the factors accounting for the gender disparity in high level leadership positions in higher education in the DR.

**Problem Statement**

Although women are slowly entering the university presidency in the DR, female university presidents are the exception, and there is a significant gender disparity in the highest leadership positions in the Dominican higher education context (Ministerio de Educación Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología, 2017). Research argues that in traditionalist societies and in some developing countries particularly, it is increasingly challenging for women to make it to top leadership positions (Hasan & Othman, 2012). The DR has been marked by a colonial order that created unequal power relations, through interrelated hierarchies of gender, race, and social-economic-status (Santos, 2018). Based on patriarchy, everyday practices naturalized gender hierarchies (men over women, and male heads of family over other members). Although the DR is far from the colonial rule and its structure, the patriarchal legacy lies ingrained in Dominican culture and beliefs.

A qualitative study conducted to explore women’s experiences in their pathways to leadership in politics, found that women faced challenges due to traditional female role expectations, particularly in balancing work and life (Secretaría de Estado de la Mujer [Secretary of State of Women], 2009). This study sheds light on women’s pathways to political
leadership positions, and provides understanding of the factors that affect women’s success in leadership roles. However, there is a lack of research that addresses women’s career pathways to leadership positions particularly in higher education institutions in the country.

To achieve a fuller understanding of the current context for female leadership within Dominican higher education, there is a need for research that can serve to establish an initial framework of information about the experiences of current female leaders in Dominican higher education institutions. Such studies provide the Dominican higher education sector, particularly universities, insights on the lived experiences of female leaders, that could raise consciousness about why and how to foster an environment of equity where women are encouraged to seek out leadership opportunities. Such studies could also inform more intentional strategies to provide opportunities for qualified females in higher education settings to attain leadership positions and achieve success in leadership roles; contributing to equal opportunities for women as men, and to gender equality at the apex of organizations.

Additional studies of the experiences of women who have already ascended to leadership positions within any given sector of the Dominican economy and education infrastructure could yield understandings that avoid many of the historically documented pitfalls and false starts women have experienced as they emerge as leaders in new sectors of a country’s economic, social, and education infrastructure.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of women who occupy or have occupied the highest leadership positions in Dominican universities. Specifically, this study examined how female leaders at the highest
levels described their lived experience emerging as leaders within higher education and within a male dominated culture. The study gives voice to women who have worked their way to these top positions of leadership in higher education, providing a better understanding of the social dynamics, the culture and history that places women in the Dominican Republic at the current context for female leadership in Dominican society; working toward inclusive and equal environments in organizations, and supporting the professional advancement of qualified women in the field.

For the purpose of this study, a female leader was defined as a woman who has led or leads a department or unit in a Dominican university, and whose responsibilities include leading large teams, making academic decisions as well as resource management and allocation. Hence, the women in the study were women who have reached high leadership levels in universities (dean and vice-chancellor). This study aimed to provide deeper knowledge and understanding of higher education female leaders’ journey to becoming leaders, by interpreting their accounts of their day-to day experiences within their positions of leadership. The overarching question that guided this study was: How does a criterion sample of women describe their lived experiences emerging as senior level female leaders in higher education in the Dominican Republic?

This study was further guided by the following research sub-questions:

1) What factors have influenced their experiences as female leaders in higher education?

2) How does the Dominican culture influence their experiences and women’s current context in the country?

3) How do they describe the current context for women in higher education in the DR?
Conceptual Framework

The study sought to give meaning to women’s experiences as female leaders in higher education in the Dominican Republic. I interpreted and constructed meaning of the accounts described by the women who occupy leadership positions in Dominican higher education. The examination of the women’s lived experiences as leaders in a male dominated culture was guided by the cultural and social context. The study employed a hermeneutical phenomenological approach, through which the interpretive focus helped reveal the obstacles and disadvantages female leaders encounter in their journeys as leaders, but that take for granted due to the embedded patriarchal and male dominated culture within its society. Hermeneutic phenomenology was appropriate for this study since it enabled rich and deep understanding of female leaders’ specific experiences influenced by cultural social role expectations, and for understanding society as a whole (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Hermeneutics emphasizes the role of history and background in our ways of perceiving the intended meaning of experiences (Byrne, 2001). Therefore, in hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher is able to give meaning to the participant’s experiences guided by her own background, constructing a dialogue between the participant’s and her experiences (Prasad, 2002). Hence, throughout the research I reflected on my experience and history to construct meaning from women’s accounts.

To enable deeper understanding of the underlying meaning of women’s experiences as leaders, the descriptions of their day to day experiences were examined through the various metaphors that scholars have used in an attempt to illustrate the obstacles faced by women advancing to leadership positions. Scholars have privileged metaphors to reveal concepts and
phenomena that are complex and inexplicit (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Most of the obstacles that women encounter are subtle and hidden, and caused by cultural beliefs regarding the roles women and men should enact. Of particular significance for this study, metaphors provided a clearer image of women’s experiences with prejudice in a male dominated traditionalist society as the Dominican Republic. The use of metaphors to analyze findings afforded deeper examination of female leaders’ experiences in their journeys to top positions.

As a theoretical approach, the study was seen through the lens of feminist perspectives, particularly, feminist standpoint epistemology. Feminist standpoint epistemology enabled the critical examination of society through women’s everyday experience in their journeys into leadership positions in higher education (Brooks, 2007). This feminist perspective provided a framework for examining female leadership, and the cultural and social context within which the phenomenon is embedded.

The feminist approach recognizes the importance of understanding women’s experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2007) and places women at the center of the research process (Brooks, 2007). It was particularly useful for this study because its ideas are rooted in the intention of transforming society and seeking social justice by developing consciousness through women’s experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2007); hence, the experiences of women, told by women. “Often the very process of enabling women to articulate their own experiences of oppression raises awareness, among women and others, about the particular difficulties diverse women face and inspires movement toward change” (Brooks, 2007, p. 61).

The critical perspective through which the women’s journey to leadership positions in Dominican universities was interpreted and understood, provided the study participants
awareness of women’s issues in the country. According to Brooks (2007), the feminist critical approach to research enhances women’s awareness of their situation and provides them new and different perspectives to understanding and interpreting their own experiences.

Summary

This study explored the experiences of women who occupy high levels of leadership in Dominican universities. This study sought to examine how female leaders have experienced their pathways to leadership positions in a male dominated culture. The study employed a phenomenological approach, particularly, hermeneutic phenomenology. Through a hermeneutic approach, this study aimed to understand the essence of the women’s lived experiences.

Chapter One provided the background for the study, the purpose and research questions, as well as the conceptual framework for the study. In the second chapter, I present a review of the literature for this study, starting with an overview of feminist perspectives and of the history of feminism, leadership and gender, and female leadership in higher education institutions. Chapter Three presents the methods for this study, population, sampling strategies, and data analysis. In Chapter Four I portrayed the individual narratives of female leaders’ experiences. Chapter Five presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged in the analysis process and a composite description of female leaders’ journey toward leadership. Finally, in Chapter Six I provide a discussion of findings and relate them to existing literature, as well as the implications for practice and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of women who occupy the highest levels of leadership in universities in the Dominican Republic. Exploring gender and leadership framed by the social, cultural, and organizational factors that have historically contributed to the persistence of gender inequality, enabled understanding of the current context for female leaders after many decades of social movements and reforms.

I begin the chapter by presenting an overview of the history of feminism and the feminist perspectives that frame the study. Next I present a review of the literature on leadership and gender that describes the stereotypes and biases encountered by women in the workplace, as well as the metaphors used to explain women’s experiences. The last section of the chapter presents the literature on women in higher education, and female leadership in higher education in the LAC region.

Overview of the History of Feminism

Understanding the history of feminism is significant for this study because it contextualizes the rise of feminist epistemology, which reflects the struggles of many oppressed groups to recover the worth of their own experience (Narayan, 2004, Chapter 15), and it defies patriarchy and power relations, highlighted in traditional, male-dominated societies such as the Dominican Republic. Narayan (2004, Chapter 15) argued that “feminist epistemology also resembles the attempts by third world writers and historians to document the
wealth and complexities of local economic and social structures that existed prior to colonialism” (p. 214).

The feminist movement arose in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as women fought for the legal recognition of their rights (Byers & Crocker, 2012). Women were not allowed by law to apply for a credit card or a loan in their name, to demand equal pay as men, to inherit or consign a property, nor to accuse a spouse of rape (Molloy, 2018). In the United States, various social and political initiatives after the Civil War encouraged the social acceptance of women. Particularly, social movements and activisms in the Century, such as the Declaration of Sentiments (Soule & Olzak, 2004), influenced the change in social acceptance of women's access to and participation in the civic realm (Allen, 2011). The Declaration of Sentiments was a document presented by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the first women’s rights convention, organized in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York (Soule & Olzak, 2004). It demanded that women receive the same rights as men. The Declaration of Sentiments became the basis for 19th Amendment of the Constitution (Women’s Suffrage), in which women gained the right to vote in 1920.

Scholars describe the history of feminism as divided into three waves (Boxer, 1982; Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004; Pinterics, 2001). According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004), some of these key periods were characterized by the absence of feminist thought and mobilization, and others by the persistent growth of feminist criticism and of activism. The term “wave” used to classify feminism into these three periods, is employed as an analogy to illustrate the activity of growth and decline of feminism over time. Pilcher and colleague argued that “the peaks and
troughs of the feminist movement are characterized as following the motion of tidal water, with its ongoing cycle of gradual swelling, eventual cresting and final subsiding” (p. 52).

**First Wave Feminism**

First wave feminism involved a period of feminist activity during the 19th and early 20th centuries in Europe and the United States. Feminists during this period were concerned with women’s suffrage, the right to education, better working conditions, marriage and property laws, and women’s reproductive rights (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). The first wave started from the 1848 Seneca Falls convention and ended with the passage of women’s suffrage in 1920 when they gained the right to vote (Bailey, 1997). The feminist movement in this period focused primarily on the struggle to break the barriers which kept women from any public activity (Bacchi, 1982). Bacchi (1982) argued that first wave feminist did not question traditional sex role stereotyping, but rather, they extended the “familial influence into politics and to make society more temperate and moral” (p. 576). Therefore, feminists in this period where mainly focused on reclaiming their basic social and economic rights.

**Second Wave Feminism**

Second wave feminism was the period of feminist activity between the early 1960’s and the late 1980’s. Its emergence retroactively gave the name to the first wave feminism. During this period, women proclaimed their right to the same opportunities as men in the public sphere and focused on the social structure preventing equal opportunities, as they concentrated most of their attention on challenging patriarchy (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). Second wave feminism started after women were forced out of the workplace when men retook their jobs after World War II; and ended when the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) failed to be ratified (Maltaweel,
Valadez, & Lambrecht, 2019). The ERA proposed equal rights for all American citizens regardless of sex. During the second wave, feminists also highlighted the importance of consciousness raising. Lerner (1993) argues that although there is evidence of feminist consciousness long before the nineteenth century, patriarchy’s suppression of feminist writings did not allow feminist consciousness to give rise to feminist movements before this time. Lerner explained that feminist consciousness could only exist when women used their voices to challenge the established order.

**Third Wave Feminism**

Third wave feminism began in the 1990’s as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and also as a response to the negative reaction toward the initiatives created by the second wave (Bailey, 1997; Kinser, 2004; Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). Feminists in the third wave challenged the second wave’s essentialist definition of “femininity”, which third wave feminists considered overemphasized the experiences of white women (Kinser, 2004). Black feminists in the period like Gloria Anzaldua, Bell Hooks, Chela Sandoval, among others, defended their space within feminist thought seeking consideration of race-related biases (Kinser, 2004).

The classification of feminism into “waves” or periods has been questioned by scholars (Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997; Bailey, 1997), especially, regarding the unclear borders between the second wave and the third wave. Generally speaking, the first and second feminist waves are characterized for being periods of social transformations and advancements for women, with the second wave being a clear successor of the first (Bailey, 1997). Second wave feminists gave continuity to the efforts and claims for social justice that feminists fought for throughout the
first wave period (Bailey, 1997). Although the second wave is not a mere continuity of the first, second wave feminists reference the accomplishments of first wave feminists as peaks in feminism and women’s movement (Bailey, 1997).

The main controversy among the waves analogy used to classify feminist movement and thinking, has been emphasized in the literature primarily in questioning the need for the emergence of a third wave of young feminists, as scholars have referred to feminists in this period (Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997; Bailey, 1997). While a connection with earlier feminist activities (first wave feminists) was supported with the appearance of the second wave, the third wave, “seems to identify itself as such largely as a means of distancing itself from earlier feminism, as a means of stressing what are perceived as discontinuities with earlier feminist thought and activity” (Bailey, 1997, p. 17-18).

Contrary to the connection between the first and second feminist waves in terms of historical accomplishments, Bailey (1997) emphasized that the appearance of a third wave has clear political motivations. Young feminists argue that their generation “has been shaped by unparalleled historical circumstances and happenings” (Pinterics, 2001, p. 15), and they question second wave feminist theory, challenging who establishes the feminist community and what defines feminist theorizing. Second wave feminists have been criticized by third wave feminist for “organizing and theorizing around women's sameness” (Pinterics, 2001, p. 16), hence disregarding differences among women (race, class, diverse roles, and experience). Third wave feminists highlight “the need for greater acceptance of complexities, ambiguities, and multiple locations, and highlight the dangers of reduction into dichotomous thinking” (Pinterics, 2001, p.16). As a result, Pinterics (2001) posited there is an influence of other
feminist philosophies in third wave feminist thinking (e.g., standpoint theory, queer theory, postmodernist, anti-essentialism), which generally speaking challenge feminist thought based on differences and positions among individuals. Although literature regarding the feminist waves has been driven from the belief of conflict and contradiction between the “generations” of feminists (Bailey, 2002; Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997), recent scholarly work argues that the second and third waves are an evolution of thinking rather than a rejection of earlier feminist thought (Byers & Crocker, 2012).

The history and evolution of feminism in the LAC region is not defined in specific periods or “waves”. However, during the period that comprises the time between the end of the second wave and the beginning of the third wave in the United States, Alvarez, Friedman, Beckman, Blackwell, and Chinchilla (2003) recognized the importance of the “Encuentros” (1981-1999) as a determinant period in the feminist movement in the LAC region. According to the authors, the “Encuentros” were important for the period due to the diversity among the feminists who attended the meetings, and emphasized the richness of different perspectives and experiences, which allowed the women who attended the gatherings to influence change in their counties’ social and political arena. They argue that for the first time, the “Encuentros” had brought together women of different backgrounds (ethnic, gender, age, class), and gave voice to groups that had been traditionally silent. As a result of the feminist activism and movements in LAC, such as the “Encuentros”, women began reflecting upon their position of oppression in a patriarchal culture, and gaining consciousness of the absence of their experiences, and particularly told by women (García & Valdivieso, 2005). But feminist consciousness in LAC did not only represent a fight for equality with men, but also, a struggle
of Latin women who began to question the predominance of Western women’s voices and experiences in the feminist discourse which did not represent their experience as Latin feminists (Curiel, 2009).

Scholars in Latin America recognize that little is documented regarding Dominican feminism and its evolution (Chen, 2004; Curiel, 2009). Therefore, understanding the current standing of women in the Dominican Republic through a hermeneutic phenomenological study, and understanding this phenomenon through a feminist standpoint lens, enables an examination of its society and deeper understanding through women’s “subjugated” position.

**Feminist Perspectives**

Feminist perspectives come as a result of the need to explain feminism and women’s struggles. Societies exhibit different forms of power relations among their members (Welton, 1993). Critical theorists such as Habermas believed that emancipatory knowledge originates from individuals’ desire to accomplish emancipation from domination of some social groups over others (Welton, 1993). Critical perspectives are rooted in the idea that “the development of emancipatory consciousness evolves through a critical praxis that requires our participation as cultural citizens and subjects of the world” (Darder, 2014, p. 1). As critical theory is a social theory concerned with changing society as a whole, emancipation continues to be essential in modern-day understandings of this theory (Allen, 2015).

Critical theories seek to deeply analyze and understand social life and to uncover the assumptions that ground standard understandings of social dynamics (Crossman, 2018). Critical theory developed out of the Marxist tradition and it was established by a group of
sociologists at the University of Frankfurt in Germany. The Frankfurt School was a school of thought through which society’s contradictions where challenged (Cole, 2018).

Other theories emerged following critical theory (e.g., critical race theory, gender and queer theory, critical feminist theory). Feminist theories as a theoretical approach to social science emerged as a questioning of the exclusion of women’s experiences and achievements from the history of knowledge (Amussen, 1996). Feminist perspectives, particularly, feminist standpoint epistemology, enables the critical examination of society through women’s everyday experiences and position in the world (Brooks, 2007).

**Feminist Standpoint Epistemology**

As a result of feminist efforts to raise consciousness regarding women’s marginalization, in the late 1900’s, alongside the second wave feminist movement, women questioned the male-centered theories and models being taught in academia, as these spaces failed to reflect women’s experiences and voices (Brooks, 2007). Brooks (2007) argued that feminist standpoint epistemology was a different way of knowledge building that represented and expressed women’s lives as they themselves experienced them.

Feminist perspectives recognize the importance of understanding women’s lives by developing consciousness through experience and with the intention of transforming society and seeking social justice (Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2007). Feminist scholars claim that feminist standpoint epistemology is a way of breaking the tradition of women’s underrepresentation and omission from the dominant knowledge standards. “Research conducted within a feminist framework is attentive to issues of difference, the questioning of social power, resistance to
scientific oppression, and a commitment to political activism and social justice” (Hesse-Biber & Yaiser, 2007, p. 3).

Moreover, Brooks (2007) argued that feminist standpoint epistemology defies us to critically examine society through women’s experiences and their diverse roles in society. Feminist standpoint epistemology owes its development to feminist consciousness-raising efforts that began in the late 1960’s both outside and within academia. In this period, women began questioning and critiquing the exclusion of their experiences in politics, public policy, and in professions such as law, medicine, business, and in multiple disciplines like science, social science, and humanities (Brooks, 2007). Brooks posited that female students began challenging the absence of females’ experiences in the male-centered theories and concepts they were learning. Women became increasingly aware of the contradictions between their lived experiences and the research models that existed (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). As a result, women created alternative ways of thinking, seeking to give voice to and represent women’s lives.

Feminists’ critique of positivism is also the basis for many feminists to develop different methodologies and methods for research (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004). According to Hesse-Biber et al. (2004), positivism honors the researcher as the “knower” in a hierarchy, resembling the hierarchy of the patriarchal culture, thus producing unequal power relations and universal truths. For feminist methodologies, such as feminist standpoint epistemology, universal truth does not exist in a hierarchal society, but partial and context-based truths. Hesse-Biber and colleagues pointed out that a hierarchal society produces different “standpoints” or views from which social life is lived and experienced.
Dorothy Smith was a creator of feminist standpoint epistemology and she affirmed that knowledge must start from women’s lives, as members of the dominant group only have a partial perspective based on their privileged position within a hierarchy (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004). Standpoint theory not only critically examines the lives of the marginalized, but it also critically looks into the lives of the dominant group, offering varied viewpoints. Narayan (2004) argued that the motivation of feminist epistemology is “to depict an experience different from the norm and to assert the value of this difference” (p. 214).

Feminist standpoint is based on Hegel’s thinking which argued that men’s position of power in social life results in partial understandings while women’s oppressed position affords more complete understandings (Harding, 1986). Harding (1986) posited that “feminism and women’s movement provide the theory and motivation for inquiry and political struggle that can transform the perspective of women into a standpoint” (p. 26), which according to Harding, is a preferable foundation for interpretations of social life.

Standpoint theory, as other feminist theories, has been criticized for not being sensitive to issues of differences other than gender (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004). However, the authors explained that it has expanded to account for gender as a trait that intersects with other socially constructed classifications that overall make up an individual’s standpoint. Thus gender, race and social class together define a person’s “standpoint”. Kowalski-Braun (2014) asserted that feminist standpoint has evolved by “incorporating considerations of difference” (p. 41). In addition, Haraway’s (1988) notion of objectivity refers to considering the knowledge available from different perspectives, not only from the privileged. Moreover, the very issue of partiality that has been questioned about feminist standpoint epistemology and its objectivity, is in fact,
according to Harding (1992) what makes the case for standpoint’s strong objectivity. In her examination of feminist standpoint, O’Brien Hallstein (2000) claimed that “standpoint theorists have maintained a commitment to theorizing and describing the common standpoint women occupy, even as they have begun to recognize differences among women” (p. 3-4). In other words, they recognize both commonalities and differences among women (O’Brien Hallstein, 2000).

Multiple scholars have looked at society and gendered structures through critical feminist perspectives, and draw from standpoint epistemology to understand phenomena from women’s place in the world (Gouthro, 2002; Hekman, 1997; Kowalski-Braun, 2014; Sundberg, 2003; Taylor & Coia, 2014). In her study that explored how feminist perspectives and generational differences influence the leadership practice of women administrators in higher education, Kowalski-Braun (2014) utilized standpoint epistemology to ratify women as the “knowers”. Concurrent with Hegel’s thinking, Kowalski-Braun (2014) recognized that women’s position of subordination in society puts them in an advantageous position as their place in the world enables them to have multiple views and perspectives.

The struggle with defending their space within feminist thought evidenced in the history of feminism in the Dominican Republic, makes standpoint epistemology an essential theoretical ground from which to explore women’s current status in the country. In a culture where social and political forces continue to place men as the privileged group, and women’s primary expected role continues to be that of a caregiver, the critical feminist perspective helped navigate a deep understanding of the social systems and structures that continue to shape women’s experiences.
Leadership and Gender

Starting from the 19th century, the concept of leadership emerged when historians and philosophers began considering who displayed leadership (Cutler, 2014). History, particularly in the military and political context, highlights highly influential men that led people in challenging situations. But the stories of these almost supernatural men in history do not mention women (Cutler, 2014).

Currently, women are active participants and have gained leadership in politics, business, education, and other fields globally, which places them in a much different scenario (Atlantic Council, 2017; Hurley & Choudhary, 2016; Novta & Wong, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2015). As of 2014, women make up almost half of the workforce in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015). Even so, female executives continue to be scarce across diverse sectors of the economy (Atlantic Council, 2017; Cleaver, 2018; Folk, & Rickne, 2016; Novta, & Wong, 2017), although recent studies have identified that women are perceived as equally qualified compared to men (Pew Research Center, 2015). Almost two decades ago, Schein (2001) discussed this phenomenon by stating that obstacles for women in management and women’s absence at the apex of leadership were universal. Global statistics on the proportion of women on corporate boards presented by the Catalyst (2014) confirm gender disparity and women's underrepresentation in positions of power. Likewise, current scholarly conversations assert that in almost all industries, women are well represented in management until they reach the highest levels (Cleaver, 2016). Regardless of the forward impetus with which women have progressed in attaining leadership roles, the gender gap at the upper echelons in organizations does not seem to close.
For decades, the focus on leadership and gender was on which were the most desirable leadership traits, who possessed the appropriate characteristics for leadership, and the perceived effectiveness of male and female leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Cutler, 2014). More recent literature underscores women’s capacity to undertake leadership roles, and argues that while there is evidence of the gains for organizations with women in the highest positions, there is a significant gender disparity in elite positions (Noland, Moran, & Kotschwar, 2016). Both past and present scholarly conversations accentuate that leadership roles are commonly associated with men (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Koenig et al., 2011; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014). These traditional role expectations hinder women’s progress into executive positions in organizations, allowing the gender gap to prevail. The gender gap is a global phenomenon (World Economic Forum, 2017), which motivates continuous research in this issue, particularly the reasons for its persistence.

Much has been said about the differences between women’s and men’s leadership styles, attempting to explain the disadvantages female leaders face (Hasan & Othman, 2012; Wang et al., 2013). However, research has found insignificant differences between female and male leaders’ behaviors (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Mendez and Busenbark (2013) interpreted these accounts by stating that “the important differences between male and female leadership attributions does not seem to result from gender differences in leadership styles or behaviors” (p. 19). Based on existing research, the differences between male and female leadership is primarily based on the assumptions and expectations that society assigns to women’s and men’s social roles.
Role Congruity Theory

Role congruity theory discusses the effects of gender stereotypes and biases that cause prejudice against women (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway, 2001; Fletcher, 2004). Grounded in social role theory, role congruity theory appears in much of the academic literature, which suggests that “a potential for prejudice exists when social perceivers hold a stereotype about a social group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain classes of social role” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574). In other words, the incongruity people perceive between the traits socially expected of women and the characteristics of a leader role, caused by gender stereotypes, contributes to prejudice against female leaders. Similar to what Eagly and Karau (2002) illustrated regarding social role expectations and the characteristics expected of each according to their gender, Ellemers (2018) argued that "differences in the emphasis placed on agency versus care are, indeed, visible in the way men and women behave and the life choices they make" (p. 277).

Moreover, Paxton and Hughes' (2014) accounts exemplify the previous scientific insights (Eagly & Karau, 2002) concerning the double bind women leaders encounter. The authors argued that if women leaders display traditionally masculine leader traits (assertiveness and dominance), they are perceived as good leaders, but do not meet the expectations of their roles as women. Paustian-Underdahl et al.’s (2014) meta-analysis extended role congruity theory by proposing that the incongruity in gender roles, caused by gender role expectations, may also affect men in organizational contexts, suggesting that stereotypes caused by social role expectations are not exclusive of the female gender.
Ibarra et al. (2013) discussed the double bind female leaders face. Consistent with role congruity theory, the authors argued that gender stereotypes contribute to women being seen as less suitable than men to enact leadership because of their social sex role expectation. But on the other hand, if women act more like what is traditionally expected of men (assertive and decisive) and different from what is expected of their sex role (caretaking and sweet), they are negatively judged.

Earlier research also suggested that “women who strive for leadership positions are in a double bind: They can enact communal behaviors and be liked but not respected or enact agentic behaviors and be respected but not liked. Agentic traits are typically ascribed to men (assertive, competitive, and dominant) and communal traits are traditionally associated with women (affectionate, compassionate and gentle) (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011). In either case, they risk being disqualified for leadership roles” (Rudman & Glick, 2001, p. 744). For Rudman and Glick’s (2001) study, 179 Rutgers University undergraduates in the United States evaluated a videotaped agentic or communal, male or female applicant for a computer lab manager position. Study participants rated the applicants based on competence, social skills, and hireability. Rudman and Glick’s study explained why agentic women face a backlash. The study’s findings showed that the agentic female applicant was discriminated against and not liked, and the male applicant's social skills and hireability were less affected by his dominative style.

Although current research suggests that women tend to enact leadership styles that are suitable for the challenges of present-day organizations (Eagly, Gartzia, & Carli, 2014), gendered stereotyped expectations obstruct these advantages for women (Hoyt & Murphy,
“Members of marginalized social groups are often acutely aware of the stereotypes associated with their social group, and they are aware that others may respond to them based on these stereotypes” (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p. 7). These ideas concur with the body of literature (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 1995) that over decades has advocated that stereotyped-based expectations can affect women and contribute to their underrepresentation in executive roles. Nonetheless, women who display characteristics not expected of their gender role, are judged.

In accordance to the literature on social role expectations and role congruity theory, Rhee and Sigler (2015) found that male leaders were preferred over female leaders. Their study also found that female leaders who demonstrated characteristics that go against their gender role expectation were perceived as even less effective. Through video samples of dramatized leaders, the authors examined the perceptions of leader effectiveness and preferences regarding gender and leadership styles. Their study relates to role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders, where female leaders who demonstrate leadership traits that are stereotypically assigned to men, are perceived as less effective because their enactment of leadership contradicts traditional expectations of female leaders’ traits. Gender role expectations cause gender stereotypes and biases, which determine people’s opinions and assumptions about men and women, and influence leaders’ perceived effectiveness.

**Gender Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are general beliefs about members of a social group; and gender is a main attribute when it comes to perceptions about people (Ellemers, 2018). Crites et al. (2015) argued that, “in our society, stereotypes are almost always perceived as negative because they can lead to discrimination and they reduce the amount of individuality amongst different
people” (p. 1). Meaning that these stereotyped categories “standardize” beliefs about individuals in certain groups, not considering individual traits, in this case.

According to research, prejudice against women continues to be one of the key obstacles in women's progress (Bear, Cushenbery, London, & Sherman, 2017; Brescoll, 2016; Fischbach, Lichtenthaler, & Horstmann, 2015; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). "Discrimination became the most powerful narrative about the reasons for women's underrepresentation in leadership roles” (Eagly & Heilman, 2016, p. 351). The marginalization of women in roles that are traditionally ascribed to men is underscored in the existing evidence of the cultural masculinity of leadership stereotypes (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011).

According to Ellemers (2018), stereotypes affect women who aspire to positions of power. “Gender stereotypes reflect the primary importance we attach to task performance when judging men and to social relationships when considering women” (Ellemers, 2018, p. 277). Reflecting on the stereotypical expectations of the social roles of men and women, Eagly and Heilman (2016) discussed the factors affecting women's attainment of high-level leadership positions. In their review of current scholarly work on leadership and gender, they argue that research has identified several obstacles that impede women's advancement into executive positions. Stereotypes and prejudice against women remain key to women's lack of progress (Eagly & Heilman, 2016).

Sex role stereotypes have been addressed in research for decades (Rhee & Sigler, 2015; Schein, 1973; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996). Results of these studies were consistent with role congruity theory. Studies document how sex role expectations produce negative
perceptions about women’s qualifications for management; as management is an occupation traditionally associated with men. Schein (1973), who created the “think-manager-think-male” paradigm, confirmed that there was a significant similarity between the descriptions of men and managers, but no similarity between women and managers. According to Schein and his colleagues (Schein, 1973; Schein et al., 1996), the belief that men are more likely than women to possess the required characteristics for upper management inhibit women’s progress into managerial occupations.

A more recent examination of the traditional expectations of sex roles confirmed the overall masculinity of leader stereotypes (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Koenig et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of existing research that have examined the cultural masculinity of leader stereotypes, to determine the circumstances among which masculinity is prominent. The studies were examined under three paradigms: (a) think manager think male paradigm, (b) agency-communion paradigm, and (c) masculinity-femininity paradigm.

**Think manager think male paradigm.** According to Koenig et al. (2011), “the think manager-think male effect occurs when men and leaders are similar and women and leaders are not similar” (p. 617). In the studies analyzed by Koenig and colleagues under the “think manager think male paradigm”, separate groups of participants rated a leader category (e.g., successful middle manager), women, or men on a scale of gender- stereotypical characteristics (Koenig et al., 2011). The characteristics in most of the studies included agentic and communal personality traits. (e.g., aggressive, modest, kind). The mean rating of managers (leaders) were correlated with the mean rating of men, and women separately. The examination determined
that the studies analyzed under the “think manager think male” paradigm revealed a more masculine stereotype. A higher similarity between men and leaders compared to women and leaders was confirmed.

**Agency-communion paradigm.** In the studies analyzed by Koenig et al. (2011) under the agency-communion paradigm, study participants rated a leader category on separate masculine (agentic) and feminine (communal) stereotyping scales to confirm whether the stereotyping of leaders was more masculine than feminine. The analysis of the studies confirmed a more masculine stereotype, with study participants rating managers as higher in traits traditionally associated with men (e.g., agentic). The agentic-communal paradigm differs from the “think manager think male paradigm”, as it explored the content (traits) of leader stereotypes. Whereas the “think manager think male” paradigm addressed the comparison of similarities between men and leaders, and women and leaders.

**Masculinity-femininity paradigm.** Participants in these studies rated leader roles and other occupations on a single rating scale (masculine vs. feminine) (Koenig et al., 2011). The studies analyzed under the masculinity-femininity paradigm tested the stereotypes of occupations determining whether they were masculine or feminine, in contrast to the studies under the “agency-communal paradigm”, which rated a leader category on a scale of “feminine” versus “masculine” traits. The analysis established that the studies under the masculinity-femininity effect showed a more masculine stereotype, with participants rating occupations that involved leadership as masculine. The “masculinity-femininity paradigm” is
similar to the “agentic-communal paradigm” as participants rated leaders in general or specific leader roles, in contrast to men and women like in the “think manager think male paradigm”.

Although the three studies used different methods, all three tested the correspondence between gender and stereotypes of leaders (Koenig et al., 2011). The three paradigms examined under Keonig et al.’s meta-analysis of existing research on sex role stereotypes indicated that the stereotypes of leaders were markedly masculine. “The masculinity of the cultural stereotype of leadership is a large effect that is robust across variation in many aspects of leaders’ social context” (Koenig et al., 2011, p. 637). Their analysis also revealed that stereotypes of leaders were less masculine in educational settings than in other fields, and in middle than high-status roles. This confirms gender stereotypes regarding the occupations that men and women are fit for; as education is a career traditionally associated with women. Also, that middle management roles are more common for women than high status leadership (Cleaver, 2016).

According to Koenig et al. (2011), the masculinity of leader role entails prejudice for women who aspire to leadership positions, as “men fit cultural construals of leadership better than women do and thus have better access to leadership roles and face fewer challenges in becoming successful in them” (p. 637).

Brescoll (2016) believed that another form of prejudice towards female leaders is caused by expectations around emotions, and suggests that these expectations are a central obstacle for women’s advancements to and success in leadership roles. The author asserted that the conviction that women are more emotional than men is one of the most durable stereotypes in Western cultures. Women are traditionally thought of as less likely than men to be able to
control their display of emotion, and as a consequence, may be perceived as lacking the abilities to be objective, to deal with critical feedback, and to deal with subordinates (Brescoll, 2016).

**Gendered Organizations**

Research tells us that another common barrier for women’s progress in the workplace is gendered organizational culture that keeps women from reaching leadership or contributes to them exiting the workforce before reaching executive positions (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016; Miller & Adkins, 2016; Wilson, 2015). Likewise, Carli and Eagly (2016) indicated that organizational structures obstruct women’s entrance to leadership positions.

Culture refers to the set of collective social norms, values, beliefs and attitudes shared by a group of people (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). The national culture of a country determines the shared beliefs and assumptions which influence social processes and stimulate the conception of stereotypes and roles related to individuals from certain groups (e.g., women, people of color).

Noland, Tyler, Moran, and Kotschwar (2016) asserted that a country’s societal attitudes of discrimination are reflected in the organization’s structure. Correspondingly, studies that have addressed the influence of culture on organizational behaviors and attitudes (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Carrasco, Francoeur, Labelle, Laffarga, & Ruiz-Barbadillo, 2015) have determined that culture influences the social roles assigned to men and women, encouraging gender stereotypes and biases in organizational culture, norms, interactions, and the way they operate.
Similarly, earlier literature discussed the gendered organization to explain organizations that are male-dominated and that abide by norms that reinforce implicit gendered oppression (Acker, 1990). Acker (1990) claimed that organizations are gendered and that traditionally, the image of “workers” equates to men. Meaning that “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (Acker, 1990, p. 146).

Organizational hierarchies, policies and norms are tailored to male characteristics and needs, excluding women from its dynamics. Hence, processes in gendered organizations reflect deeply embedded masculine norms. The author argued that “images of men’s bodies and masculinity pervade organizational processes, marginalizing women and contributing to the maintenance of gender segregation in organizations” (p. 139).

Ely et al.’s (2014) study surveyed 25,000 Harvard Business School alumni from different generations on their opinions about work and family and their career paths. Their investigation found that more men than women were given high-level responsibilities at work. Also, their study revealed that the women who decided to leave their jobs after becoming mothers, did not quit due to parenting issues; they left because they were unsatisfied with their jobs. They were no longer considered for essential assignments and felt they were marginalized for taking advantage of reduced schedules. Likewise, Wilson (2015) argued that “ambitious professional women on track to success in their careers confront enormous dilemmas when they have children” (p. 3). The author explained that life sequencing happens when women decide to leave the workforce to have children and focus on parenting. This decision affects women’s careers regardless of their qualifications (Wilson, 2015).
Studies conducted in Europe (Knorr et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2012) also found that exiting the labor force for parenting affects women’s upward trajectories. These studies revealed that men think that having children negatively impacts women in attaining management positions. The findings imply that since men are the majority in high-level leadership, their decisions to hire and promote women for leadership roles may be influenced by negative assumptions about women's willingness to engage in leadership, and their capacity to take on demanding leadership roles.

A recent study used mixed-methods research to explore the barriers affecting women's progress in Indian companies (Kapur, Mehrotra & Banjerjee, 2016). The authors interviewed 26 senior and middle-level female managers, along with a survey of 134 female managers from information technology, telecommunications, finance, and retail sectors to understand women's experiences with organizational barriers. Study results found that 68% of respondents confirmed that "unsupportive work environments, organizational culture, and societal pressures can be a major barrier in attaining high-level positions" (Kapur et al., 2016, p. 965).

As a way to address the gender gap issue, particularly at the highest levels of leadership, organizations are creating policies and programs in an attempt to eliminate structural biases affecting women's progress (Kapur et al., 2016; Noland et al., 2016; Lublin, 2016). For instance, some organizations have created mentoring programs to support women in achieving leadership positions. Countries in Europe are adopting laws, and organizations have created policies, to ensure gender diversity when hiring and promoting (Carrasco, Francoeur, Labelle, Laffarga, & Ruiz-Barbadillo, 2015). Nonetheless, scholars argue that policies may contribute to
the gender gap problem, but they are not enough to ensure gender parity in the highest leadership in organizations (Datta & Agarwal, 2017).

**Metaphors**

Scholars have used metaphors in their attempt to understand women’s experiences in their pathways to leadership and to portray the obstacles encountered by female leaders usually caused by gender biases and stereotypes. Carli and Eagly (2016) recently argued that "scholarly definitions focus more on the value of metaphor to elucidate concepts that may be vague or complex" (p. 515). Female leaders experience greater scrutiny and judgment than men. Most of the obstacles that women encounter are subtle and implicit and caused by cultural beliefs regarding the roles women and men should enact.

The glass ceiling has been a tremendously popular metaphor in academic and public writing and has become the focus of discussions on gender and leadership over the past three decades. Numerous metaphors, such as the glass cliff and the labyrinth, have been proposed since the glass ceiling to convey women's experiences. The different metaphors have been used to illustrate the obstacles facing women at different moments in their careers. According to Smith et al. (2012), “the majority of the metaphors used in the literature on women’s career development are used to identify antecedents and consequences of discrimination and prejudice against women in the workforce” (p. 441). Women face sticky floors, glass floors, glass cliffs, glass doors, glass escalators, concrete ceilings (Smith et al., 2012), among others, which all illustrate the prejudices women face, and imply it is nearly impossible for women to reach elite positions as the journey to the top is harder for women than men. Research has delved into these metaphors trying to understand the barriers that are holding women from reaching the highest
positions in organizations; and after decades of discussion and research on gender and leadership, scholars continue to explore these phenomena (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Hurley & Choudhary, 2016; Mishra & Mishra, 2016; Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012; Waller, 2016).

The Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling metaphor represents women’s lack of access to high leadership (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). It represents the invisible obstacle in front of women who aspire to reach the highest positions in organizations (Smith et al., 2012). No matter their qualifications, the glass ceiling represents the invisible and impassable barrier between women and elite positions (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). In an exploration of the most common metaphors, Carli and Eagly (2016) explain that the primary implication of the glass ceiling metaphor is that women are not able to advance to the highest levels of leadership due to an invisible barrier they encounter at the time when they are reaching the top. The glass in the glass ceiling metaphor indicates that women put themselves “out there” and work their way towards the top only to find a barrier that is not evident to them until they are very close to reaching the highest organizational echelon.

Also, the glass ceiling metaphor has been adapted to explore discrimination towards women of ethnicities other than white. Recent discussions have extended the conversation by substituting the glass ceiling for a concrete ceiling (Waller, 2016) to convey the context for black, Hispanic and Asian women in leadership. The concrete ceiling metaphor suggests two ideas primarily: (1) the concrete represents an obstacle that does not shatter like the glass structure in the glass ceiling, which proposes it is practically impossible for women to reach the top; and (2) the barrier to the top is seen and evident to black, Hispanic and Asian women even
before they are close to reaching the highest positions. The glass ceiling is more optimistic in its perspective in that it implies that reaching the highest level of leadership is challenging for women, but not impossible, as glass shatters but concrete does not.

**The Labyrinth**

Proposed as an alternative to previous metaphors, Eagly and Carli (2007) portrayed the labyrinth metaphor to describe the obstacles women face throughout their pathways to obtaining leadership positions. In contrast to the glass ceiling, which focuses on the barrier for women when they are close to high levels of leadership, the labyrinth suggests women face challenges throughout their careers (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In a more recent analysis of the metaphors that explain the obstacles women face, Carli and Eagly (2015) posit that “the labyrinth metaphor not only acknowledges these challenges but also suggests that women can advance to very high levels of leadership” (p. 514).

The labyrinth suggests that finding the successful path to leadership is not assured and entails persistence and hard work (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The authors argue that the paths towards leadership in the labyrinth metaphor are diverse and that some lead nowhere, which illustrates arduous journeys to the top for women. Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that the labyrinth illustrates the diverse and contextual barriers women face. Challenges for women in their journeys to leadership include prejudice caused by gender stereotypes, organizational obstacles, decisions about parenting, and so forth.

**The Glass Cliff**

The glass cliff metaphor identified by Ryan and Haslam (2005) explains that women are promoted to leadership positions when organizations are performing poorly. According to
Smith et al., (2012) this metaphor implies that women break the glass ceiling but are exposed to higher risks of failure (e.g., falling or being pushed off a cliff they did not see). Ryan et al.’s (2011) study examined the glass cliff metaphor for women leaders. Their analysis proposed that “women may be favored in times of poor performance, not because they are expected to improve the situation, but because they are seen to be good people managers and can take the blame for organizational failure” (p. 470).

Ryan and colleagues (2011) explained that the evaluation of the effectiveness of a leader depends on the situation and the context in which they are leading. For example, what is expected of a leader in an organization in crisis differs from what is expected of a leader in a successful organization. Therefore, when women are appointed to leadership positions in times of crisis, they are doomed for failure, thrown off a glass cliff. Ryan et al.’s study endorses the glass cliff metaphor by examining the contextual variations of the think manager think male paradigm. Ryan et al. analyzed three studies that investigated gender and leader stereotypes in the context of successful and unsuccessful organizations. Their study confirmed people associated manager with men, in contexts where organizations are thriving. Whereas, people associated manager with a female in contexts where organizations are in crisis. Although these assertions imply that women possess traits suitable for crisis management (e.g., kind, caring, instinctive) (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), the glass cliff phenomenon places women in roles where they face high demands and are most likely going to be negatively evaluated.

Metaphors are significant protagonists in the literature in explaining the burdens women face when trying to balance work and family. Smith et al. (2012) argued that other metaphors
such as the second shift, describe women’s greater responsibilities and participation, in comparison with their partners, in the home and with their families. This metaphor also describes women's workload, including those who are not mothers. Also, the maternal wall depicts the unbreakable barrier women face when they take time off for parenting, and the adverse effects it has on their careers. This metaphor illustrates research findings that assert that gender stereotypes cause people to judge women’s capacity of assuming demanding leadership roles because they are expected to interrupt their careers at some point (Ely, Stone, & Ammerman, 2014). Once women decide to take a break for motherhood, they are often not considered for essential jobs and face the maternal wall.

The evolution and growth of alternatives to the glass ceiling metaphor reflect women’s progress in leadership roles since it first appeared in literature three decades ago. Regardless, the metaphors attempt to convey the prejudice that affects working women. Research literature that uses metaphors to explore these prejudices faced by women highlights the need for adequate organizational structures that provide support, mentoring, and opportunities for women to make it to leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Mishra & Mishra, 2016; Smith et al., 2012).

**Female Leadership in Higher Education**

The unequal distribution of men and women in leadership roles is not an exclusive phenomenon of the corporate field. The higher education sector is no exception in the phenomenon of the prejudice faced by women at work. In the United States, enrollment figures show significant gains in women’s access to higher education; but in academic administration,
the gender gap continues to prevail with women being mostly in female-dominated disciplines with lower salaries and status than men (Allan, 2011). Although women are attaining degrees at higher rates than men (American Council on Education, 2016), they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions, despite their qualifications. Considering the dynamics and norms that function in higher education organizations is relevant for understanding the circumstances keeping women from gaining equality with men in the highest leadership levels.

“As microcosms of society, postsecondary institutions reflect, resist, and contribute to shaping norms of the larger culture in which they are situated” (Allen, 2011, p. 3).

The status of women in higher education has evolved since the 17th century, when they lacked access to postsecondary (or even any formal) education. These gains are a reflection of women’s overall social progress, because access to education has been a primary feature of equality (Allen, 2011). Allen (2011) affirms that the status of women in higher education in the present day is the result of the history and convergence of various social and political circumstances.

During the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States, pioneer women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Wright, and Margaret Fuller, were advocates for women’s equal rights to education as men. Mary Wollstonecraft was an author who expressed her ideas about women’s rights to education in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She argued that education would make of women better mothers and wives, which would be a positive contribution to society (Dentith, 2016). Characteristic of the first wave feminists’ approach, she maintained women’s place in the home. Frances Wright and Margaret Fuller were also activists of women’s equal rights and education. Dentith (2016) explained that Margaret Fuller
particularly advocated for women’s equal rights to higher education. According to the author, through her activism, she challenged the restrictions placed on women’s access to higher education and became the first women accepted at Harvard University. A journalist and teacher, Margaret Fuller created one of the first modalities of women’s continued adult education with seminars she offered for women called conversations.

Other social actions followed throughout the era which resulted in further advances for women’s participation in higher education. In the late 20th century, women’s studies courses were created in some institutions, and the establishment of women’s centers were products of the social movements that accounted for women’s slow but steady insertion into higher education. However, academic leadership scenarios continue to reflect social and organizational barriers that keep women from rising to top positions.

Research shows that, as in other fields, there has been an increase in the number of women occupying leadership positions in higher education (Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014; Pirjan, 2016; Morley, 2014). For the past three decades in the United States, women have earned more than half of all academic degrees (associate degrees, bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees) (American Council on Education, 2016; Garibaldi, 2014). And since 2006, women have earned more than 50% of all doctoral degrees (American Council on Education, 2016). Despite women’s qualifications, Dunn et al. (2014) argue that male-oriented leadership models and norms have limited women's ambitions to achieve higher academic ranks, and their entrance to leadership positions in higher education. Scholars argue that while the number of women earning advanced degrees is promising, few women reach the senior leadership levels (Hannum, Muhly, Shockley-Zalabak, & White, 2015).
Data from the American Council on Education (2016) support Dunn et al.’s argument, by indicating that as of 2014, women made up only 31% of the tenured full professors at degree-granting postsecondary institutions. These recent statistics highlight that the higher the academic rank across all degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States, the fewer women. Women outnumber men in the academic entry positions (lecturers, instructors, assistant professors), but are underrepresented in the highest academic ranks (full tenured professors) (American Council on Education, 2016). The associate professor position has been described by feminist scholars as equivalent to middle-management and the most common position for women in higher education (Albalkhail, 2017; Jacobs, 1996; St. Germain-Driscoll, 2014). Moreover, recent figures evidence a wage gap among female and male faculty, as women earn less than their male counterparts (Hannum et al., 2015). Women’s highlighted presence in entry-level academic positions and in the associate professor academic ranking is an illustration of the “glass ceiling” phenomenon, as the latter is the academic rank below full professor.

As of 2013, only 22% of all university presidents in the United States, and less than half of all other senior administrators, were women (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013). Unfortunately, more recent figures on the gender gap continue to report that only 30.1% of university presidents are women (American Council on Education, 2017). These figures indicate that women's status in leadership roles within higher education has remained practically similar in the past decades, and that progress has been stagnant for women’s access to academic leadership roles.
The percentage of presidencies held by women is higher in two-year institutions that offer associate and certificate degree levels and focus mainly on preparing students for transfer into four-year institutions (American Council on Education, 2016). Rather than in four-year institutions which offer degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels and some have a strong research focus. The latter are regarded as more prestigious institutions. A recent study on American college presidents (American Council on Education, 2017) shows that as of 2016, women presidents are most likely to lead in associate colleges and master’s public institutions. According to this study, private institution presidents receive better benefits (e.g., entertainment budget, health and wellness benefits, residence) than presidents of public institutions. These assertions highlight that women reach the academic presidency majorly under less favorable conditions.

Dunn et al. (2014) conducted a reflective study, which is the kind of research that helps practitioners with self-development by concentrating on the constant processes of learning from their past. The authors used reflection journals to analyze the participant data and identify the commonalities and patterns in their roles as female leaders, to understand their own administrative careers and experience within the higher education context. The study focused on the challenges women in higher education face in their pathways to leadership roles. Their study found that the main challenges they faced as female leaders were colleagues’ and peers’ intentional efforts to stall their promotions, and circumstances in their personal lives. Dunn et al. posited that finding family-work balance, and making time for themselves was a challenge as well. Through their reflections, they recognized that men in equally demanding roles were able to find the balance and “make it work”, because they had partners who stood behind them.
and managed most details of their personal lives so they could focus mainly on their work. These ideas document how organizational and social structures constructed under male norms and images, marginalize women.

Consistent with research on gender and leadership in the corporate field, in a recent discussion Acker (2014) addresses gendered organizational structures in higher education contexts, where there is evidence of the persistence of masculine habits of working, even when there are women in senior academic leadership positions. Acker conducted qualitative research to explore whether women managers in higher education have opportunities and are on their pathways to academic leadership or if they are in a "revolving door" situation that will limit their career progress and cause them to regress to the positions from which they started. The "revolving-door" metaphor has been widely used by scholars (Beck, 1999; Brewer, 2012; Dill, Morgan, & Kelly, 2008) to portray high turnover rates in organizations, where positions constantly change. For instance, in politics the "revolving door" phenomenon depicts political leaders’ constant movements from the public to the private spheres, representing conflicts of interest (Rennie, 2016).

Acker’s (2014) research illustrated women’s entry into managerial positions in academic leadership, from Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. The author’s research examined women’s experiences as managers, and their exits from those positions due to hardships encountered. The author conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 31 women who occupied associate professor positions, referred to by the author as "low-middle manager." According to Acker, the women interviewed described their experiences as managers as stressful, and that the challenges encountered pushed them away from wanting to occupy
leadership positions. They had major management responsibilities as well as having to support students with claims of discrimination and other personal issues. They defined their positions as having too many responsibilities with very few resources, and gendered, which caused them health and identity issues. Particularly, some of the women described tense relationships with colleagues, as their male supervisors even screamed at them at times. Also, the women discussed gendered work by explaining that they had to "clean up messes, like housework" (Acker, 2014, p. 79). Acker’s study confirms how gendered expectations put forth a subtle force for women having to combine “toughness and nurturing” and doing excess emotional work. Study participants explained how they had to do a lot of the work that their male bosses left undone. Also, one female associate dean expressed that the male dean did not like it when people cry, so “if people knew they were gonna cry, they came to me” (Acker, 2014, p. 79). Study participants reported working very long days and feeling tired due to lack of sleep. Almost half of the women in the study left their leadership positions before their planned end date. Their experiences reflect a "revolving door" in that they circled stressful and discriminatory forces while in management, and the adversities brought them back to where they started, as they quit before being close to higher leadership ranks in academic leadership.

Other studies have explored the intersectionality of race and gender to understand the experiences of African American female leaders in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Through a phenomenological method, Davis and Maldonado (2015) examined these women’s lived experiences regarding their development as leaders in higher education institutions. Intersectionality refers to the interaction of several identities and experiences of marginalization and subordination (Davis, 2008). For their study, Davis and his colleague
interviewed Senior level African American female executives, which included deans, provosts, vice presidents, and presidents. Their study found commonalities across women’s experiences in executive leadership roles in the higher education institutions. Despite their leadership abilities, the women in the study reported having experienced race and gender bias, because of their exclusion from informal social networks. Also, study findings revealed that the women in the study were acutely aware of their marginalized position, which in turn made them resilient and motivated them to intentionally “play the game” towards their success into executive positions. The study confirmed that “the women who demonstrated resilience, integrity, intrapersonal characteristics, and social skills were more likely to climb the career leader within their respective organizations, with the support of a mentor and/or sponsor” (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 60).

Although women have broken the “glass ceiling” and made it to top leadership positions, there is evidence of a lack of recognition of women’s leadership capacities in higher education, which perpetuates a persistent underrepresentation of women in the highest ranks of academic leadership (Morley, 2013). It is necessary to challenge traditional beliefs and systems to support women's attainment of leadership roles. Organizations, therefore, play a significant role in women's career progress into academic leadership. Griffiths (2012) studied women leaders in higher education in two universities in England, exploring the perspectives of women in leadership roles in a new and old university. Eighteen women leaders were interviewed regarding their experiences enacting leadership roles, their relationships with colleagues, and mechanisms of support they felt for their work. The author found that the new university had more women in senior positions, and provided better leadership training and mentoring,
compared to the old university, where the women leaders were the minority. Griffiths found that women leaders were highly skillful and that they showed inclusive and collegial approaches combined with direction and vision, which depict a combination of traditional feminine and masculine traits. She also found that at the new university, there was an environment of direction and a caring character enacted from leadership, which provided a supportive context for women leaders. Griffiths’ study underscores that contemporary, more inclusive organizational contexts support women. The women in her study recognized that traditional higher education did not provide flexibility and opportunities for advancements, which underscores how organizational cultures and structures may hinder or support women’s career progress.

Abalkhail (2017) illustrated how traditional cultural beliefs permeate higher education organizations in Saudi Arabia. Women in Saudi Arabia have benefitted from economic resources and access to education in recent decades. According to the author, this progress has resulted in the creation of more job opportunities for women, but organizational and social practices continue to reflect the country’s traditional culture. As in other scholarly discussions, Abalkhail’s examination of women in leadership roles recognizes the importance of understanding cultural and social practices which frame women’s experiences with leadership. “Women’s career development will be hampered by organizational practices that are supported by deeply embedded assumptions of men as natural leaders” (Abalkhail, 2017, p. 167). The study employed a qualitative methodology to examine women's perceptions of the issues influencing their career advancements to leadership, looking into the challenges women face, and the factors that support their progression. Abalkhail interviewed 22 women managers in
two public universities in Saudi Arabia. The study found that recruitment and promotion are one of the main factors influencing women's appointment to leadership positions, as the majority of senior positions in the Saudi universities are held by men with many years of experience who are more likely to be promoted. Particularly, her study found the influence of religion in the structure of power. The Saudis believe that “God privileged man with superior intellectual capacity and greater abilities than women” (Abalkhail, 2017, p. 173). Under this religious belief, men are appointed by God the power over women to care for them, which in turn is reflected in the workplace. Men believe they have power and control over women. In Saudi society, the workplace is physically segregated as women work in separate buildings than men, which restricts interaction between men and women. The experience of Saudi women in the workplace exemplifies how cultural practices and traditional social beliefs regarding the roles of women and men in less developed societies, are reflected in organizational dynamics and gendered power relations, which influence women’s career advancements still in the 21st century.

**Female Leadership in Higher Education in the LAC Region**

During the last two decades in the LAC region, regional organizations such as *Comisión Económica para America Latina y el Caribe* (CEPAL) [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean] and some governments considered the role of education in ensuring the productive, equitable development of the nations. The initiation of these conversations helped to raise awareness of the need for guaranteeing access to education and equality of opportunities for women in the region (Bonder, 1994). Bonder (1994) argued that
movements led by women in the region reached positive levels of impact on institutional, cultural, and political scopes.

Regional feminist movements have worked as forces towards positive change for women in recent decades. Alvarez et al. (2003) explained the influence of social movements on Latin American and Caribbean feminism through an essay that narrated the impact of the “Encuentros” [encounters]. The gatherings started in 1981 in Colombia, and were held biannually until 1999 where the last “Encuentro” took place in the Dominican Republic. They were a series of meetings where feminists from practically every country in the region came together to “build solidarity, devise innovative forms of political praxis, and elaborate discourses that challenge gender-based and sexual oppression” (Alvarez et al., 2003, p. 3). The authors argue that despite the diversity of class, race and ethnicity, age, and sexual identities among the women that formed the “Encuentros”, the meetings were key in challenging masculinist cultural norms, and in finding a common understanding of the circumstances affecting women in the region, including reproductive health, education, gender violence, labor rights and sexuality.

These periodic regional conversations also help reorient movement practices, cultural discourses, and even State policies, as participants learn from the experiences of their counterparts in other countries in the region and often return home inspired by new organizing strategies and ways of framing their issues and demands. (Alvarez et al., 2003, p. 5)

The Dominican Republic’s international occupation was determinant and marked the history of what still today is reflected in social traditions and expectations of women’s roles in society. Feminists from Latin America and the Caribbean (Curiel, 2009; Mayes, 2008) have for long argued that the historical roots of colonization in the region continue to be implanted in
many practices. The later United States’ occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924, provoked a reaction of “Latinidad” nationalism that reinforced even deeper forces of traditional cultural beliefs and practices for women. According to Mayes (2008), “Dominicans inherited an unchanged, Hispanic cultural tradition in which women are silent and holy wives” (p. 351).

In the 1930’s, female activism was strengthened and the Acción Feminista Dominicana (AFD) [Dominican Feminist Action] was established. Mainly comprised of white affluent women, the AFD was supported by dictator Rafael Trujillo who strategically sought political popularity within the group (Mayes, 2008). After Rafael Trujillo’s dictatorship, a process of democratization took place in the country with President Joaquin Balaguer’s leadership. Research advocates that “political changes that accompany democratization are likely to facilitate support for, and the engagement of women” (Morgan et al., 2008, p. 38). At the end of Balaguer’s rule in 1996, democracy in the Dominican Republic unleashed a favorable wave of support for women from other political parties who began to incorporate women’s issues in their agendas. A coalition of women from diverse community organizations, political parties and NGOs developed plans in favor of women’s equal opportunities. According to Morgan et al. (2008) “by the second half of the 1990’s, national-level politicians were using gender-inclusive language in their campaign speeches” (p. 38).

As a result of the demands of feminist groups, in the late 1990’s Congress passed two key laws for women. One law established protection for women from domestic violence, and the second established that 25% of the candidates in city council and Chamber of Deputies were required to be women (Morgan et al., 2008). In 1999, the Secretaría de Estado de la Mujer
[Ministry of Women] was established within the country’s Presidency. An important advancement for women in the country was reached when Milagros Ortiz Bosch became the first female vice president in 2000. These events mark the history of women’s status in the Dominican Republic regarding their social, civic, and economic human rights. Understanding Dominican Republic’s cultural roots helps to understand women’s present standing in the social, political and education fields.

The monumental shifts for women’s status in the Dominican Republic from the 1990’s through the early 2000s, such as the presence of a few women in top political and organizational positions, is evidence of contextual shifts for women. Despite the positive outcomes and progress for women in the LAC region and specifically the Dominican Republic, women are far from reaching equality with men. Some societies in this region continue to be guided by deeply rooted patriarchal social structures (Lamas, 2007). There are 12 countries in the region where still in 2018, women are not granted the right to particular jobs that are considered morally inappropriate or work that implies high physical effort (e.g., fishing on board boats, driving cranes, carrying over 24 pounds, distillation and manufacture of alcohol) (Grupo Banco Mundial, 2018) [World Bank Group, 2018]. Overall, in the higher education arena in the LAC region, women’s education levels are rising (Atlantic Council, 2017). While recent data show that there are more women attaining academic degrees than men in the Dominican Republic, there is an unequal distribution of men and women occupying administrative positions in Dominican universities (Ministerio de Educación Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología, 2017).
The Ministry of Higher Education in the Dominican Republic has been led by a woman for over two decades. Although the Ministry of Higher Education is the highest leadership position within the Dominican higher education system, the appointment of a woman in this position confirms what research has documented regarding women occupying leadership positions in fields traditionally associated to women, in this case, education. Overall, 14 of the 18 senior positions within the ministry are held by men (Ministerio de Educación Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología, 2017). Of the 32 Dominican universities, only three women have held positions of university presidency. These situations highlight the gender gap in Dominican higher education senior positions. Figures in the Dominican Republic indicate that women are far from reaching parity with men in high level leadership positions.

**Summary**

Critical theories examine social life, and try to understand the norms that frame typical interpretations of social dynamics (Crossman, 2018). The feminist perspectives emerged from critical theory, based on the need to understand societal dynamics as a whole, mainly the assumptions that underlie discrimination and prejudice towards women. Of particular interest to this study, feminist standpoint epistemology places women at the center of the research. It provides a lens of critical examination of women’s experiences by interpreting them taking into account the history and background of the participant and the researcher in order to construct meaning.

To examine women’s experiences in leadership positions, it is important to understand the history of women’s social, political and economic advancements, and the social forces that still place them in disadvantage, particularly when they are closest to the highest levels of
leadership in organizations. The feminist movement began in the 19th century as women defended their space in society, seeking equal rights as men. Women’s right to vote and to education were accomplished during the feminist movement. Through the period, women challenged their exclusion from the public sphere, and made their way into the work place.

Recent data indicates that women make up almost half the work force in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015). In the present, women occupy leadership positions in multiple fields; however, they are underrepresented at the highest level in organizations. Research tells us that women face more challenges than men to occupy leadership positions (Hasam & Othman, 2012). A consistent theme in the findings of studies that examine leadership and gender is expectations of gender social roles. These social expectations cause gender stereotypes regarding women’s capacity for leadership, as leadership is traditionally associated with men (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Traditionally, the traits that are expected of a leader are masculine.

Metaphors have been used by scholars for decades to illustrate and explain the circumstances women encounter in their journeys to leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012). The glass ceiling and other metaphors that have been widely used for decades to illustrate the obstacles keeping women from ascending to top positions, highlight the stereotypes and biases that hinder women’s career progress.

The scarcity of women in top positions in higher education administration is consistent with the phenomenon in the corporate setting (Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014). Recent figures show that in the United States, only 31% of the tenured full professors at degree-granting postsecondary institutions are women (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013); and women only
make up 22% of higher education institutions’ presidencies. Similarly, social movements have positively impacted women’s standing in the social, economic, and political arenas, granting them increased participation in the public sphere. In the Dominican Republic higher education setting, there is evidence of an unequal distribution of men and women occupying administrative positions in universities (Ministerio de Educación Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología, 2017). Only three women have been university presidents in the Dominican Republic. Data on female leadership in higher education in the Dominican Republic is scarce, but recent figures indicate that currently, more than half of the senior positions within the ministry of education are held by men (Ministerio de Educación Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología, 2017). The underrepresentation of women as they approach the highest ranks in higher education in the Dominican Republic indicates that the glass ceiling phenomenon continues to hinder women’s career progress consistent with the phenomenon globally and in the corporate field.

Chapter Two provided a review of the literature for this study, starting with an overview of feminist perspectives and of the history of feminism, leadership and gender, and female leadership in higher education institutions. Chapter Three will present the methods for this study, population, sampling strategies, and data analysis. Chapter Four I portrayed the individual narratives of female leaders’ experiences. Chapter Five presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged in the analysis process and a composite description of female leaders’ journey toward leadership. Finally, in Chapter Six I provide a discussion of findings and relate them to existing literature, as well as the implications for practice and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Women face more obstacles than men in achieving leadership (Hasam & Othman, 2012). Despite women’s progress in achieving equality with men, the gender gap in senior leadership in higher education continues to be a phenomenon that persists and continues to affect women’s career advancements. There is evidence of the influence of traditional social structures on women’s social role expectations and the opportunities for achieving elite leadership roles in higher education in the LAC region (Curiel, 2009; Mayes, 2008). However, in the Dominican Republic, there is a lack of research that examines women’s experiences in their journeys into leadership positions in higher education. Understanding women’s experiences through research provides a base for understanding how the country’s traditional cultural dynamics affect women, as well as a framework for evidence based decision making regarding organizational policies and structures to improve women’s current status. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of women who occupy the highest levels of leadership positions in Dominican universities. Specifically, this study examined how the female leaders describe their lived experiences emerging as leaders within higher education and within a male dominated culture.

The following chapter describes the methods used for this study. This chapter defines the study design, sampling strategy and population. In addition, it explains data collection procedures and data analysis, as well as my role as the researcher and reflexivity practice. I also explain the strategies that ensured trustworthiness. And lastly, I describe the limitations and delimitations of the study.
Study Design, Approach and Rationale

The study employed a phenomenological approach, particularly, hermeneutic phenomenology. The study sought to understand women’s pathways toward the highest levels of leadership positions in higher education in the Dominican Republic. The purpose of phenomenology is to investigate, describe and analyze the meaning of lived experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A hermeneutic phenomenological design was suitable for this study since it allowed me to collect data from a criterion sample of women who occupy positions of dean and vice chancellor in Dominican universities, and understand how their experiences have shaped the way they enact leadership (Creswell, 2013). For this study, the hermeneutic phenomenological method focused on the female leaders’ account of what they experienced, and how they made meaning of their experiences (Husserl, 1962). Since phenomenological studies target how people perceive and describe objects and lived experiences, rather than describing the phenomena itself (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), the study’s focus was understanding women’s description of their experiences as leaders. As a result of its history, a patriarchal structure is ingrained in the Dominican Republic’s traditional culture, which defines women’s social roles. Sandberg (2013) argued that “the gender stereotypes introduced in childhood are reinforced throughout our lives and become self-fulfilling prophecies” (p. 22). Sandberg explained that when members of a group are made aware of a stereotype, it is probable that they will perform conforming to that stereotype. The traditional cultural beliefs and dynamics in the Dominican Republic are generally “natural” for women. A hermeneutical approach to the study helped develop awareness in the women, while they constructed meanings of their experiences. This
interpretive focus aided in revealing the obstacles female leaders experience in their journeys to leadership, but that might take for granted due to a lack of awareness. According to Van Manen (1994), phenomenology seeks understanding of the nature of a particular experience; it is a method through which the meanings and essence of phenomena are originated (Moustakas, 1994).

Through a hermeneutic approach to the study, I interpreted women’s experiences guided by the critical examination of Dominican society. Based on the literature on leadership and gender that posits that despite women’s advancements they continue to be underrepresented influenced by traditional social dynamics that affect women; the history of feminism and the social movements that catalyzed change for women and; my own experiences as a female leader in higher education, I gained understanding of the essence of the women’s lived experiences, while also gaining knowledge of my own experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). According to Arnold and Fischer (1994), “as we derive a sense of the text, our own self-knowledge is changed” (p. 59).

Hermeneutics can be traced back to ancient Greece, and its name is derived from the legend of Hermes the Greek messenger who carried messages of knowledge and understanding between the gods and humankind (Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Chang, 2010). Originally, it was employed as a technique for interpreting texts that were difficult to understand (Prasad, 2002), like biblical passages. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) extended hermeneutics by transforming it from a technique to a general theory for understanding and interpreting text “to recover the author’s originally intended meaning” (Prasad, 2002, p. 15). Hermeneutics owes its growth to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (b. 1900). The philosophy
of hermeneutics following Heidegger and Gadamer, emphasizes among other ideas, “the nature of interpretation as a dialogue between the text and the interpreter” (Prasad, 2002, p. 16).

Gadamer’s work extended philosophical hermeneutics to critical hermeneutics by highlighting the importance of tradition, background, and history in our ways of understanding experiences (Byrne, 2001). Hermeneutics emphasize that understanding derives from interpretations rooted in our linguistic and cultural traditions, which according to Gadamer, contribute to our innate predispositions (Byrne, 2001).

The three assumptions of hermeneutics that shaped the research strategy of this study were: (1) hermeneutics refers to the shared understanding of a phenomenon, where different interpretations or “fusion of horizons” are brought together through dialogue, (2) knowledge is constructed through dialogue between the text and the researcher, (3) the researcher becomes part of the “hermeneutic circle” which refers to the continuous movement between the parts and the whole (Paterson & Higgs, 2005).

Hermeneutical phenomenology was particularly appropriate for this study, since the approach facilitated a process of knowledge construction through dialogue and interpretation based on tradition and experience; particularly, the female leaders’ experiences, and my own experiences as a leader. The interpretive strategy was appropriate to enable rich and deep understanding of female leaders’ specific experiences with gender stereotypes caused by cultural social role expectations, and for understanding society as a whole (Patterson & Higgs, 2005). Hermeneutics complemented the feminist perspective that guided the study because through hermeneutics the researcher interprets the participant’s experiences based on the participant’s and her own social context, and experience, which Gadamer referred to as
“historicality”. Feminist standpoint epistemology enables critical examination of society through women’s day to day experiences and the characteristics that defined their “standpoint” (Brooks, 2007).

**Field Test**

I conducted a field test for this study by interviewing three female leaders in one university in the Dominican Republic. The field test helped me practice applying for the HSIRB approval, designing the interview protocol, and conducting the interview. As a result, I came to realize that the interview protocol is a guide for the researcher, rather than a step by step recipe. Not all the questions need to be asked. The interviewees were distracted every time I looked down at the protocol and made annotations. The field test was also an opportunity for practicing probing. One of the women interviewed did not share much information, and the interview was too short and I did not gather enough data. Taking the time for probing, helps with guiding the interviewee into answering the questions and digging deeper into their experiences. This field test also helped me better understand the research process, review the interview protocol, guide the possible analysis, and understand the influence of cultural background in this study.

**Reflections on My Identity (Reflexivity)**

As a female leader in higher education, I have experienced prejudice and biases caused by gender stereotypes throughout my professional career. Based on my personal experience with this phenomenon, I understand that women are expected to act in a certain way in order to be perceived as effective leaders, and to enact their female role as expected by society. Therefore, I am motivated to conduct this study to further understand the prejudices affecting
women caused by gender stereotypes, to explore the experiences with this phenomenon of other women who have reached leadership roles in higher education institutions in the Dominican Republic. Having been raised in a traditional society, where women are expected to get married, have children and stay home to take care of their families, I constantly face judgments in my personal and professional life, which have shaped my perspectives and awareness toward gender stereotypes.

Phenomenology requires the researcher to avoid researcher bias by writing memos throughout the study process, in order to acknowledge personal experiences and assumptions. In phenomenology, practicing reflexivity to bracket or set aside personal experiences and consciously describe the way in which they could shape the findings in the study is a technique for avoiding bias. Moustakas (1994) referred to epoche when being reflexive and setting aside preconceived ideas and prejudices about things; “to refrain from judgment” (p. 33). In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenology requires the researcher to engage in a process of self-reflection in a way that the biases and assumptions of the researcher are key to the interpretative process (Laverty, 2003). Gadamer believed that our past experiences and prejudices enrich our understanding (Byrne, 2001). He referred to prejudice as preconceived ideas of a phenomenon resulting from our past experience and socialization (Byrne, 2001). Researchers in hermeneutical phenomenology are obliged to constantly and continuously critically consider their own experiences and explicitly assert how their experiences or assumptions relate to and aid in constructing meanings. Throughout the study, I kept I wrote memos with reflections, my assumptions, observations and comments that came up before, during and after the interviews.
**Human Subjects Institutional Review Board**

Prior to conducting the study, I requested approval from Western Michigan University’s HSIRB to conduct the research. Refer to Appendix A for HSIRB approval letter.

**Sampling, Subjects, Access, and Setting**

**Site or Source of Potential Study Participants**

This study recruited participants from universities in the Dominican Republic. There are 49 higher education institutions throughout the Dominican Republic, 32 of which are universities. There are differences among higher education institutions as they possess diverse modalities, organizational structures and academic offerings. The study recruited participants from universities in the Dominican Republic because universities are more homogeneous in their structures and for study purposes, it helped me ensure a criterion sample of women leaders who lead units or departments that are similar in their organizational structure.

**Population and Sample**

The sample of the study was five women occupying leadership positions in universities in the Dominican Republic. Since the study purpose is to explore women’s experience in their journeys to leadership positions, the inclusion criteria were:

1) Female deans, vice chancellors and chancellors in universities.
2) Former female deans, vice chancellors and chancellors in universities.

Exclusionary criteria for subjects are:

1) Male leaders.
2) Women who do not occupy or have not occupied targeted positions.
Access and Recruitment

The process to access and recruit participants required I review the organizational charts of the 32 universities’ websites in order to identify female leaders occupying dean and vice chancellor positions. However, most of the university websites did not include contact information for high level administrative positions. I then contacted colleagues to refer me to female leaders in universities. As a result, I recruited eight female leaders that met the criterion detailed above through email invitations (refer to appendix B). As a result, I obtained the five study participants for the study.

In qualitative research small samples are used because the general objective of sampling is to obtain information that is useful for understanding the complexity, depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon, rather than to represent populations as in quantitative research (Plano-Clark & Ivankova, 2016). At the end of each interview, I asked participants to identify an object, illustration or idea that best illustrated their journeys to share in a second meeting. The purpose of the second meeting was to probe more deeply around emerging thematic ideas from the first round of interviews, based on participants’ chosen artifact or illustration. After transcribing the first round of interviews for each participant, I identified emergent themes that helped me guide the second meeting. I sent study participants their interview transcripts before the second meeting as a way to enable self-reflection and analysis of their experiences. Two study participants shared that reading their transcripts helped them in identifying metaphors and analogies that best portrayed their journeys to leadership. I did not send participants the themes until after the second meeting to avoid influencing their perspectives regarding their lived experiences.
Sampling Strategy

For quality assurance, criterion sampling was employed, where all participants met the same criterion (Creswell, 2013). Plano-Clark and Ivankova (2016) stated that this involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest. For this reason, study participants were women with leadership experience at the dean and vice chancellor positions in universities in the Dominican Republic. For study purposes, a “female leader” or “leadership position” was defined as a woman who has led or leads a department or unit in a Dominican university, and who’s responsibilities include leading a team, involvement in academic decisions, as well as resource management and allocation.

I sent the women an email explaining the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate. The email specified that participants were required to occupy leadership positions at the moment or have had occupied leadership positions at some point in their careers, in order to participate. The five women who confirmed participation in the study currently occupy dean and vice chancellor positions. Two female chancellors were invited to participate but they did not reply the e-mail invitation in spite of the follow up. The email explained the meaning of leadership positions in universities for study purposes. Follow up e-mails to the eight women were sent as a recruitment strategy in order to meet the required sample size (five participants). As a result, I obtained the five participants for the study.

Once a potential participant confirmed interest in participating by replying the invitation e-mail, I coordinated with each the site of their convenience for the interview. Once the time and place of the interview was agreed upon, I explained to each participant that the interview
was confidential and that they would sign a consent form at the interview site before beginning. The consent form was enclosed in the email for the participant to read before the interview. Each participant interviewed signed the consent form agreeing to participate in the study. The consent form described the purpose of the study and explained that all information shared was strictly confidential.

**Data Collection Methods, Procedures, and Instrumentation**

**Forms of Data**

**Interviews.** In-depth interviews were conducted in order to explore and understand women’s experiences in their pathways to leadership. According to Giorgi (1997), in qualitative research, data may be collected verbally using open-ended questions that require extensive answers, through which the researcher searches for a comprehensive description of the participant’s experience. Interviews were recorded using my phone with consent of the participant to facilitate transcription (Creswell, 2013).

**Representation of their journeys.** As a complement to the interviews, I solicited participants to represent their journeys using an artifact, drawing or illustration to present and discuss in our second meeting. People make meaning of their experiences and are able to express them in different ways (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued that individuals make meaning in deeper ways when they express their experiences through art (e.g., symbols, metaphor, pictures). Pictures are a means of allowing individuals to tell their story about a particular situation (Guillemin, 2004). All study participants described the meaning they gave to their journeys through a metaphor or analogy. Three women presented a drawing or picture (refer to appendix C). During our second meeting, I guided our conversation...
based on the emergent themes I identified from study participants’ interview transcripts to dig deeper into the meanings they assigned to their lived experiences toward leadership.

**Data collection Protocols and Procedures**

**In-depth interview.** A protocol was used to guide the interview. Questions in the interview protocol were guided by the research questions (refer to appendix D). The first round of interviews was conducted at participants private office spaces. Interviews were recorded to ensure verbatim transcription and to facilitate the transcription process. The purpose of the study, interview length, and confidentiality were discussed with each participant. Participants read and signed the consent form agreeing to participate in the study at the beginning of the interview (refer to appendix E). The first interview length went from 45 to 90 minutes.

**Second meeting.** I coordinated a second meeting with each study participant where they presented and described the varied representations of their journeys. As mentioned before, I guided the conversation and probed into participants’ accounts guided by the initial themes that appeared during my transcription of each study participants’ in-depth interview. The length of the second meetings with each participant was 30 to 50 minutes.

**Data Analysis**

**Type of Data Analysis**

The approach for the study was inductive data analysis, through which data was sequentially coded and grouped into subsequent codes and themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Richards (2015), coding qualitative data implies reexamining data pieces until patterns and explanations are understood.
Analysis Steps

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and read several times in order to identify salient points or segments in the text (Creswell, 2013). Giorgi (1997) stated that phenomenology is holistic, and suggests reading through all of the data before starting the analysis process. However, in an initial stage of the process, while transcribing each separate interview, I identified salient themes in each to help me guide the second meeting with participants. For each participant, I highlighted the in vivo codes and copied them in a separate document to bring to the interview as a guide. Therefore, my analysis process began immediately after each interview with participants.

I then transcribed the second meeting with each participant. To further reveal themes and sub-themes, I proceeded to read the interview transcripts again and the transcripts of study participants’ representation of their journeys individually various times and highlighted additional fragments or in vivo codes of the texts that had a relevant essence (Saldaña, 2013). I then copied them in the document with the themes that emerged initially. Next, I put together the themes that seemed to relate. I again read the transcripts to get a sense of the context that framed the meaning of the initial fragments in order to write the individual narratives. Hence, this first set of themes that emerged from the transcripts of the first and second interview with each participant, guided the story frame for writing the individual narratives of the women in my study. When analyzing data, the researcher creates and writes a story about the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). The process itself of writing the narratives helped me further grasp the essence of their experiences and identify the story frame. I then went back to the transcripts again to confirm if there were additional segments of the text that made sense to the
first set of themes that emerged. Then went back to the narratives to confirm the themes were represented in each. 

Although my knowledge of the phenomenon guided the identification of the emerging themes from the beginning, I then began the “hermeneutic circle” of continuous dialogue and movement between participants’ accounts and my personal knowledge and assumptions about the phenomenon based on my “historicality”, as Gadamer referred to it (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). During this stage, I went back to the reflections and observations I recorded in my memos which aided me in remembering ideas that had come up at the moment of the interviews. This “fusion of horizons” produced a shared understanding of participants’ experiences. I then grouped, separated and also eliminated pieces from the fragments classified within the set of themes, which resulted in reduced themes and, sub-themes for each of the themes (Saldaña, 2013). Analysis in phenomenology is fundamentally a writing exercise, only through writing and rewriting can the researcher extract meaning.

Concurrently to this process, I employed metaphorical analysis to identify sub-themes in the data (Saldaña, 2013). Countless researchers have used metaphors to look for meaning of study participants’ accounts of their lived experiences (Meyer, 2005; Ramakrishnan, 2014; Skorobohacz, Billot, Murray, & Khong, 2016). Ryan and Bernard (2003) explained that the seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson “observed that people often represent their thoughts, behaviors, and experiences with analogies and metaphors” (p. 90). The women in my study used metaphors and analogies to portray their lived experiences that they represented through drawings, pictures and descriptions of artifacts. However, during the interviews they also used expressions and shared ideas using figure of speech and metaphors. Women’s experiences with
leadership have been described through metaphors by scholars and the general public for
decades. I also identified the meanings of the themes that developed and related them to
various metaphors that have been used to describe the obstacles women in leadership encounter
(Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The themes and sub-themes resulted in inferential and explanatory
codes that arose from the texts (Saldaña, 2013). Last, my general interpretation of the
phenomenon was presented in the study findings through the content developed in each theme
and especially through the composite narration of their experiences (Merriam, 2002). The
findings from my study reveal female leaders’ ideas, perceptions and understandings of their
journeys toward leadership.

**Trustworthiness in Analyzing Data**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1982), trustworthiness of a study serves to evaluate its
significance. The strategies used to assess qualitative research must fit the study design being
conducted (Krefting, 1991). I practiced trustworthiness in the study through several strategies:
Member checking, reflexivity, peer debriefing, and triangulation. These strategies determined
the credibility and confirmability criteria for evaluating trustworthiness in my study (Lincoln &
Guba, 1982).

Member checking ensured credibility in data analysis, by having participants review and
verify transcripts. To ensure I accurately represented female leaders’ descriptions of their
journeys, I emailed interview transcripts to each participant. As mentioned previously, I first e-
mailed the in-depth interview transcripts; and after the second meeting, I emailed the
transcripts of their representations of their journeys. Two study participants expressed that
reading the transcripts of their interviews allowed them to reflect on their experiences.
According to Krefting (1991), the researcher must be able to represent the lived experiences of the study participants as adequately as possible. As part of the member checking strategy, after both meetings with study participants were conducted, I sent each participant the themes that emerged from their interviews and second meeting together with the transcripts of the second meeting. Of the five participants three responded confirming the accuracy of the interview transcripts and one responded the second email with transcripts from the second meetings and themes.

The technique of reflexivity ensures neutrality is kept during data analysis, which ascertains confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). I practiced reflexivity by writing memos acknowledging my personal experiences and assumptions regarding the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I also wrote notes, ideas and observations that came up during the research process and specially during the interviews. Throughout the study, but especially when analyzing the data, I was continuously self-reflective and conscious of my history and my personal experiences with the phenomenon, to ensure awareness of my preconceived ideas or “prejudice” as Gadamer referred to them. This process enhanced my understanding of my own experiences, my relation with the phenomenon to construct new knowledge and understandings. In the following Chapters Four, Five and Six, I make my assumptions explicit acknowledging how my experiences shape my interpretations of the phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

Peer debriefing establishes the credibility evaluation criterion that ensures trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). By conducting analytical sessions with peers, I was able to become aware of assumptions and ideas that otherwise might not arise and that I may take for granted. I
consider this strategy as part of the collective knowledge building through dialogue, which enriches the study. I conducted peer debriefing face to face sessions and through WhatsApp chat. This constant exchange helped me make relevant decisions regarding my study process. I documented the face to face sessions in my memos.

In addition, I employed triangulation to ensure credibility of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1982) argued that triangulation allows better understanding and entails using different sources of data. Since multiple sources of data were used in this study, interviews and representations, triangulation aided in ensuring credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). As such, the metaphors and analogies the women described through pictures and artifacts served as additional data where study participants had the opportunity to illustrate the meaning they gave to their experiences as female leaders in universities.

**Limitations**

The higher education system in the Dominican Republic is fairly small (49 higher education institutions and 32 universities), which enables most institutions’ leaders to be acquainted. The information the women shared about the cultures and norms in their institutions may have been limited because I am involved in higher education and am a former dean at one of the universities. Also, while writing women’s narratives, I made an effort to ensure that I portrayed the context that accurately framed women’s lived experiences without disclosing information that may identify the institutions.

**Delimitations**

The delimitation of the study were the 32 universities in the Dominican Republic and women deans, vice chancellors and chancellors.
Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand female leaders’ experiences in their pathways to leadership in universities in the Dominican Republic. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the study revealed women’s lived experiences in their pathways toward leadership, providing deeper understanding of Dominican culture and social norms that frame their experiences.

Five female leaders in universities were the study sample, particularly female deans and vice chancellors. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with study participants. Data was analyzed through an inductive process, in which themes and sub-themes emerged and helped frame women’s descriptions of their journeys.

Chapter Four presents the female leaders’ individual narratives. Chapter Five describes the themes and sub-themes that emerged and a composite narration of women’s experiences. Finally, Chapter Six provides a discussion of the findings and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER FOUR

INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVES

The following chapter presents the descriptions of the lived experiences of the women in my study, by illustrating their journeys into leadership as described by them, and including their personal representation of their journeys. Each woman described her lived experiences in her pathway to leadership through an in-depth interview. The interview allowed me to get to know each participant, the opportunities they have had, the obstacles they have encountered and their own understanding of their lived experiences as female leaders. Following the interview, each woman in my study shared an image, a drawing, or artifact, and described it through a metaphor that best illustrated her pathway toward leadership, allowing for a richer understanding of her personal standpoint. As mentioned in previous chapters, feminist standpoint epistemology is the lens used in this study to understand women’s experiences, allowing for a critical examination of Dominican society through women’s everyday experience in their journeys into leadership positions in higher education (Brooks, 2007). Therefore, the narratives help explore the individual experiences of the female leaders and enable the reader to know each participant, while respecting their individuality and highlighting their particular voices before assigning meaning and interpretations to their personal accounts. In addition, the narratives also served as data analysis tools; as such, the descriptions of their individual experiences aided in confirming the themes that first emerged from the analysis process during the transcriptions of each participant’s interview and the representations of their journeys.
Through hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher gains understanding of the essence of participants’ lived experiences, while also gaining knowledge of her experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Throughout the research, I kept a journal of thoughts, concerns and ideas that have come up before and during the interviews with study participants, during transcription of the interviews and while writing the individual narratives. This self-reflective process aided me in becoming aware of my preconceived ideas or “prejudices”. As an attempt to refrain from judgment and to honor women’s voices in their individual narratives, the first narrative in this chapter is my own. Through writing my narrative I acknowledge my own experiences and close relation to the phenomenon. In addition, I describe my overall experience as a female leader in higher education through a metaphor that best echoes my journey.

Overview of Participants’ Profile

The study sample were five women occupying the highest leadership positions in universities in the Dominican Republic. Two of the five women are deans, and three are vice chancellors, all in the academic area in universities. Age, years in the current leadership position, their academic background and overall experience in higher education before entering their current positions varied across participants. This section presents the reader an overview of participants’ profile providing a broader context to understand each of their experiences. Hence, Table 1 presents an overview of each participant’s age, academic background, years in the current leadership position, and experience in higher education.
Table 1  

**Overview of Participants' Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Current Leadership Position</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
<th>Academic Background</th>
<th>Previous Experience in Academic Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Academic vice chancellor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>María</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Academic vice chancellor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Graduate vice chancellor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. HE= Higher Education

Although they shared various common themes, which will be addressed in Chapter Five, their overall experiences were different. The diversity among their journeys is what makes their accounts so rich in context and allows a critical examination of women’s current standing in Dominican culture. The names used for each woman in the study are pseudonyms.

**Laura**

After being a female leader for almost two decades, I have a personal interest in exploring women’s experiences in leadership. In particular, I have always been interested in examining how women transit the leadership world in an environment where they are expected to enact certain roles as a result of traditional beliefs. Therefore, the following narrative is the description of my journey towards leadership in higher education, by acknowledging the lived experiences that have shaped my leadership and my understanding of Dominican culture, and
women’s position within it. At this point of the study, I find it necessary to again make a conscious attempt to reflect on my perspectives and understanding of the influences that have shaped my experiences as a female leader. I do this by describing my particular experiences and by acknowledging that based on my standpoint, they are different, but at the same time similar to the experiences of the women in my study. Likewise, viewed from the feminist critical perspective in which this study is grounded, the experiences the women in my study shared helped me further understand underlying meanings of my own experiences.

I have a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education and a master’s degree in educational administration. While I completed the bachelor’s degree, I worked as a teacher in a school, where I continued teaching at the preschool level until I graduated and moved to Boston, Massachusetts, to pursue the master’s degree.

I began my career in administration when I returned from studying abroad. I worked as principal for a k-12 private school for four years. Then, when my daughter was born, I decided to take time off to stay at home. During that time, I was not aware that I missed my career until I went back to work, or maybe it was too short of a time to even notice. Therefore, after one year away from paid work, I was offered a job leading an educational project in a private university, and that is when I transitioned into the higher education sector. When the project ended, I was offered to stay full time in the university to coordinate the only graduate program the university offered at the time, and to lead continuing education programs. During my first three years in the university, I created the graduate and continuing education department, and was promoted to dean of graduate studies and continuing education. I occupied the dean position for the next 11 years.
I was 26 when I took on the job in the university. Age has always been an obstacle. Even now, almost two decades after, it still is. I remember wearing suits all the time and putting my hair up to appear older. I felt the need to let people know that I was a mother, as if somehow, that gave me certain status. Very often people would say, “You are so young to be a dean.” I felt as if I had to make an effort to seem more formal and mature during meetings, conscious of every word that I spoke, making sure my ideas sounded “mature enough”. It was stressful because I was too aware and, eventually, it made me self-conscious. These experiences shaped the way I behaved. As such, they forced me to hide my natural personality and wear a “poker face”. It was exhausting. But this happened mostly in my interactions with people outside the university. I had to work with the Ministry of Education and international universities; and these were the settings where I received those kinds of remarks that made me feel judged due to my young age, until I proved I was capable. I had to work harder to demonstrate that I had the knowledge and experience, and that was the reason I was in that position. Although I was among the youngest members in the academic council, and led a diverse team, age and gender never seemed to influence my experiences with colleagues within the university. I guess they acknowledged that, even though I was young, I was qualified.

We were three female deans, and two female vice chancellors at the university. Often we would attend press conferences and media tours along with the chancellor to discuss the university’s projects and initiatives. The male directors of the newspapers and television shows would inappropriately comment about how lucky the chancellor was to be surrounded by “beautiful young women,” as if we were trophies. Although the chancellor did not take part in
the comments, this was the reaction from others. There were various occasions when this sort of situation would occur. That is a social dynamic that is “normalized” in Dominican culture.

I believe the Dominican culture is traditional and male dominated. Although women are working outside the home and excelling in most settings in the country, the narrative has not changed. Women are still expected to be the main caregivers and to have most of the responsibility over managing their households, which puts a lot of pressure over women. Men are still considered to be the main providers. Even so, when women excel their husbands professionally and financially, they are judged because that is not their expected role in the family.

I have lived experiences where I have been judged for pursuing a career. People have questioned my priorities as if I am expected to choose between one aspect over the other. Most of the judgments come from women. Women have judged me for working and even for pursuing a Ph.D. instead of being dedicated exclusively to my family. Also, men’s opinion of my professional achievements is that I have been successful because I stand out for being white, blond and blue eyed. Yes, I have heard this more than once! I even had a man tell me once that I should be the one directly marketing the graduate programs because my looks would certainly ensure an increase in enrollment.

These lived experiences have enabled me to become aware and to understand the underlying meaning of these subtle and sometimes explicit messages. Patriarchal structures are still embedded in most organizational cultures in the Dominican Republic and they perpetuate discrimination towards women. I recall an experience in which they emphasized the importance of dressing appropriately for work and detailed the dress code for employees. In the picture of
the flyer, there were women and men; however, the guidelines for dressing “professionally” were all directed to women. Skirts must be worn knee level, make up should be discrete, hair done in the beauty parlor, nail polish colors must be discrete, and so forth. I was outraged by this email. Besides the fact that it implied that a person’s professionalism is measured by her looks; the dress code guidelines only addressed women. Moreover, at the time, all members of the human resource staff were women.

I was raised in a traditional, Catholic home. My mother was a stay at home mom, dedicated entirely to her husband and her children. My father was the only provider. In my family, my father made the important decisions. While growing up, my mom taught me that women take care of their families and serve their husbands, just as she did. We had a family owned business. My brother was encouraged to study administration so he could continue with the family business once my father retired. Although my father never considered my sister and me to lead the business, he did encourage me to pursue a career. He supported me in becoming independent and to succeed in any career I wished to develop, for which he ensured I received the best education. My parents taught me I was capable of achieving my goals. They continue to support my career, the decisions I make, and demonstrate they are proud of my accomplishments. Now that I have my own family, I am raising my son and daughter both to be independent. They are both expected to help at home and have the same responsibilities regardless of their gender. They know I am passionate about my career, and that I work hard to achieve my goals. We are raising them to have self worth and to pursue their dreams equally. Although my husband supports my decisions regarding my career, and is an involved parent, I have most of the responsibility of managing our home. Questioning my mothering abilities is
an issue I have struggled with since I became a mother. I feel guilty most of the time for not spending more time with my family when I am at work, but also feel guilty when I take time off to enjoy my family. So it is an inner struggle that challenges me every day.

My journey towards leadership began at a very young age. I have had great opportunities to develop my career, and I have lived both good and bad experiences. Every one of my lived experiences has been a lesson. Through them, I have developed into the person I am. I continue to learn and grow everyday.

**Traffic**

I will portray my lived experiences towards leadership through a metaphor. Everyone who has visited the Dominican Republic knows that traffic is challenging and frustrating. For every kilometer you move forward, you have to stop due to a long line of cars, people crossing the streets in the middle of the highway, double-parked cars, and motorcycles getting in your way. Therefore, through this metaphor, I compare my lived experiences with the experience of driving in Dominican Republic; you advance, but are stopped or slowed down by an obstacle every few minutes. In this country, a near destination takes longer to arrive to due to the obstacles encountered in your way. You have to put in additional effort to find short cuts, and avoid traffic. I compare this to my experiences related to having to work harder to demonstrate I am qualified due to prejudices, that in my opinion, are influenced by age and gender; being forced to act in a predetermined way to avoid being judged.

In spite of how difficult it is to survive in Dominican Republic traffic, after hard work, perseverance, and many obstacles, you arrive to your destination. You might find a bigger obstacle because you were late for a meeting, but you adapt and deal with that problem as well.
Patricia

Patricia has been the academic vice chancellor for three years in a public university. She previously worked in marketing and came from outside the university with no academic experience. She recognizes that becoming the academic vice chancellor has been challenging for her as she has had to learn about the academic field and gain experience by making mistakes, learning from them, growing, and moving on. She described her pathway towards leadership in higher education as challenging but enriching. “It has been an unforgettable experience, very enriching. Which has allowed me to grow. If you ask me, for example, how my life was three years ago, and how it is now, I can tell you with a lot of certainty that it is a totally different before and after.”

Patricia conducted herself gracefully throughout the interview. She demonstrated assertiveness in every statement she pronounced, as if her lived experiences and personal growth have endorsed her confidence. Patricia spoke in a soft, friendly tone of voice, smiling and laughing once in a while when hearing her own opinions spoken by herself out loud. Patricia recognized that participating in the interview, and the second meeting that followed, allowed her to think about her experiences and examine the underlying meanings; as such she shared: “Let me tell you that when one has these spaces, because one does not often sit and think about one’s life experiences, you are able to reflect on why things have happened the way they have.” Likewise, she expressed that the interview highlighted her appreciation of the opportunities she has had to develop and progress within higher education. “Thanks to the support of our chancellor, I have entered everything that has to do with the academic area, and I
can tell you that I have discovered through that support, through that opportunity, I have discovered my vocation.”

Patricia completed a bachelor’s degree in marketing and also worked in the field before entering the higher education context. For 12 years, she was the public relations department’s marketing manager at an NGO that worked with youth in vulnerable environments. She expressed a profound interest in working with and helping youth, and discovered that her prior work in the NGO was very similar to her work as the academic vice chancellor in the public university. She viewed the experience gained in her previous work as an opportunity to continue to support the needs of underprivileged youth in the country through her work in the university. She feels as though the purpose of both institutions is to transform Dominican society by supporting and mentoring youth who are at a disadvantage due to their economic and social context. She further explained that the similitude and relevance among her previous experiences in the NGO and the experiences she has lived throughout her journey in the university have not been unintentional. Patricia believes they are God’s plan for her life and described these as “Godly acts.” She recognized God in every life experience, in the opportunities she has had, and also in the obstacles she has encountered in life. As a Catholic, she firmly believes that God has a divine plan for her life.

The chancellor hired Patricia to become the Social Responsibility Department manager when she entered the university. She was in charge of everything the institution did with and for the community. She was in that position for six months before becoming the academic vice chancellor. She said she was promoted to the vice chancellor position because she was recognized for her excellent performance and the results of her work as the Social
Responsibility manager in the university. The academic vice chancellor position had been vacant for a while. When remembering this, she again mentioned God’s work in the opportunity she had to occupy the academic vice chancellor position and expressed gratitude towards the chancellor. “This opportunity has been with no doubt thanks to the chancellor who has seen in me, maybe more than what I have seen in myself. Sometimes, one does not recognize the strengths that one has. But he did see them, and decided to support me in that sense.”

As she shared her arrival into the academic vice chancellor position, her journey throughout, and the opportunities she has been given, she described the obstacles she has encountered as well, and the struggles she continuous to face. She described being rejected by her team and feeling that they did not accept her. She said she was judged for being new to the institution and also for having no previous academic experience. She reported that her decisions were not respected and she expressed having to give more explanations than she felt necessary. Besides from recognizing being inexperienced to occupy the position and the challenges this has presented to her, she pointed out age and gender as the main obstacles in her journey. Patricia is in her mid thirties. She described resistance mainly from department chairs and faculty who are older than her and have been in the institution for many years. She stated that men outnumber women in the team she directly leads, and that leading men is not an easy job for a woman. “The situation for us women is difficult, leading a group of men is difficult.” She described her personality as tough. She explained that men in her team challenged her and resisted her leadership until she demonstrated that she was tough. She said she has to prove herself more for being both a woman and also younger than her colleagues. However, Patricia
described leading women as more challenging than leading men. “Culturally, us women compete with one another, unfortunately. And those are the things that limit us women to continue climbing and to occupy leadership positions nationally.” She described this as the major obstacle for women, women competing with each other. It seemed as though the resistance and difficulties she faced as a woman leading a group comprised mostly of men, were overcome once she demonstrated they did not affect her. However, the struggles she has experienced leading women are more challenging for her as she explained that they continue to affect her leadership. She explained that with the women in her team she has had to deny her true personality (tough) in order to survive as the vice chancellor and in order to get them to achieve goals and follow her lead. While describing this situation, her eyes filled up with tears, demonstrating perhaps that this situation affects her deeply. She explained that they expected her to be understanding and nurturing “because they (women) come from a culture that is permissive and light”, and they expected her to be that way. Patricia described having to suppress feelings like anger and discomfort and also avoid showing a tough personality during meetings to prevent judgments about being overly emotional and out of control.

Patricia also reported that “this job is not easy, it is a tough job that absorbs you. Working in the academic area, and particularly in this position, one even sometimes forgets about one’s self. You forget about yourself in order to achieve goals.” She shared that in addition to the responsibilities and pressures that come with the academic vice chancellor position, being a mom and wife is also an additional responsibility. “When you get home late, tired from your work day, then you also have to be with your children, and take care of your family”.

During our interview, I asked her to reflect on Dominican culture. She described Dominican culture as “machista” (male chauvinist), and explained that in Dominican culture, “a man does not accept to be led by a woman.” She said that Dominican culture drags machista dynamics from our past, “men are traditionally expected to occupy higher positions, of higher hierarchy than women, and women must always be in the lower positions.” She narrated a story she remembered about her father who always used to tell her as she was growing up “a woman can never be president.” She said this legacy that is still present in today’s Dominican culture, has not allowed women in our history and still to this day, to occupy better positions.

Regarding Dominican culture, Patricia raised concern about how women themselves have had an influence on women’s current issues in society. For instance she commented:

Us women have major responsibility in that. Because we have always educated our daughters to only become housewives. Because I remember my grandmother used to tell my mother, you have to only be at home for when your husband arrives. Your husband is the man of the house.

While sharing her description of Dominican culture, she stated, “we (women) have encouraged that machista culture.” However, she acknowledged that today’s woman has a different perspective, and that women are becoming more educated. I noticed ambiguity in her remarks on women’s role in our culture as if she had an inner struggle with beliefs and traditions, perhaps due to her Catholic background. She was born and raised in a Catholic, traditional family, and studied at a Catholic school led by a priest and taught by nuns. The role she described for women in Dominican society, she described as fundamental:

Women have a role, and it is biblical. But now, there is a topic, feminism. I do not agree with it. It is not that I want to say that I do not agree with women occupying positions and having influence. But I believe that what is important is that us women recognize which is our role, and for what we have been called. I mean, a woman is not a man. A woman is an educator. According to the bible, men are the providers, the man is the head of the
house, and a woman is a man’s crown. Therefore, I believe that most of the things that are happening in our society and worldwide are because women have wanted to enact roles that do not belong to them.

After sharing these thoughts, Patricia said she believed men have greater opportunities than women regardless of women being just as qualified as men. She said that in higher education particularly, men are outnumbering women in the best positions. While she shared these ideas she realized that currently there are only two female chancellors among all universities in the country, and that very few have been chancellors in the past. She admitted she hopes for a future where women have the same opportunities and become increasingly educated and aware of their situation. “As women continue to worry about their education, and also continue to enact the role which corresponds to them, things will change.” Regarding her acknowledgement of the need for a better future for women, she posited:

Myself, as a mother, I am already encouraging my children to enact in society the role that corresponds to them, that the man understands that when he has his wife, she is not his property. To my daughter, that she is not a man’s property, and that she has to develop but that she has to respect the man. And my son has to respect his wife, when he has her, and his wife has to respect him. That is equality. Equality is that each one knows their role, acknowledges that it corresponds to them, and enacts it.

She expressed believing that Dominican women will continue growing and developing. Her remarks demonstrated she believes that women have the same opportunities than men. In various occasions throughout our interview, she expressed concern for the changes that have taken place regarding women’s traditional roles. She says she considers a woman’s primary role is to be a mother and a wife. For instance she shared:

But what scares me is that we (women) for that desire of being the same, and that we have to be the same as men, we neglect other aspects that are fundamental in women. That is what scares me a little, the topic of equality.
The Butterfly

I asked Patricia to share a picture, drawing or artifact that best represents her lived experiences towards leadership. Patricia seemed eager and very willing to share her picture. As I sat in the chair in front of her desk, I noticed she had placed a picture of a butterfly on the desk in front of the place where I was to sit. She immediately began to describe why she chose a picture of the butterfly. I noticed she had taken the time to analyze what we had discussed during our interview, and that she thoughtfully chose what she was about to share with me. The butterfly in the picture had beautiful, vibrant colors. Patricia stared at the butterfly throughout the entire meeting while she was explaining her picture as if she felt attached to it in a special way.

She described the butterfly’s life journey, and while discussing its metamorphosis, she compared each stage of the butterfly’s life with her own life cycle of growth; just as she had highlighted during our interview that her journey to leadership has been enriching and a fulfilling experience of personal and professional growth. She said the first stage, the Egg, is the birth. The essence of the butterfly is there, but still not developed, inexperienced. Then she described the Larva, the caterpillar that emerges when the egg hatches. She compared that stage to her experience entering her first position in the university, into a new, unknown world. She then described the third stage of a butterfly’s life, the Pupa, and explained that in that stage, she moved on to the academic vice chancellor position. She was in the midst of all the challenges and obstacles she encountered in the position, and was developing her identity as a leader. Lastly, she described the butterfly. She said in this stage she was fully-grown, more mature and ready, she had overcome many obstacles, which had made her the leader and person she is
today. However, she recognized that personal growth never stops, and she admitted still having a long journey ahead to sail before feeling she is fully realized.

**Anna**

Anna’s background is in education. Her passion for teaching and helping individuals develop are evident in her expressions and in how comfortable she felt speaking about her experiences when beginning her career in the K-12 context and subsequently moving into higher education. She has been the Dean for Faculty Professional Development for four years in a private university.

Anna thoroughly described her journey, sharing details of specific experiences she has had over the years. She entered the university 20 years ago. At that time, she was a faculty member in the Humanities and Education department. She taught courses and also served as advisor for research projects. She was then promoted to a management position as a master’s program coordinator. She recognized that promotion was assigned to her because she was valued in the institution and also for her excellent performance as an involved faculty member. “They said, we think that she is able to give much more, so I was given the opportunity.”

Anna highlighted in various opportunities during our interview that getting where she is now has not been an easy task and it has been a long road for her. Her description of her journey in academic leadership was that it has been one of sustained progression but that she has struggled, and that she got to where she is now by merit, through great effort, persistence, and hard work. She also admitted being grateful to the institution for recognizing her capabilities, which in her opinion is the main reason why she has reached important academic leadership positions in the university. Anna explained that as part of her process of personal
development, the responsibilities she has been assigned to, and the recognition she has received from the institution have helped her acknowledge her capabilities. “It has been the bridge, the bridge of development to recognizing that I had the conditions to do that, that was an interesting process.”

While coordinating the master’s program, she was also involved with curriculum development in the university, and led important transformations within the institution, such as the development of the university’s pedagogical approach and teaching model. Anna admitted she never thought that she would last so long in that institution. “That was not part of my journey, staying many years like in the same place. But with one of the things I have felt identified is the possibility of self development that the university provides, and growth.” She said she was aware that there were others in the university with the same experience and capabilities as her, but who have not had the same opportunities. The university supported her in enrolling and completing her doctoral degree in an international university with which they had a partnership. In 2015, she was promoted to the Dean position she holds now.

When answering questions about the influence of the experiences she has lived, Anna did not hesitate to respond. She answered my questions firmly and with little hesitation. She expressed not being afraid to convey her opinions and the reactions they may cause. She has no problem with going against the wind, as long as it is for a good and just cause. For her, it is of utmost importance to maintain her essence, her true self as an individual. “The freedom of my opinions, I mean, if I have to go to a meeting, and say what others want to hear, I do not participate in that.”
Although it appeared Anna generally had positive feelings about her pathway to leadership, and despite the support she acknowledges, she said she has encountered power struggles and difficulties particularly with female supervisors. Anna said that in some instances, the opportunities that she has had in the university have gained her enemies. “Because people only see that you have a privilege, but they don’t see everything that is behind.” She reported that she felt as though her supervisor felt threatened by her. “If something turned out wrong, then I was the one to blame and to pick up the pieces. But if things were favorable, then she questioned me because she was not involved.” Anna recalled addressing the issue with her supervisor, but “things just got worse.”

In an attempt to portray the obstacles she has faced, particularly with her female supervisor, she went on narrating a specific experience. Before becoming dean of Faculty Professional Development, there was an opening for a different dean position. The chancellor had expressed his trust in her capabilities to assume the position, and she stated being certain that her colleagues regarded her as competent for the position. “I recognize that colleagues value me, my development, and my professional journey. However, everything was set up so that candidate selection did not tend to me.”

Anna portrayed the sacrifices she has had to make throughout her journey in academic leadership. “It is not true that it is enough with the work hours, so there is a personal time you sacrifice that you do not recover, and that also has an impact, even in ones’ motivation, in the quality of the work. The job demands personal sacrifice.” She acknowledged those experiences as learning opportunities. Although they were hurtful and affected her to the point where she considered leaving the university, she said she did not take them personally. From her point of
view, her supervisor felt threatened by her because she was insecure with her own management capabilities and experience.

Throughout our interview, Anna demonstrated her faith in God. She recognized God constantly, especially when admitting gratefulness for all the experiences lived, the good and the bad. To convey her faith in God during hard times, she expressed thoughts she had:

Lord I do not understand the purpose of what is happening, but I know that it is good for me. This experience is hurtful but I know it will be beneficial for me because you do not allow anything bad to happen. Life has given me the opportunity to see that, yes, one of the Lord’s purposes with me was positive, although it was hurtful at the time.

When I asked Anna to describe Dominican culture, she smiled and mentioned that in her opinion, Dominican culture continues to drag traditional beliefs. She stated that “still, a machista mentality prevails, it’s hierarchical. In that hierarchy, the man has the power.” She discussed how gender inequality is evident in organizational structures in government, politics, and higher education leadership. Anna also explained that in her university, among 11 Academic Council members, only two are women. I noticed in her facial expression that she realized for the first time that most of the positions held by women in academic leadership are positions where women are department directors and coordinators. “So, this scenario tells you there is an issue.” She explained that in the K-12 education context it is different, where women are the majority. “Due to its nature, in the K-12 context there is a spirit and an expectation of nurturing.” She explained women are naturally drawn to being maternal and nurturing. And said “that is a job reserved for women.”

Anna expressed that women’s role in Dominican society is essential. “I believe that in order for transformation to happen in this society, without women’s participation it is not
possible. I am not saying women are superior to men, but it is not possible.” She admitted that women must become aware of the social dynamics and change the narrative.

Women carry over their shoulders in society all the issues of teaching, mentoring, and their children’s education and guidance. For that to disappear, that which we are seeing, us women must have a different attitude. Because probably what we are seeing today is product of what we (women) have encouraged and we are receiving the consequences of that.

Anna shared that in previous generations, including ours, women have been taught and raised to serve others. She explained how this legacy has an influence on women’s self esteem, and that instead of encouraging them to develop as individuals “women are taught to be pretty for men, you need to be there for a man all the time.” She admitted that in Dominican society there is a contradicting narrative, where on one hand, women talk about succeeding and being independent, but on the other hand, continue to encourage traditional beliefs. “You want things to be different, but are you doing things differently?” Anna also said that women have to prove themselves in order to be recognized, “but they shouldn’t have to struggle to be recognized, it should happen naturally.”

Anna’s observations seemed to show awareness regarding Dominican culture and the influence of gender on women’s experiences. However, I noticed contradiction in Anna’s comments regarding her own experience with gender in her leadership journey. She firmly stated that gender has not influenced her experiences. However, later on, she narrated a specific experience she lived in a religious institution before her work in the university.

There was a job opening for the director position, the highest position in the institution. But that job was reserved for priests. Even so, I was considered for the position, however, there were different conditions for me, like the salary and my decisions were often rejected.
She remembered another experience she lived regarding the influence of gender in organizational systems:

I had a supervisor who was a man. Salaries were being evaluated and adjusted. But my salary was not adjusted to the salary that corresponded to that position. Therefore, I went to the administration thinking it had been a mistake. There I was told that it had not been a mistake, that man had made the decision. Therefore, I quit the job, because I have to keep my dignity.

Anna said that her background and lived experiences have shaped who she is today and how she enacts leadership. She admitted she believes in collaboration and teamwork, and also said that as a leader, she believes in helping individuals grow and encouraging them to succeed. She described being assertive and firm when having to give feedback when things are not done well, and goals are not met. I could see pride in Anna’s comments regarding her assertiveness and how she addresses issues without difficulty, as if this was a trait she developed as a result of her experiences.

The Spiral

Anna admitted that when I asked her to share a picture, drawing or artifact that best resembled her experiences, she struggled with the idea because she said it has been a long pathway and that her lived experiences have been varied, therefore, portraying them in a single picture was a challenge for her. But she also explained it allowed her to reflect on her journey and the meaning of her experiences. In our second meeting Anna received me in her office and on her desk she had placed the picture of a spiral she printed from the Internet.

Anna began by saying that the spiral illustrates her space in the world, because it is in constant movement. She described:
I chose it because I believe in transformation, and I believe in the process of self-development, in recognizing your identity. But I also believe that the spaces that life gives you the opportunity to be in, contributing to ones’ development, with ones’ growth. For me, this image is what reflects my process.

Anna stated that if she had not chosen the spiral, she would have chosen the transformation of a butterfly. She shared an experience early in her career, while she was working in a K-12 school as a teacher, a professor in the university recognized her capabilities and encouraged her to take a leap and work in a special project at the university. “He said, take all the experience you have, and help us develop a program, because I am certain you are capable of adding value to these spaces.” She recognized that professor mentored her, and from her comments regarding that first experience when she entered the higher education context, I understood she felt supported by him, and that he had accompanied her through a new phase in her professional life. “That’s where it all started.”

Anna went on describing the similitude between the spiral and her personal journey, stating that each experience lived, has been a valuable opportunity for her growth. Just as she expressed during our interview, she feels she has changed over time, for better. Anna also said the spiral does not always move forward, sometimes she said, “you go back a few steps, you make mistakes”, but admitted that, that is the moment where learning happens. When I asked her to elaborate on that “learning” throughout her pathway, she described it as becoming more aware, about critically examining each experience in order to be intentional in personal growth.

She highlighted her influence on others throughout her journey. She said that her lived experiences have also allowed her to help others, to understand their points of views. She seemed to perceive these experiences as opportunities where she developed empathy towards
others. She recognizes she has come a long way, but that there are still experiences to live and learn from. She said metaphorically, the spiral continues to move.

I believe I have many opportunities for growth, to become better. I believe I am able to give more; I have the opportunity to have an influence in other scenarios, to contribute to a better society through ensuring quality education.

Anna indicated that she believes that a person must be able to develop personally to be able to lead.

**Maria**

I met Maria in a conference room in her office for our interview. She has a candid smile, and soft tone of voice, which depicts serenity. She portrayed wisdom and maturity in the way she spoke and interpreted her lived experiences. She used sarcasm to describe her experiences and made humorous comments throughout our interview.

Maria has been the academic vice chancellor for six years in a public university that offers undergraduate and graduate programs in education. Previously, she was the academic vice chancellor at a private Catholic university. She has a bachelor’s degree in psychology, but her career developed in education. Before entering academic leadership, she worked for the Ministry of Education. After a few years in the ministry of education, she resigned and focused on teaching in various universities and also worked with some professional development projects.

Maria explained that in one of the universities where she was teaching there was an opening for the academic vice chancellor position. At the time, the university was undergoing the quinquennial evaluation, which is the national evaluation performed every five years by the
Ministry of Higher Education to assess student learning outcomes in the most demanded careers. She said the chancellor encouraged her to occupy the position, because he believed she was capable of working with the ministry and to support the evaluation process. She described her experience as the academic vice chancellor in that university as a learning experience. She was there for four years.

Maria took some time off higher education to focus on her personal project where she led an office that worked with youth in vulnerable environments. She then took on the vice chancellor position she continues to occupy to this day. Maria shared that when she entered the institution it was challenging due to some processes of organizational transformation they were undergoing, but also said that the university was familiar to her because she had worked in some projects with that university during her time at the ministry of education. She smiled while she described her entrance in the university, saying she felt drawn to that institution and that it brought many good memories of her work with them.

She said that her overall experience as an academic vice chancellor has been good and that the position has many advantages. She expressed that despite the great responsibility and sacrifice that come with the position, the highlight is the opportunity that it has provided her to make a difference and help others. She also mentioned advantages related to the prestige the position offers in terms of status and financial compensations.

Maria discussed the barriers she has encountered in her lived experiences in academic leadership. First of all, she mentioned having to prove herself in order to be respected professionally: “I felt in some instances that I had to make an additional effort to demonstrate my worth. I am not sure it has to do with the condition of being a woman, but it’s like I had to
prove in every place that I am competent.” While reflecting on the struggles to prove she was qualified, she expressed uncertainty regarding why this happened, although further on she described experiences where she felt she had to “mark her territory,” particularly when she was interacting with men. She shared an experience while working on a project:

The doubt that was brought up was if the other person, who was a man, was the better person in the team to present the results of the project. Some of the executives doubted that I was able to systematize the experience; they trusted more a man’s abilities for that.

Maria seemed to remember very clearly the details of how she overcame those obstacles and shared the conscious efforts she made, like for example the clothes she wore. She expressed: “How do I present myself? What do I have to do to gain the respect of others?”

For example, I am very friendly and gentle. And if I have to stand up right now and serve you coffee or pick up, I’ll do it. That is not a problem. But for example, I would never serve coffee to the chancellor.

She recognized experiences where she was the only woman in the room, and her male boss asked her to serve coffee. She also said she had seen it happen even with photocopies. Maria admitted that the influence of gender on her life experiences has gained her consciousness and provided her with alternatives to overcome them. She said: “When it happens for the first time, maybe you are not aware. But when it happens various times, you notice it. So I protect myself. Now when I am asked to serve, I reply saying let’s call someone else.” Maria also explained how, having lived these experiences has helped avoid actions herself that perpetuate gender dynamics and affect other women.

Maria also acknowledged how these experiences have influenced the way she acts, stating “it is saddening that they force you to assume unnatural behaviors, they force you to
have an armor in a certain way to avoid it happening to you. You walk through life prepared.” I asked Maria to describe the unnatural behavior she mentioned. She immediately explained:

I would want to be able to be friendly in a particular context, but I take care of myself, and I am not (friendly). And I am friendly, but I know, and I think, what if I am misinterpreted, that some gesture is misinterpreted. You build a barrier, and you adopt attitudes that do not correspond to you but rather with what you represent. You shouldn’t have to split up like that; you should be able to develop naturally.

She said that the changes she made to her “natural” behavior in order be respected have impacted how people perceive her, in the way that she has to act tough and avoid being friendly. As a result she expressed some people in the university are scared of her or threatened by her in some way. Maria shared she acts a certain way when she is at work and in a more natural way when she is not in a work related environment. She added humor to her accounts; she laughed and said, “thank God the day ends at some point and you go back to being yourself!”

Maria also explained how gender influences how she leads and interacts with her team. She differentiated the experiences between both universities where she has occupied the academic vice chancellor position. She recognized that the university where she is now, is “feminized” because it is a university that specializes in the field of education, which is a profession generally associated with women. Therefore, although the chancellor is a man, the other vice chancellors are women, as well as most of the other people she directly leads.

She then described her experiences in the previous university, highlighting that she was the academic vice chancellor and that all the deans she supervised were men. She said: “There I had to set clear boundaries, because when you lead women it is usually more easygoing.” She said leading a team of men was like “power against power. There it was more challenging for
me.” She portrayed a specific example to illustrate how she set boundaries and “marked her territory”:

If I was to meet with the deans (men), I occupied the main seat at the table. I had to mark it, I am the vice chancellor, you are the dean of engineering, you are the dean of marketing, but I occupy this place. It would never have occurred to me to sit in one of the other chairs. That could have given way to them not respecting me in the way I expected them to.

Maria expressed she would have liked to develop a team dynamic, explaining how gender influenced her enactment of leadership and her experience in that particular male dominated organizational structure. She described she feels an inclination towards transformational leadership, rather than transactional leadership. She believes in collaboration and teamwork. However, she acknowledged, “you have to play roles”, and that the leadership approach she prefers would have not been effective with her team at the previous university.

Maria also remembered that, at the beginning of her career, age was a significant barrier that influenced her lived experiences. She is now in her mid-fifties but recalled the obstacles she encountered when she was younger. “When I was younger, much younger, I said in a meeting, if I had gray hair you would consider me.” She explained she repeated that expression in various occasions, demonstrating that early in her career, age was an issue she struggled with. She again shared:

I said, when I have gray hair I know I will get the chance to get these kinds of jobs, challenging jobs. Age was associated to experience and capability. I had to make a greater effort to prove that despite my youth, I had skills and knowledge.

Maria’s hair is gray and she laughed while she made a joke about being lucky that her hair turned gray early in her thirties, otherwise she would have had to wait longer to be respected. “I have never tinted my hair because I said, I have wished for this gray hair for too
long!” She also remembered that while working in a project she was always assigned to teach the younger groups, rather than the groups of adults. She again laughed and said that many years later, when she was not that young anymore, she got to teach that same group of teenagers when they became adults. Also related to the influence of age in her lived experiences, Maria admitted that when she worked in the ministry of education, individuals who were older than her judged her because she was young and entered with a higher salary than them. She shared:

But it is not my fault that they paid me more. I arrived there after having studied and worked. I had experience. I had completed important programs abroad. I accepted the job and I didn’t know what others were paid, and I didn’t care. But the people who are there, and you understand this later on, are aware of these things.

Maria shared an experience she lived that was influenced by her perceived lack of competence due to being young early in her career. One of her colleagues at the ministry of education, who was about 20 years older than her, was surprised when Maria responded with a scholarly statement during a work meeting. She repeated the woman’s sarcastic remark: “Oh, the young girl studied!” She also explained that, that same person who had doubted her capability recognized her work, many years later when Maria was teaching in the university. Regarding that later encounter with the person who had judged her competence, she shared:

For me, that was important. Many years later, there was that change in her opinion about me, of the person that had arrived there to work, and that she had judged me with prejudice as incompetent. There she was recognizing I was a very qualified person.

As in the other interviews, I asked Maria to describe Dominican culture, as she understands it. She attributed the lack of awareness affecting Dominican society, particularly the current setting for women, to the absence of critical thinking and lack of education. “I believe there is a lack of reflection and profoundness, a lack of critical thinking. The
management of information is too superficial; they do not get educated regarding specific matters. People buy into any argument easily.” She described the culture as continuing to be patriarchal, saying authority continues to be ascribed to men. She further explained her perspective regarding the lack of critical thinking by sharing “that is how I associate it to being superficial and a lack of critical thinking. Other developed countries have had to sacrifice a lot to ensure change and development.”

Maria discussed women’s role in Dominican society, expressing “I believe that spaces have been created that have enabled women to occupy positions of relevance, but never enough.” She recognized that although women in the Dominican Republic are participating in different settings, female leadership continues to be limited to mostly middle management and they do not progress to higher positions. She made an interesting observation regarding how women in the Dominican Republic lead magazines, but newspaper directors continue to be men. Regarding this observation she expressed: “There is always the head, which is a man, and then by his side a woman. So that’s were you see residues of patriarchy, in the division of spaces.”

Maria shared the example of the higher education context, highlighting that only four women have been university chancellors. She also noted that mainly women occupy the academic vice chancellor position, attributing it to the traditional “feminine role, relations with others, that the position is related to education.” Maria observed that men outnumber women in the positions that have to do with managing financial resources and research. Using humor and sarcasm, she identified specific gender roles within higher education:

Everything that has to do with finance, administrative resources, and research, well, those are areas that men handle better, math and statistics. However, I have to work with the
registrar’s office, admissions, professional development, with student regulation, well, so it’s more the role of a woman.

Maria believes that certain historical events were essential to women’s current standing in the country. She commented:

My generation, maybe a little earlier, started to prepare themselves, the access to universities was important. Also thanks to the economic issues that presented themselves in the 80’s that developed the Gulf war, we started participating in the workplace because men were not able anymore to financially sustain by themselves the households. That situation forced women to go out and work, and not be retained at home. The man was forced to give her permission to work. Yes, that is what was said at the time.

She also said that, “the main problem continues to be ignorance. Women enroll in universities, but then they get pregnant when they are very young and therefore they cannot develop as they would want to.”

Maria acknowledged God as her guide and recognized that God has a divine purpose for her life. She expressed an interesting perspective regarding religion and the role of the Church in the country. She explained that in her opinion, religious influence is important in Dominican Republic. But she clarified that the Church’s influence may be used accordingly for good or may be an obstacle in some way. She recognized the Catholic Church is doing important work with youth, helping them develop healthy leadership skills that may have a positive influence in the future of the country’s society. Maria differentiated two churches, one church that is working in communities, impacting society, and the “hierarchical church”. Regarding hierarchy she stated:

That is the hierarchy that functions under the archbishop, and they own the Catholic universities, and have political influence and power in the country. Then, that hierarchy in the Church is a barrier for women’s advancements, because within its constitution, they (Church) do not allow the highest position to be occupied by a woman. Priests are always men. It is difficult for them to move away from that tradition. Women have always been seen as a support for the priest.
For me to tell you that we have had progress, a Catholic university must be led by a woman. In order to influence change, the Church has to work with the structure, in the top of the structure. That’s when we’ll say we are progressing. That way we would move from discourse to action.

**The Clock**

Maria and I met in the same conference room in her office for our second meeting. I could tell she was eager to share her reflections with me. She portrayed her journey into leadership using a metaphor by comparing each feature and function of the clock to her lived experiences. She described her metaphor gracefully as if she was narrating a story. I observed she caressed the watch on her wrist while she was talking about it. Her description was unique and detailed.

At times, her narrative shifted from describing the clock, to talking about her lived experiences directly. She began by expressing that the clock has to be wound in order for it to function. She explained that the clock is a well-elaborated artifact, with a clear, defined mission. The clock’s mission symbolized her purpose in life, as such, she posited: “I perceive myself not in a job, I perceive myself in a mission, where my own interior conviction is more important than anything else.” She acknowledged God by stating that the opportunities she has had have been because “God put me here, not the chancellor.” She explained that she has faith in that belief under any circumstance. She illustrated the experience she has gained throughout her journey by saying that “the artifact (clock) is created, it is created with care.” She again mentioned that the clock is created for a mission, to mark the hours. She compared the obstacles in her lived experiences, which she had described during our interview, with the
problems a clock may have with its functioning. But she explained that at some point she has had help to overcome them, because she was not able to do it alone. For which she stated:

The clock stopped at certain points in moments of confusion, moments of loneliness, because you have to change its batteries sometimes, or make small repairs it needs. So yes, there have been those moments when you have to organize its (clock) parts. But those moments don’t seem bad to me. They seem moments when even if I stopped doing my job, which is to mark the hours, and I may have been late, everything was resolved when we winded the clock and put it to work.

Maria said that the clock continues ticking until its life span ends. She explained she believes that she would have been just as happy as she is even if she hadn’t been vice chancellor. “But I was given the responsibility.” She again metaphorically mentioned God narrating, “the watchmaker who made me had a purpose, and I am trying to respond to his purpose, and I have to go on until the clock stops. I believe no obstacle is big enough to make me move away from the mission I was created for.”

She described the values she was taught by her family, especially respect towards others, expressing that she owes her values to her upbringing. She expressed she was taught to be humble and that if she were given the opportunity to occupy a position of greater responsibility, she would assume it with “trembling legs, and keeping in mind always that the clock has its mission.” She shifted back to discussing the clock metaphorically, saying the clock is waterproof, while she smiled. “Yes, it is water proof because I have cried.” Maria recognized that she is humble enough to ask for help when she needs it. She explained that at certain moments in order to continue developing she needs other people and that she will continue acknowledging the good and bad experiences in her journey as significant learning experiences. “My journey is not over.”
Claudia

Claudia and I met in her office for the interview. As I entered her office, I sensed a feeling of peacefulness. The room was surrounded by soft background music and the scent of incense warmed the area. The room was inviting, decorated delicately. The colors on the chairs’ tapestry matched the ochre on the wall behind her desk. Claudia shared her lived experiences in academic leadership with ease, providing information about her journey and personal perspectives.

Claudia is the graduate studies vice chancellor at a private university. She has been in that position for the past three years; previously she was dean of the humanities and education department at the same university. She said she is a “teacher by vocation and by profession.” Claudia has a degree in education. She laughed as she shared that “everyone told me I was crazy, that I was going to die of hunger, and I said, ok.” Her first work experience was teaching at a preschool. She described this experience as her “best work years because it was an environment of a lot of learning and cooperation.” Claudia admitted that while completing her bachelor’s in education there was a moment of doubt and she left her work at the preschool to work at a bank. She stated she decided to study law and said, “everyone in my family is a lawyer.” Parallel to her bachelor’s in education, she completed half of the bachelor’s in law. At the bank she worked in the department of professional development and completed a master’s program in human resources. About her experience at the bank she shared: “I felt comfortable there. But one day, and whoever is a teacher understands this, I missed teaching.” She explained that after 10 years working at the bank she recognized she was not happy. The chancellor at the university where she currently works has known her since she was a young
girl and called her to ask her to come to the university to work with him. The university at the
time was going though a crisis and she explained, “they were struggling to improve the
university’s situation and he said he needed me here.” Claudia took on the job, while she was
still working at the bank. She said she worked at the bank until four o’clock, and then went to
work at the university until 10 o’clock as a consultant for program development. She stated
while describing her experience entering her job in the university:

My passion was born again. I was reacquainted with what I truly like doing and what I had
studied for. So then, I decided to quit the bank and jumped into the abyss. It was an
institution that was going though difficult times, I jumped into the abyss.

Claudia said that one of her motivators is taking on challenges and achieving goals. She
understood the job she was offered at the university as a great opportunity that enabled her to
take on a challenge. She expressed, “So they opened the big door for me.” She worked as a
consultant in the university for 10 months until the chancellor offered her a promotion. “He
(the chancellor) saw my potential and asked me to take on another challenge.” She was
promoted to become the dean of the humanities and education department, which was a
department that, due to the institution’s crisis, had lost most of their students. Claudia
recognized that since she took on the job, the department grew and student enrollment had
increased from 30 students to over 1,000 students.

After seven years as dean, she stated that “the objective was achieved, the department was
positioned.” Claudia was then offered another promotion to become the graduate studies vice
chancellor. She described:

They brought me to a position that was more challenging for me because in the humanities
and education department I was in my comfort zone, that was my field. But graduate studies
are more complex because various fields are involved. It is difficult to lead such diversity
and trying to bring each person to give their best. It is complex but doable.
Claudia explained the changes she encouraged and all the successes achieved at the graduate level. She communicated being proud of her achievements and expressed her qualities and capabilities with confidence. Claudia also openly shared the struggles she has encountered in her lived experiences in academic leadership. She recognized having to make many personal sacrifices, especially related to the time spent with her family and the struggles faced in trying to balance work and her personal life. Claudia said that professionally, she has to make greater efforts to demonstrate her competence and she mentioned the struggles with proving her worth various times during our interview. “It is not simple, there are a lot of stones on the road, being a woman does not make it easy.” I asked Claudia to describe the “stones on the road.” She explained that gender and age have influenced her experience as a leader and communicated:

I am the youngest member of the university’s academic council. They see me as a child until I put on the pants. I have to put on the pants to be listened to and I believe it is not fair. I mean, I don’t want to stop being a woman and assume a male role in order to be listened to.

Claudia is in her mid-forties, and explained that due to her age and gender, she has to permanently struggle to demonstrate her work and her achievements. She has observed that in other areas where men are the leaders, that does not happen. She explained this by stating “I have to live in that permanent stress. The work does not stress me, but that, the permanent struggle to prove my competence, that generates in me a lot of stress.” She reported an experience she lived with one of her teams, and admitted she felt resistance, influenced by gender. She had been requesting them for some time to work on something that needed improvement and that might represent a problem with the ministry of education if it was not addressed, but she felt she was not taken seriously. She stated, “They were all men. I am known
for being a perfectionist and very organized. But men continue to see us women as neurotic, exaggerated, or that we have disproportionate reactions.” Claudia shared a sarcastic smile and said, “they resisted and it became a problem.”

Claudia reported that men outnumber women in the university’s academic council. There are only four female members, three of whom are vice chancellors and one is dean, all in academic areas. The administrative vice chancellor is a man. She believes that the institution’s tradition is that the chancellor is a man. She described the chancellor position as a “very political position” which is elected by the university’s regency council, whose members are all men. Claudia has observed that the deans who are male get along well; however, there is a power struggle in their interactions with women. She described how gender has an influence on others’ perceptions of her competence and the way it affects her by stating:

There is a game of who has more power and it has to do a lot with being a woman. I mean, that takes up a lot of time and a lot of energy to accomplish your job, because I tell you that you have to be proving all the time, more than any man, you have to live demonstrating that, besides being a woman, a mother, a wife, I can do it. It is an exhausting job.

Likewise, she mentioned that in some instances, women might compete among them, but it appeared that in her experience, that situation is not predominant. Claudia articulated that the vice chancellor position provides some sort of respect. Regardless, she recognized there is resistance by saying, “They (men) place a stone, or they question what you are doing. But that is always going to happen, and you have to live with that. I won’t stop doing my job because of that.”

Claudia expressed faith in God and said she is grateful for being born a woman. She believes that the unique qualities of a woman are what make her special when it comes to leading and identified that women are more sensitive and empathetic. She described:
I believe that the fact of being a woman gives us a different touch. We are more human, more sensitive, you feel others’ pain, I mean, there is a series of factors that correspond to us as women, and that is why I don’t want to stop being a woman. Because I try to provide my team tranquility, create cohesion, and that the work is accomplished in peace.

Claudia recognized that women have progressed within Dominican culture, mainly because according to her, “women are finally undertaking roles (leadership) that belong to them.” Despite the advancements she acknowledges, she recognized that generally speaking, salaries for women are lower than salaries for men, and that there is prejudice in recruitment processes:

The requirements described in job openings in the Dominican Republic continue to specify sex, and in most cases the requirement is men. People don’t want to hire women because they will get pregnant, be absent for maternity leave, they are going to have to be absent at some point because a child is going to get sick. There are a series of things that affect us.

Claudia described Dominican culture as machista, and said that “men are everything in the Dominican Republic, and women are mainly an accessory.” She explained there is a high rate of divorce in the country as a result of women’s progress within society: “When a woman is more successful than a man, the man resents her. Our society is like that.”

As our interview ended, she shared her last remarks with a proud smile, “we (women) are multitasking, you know? We have children, we have husbands, we have a home, but incredibly we can do all that, and do it well. But they (men) don’t understand how we can do it.”

The Iceberg

I met Claudia in her office for our second meeting. This time, her assistant greeted me and asked me to wait for Claudia a few minutes while she concluded a previous meeting. I sensed the same feeling of tranquility as I had the first time I visited Claudia’s office. I
observed Claudia interact with a few people she encountered outside her office while she came out to greet me. She communicated with warmth and the people that were there appeared to esteem Claudia.

Claudia said she had reflected on the image that best portrays her experiences but that she planned to draw it while she explained it. Claudia took out a blank piece of paper and a pen and began drawing what seemed to be a pyramid and then she started describing the drawing. Although she did not name the drawing, the drawing and explanation showed me she was illustrating her experiences through the Iceberg metaphor. At the top of the iceberg she wrote the word “achievement” and, on the bottom, under the water, she wrote the words “effort, dedication, lack of sleep, absence from family, and lots, lots of work.” Although her description was short and concise, she communicated her ideas with ease and what she was attempting to portray was evident.

Claudia said that what you see are the achievements. I observed her eyes water while she explained that regardless of the successes she has accomplished and the recognition she has received, the sacrifices and hard work are hidden. She said in a low tone of voice “People only see the result, but don’t stop to consider what it takes to get there.” She explained that in the hidden factors rests the true importance of experiences. Claudia acknowledged that since they are invisible to everyone else, most of the time the issues that surround them are not addressed or even considered. She concluded by recognizing a journey of “successes, stumbles from obstacles on the road, and accompanied by lots of hard work.”
Paula

Paula is the dean of the department of humanities and education in a private university. Her background is in education. She greeted me with a warm welcome in her office. Before we began the interview, Paula admitted she had been a little nervous about our meeting and she felt somewhat intimidated, because she thought I would ask scholarly and specialized questions about female leadership she was not going to be able to answer. As such, I took a few minutes to thoroughly explain Paula the study, as well as the process that entailed the interview. I told her there were no right or wrong answers and that I was only expecting to learn about her personal experiences as a female leader in higher education.

Paula began by sharing that she worked as a teacher in a school and after a few years, entered the higher education setting to teach in the humanities and education department. She was offered to work in redesigning a program in the department, which she accepted. There was an opening in the dean position in the department when the previous dean was promoted to vice chancellor. The chancellor offered her the position, recognizing that she had accomplished good results working with the program redesign. She said the chancellor shared with her that “you were not recommended to me by anyone, your work speaks for itself.” Paula described the experience as a “big challenge”, because the university was undergoing a process of reform, stating that “I entered the position in a difficult moment for the university, but I accepted.”

Paula admitted she was grateful to the chancellor for giving her the opportunity to grow within the university and for the trust he demonstrated by endorsing her for such an important responsibility. Paula acknowledged her direct supervisor at the time as a mentor. She explained she accompanied her through the process of understanding the institution’s culture, learning
about the position and its processes. Paula said that her supervisor “walked beside me and taught me how to handle certain situations.” The main challenge Paula described in her journey was achieving goals when she had to rely on other departments. “The departments that have an influence in your leadership sometimes make the journey difficult.” I asked Paula to describe the obstacles she encountered in this sense, for which she explained that the people who worked there before her demonstrated resistance to change, and she struggled to initiate new projects in the university. She understands the resistance she experienced from colleagues at the time, as “a culture that needed to change.” Paula explained that the institution was growing fast and that “some people simply did not understand what was happening and were not willing to step up to the pace at the beginning.” She stated that to overcome the obstacles that were affecting her management, she took on responsibilities and roles that did not correspond to her. She felt that, “that was the only way to achieve things.” She admitted that eventually, when others realized that the innovations that were being implemented positively impacted their work and departments, “they simply got on the train.” She also described difficulties with struggling to managing innovation with scarce resources. But admitted that she received support from the financial department in finding ways to optimize the use of existing resources.

Paula described Dominican culture as “immediate.” She explained there is a lack of analysis and critical thinking. “People simply jump into conclusions without considering the underlying implications.” While discussing her description of Dominican culture she said, “women have come a long way, but we are still lacking presence in Dominican society.” Although Paula portrayed the example of the academic council in her university where women are the minority, she believes there is not a specific situation influencing that situation. She
shared her understanding of women’s underrepresentation in high leadership positions, explaining it has persisted over time, due to tradition:

I think it is a culture, that there is no specific reason. Because we can no longer say that there is a lack of preparation, that women do not possess the knowledge or the skills to do it. But we maintain a culture of the past. I do not think it is an issue, I just believe it has been maintained, it has not changed and that culture has been maintained despite the fact that women are prepared. We can see that we have many skills to solve situations but I think it is a cultural issue that has been passed through time.

In addition, Paula highlighted throughout our interview that there are no obstacles for women to participate equally than men in diverse social settings and to assume leadership positions. She said that progress for women has not happened as we expect because women themselves have made the choice to avoid challenges:

We have not been risky enough ourselves sometimes to assume those positions. And sometimes we prefer to stay little, I don't know; give the opportunity for the man to be the one there. I don’t know. I think it can be that. I do not see it as machismo or that man wants to impose any of that. I think that we ourselves are the ones who have allowed it to happen. Women do not assume their real value in society. Women are very valuable and we have women who do not understand and do not bet on us (women).

Paula further supported her ideas regarding the obstacles that have kept women from equally occupying elite leadership positions to men, by portraying she has lived this experience with her girl friends that have chosen their families over a profession. She expressed:

They dare not do it. Out of fear and they say ‘oh no, I'm not going to get into that. Because and then, what about my personal time?’ I think she was afraid to face challenges. They have had a culture of leading a quieter life, more of home and less of throwing themselves into their professions. Many times women prioritize their families. And that is not a matter of man or woman. That is, it is a very personal issue regardless of sex. Every human being has his priorities. I think that is it. Women have been given the open path so they can get to where they want. I think that sometimes it is a matter of ourselves to not undertake that challenge, not to want it, because we are afraid, and prioritize other things.
Paula acknowledged she is the only female dean in the institution and among the youngest in the academic council. She said that age and gender have had a positive influence in her lived experiences in academic leadership. She described her experience being a woman and young by saying:

They are seven male deans. But for me it is a positive experience. I feel protected, supported, cared for, by all my fellow deans. I always feel supported by my co-workers; it is an experience that they are always very receptive to what I bring, I don't know if they see me as a weirdo (laughs). I think that one also knows, one has tried to be at their level too. They are men, I am a woman, but we have the same, the same responsibilities.

I asked Paula to describe “being at their level” for what she explained that all deans have the same responsibilities regardless of their gender and that she simply has demonstrated, through her work, that she is equal to them. She further explained:

Gender is not an issue, all the contrary, I feel supported and protected. I think that here we are all collaborators regardless of whether we are female or male. In discussions when we disagree, your arguments are the ones that win, not your gender.

**The Tower of Legos**

Paula and I met in her office for our second meeting. She said she had given a lot of thought to our interview and decided that a tower of Legos is the best illustration of her journey into leadership. She metaphorically described a process of construction of a Lego tower shifting from specifically describing the construction of the Lego tower to directly discussing her experiences through her journey into leadership. She shared “Then I came here, and I had to learn a lot. I had to build my dean role practically alone.” She then said:

That construction has been diverse, there has been falling apart, picking up again, putting them together, constructing upwards, because these years of experience are of profit. But the process has not always been upwards. There are times when the little pieces fall off and you have to put them back on.
I asked Paula to describe an experience when the Lego pieces fell. Paula described a specific experience related to the obstacle she mentioned during our interview regarding resistance from colleagues towards new projects. The chancellor asked that a department that functioned under another department be included in Paula’s humanities and education department. It was a strategic decision that was relevant to the organization structure and responded to the transformations that were taking part in the institution. That decision caused Paula to experience many power struggles with other deans. She said it was a difficult time and that she even considered giving up. However, she confronted the challenge and moved forward with what she had been assigned by the chancellor. She made sure she was prepared, and that all the decisions she made during the transition of the department into her department, she made grounded on evidence and data. Paula admitted her faith in God, and she acknowledged she overcame that obstacle due to her faith in God’s plan over her life expressing:

But in the end, I have faith. I have a strong belief in God and I know that he puts things in the right place and everything turned out well. The department is working efficiently, we manage it and now we have the support of the other department.

Paula admitted that experience had an effect on her and she metaphorically described how the Lego pieces had fallen during the crisis:

That was a process that made me throw away a few Lego pieces (laughed), but we picked them up and started again. It made me doubt my leadership, doubt at night, think about what I was doing wrong. I started thinking about what strategy I was missing. I began to question my role as a leader; I thought to myself, it is getting out of my hands. But everything flowed.

As in the interview, Paula acknowledged that she has received a lot of support from the chancellor and the academic vice chancellor that was her previous supervisor and recognized they gave her the opportunities to grow professionally. She said the support she received
encouraged her leadership, and expressed “The support makes you have a bigger commitment to avoid making someone look bad.”

Paula believes that her knowledge and preparation in the academic field have gained her respect from her colleagues. She acknowledged that when she was new to the position, being younger than the other deans made her self-aware. She described feeling nervous when she had to participate in the academic council meetings. She felt “intimidated by the suits and their age.” She explained she faced her fears and self-doubt by making sure she was prepared for the meetings, and said “little by little I demonstrated I was qualified for the position, and that was another piece of the Lego tower I was able to put and that is still stable in its place.” Paula concluded by recognizing that the construction of her Lego tower is endless, because she continues to live experiences, through which she makes mistakes but also learns and grows. She shared “Each experience is an additional piece in the tower which progresses upward.”

**Summary**

This chapter presented the individual narratives of each study participant as well as my own. The narratives describe the experiences lived by the women in the study by portraying their pathways towards leadership as they described them, without interpretation. All the women interviewed were eager to share their stories. Each woman assigned their own meaning to their lived experiences based on their personal standpoint. Chapter Five presents the findings of the study. Chapter Six provides a discussion of the findings and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE

STUDY FINDINGS

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand the experience of senior level female leaders in universities in the Dominican Republic. Particularly, this study examined how women at the highest levels of leadership describe their lived experience emerging as leaders within higher education, providing a better understanding of the social dynamics within Dominican culture. Grounded on the principles of feminist standpoint epistemology, the narratives presented in Chapter Four honored women’s voices by describing their truths regarding their personal journeys and perspectives about Dominican culture, placing them at the center of the research process (Brooks, 2007). Each woman in the study has a different background and lived different experiences that shaped how they perceive the intended meaning of their experiences (Byrne, 2001). As mentioned in previous chapters, as I derived a sense of the interview transcripts and individual narratives, I too became increasingly conscious of my own experiences and the meaning I assign to them from my standpoint (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). Hence, based on my background and past experiences regarding female leadership in Dominican Republic, my understanding of the meanings that study participants give to their experiences was enriched (Byrne, 2001). This raised awareness allowed me to construct collective meaning of the lived experiences of the women, acknowledging that our experiences differ but are closely related in various ways. Again, I practice reflexivity and acknowledge my close relation to the phenomenon.

The traditional cultural beliefs about women’s role still present in Dominican society are naturalized and permeate its social dynamics. The study’s interpretive focus helped reveal the
meanings of female leaders’ experiences in their journeys to leadership and that might be taken
for granted. Therefore, the study’s hermeneutical approach provided awareness in the women,
while they construct meaning of their experiences as female leaders within Dominican society.
Through phenomenology the meanings and essence of phenomena that are otherwise not
explicit are originated (Moustakas, 1994). The themes and sub-themes that surfaced during my
analysis process are a result of what was articulated in the interviews, what I grasped from the
transcripts and the representations study participants provided. While the representations of
their lived experiences differed, the five women employed a metaphor or analogy to describe
their journeys with their pictures, drawings or artifacts. Their metaphors aided me in deepening
into the meaning of their experiences. Participants’ metaphors did not coalesce into a separate
or additional emergent theme, but they strongly reinforced the five women’s narrations of their
journeys. Therefore, the essence I captured from the metaphors are woven within the themes
and sub-themes presented in this chapter.

The analysis process entailed undergoing the “hermeneutic circle” of continuous dialogue
and movement between women’s accounts and my personal perspectives regarding the
phenomenon based on my background, or as Gadamer referred to it, my “historicality”
(Paterson & Higgs, 2005). This “fusion of horizons” produced a shared understanding of
participants’ experiences. To reveal the themes and sub-themes, I first read the interview
transcripts and the transcripts of study participants’ representation of their journeys individually
various times until fragments of the text resonated and I discovered a relevant essence. I then
highlighted the fragments identified in each transcript and copied them in a separate document.
I put together the ones that seemed to have a common theme. I again read the transcripts to get
a sense of the context that framed the meaning of the fragments in order to write the individual
narratives. Hence, this first set of themes guided the story frame for writing the individual
narratives of the women in my study. The process itself of writing the narratives helped me
grasp the essence of their experiences. I then went back to the transcripts again to confirm if
there were additional segments of the text that made sense to the first set of themes that
emerged. I separated and also eliminated pieces from the fragments classified within the set of
themes, which resulted in sub-themes for each theme.

This chapter presents the themes and sub-themes that surfaced from the interview and
metaphor transcripts and from putting together women’s narratives of their journeys. Each
theme and sub-theme presents the important commonalities and differences among
participants’ experiences. Table 2 provides an overview of the themes, sub-themes and
participants’ illustrations.

Table 2
_Emergent Themes, Sub-Themes, and Participant Illustrations_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Participant Illustration</th>
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<td>Theme One: Understanding their Journeys</td>
<td>Growth process</td>
<td>&quot;Because this has been a process of construction&quot;</td>
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<td>Taking on the challenge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The obstacles</td>
<td>“When I was younger, much younger, I said in a meeting, if I had gray hair you would consider me”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Endless proving</td>
<td>“More than do men, one has to live in that demonstration that despite being a woman, a mother, a wife, I can do it”</td>
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Theme One: Understanding their Journeys

Phenomenological studies focus on how people perceive and describe objects and lived experiences rather than describing the phenomena (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I asked each woman to describe her journey into leadership in higher education. They thoroughly described their professional background and the accomplishments that granted them professional progress to reach the leadership position they occupy today. By probing into their pathways towards leadership, they described their own interpretations of their journeys, the obstacles they encountered, and the factors that have influenced their lived experiences as female leaders in higher education.

A feminist critical approach to research enhances women’s awareness of their standing in the world and provides them new and different perspectives (Brooks, 2007). Four of the women in this study appeared to reencounter with emotions and feelings when narrating...
concrete experiences and seemed to have internalized underlying meanings. Particularly, two of the women communicated that they allowed them to reflect on their experiences and their meanings. For instance, Patricia said “Let me tell you that when one has these spaces, because one does not often sit and think about one’s life experiences, you are able to reflect on why things have happened the way they have.” Similarly, when discussing the influence of gender in her lived experiences and her interactions with male deans in her team, Claudia said:

I have always noticed that their (male deans) interactions with female directors and the dean involved power struggles. However, now that I reflect and think about it, I understand that the power struggle has to do with the other directors and the dean being women.

**Sub-theme: Growth Process**

"Because this has been a construction process." (Paula)

A common theme all the women shared was that they described their experiences as learning opportunities. They recognized a growth process, particularly in the hardships they endured. For example, Anna said, “I value each process I have lived in higher education leadership, they have all been relevant and important.” Patricia shared “I have developed a certain emotional intelligence.” When sharing her picture of a butterfly to describe her lived experiences, she said, “I chose the butterfly, because of its evolution. First the butterfly is a larva, and then it turns into a Pupa. Then it strengthens and develops, until she grows wings.”

Maria particularly referred to her experience as academic vice chancellor as “a job that comes with a lot of learning.” She communicated this life process in the narration of her metaphor of the clock:
The artifact is done, it is done with care, and it is done for a mission that is to mark the hours. The clock has stopped, yes, it has stopped in moments of confusion, of loneliness, because you have to change its battery and change some pieces.

Patricia and Paula were the women who most emphasized a journey of growth. Of the five women, they were the ones who entered academic leadership without previous experience in the field. As a marketing professional, Patricia had previous management experience in that area but had never worked in higher education. As an academic vice chancellor not coming from the field of education, she recognized the challenges she faced for not having the academic background. She admitted that she has had to learn about everything in the academic field through practice and that she completed various higher education management programs in order to gain knowledge regarding her role as academic vice chancellor. Patricia said, “All those experiences and all the stages of my life, have forged my personality, my character.”

Although Paula’s background is in education, her previous experience had been teaching in a school. She entered the dean position in the university without previous experience in academic leadership. She said assuming the dean position has been “a challenge, a huge challenge.” She referred to her experience as dean mentioning the word “construction” in various occasions during our interview. During our second meeting, while she metaphorically illustrated her journey discussing the construction of a Lego tower, she agreed, “that construction has been diverse, there have been moments of falling apart, of picking up again, of putting them together, constructing upwards, because these years of experience are of benefit.”

Patricia and Paula’s comments seem to provide evidence that they were growing professionally because they were new to the academic setting, particularly to academic leadership. Patricia had previous management experience, but in her journey into academic
leadership, she developed knowledge about the academic field. Although Paula’s background is in education and had pedagogical knowledge and experience teaching, she was new to the higher education context and her experiences in academic leadership allowed her to develop knowledge of the higher education system and grow professionally.

Anna illustrated her journey through a picture of a spiral by describing that, “I believe in transformation and in the process of self-development, in identifying one’s self. But I particularly believe in the opportunities life gives you to grow through the experiences you live.”

The five women mentioned profound appreciation for the opportunities that they were given throughout their journeys in academic leadership. Along with their appreciation, they recognized the people who supported them. For example, Anna mentioned a person in an international institution with whom she was collaborating with in a university project. She said that person recognized her potential and recommended her to be hired full-time. “Because it was that person that started inquiring about my responsibilities at that time, and said that I was capable of giving much more.” Likewise, Paula acknowledged her direct supervisor (woman) at the time that hired her to work on a program development project. She said her supervisor became a mentor and taught her many things about the institution and the higher education system.

Of the five women, four acknowledged particularly the chancellors’ influence on their progress. Patricia shared that her development has been possible because of the chancellor. “Thanks to the chancellor’s support, he took me by the hand, and he has refined me, I have developed little by little. Of course there are a lot of things I still need to learn.”
Maria occupied the academic vice chancellor position twice, in two different universities. About her first experience as academic vice chancellor she said, “the chancellor told me that I was able to occupy the position,” and that he needed a person qualified to undertake some projects in the university. Claudia also agreed that the chancellor at her institution was responsible for her promotion to dean, which was her first experience in academic leadership, “he saw my potential and asked me to occupy the position.” In her metaphor about the clock, Maria seemed to communicate that support she has received stating that, “The clock can’t do it by itself, someone has to wind the time and help it keep marking the hours.” Paula also mentioned her appreciation to the chancellor for her promotion to the dean position. She recalled, “he believed in me.” She perceived the promotion as recognition of her work and acknowledged that this recognition has motivated her to accomplish her professional goals.

The five women narrated their journeys regarding them as a process of continuous development and personal and professional growth. They all demonstrated being grateful for living all their experiences. They appeared to feel highly satisfied with their accomplishments but identified challenges. Each woman understood their journeys in different ways. While discussing the lived experiences of each woman, their narrations provided deeper understanding of concrete circumstances they experienced and the ways in which they sought to achieve success, which will be further addressed in the themes and sub-themes that follow.

Sub-theme: Taking on the Challenge

"I jumped into the abyss." (Claudia)

Three of the five women I interviewed admitted in some way they entered their leadership positions under challenging circumstances. The conditions varied in scope and
implications for their leadership, but they were all defiant. Patricia took on the academic vice chancellor role after the position had been vacant for some time. The fact that she brought it up motivated me to probe into that comment to understand the circumstances. She explained the lack of a leader in the team had affected the work environment and the team’s motivation. She said she found a culture that accepted mediocrity and had led to a stagnant phase. She shared: “when I arrived I noticed that I had to organize the departments, but I did not have another option.” Patricia faced resistance from the team, having to work harder to gain their respect and to have them on board with the changes that were needed.

Likewise, Maria’s first experience as academic vice chancellor was also under demanding circumstances because she was asked to assume the position at a time that the institution was undergoing a national evaluation of some of the programs they offered, for which they had to deal with the Ministry of Higher Education, go through audits, and implement changes. Maria said, “The chancellor told me I was capable of occupying the position because the quinquennial evaluation was coming.” Similarly, the second time she took on an academic vice chancellor role, she was the first to occupy the position in that institution. She commented she entered immediately after the position was created and shared: “I wasn’t told what they were going to pay me. I took on the job with a lot of challenges because the position was new, and I knew the job was challenging because I had been involved in a project with the institution before.”

Claudia also entered her academic leadership positions under difficult circumstances. The institution was greatly affected by an undergoing financial crisis. She recalled saying to herself “they gave me a department with no students. It’s a challenge, but that’s fine.” That was the
first leadership position Claudia occupied in the university. She was expected to innovate and implement changes but resources were scarce. She had to plan strategic changes with the limited resources that were available. She prioritized improving the department’s image by focusing at first in redesigning the academic programs and ensuring quality. She expected that strategy would attract more students into the department. After a few years, the department was well on its way, as student enrolment had increased and she was able to implement many changes. She communicated that when the crisis in the department was beginning to cease, she was then moved to another department that needed improvement. “After goals were achieved, they said, well, now you have to go to the graduate studies department.” She was promoted to vice chancellor of graduate studies, where she again faced the same struggles she had overcome in the previous position.

Patricia, Maria, and Claudia communicated making a conscious decision to undertake their leadership positions facing threatening conditions. Claudia recalled leaving her previous job to work at the university and admitted her awareness of the challenging circumstances, “I jumped into the abyss.” It appeared that they were willing to face the struggles regardless of the circumstances and the risk of failing.

Taking on the challenges seemed to be one of the factors that attracted them to the leadership roles. Claudia, for example, identified that “one of my motivators is the issue of achievement, I mean, achieving things, achieving goals.” Patricia also recognized “the obstacles I have faced have been motivators to succeed.”

Sub-theme: The Obstacles

“When I was younger, much younger, I said in a meeting,
While narrating their lived experiences to leadership, the five women identified various obstacles they encountered. The challenges they described went from the pressures of the many roles they undertake, resistance for being new to the institution and organizational culture, and highlighted the influence of age and gender. The women in the study expressed that workingwomen battle with juggling their multiple roles. Three of the women described that besides from bearing the demands that come with their leadership positions, they carry most of the family responsibilities, particularly raising their children. They communicated the impact of carrying family responsibilities in addition to their full-time jobs has in their lives and how it affects them emotionally. For example, Claudia demonstrated concern regarding the higher demands women face. When sharing her drawing of the pyramid, she mentioned the emotional burden that women carry, stating that it is hidden. She said: “women’s weight is heavier, because there is an emotional factor that has a lot of influence. What is hidden is the time you sacrifice from your family, you know?” Patricia also communicated difficulties with finding balance between her work and personal life, and even time for herself. She said:

It is hard to find balance, to find the time for yourself. During the day, I don’t have time to think about anything else other than work, until I go home and my children are waiting for me to assume the mother role, and then the wife role also. I mean, there are a lot of roles that pertain to women, but I thank God for that.

Anna recognized that as a result of the high demands of her position in the university she has to make personal sacrifices. “You sacrifice personal time that you don’t get back, and that has an impact, even in ones’ motivation.”
The women interviewed for this study discussed various situations and obstacles they face at work. Regarding having to deal with resistance and struggling to gain the respect of her team, Patricia expressed:

The first barrier was my inexperience because I arrived with much less experience than most of the people in my team. Therefore, I faced resistance. Little by little they have come to accept me but it continues to be a struggle I face everyday. (Patricia)

She explained that she prepared herself taking leadership courses and asking for help when she needed to. She received a lot of support from the chancellor, who mentored her very closely. Patricia emphasized gratitude for the chancellor’s trust in her abilities.

Anna described challenges with others’ opinions about her due to the promotions she received in the institution. “I faced difficulties with colleagues who did not understand my growth in the institution. I have gained enemies.” Anna was not able to identify a specific strategy she used to overcome this barrier but admitted that, eventually, when people are able to see the results of her work she felt they would stop judging. Likewise, Paula admitted confronting barriers in achieving her work due to organizational structures and a culture that stalled advancement. She explained that she took on responsibilities that did not pertain to her position in order to ensure “having the work done.”

Three of the women in this study identified age as an obstacle, and that it influenced their experience as a leader in higher education. For example, Patricia stated that along with her inexperience, being younger than most of the people she directly leads has been an obstacle. In an attempt to explain people’s opinion about her, she imitated what they say: “Why her and not me? Why her? She just got here! She is so young and this is not her field.” Being now in her mid thirties, she admitted she continues to feel judged for being young given that most of the people
she directly leads are older than her. Claudia, for instance, said figuratively speaking, “they see me as a child until I put on pants.” Similarly, Maria identified barriers that in her opinion were influenced by age at the beginning of her career. She said: “age is generally associated with experience.” For instance, she stated that she was disregarded to lead some projects regardless of her qualifications. Maria also remembered various situations when she was not considered for projects that were more associated to the masculine role. Her eyes mirrored being deeply concentrated in the ideas she was expressing as though she was reliving those experiences while she talked about them. She explained an older man was preferred over her to systematize the experience of a project and to present it to the board at the institution.

The other person was perceived as more reliable. What do I have to do to gain others’ respect? I mean I had to put in extra effort to convince that despite being young, I had developed skills and knowledge. I had experience.

Anna also recognized she was denied some professional opportunities. Anna described an instance when she felt she had to make an effort to demonstrate she was competent to assume a demanding leadership position because she is a woman. She recognized that position was reserved for men because men had traditionally occupied it. Once she got the job, she struggled to receive the salary that corresponded to that position.

Three women raised concerns regarding power and the influence of gender. Although their views differed, Anna, Maria, and Claudia discussed power dynamics in their experiences. Anna communicated her concern that “in organizations, people who hold positions of power have an advantage regardless of who is right or who is wrong.” Anna faced power struggles particularly with a female supervisor, who in Anna’s opinion was unfair to her because she felt threatened by Anna as a result of her low self-esteem and confidence as a leader.
Maria and Claudia also discussed power struggles particularly with men in their teams. For example, Maria said that in her first experience as academic vice chancellor, all deans in her team were men and she felt that she had to set clear limits in order to be respected. “Because leading women seems to be more easy going. But with men, it’s like power against power, and you have to set boundaries, and in that setting it was harder.” Likewise, regarding power struggles, Claudia commented tensions between the male and female deans in her team. She admitted the male deans in her team are difficult, especially in their relationships with the female dean. All deans in her team are men, except for one female dean. “Men amongst themselves respect each other. However, there is a game of power. There is a game of who has more power and it has mostly to do with being a woman.”

Most of the women appeared to communicate the influence of gender in their lived experiences. For example, Claudia recognized being a young woman has influenced her lived experiences in academic leadership. She said that these two traits have made it harder for her to enact leadership. Maria clearly identified that the influence of gender in her experiences as a female leader was especially highlighted in environments where the work implied roles traditionally ascribed to men, like managing quantitative data, administration, and in more “masculinized” fields. She admitted that in those settings she had to prove herself more to be respected and more so with the men in her team.

Patricia also communicated that gender has influenced her experience as a female leader. She recognized that leading men has been challenging. She said, “it is hard, in our case (as women), it is hard to lead a team of men, because in my case, they are mostly men.” Nonetheless, she admitted that in her lived experiences as a female leader, she has encountered greater
struggles leading women than leading men. Patricia affirmed that her lived experiences have shown her that the major obstacle she has encountered in leadership has been working with women and expressed that in Dominican culture women compete with each other.

She stated:

Men somehow, I don’t know if it has to do with my personality because I have a strong personality (laughs); but generally, when men get to know you, and they see you are a strong woman, and that you have the ability to give orders, then they limit themselves. However, it is not the same with women. Women one way or another compete with you. I believe that culturally, women compete with each other, unfortunately. Those are the things that limit us women in continuing to ascend and occupy important positions.

Anna’s experiences seemed to communicate that she also has faced difficulties with gender, particularly with female supervisors. Some of the experiences she described as barriers in her journey into academic leadership were, in her opinion, due to circumstances with the two female supervisors she had before becoming dean. She communicated they prevented her from ascending to higher positions in the university when she had the opportunity.

Paula’s view differed from the other women regarding the influence of gender in her experiences as a female leader. While she acknowledged she is the youngest among the deans and the only woman, she admitted age and gender have given her certain advantage, as she feels supported by her colleagues. Paula said in various occasions during the interview: “I feel supported. I feel protected and supported by my colleagues.”

Most of the women in my study demonstrated concern for having to deny their essence, their true self in order to cope with the barriers encountered on their journeys to leadership. Some of the ideas they expressed in this regard were:

a) “I’ve had to address issues with subtlety to avoid affecting the work climate but to have them (women) do the work. I’ve had to comfort them.” (Patricia)
b) “I don’t want to have to enact a man’s role in order to be heard.” (Claudia)

c) “Based on ones’ essence, one is forced to adopt anti natural behavior. I would like to be able to be friendly but I protect myself.” (Maria)

Some of the women in this study recognized that, although they have been able to overcome most of the obstacles, others continue to persist. Their comments appeared to communicate that they endure a process of development within their journeys. Claudia and Patricia, for example, shared that they continue to experience resistance from their teams even after all their efforts and struggles with proving their capability.

**Sub-theme: Endless Proving**

“More than do men, one has to live in that demonstration that despite being a woman, a mother, a wife, I can do it.” (Claudia)

The women in this study appeared to reflect frustration and discomfort when narrating how they have faced the obstacles influenced particularly by gender and age. In Maria’s metaphor of the clock, she shared: “I stand by my clock, which ever form it takes, and it’s waterproof (laughs). Yes, because I have cried, but the clock continues to tick; but well, that’s life.” Although the meanings they assigned to their lived experiences varied, they all communicated making adjustments in some way, adapting their behavior to fit in and making efforts to prove their worth. Some of the approaches they described were:

d) “I have to put on pants to be listened and I believe it is not fair.” (Claudia)

e) “I’ve had to mark my territory. I have done so bravely and responsibly.” (Anna)

f) “You even think about what you are going to wear to gain the respect of others.” (Maria)
g) “I would put in extra effort to make sure I was prepared when I had to defend my ideas to demonstrate I knew what I was talking about.” (Paula)

Patricia also acknowledged that she needed to demonstrate to the men in her team that she was tough in order to gain their respect. Likewise, Maria marked her territory at meetings with her team comprised of men. For example she said she intentionally occupied the main seat in the table during meetings and avoided practicing group dynamics and team building activities with them. She seemed to communicate she was performing an act by setting boundaries to avoid being judged for weakness.

Three of the five women in this study believed that people’s perception of their efficiency and capability to undertake leadership roles were influenced by gender and age. For example Maria recalled the impact of age and gender in her perceived capability:

I think that the primary obstacle in this process has been feeling that I have to make an additional effort to demonstrate my worth. I don’t know if it has to do with being a woman, but it’s like I have to prove in every place that I am competent.

Maria also remembered having been judged as incompetent by an older female colleague who was surprised when Maria demonstrated her knowledge and skills, for which she felt she had to work harder to demonstrate her qualifications.

Regarding having to prove herself more, emotions appeared to stir within Claudia as she commented the stress caused by these experiences. She expressed:

It is not easy. There are a lot of stones on the road, being a woman does not make it easy. As a young woman, I have to permanently struggle to demonstrate what we are doing, how we are doing it, and that we are doing it well. I do not see this in other areas led by men. Therefore, I have to live with that permanent stress.

Patricia feels that she has to permanently prove she is capable of managing the team and confronting situations that arise. She said the academic world is very demanding and that being
young makes it harder for her to succeed. She communicated: “I have to keep strong, to prove to others and to myself I can accomplish the work.”

Paula believes that age and gender have had a positive influence in her lived experiences as a female leader, particularly age, since she shared she feels supported and protected by her older colleagues. However, her accounts seemed to communicate the need to prove she is as capable as her male colleagues. For instance, when she shared she is the youngest dean, and the only female, she admitted:

I have always felt supported by my peers, always receptive to what I bring, I don’t know if it’s because they see me as a weird species (laughs), but I think that I have tried to be at their level as well. They are men, I am a woman, but we have the same responsibilities.

Paula also recognized she works harder to prepare for meetings with the deans to avoid rejection and resistance to her ideas.

Two of the women recognized that their leadership positions endorse them prestige and power, which has eventually worked to their advantage with some of the difficulties they have endured. Regarding the struggles she has endured with proving herself, Maria recognized:

I also believe that being in the top of the pyramid gives me some advantages. And I think that what I do is respected and I think that people respect me. Sometimes one is aware that this position is very important in the public sector.

Claudia also acknowledged, “I am in a position now that permeates a little more respect, for the level I am at, but even so there is resistance.”

**Theme Two: Acknowledging Gender Inequality**

While the five women in this study admitted that women have made progress and are now participating in important social, political, and economic settings in the DR, they recognized gender inequality in the highest positions. Patricia recognized the advancements for women in
the country and communicated hope in women’s development in the future. For example, she acknowledged:

In the future, the context will change. Society will discover that women can also occupy leadership positions. We still haven’t had a female president but we have had a female vice president. We have already had women occupying important positions. So, little by little, society will give women the chance and it will be allowed. Society will allow, will give women the chance to occupy high leadership.

Maria also agreed that although women’s participation in relevant scenarios has improved, she said, “It is not enough.” She explained the historical influence on women’s standing to this day. She stated:

Women have advanced. We have advanced because women in my generation, or even before, started having access to education, to quality education. Thanks to economic situations that arose in the 80’s, we accomplished participation in the workforce, because due to the crisis, men weren’t able to sustain households by themselves. That situation forced women to go out and work, and not be retained at home. Men gave women permission to work.

They raised concerns about the fact that, although women have made progress in diverse fields of influence, men continue to occupy the most important positions in the country, highlighting the higher education setting.

Sub-theme: Chancellors are Male

"The organization’s culture has always been that the chancellor is a man." (Claudia)

The five women I interviewed identified gender inequality in higher education in the Dominican Republic. They said men have greater opportunities than women and are occupying better positions, particularly the highest positions at the chancellor and university boards. Anna said: “regarding equality, women have done a lot to obtain recognition but they shouldn’t struggle to be recognized, it should happen naturally.” They all recognized that among all universities, there are currently only two female chancellors. For example, Patricia said:
“Currently there are two female chancellors among all universities, and only four have been chancellors in the history of Dominican higher education. That must tell us there is something missing.” Claudia, Paula, and Anna recognized that in their institutions men outnumber women in the academic council. Anna admitted that, “among 11 people in the academic council, only two are women.” Maria recognized that women’s current participation in relevant positions of prestige is still not enough. “I look around and see we have a male chancellor and four female vice chancellors, but, a male chancellor (laughs).” Claudia also associated gender inequality in higher education with a wage gap. She mentioned that men earn more and are offered better conditions than women in the same leadership positions.

When asked to describe their understanding of the persistent gender inequality in higher education in the DR they offered different perspectives. Some of the women interviewed acknowledged a cultural influence in women’s underrepresentation in the highest levels. For example Patricia said: “We have dragged a culture where men are expected to occupy highest hierarchical positions than women and women must always be in positions of lower hierarchy.” Maria expressed: “It seems interesting to me how female leadership is reserved for middle management and they don’t progress to higher ranks, instead they are a representation of the chancellor.”

Others seemed to blame women for their lack of participation in the highest levels. Patricia and Anna identified that women are mostly responsible for encouraging gender inequality in Dominican society. Patricia admitted that, “we (women) have always educated our daughters to only be housewives.” Anna also agreed saying, “probably what we are living today is a result of what we (women) have encouraged, and today we are receiving the consequences of that.”
Paula’s perspective on the matter was different from the other participants, she believed that women are prepared and that they have been given opportunities to lead and grow professionally. Her explanation for the lack of women in the highest leadership positions in universities in the country is that “we (women) have not been bold enough to undertake those roles, we sometimes prefer to stay behind, and give men the opportunity to be there.”

Claudia and Patricia mentioned that women themselves are the major barriers for women’s advancements into high leadership positions. They communicated that women tend to compete with each other and limit other women’s progress. Patricia’s experience is that “we discriminate each other, we are the ones who say that it is a man’s job. My experiences tell me that my main obstacle regarding leadership has been working directly with women (laughs).”

Claudia understands discrimination is one of the reasons for women’s underrepresentation in the highest positions and associated it to Dominican society. She explained:

Our society is like that. Because they don’t want women because women have children, they are absent for maternity leave and to take care of their children when they are sick. There are a series of factors that affect us. And in their mind, they need a chancellor who is fully engaged and present all the time. So that perception may have an influence.

While everyone in the study identified gender inequality at the highest levels in their institutions, most of them had something positive to say about their universities’ environment regarding gender. They believed that their universities are spaces where they are allowed to grow professionally. Claudia said:

But we are lucky here, in my institution women have opportunities, although when the time comes to enact leadership one finds herself with the barriers that exist, not necessarily coming from the higher ranks, rather from peers, the ones who are at the same level as us (women).
Claudia also agreed with this idea stating: “At this institution, we (women) don’t have major barriers to develop and grow professionally as might happen in fields like business.”

They seemed to mirror the opportunities available for women in their own experiences advancing to the leadership positions they occupy today. They acknowledged that women in leadership in universities have the opportunity to have a positive impact in society and highlighted women’s influence particularly in ensuring quality education to transform society for a better future.

**Sub-theme: A Man’s World**

"Everything that has to do with finance, administrating resources, and research, well, those are areas that men handle better, math and statistics." (Maria)

The women interviewed acknowledged that women and men are traditionally expected to enact certain roles based on their gender and highlighted the influence that the expected gender roles have on their experiences. A common acknowledgment of the women I interviewed was that education is predominantly a feminine career; therefore, in higher education women have more opportunities to grow. Patricia commented: “Women’s natural role is to educate.”

The women interviewed commented that women mostly occupy the vice chancellor positions, especially in academic areas. Maria believed that there are many women occupying the academic vice chancellor position in Dominican universities because education is a “feminized” career. She understands that the academic vice chancellor position relates to roles that are traditionally expected of women. “The academic vice chancellor position has to do with the registrar’s office, students’ admissions, professional development, and student regulations, therefore, it’s more a position for women (laughs).”
Claudia also agreed with this idea, she said: “At this university we (women) are more respected because they associate us with teachers and they respect that role.” Anna also agreed that overall, women’s participation in the education setting is predominant. She understands there is a difference between the K-12 and higher education settings in that in K-12 the environment is maternal, where students are nurtured and cared for. “That is a job reserved for women.” She also shared that, as a result, women occupy most of the principal positions in the DR in the K-12 level, contrary to the higher education setting.

Most of the women in this study identified that men hold the administrative vice chancellor positions in their institutions. Maria’s explanation for the predominance of male administrative vice chancellors is that management of resources and finance is a role traditionally associated to men. Likewise, the participants understand that the chancellor position is associated to the masculine role. Regarding the role of the chancellor, Maria acknowledged that it is a “political” role, selected by the executive power and the Minister of Higher Education. Claudia agreed with the influence of gender on the chancellor position, stating: “It is a very political position. Selected by the university council, which is mostly comprised by men.” Claudia’s explanation about the chancellor’s position seemed to communicate that she understands there is an influence of traditional gender role expectations at the highest leadership levels in universities. “A chancellor is expected to be strategic and manage resource allocation. Maybe if in the future the university council’s plans focus on academic quality, a woman might have the chance to become chancellor.”

Maria raised concern about how gender norms are naturalized in Dominican culture. She clearly identified experiences related to gender roles and highlighted that most of the time people
are not aware of them. She acknowledged that having seen and experienced them herself has made her aware. For example, she recalled having experienced situations where male bosses with three more people in a meeting ask the only woman in the room to serve coffee or photocopy documents. She expressed there is a lack of awareness stating, “I believe that people don’t do it consciously.” Maria discussed the influence of the Catholic Church on women’s underrepresentation in the chancellor positions in universities. She commented:

That hierarchy is a breach for women’s progress in higher education, because within their own constitution, they don’t allow women to occupy those (chancellor) positions. Change must be done to the structure, to the core. A woman must lead a Catholic university in order to move from discourse to facts. That would have a positive impact and send a clear message to society.

Anna agreed about the influence of the Catholic Church on hierarchy and men’s authority over women. In her experience, she felt discriminated against for being a woman when she applied for a director position at a Catholic school before beginning her work in the university. Although she was eventually hired, she believed that she had been rejected at first because the director position is reserved for men (priests) in Catholic institutions. Regarding gender roles, Anna acknowledged, “women are expected to serve others.”

**Theme Three: The Influence of a Traditional Culture**

Hermeneutics considers past, present, and future for interpreting lived experiences (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Participant’s understanding of Dominican culture provides a context for the meaning they made of their lived experiences towards leadership. Culture is part of the women’s background and frames their experiences in academic leadership in the DR. The women in this study shared their understanding of the history, beliefs, and traditions that guide social dynamics in the country and permeate higher education institutions.
Sub-theme: Patriarchy and Machismo

“A ‘machista’ mentality predominates in our culture.” (Anna)

When asked to describe Dominican culture, the women communicated that overall, people in Dominican society lack awareness and knowledge to understand their duties and defend their rights. They associated the lack of awareness to a lack of education. They discussed Dominicans must employ critical thinking to make better decisions that impact its society’s development and to become empowered and demand basic rights.

Patriarchal and machista were the denominations four of the women gave to Dominican culture. The explanations communicated that both patriarchy and machismo pervade organizational dynamics and affect women’s progress. Patricia said: “Dominican society is very machista.” She described the machista society in terms of men not accepting to be led by women. “My father was very machista, he used to say ‘a woman president, never!’ (laughs).” Patricia also recalled her grandmother telling her mother that she had to serve her husband and be home before her husband arrived. She acknowledged that the traditional culture in the country is the cause of women’s underrepresentation in the highest echelons in diverse settings. Anna said: “A machista mentality predominates in our culture. Hierarchy assigns power to men over women, it has to do with our historical roots.” Claudia also identified a machista culture in Dominican society. When asked to describe her understanding of machista culture in the country, she explained: “In our culture men are the center of everything. Women are basically their companions.” Maria mentioned Dominican culture continues to be patriarchal “because authority is still subject to men.”
Paula’s descriptions of Dominican society reflected certain ambiguity; they did not seem to be authentic and reflective. Therefore, more than counterfactual experiences, it seemed that she was giving socially appropriate responses. For instance, while Paula recognized that men continue to have more privileges than women in Dominican society, contrary to the other four women, she said: “I don’t see it as machismo, nor that men want to impose their authority. I believe that we (women) are the ones who have allowed that to happen.” When persuaded to explain her understanding of society, Paula then said:

We maintain an ancient culture. Despite women’s preparation, because we do see that we are able to solve problems, I think it is a cultural issue that has been passed from generation to generation through time.

The five participants mentioned the influence of the traditions that have been dragged from Dominican culture from the past, and perpetuate men’s authority over women. Anna said: “The product of our culture today is the result of how we were raised. We were taught to be pretty for men, to be present for men all the time.”

Sub-theme: God’s Plan

“Like a divine plan, I can tell you that I was routed towards occupying that position.”

(Patricia)

The five women in the study expressed faith in God. Most of them appeared highly knowledgeable of the Catholic doctrine and the Bible. They all recognized God in the opportunities they have had in life and most of them believe that everything that happens in their lives is God’s divine plan. During the interviews, when most of the women shared experiences where they encountered some sort of struggle, they stated that they had faith in God to overcome them. Anna for instance, “For some reason, God believed that process was necessary in my life.”
Likewise, Paula expressed “In the end, I am a strong believer. I have a strong belief in God our Father and, I know he puts things where they belong and everything turned out fine.” While describing her analogy of the clock to illustrate her journey, Maria shared, “the chancellor was not the one to put me here, God put me here, and God will take me away.” She also commented that God created her for a mission in life.

While the women in this study understand that traditional gender role expectations limit women, one of the women, based on her Catholic beliefs, appreciated them as part of their feminine nature and fundamental roles that women must enact in society. She demonstrated certain ambiguity, which seemed to be partly influenced by her Catholic beliefs. Patricia clearly stated her opinion regarding women’s role based on her religious beliefs. She said: “I believe that most importantly we (women) must recognize our roles and understand why we have been chosen and for what. We need to understand our role in society. Women are not men.” Patricia understands that most of the problems in Dominican society are due to women enacting roles that do not belong to their gender. In her opinion, women can work outside their home as long as they understand that they are the ones responsible for educating their children, and taking care of their homes. Referring to the roles of men and women, she said: “according to the Bible, men are providers, men are the heads of their home, women are men’s crowns.”

Themes and Sub-Themes Across Participants

In order to illustrate the relevance of each theme and sub-theme described in this chapter, Table 2 presents how the themes and sub-themes that resulted from the data were represented across the five study participants. Table 2 enabled me to confirm the strength and relevance of
the themes and sub-themes and to develop the composite description of participants’ lived experiences, which is presented in the next section.

Table 3

*Themes and Sub-themes Across Participants*

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<th>Themes and Sub-themes</th>
<th>Patricia</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>María</th>
<th>Claudia</th>
<th>Paula</th>
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<td>Taking on the challenge</td>
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**Emerging Understanding of Their Pathways Towards Leadership**

After presenting the themes and sub-themes and illustrating the commonalities and differences in their lived experiences, in this section I portray a collective narration of my study participants’ lived experiences. At this point of my research, with an increased understanding of the essence of the women’s experiences, I tell a story framed by the themes and subthemes through a composite description of their experiences towards leadership. I therefore portray the common meaning they assigned to their journeys representing an emerging understanding of the phenomenon (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). The overarching research question that guided this study was: How does a criterion sample of women describe their lived experiences emerging as
senior level female leaders in higher education in the Dominican Republic? The hermeneutic phenomenological approach to this research enables me to answer this question by uncovering the meaning of the lived experiences of the five women in the study through the collective narration of their experiences. Therefore, the composite narration presented in the next section is a means of examining the essence of participants’ experiences.

The themes frame the composite narration of the experiences while the sub-themes are highlighted in italics illustrating how each plays out across the composite narration. The themes and sub-themes aid in portraying the experiences of the group of participants in the study as a whole. Although the essence and meaning that emerged from the data in the study is revealed in the composite narration in the section that follows, I used first person to develop the composite description of their journeys towards leadership to honor their voices and tell a more vivid narration of their stories.

**Composite Narration of Female Leaders’ Journeys**

My journey towards leadership has been a *growth process*. Each and every professional experience and promotion in my career has been a learning experience. Therefore, ‘I value each process I have lived in higher education leadership, they have all been relevant and important.’ Like a butterfly’s evolution, a spiral’s constant motion, a Lego tower’s construction, my journey has been of development and transformation. ‘I believe in transformation and in the process of self-development, in identifying one’s self. But I particularly believe in the opportunities life gives you to grow through the experiences you live.’ Like the clock, which is an artifact done with care, I have stopped at some point due to struggles, but have continued working towards my mission. But ‘the clock can’t do it by itself, someone has to wind the time
and help it keep marking the hours.’ Hence, I appreciate the people who have believed in my capabilities and given me the opportunities that have led me to where I am today. Therefore, ‘Thanks to the chancellor’s support, he took me by the hand, and he has refined me, I have developed little by little. Of course there are a lot of things I still need to learn.’ I especially recognize him (the chancellor) who ‘believed in me’; he hired me and acknowledged my abilities to take on the challenge.

I entered the academic leadership position under challenging circumstances. I had to face resistance from my team, undertake challenges with the Ministry of Higher Education, create new departments, and break cultural barriers within the organization. I have also worked under a large amount of pressure due to the lack of resources and amidst the institution’s financial crisis. ‘I jumped into the abyss’, being conscious of the threatening conditions that faced me. But taking on these challenges is one of the factors that attracted me to undertake the leadership role. In this regard, ‘one of my motivators is the issue of achievement, I mean, achieving things, achieving goals.’

Throughout my journey, I have faced various obstacles. First of all, the pressure of the many roles I undertake as a woman. Besides from a full time job, I have a home and a family I have to take care of. I have the main responsibility of raising my children. I believe that women face higher demands than men in this regard. Take for example a pyramid, where what you see is the achievement, but what is hidden is all the sacrifice and hard work. Therefore, ‘women’s weight is heavier, because there is an emotional factor that has a lot of influence. What is hidden is the time you sacrifice from your family’ ‘I mean, there are a lot of roles that pertain to women, but I thank God for that.’
Other obstacles I have faced relate to having to deal with resistance and struggling to gain the respect of my team. When I entered the university ‘I faced difficulties with colleagues who did not understand my growth in the institution. I have gained enemies.’ Age and gender have been obstacles that have influenced my experiences as well. In my opinion, ‘age is generally associated with experience;’ hence, ‘they see me as a child until I put on pants,’ figuratively speaking. I lived an experience where an older man was chosen over me to take on a project because he was ‘perceived as more reliable.’

I have been denied some professional opportunities for being a woman. I recall an instance when I had to make an effort to demonstrate I was competent to assume a demanding leadership position, because men traditionally occupied that position. Depending on the context in which I have enacted leadership, I have struggled with both leading men and leading women as well. In my first experience as academic vice chancellor, all deans in my team were men and I felt I had to set clear limits in order to be respected. Likewise, I have noticed that among my team members, there are certain power struggles and tensions between the male and female deans. The male deans are difficult, especially in their relationships with the only female dean in the team. So, definitely being a young woman has influenced my lived experiences in academic leadership. I believe that the influence of gender in my experiences as a female leader has been especially highlighted in environments where the work implied roles traditionally ascribed to men, like managing quantitative data, administration, and in more ‘masculinized’ fields. I feel that in these scenarios I have to prove myself more to be respected and more so with the men in my team. Despite the challenges with leading men, I admit that I have encountered greater struggles leading women than leading men. In Dominican culture ‘women
one way or another compete with you. I believe that culturally, women compete with each other, unfortunately. Those are the things that limit us women in continuing to ascend and occupy important positions.’

I have been affected by the fact that all these situations have made me deny my essence, my true self in order to cope with the barriers encountered in my journey to leadership. For example, ‘I would like to be able to be friendly but I protect myself.’ And the **endless proving** is stressful as well, making adjustments in some way, adapting my behavior to fit in and making efforts to prove my worth. I believe that the struggle as a female leader has been ‘feeling that I have to make an additional effort to demonstrate my worth. I don’t know if it has to do with being a woman, but it’s like I have to prove in every place that I am competent.’

Despite these difficulties, ‘being in the top of the pyramid gives me some advantages.’ ‘I am in a position now that permeates a little more respect, for the level I am at, but even so there is resistance.’

Although women have come this far and are occupying leadership positions, there continues to be **gender inequality** in the highest positions of leadership in Dominican universities. Men have greater opportunities than women and are occupying better positions; particularly the highest positions at the chancellor and university boards. Among all Dominican universities, there are currently only two female chancellors, ‘that must tell us there is something missing.’

Gender inequality is also evident in the existing wage gap. Men earn more and are offered better conditions than women in the same leadership positions. I acknowledge a cultural influence in women’s underrepresentation in the highest levels in universities. For example, ‘we have dragged a culture where men are expected to occupy highest hierarchical positions than women and
women must always be in positions of lower hierarchy.’ ‘It seems interesting to me how female leadership is reserved for middle management and they don’t progress to higher ranks, instead they are a representation of the chancellor.’ I consider discrimination one of the reasons for women’s underrepresentation in the highest positions and I associated it to our culture, because ‘our society is like that. Because they don’t want women because women have children, they are absent for maternity leave and to take care of their children when they are sick.’

However, I believe women are responsible for their lack of participation in the highest levels, because we encourage gender inequality in Dominican society. In our culture, ‘we (women) have always educated our daughters to only be housewives’ therefore, ‘probably what we are living today is a result of what we have encouraged.’ Also, in some cases I believe that women have been given opportunities to lead and grow professionally, but they ‘have not been bold enough to undertake those roles, we (women) sometimes prefer to stay behind, and give men the opportunity to be there.’

I believe that education is predominantly a feminine career; therefore, in higher education women have more opportunities to grow because ‘women’s natural role is to educate.’ This may be one of the reasons why women mostly occupy the vice chancellor positions, especially in academic areas. For example, ‘at this university we (women) are more respected because they associate us with teachers and they respect that role.’ Men on the other hand, hold the administrative vice chancellor positions, because management of resources and finance is a role traditionally associated to men, it is a man’s world. Likewise, I believe that due to these social expectations and traditions, the chancellor position is associated to the masculine role. The chancellor position is a ‘political’ role, selected by the executive power and the Minister of
Higher Education. ‘It is a very political position, selected by the university council, which is mostly comprised by men.’

I believe that gender norms are naturalized in Dominican culture and most of the time people are not aware of them. Since I have experienced gendered role expectations myself, it has made me aware. For example, I recall having experienced situations where male bosses with three other people in a meeting ask the only woman in the room to serve coffee or photocopy documents. I recognize the influence of the Catholic Church on women’s underrepresentation in the chancellor positions in universities, because there is a predominance of a traditional hierarchy and ‘that hierarchy is a breach for women’s progress in higher education.’

In my opinion, Dominican culture is *machista* and it is influenced by a *patriarchal* legacy, since ‘authority is still subject to men.’ As girls in this culture, we were raised to serve our husbands and take care of our children. That traditional culture in the country is the cause of women’s underrepresentation in the highest echelons in diverse settings; therefore, ‘a *machista* mentality predominates in our culture. Hierarchy assigns power to men over women, it has to do with our historical roots.’ Moreover, ‘in our culture men are the center of everything. Women are basically their companions.’ The high rate of divorces in the DR has to do with that *machista* mentality that continues to predominate, because when women excel their husbands professionally and financially, men are threatened, and women are judged because that is not their expected role in the family.

I believe in God and have faith in that everything that happens in my life is *God’s plan*. Because ‘like a divine plan, I can tell you that I was routed towards occupying that position.’ Although I am aware that women are capable of occupying demanding leadership roles and have
come very far, I am concerned with the fact that women forget their main responsibility is educating and raising their families. Therefore, ‘I believe that most importantly we must recognize our roles and understand why we have been chosen and for what. We need to understand our role in society.’ ‘According to the Bible, men are providers, men are the heads of their home, and women are men’s crowns.’

Summary

This chapter presented the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interview transcripts and the transcripts of participants’ representations of their journeys towards leadership; also, from putting together women’s narratives of their journeys. The women describe their journeys as a growth process. They identified obstacles they have encountered, which have shaped who they are today and acknowledged the influence of Dominican culture on their experiences and on women’s current scenery in society, particularly in the higher education setting. As a means of constructing collective meaning of women’s accounts of their lived experiences towards leadership in higher education, I addressed the overarching research question for the study in the last section in this chapter by presenting a composite narration of women’s experiences. Chapter Six provides the discussion of study findings and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore how women who occupy the highest leadership positions in universities in the Dominican Republic (DR) make meaning of their lived experiences. By integrating a feminist standpoint framework into this research, particularly throughout the analysis process, this study revealed ideas and new perspectives about Dominican society through the five women’s life experiences as female leaders in higher education. Likewise, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach that guided this research process “illuminates the silences” (Kafle, 2011, p. 190) by uncovering the underlying essence of participants’ experiences from their individual narratives and, concurrently, from the collective themes that emerged from the analysis process. Brought together, both a feminist standpoint lens and the hermeneutic phenomenological approach aided the interpretation of women’s accounts “describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting and consideration of parts and whole” (Kafle, 2011, p. 191).

At this point in the research, where I discuss the findings presented in Chapter Five, I again acknowledge my personal standpoint and close relation to the phenomenon by making my assumptions explicit. I am a woman, a mother, and a wife, who has transited academic administration in higher education for almost two decades. The experiences I lived are framed within a male dominated culture that shapes the constructs of gender roles and permeates social and organizational norms.

This last chapter of my research reflects the whole hermeneutic cycle I underwent throughout the analysis process, as I read and reread the transcripts of the five interviews,
reflected upon their accounts and my own experiences to build new understandings, wrote the individual and collective descriptions of their experiences, and now interpret findings and relate them to existing research. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I analyzed women’s experiences through the most common metaphors used in academic and public writing. The discussion of study findings and their relation to the metaphors are presented in the following sections. Findings are presented within the themes that emerged during the analysis process and that were presented in Chapter Five.

**Understanding their Journeys**

As mentioned in Chapters Four and Five, the five women described their journeys as fulfilling, yet challenging. While they appreciate their experiences as growth processes that shaped who they are today, the study found that most of the women encountered various obstacles in their pathways towards leadership in higher education, mainly influenced by gender and age. They understood their journeys in varied ways, shaped by their backgrounds, and also the contexts from which they emerged as leaders in higher education.

**Taking on The Challenge: The Glass Cliff**

My study found that women took on their leadership roles under challenging conditions. Scholars have discussed the glass cliff metaphor to explain the phenomenon where women are promoted to leadership positions facing high demands and in times when organizations are performing poorly, thus, risking being negatively evaluated (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Patricia, Maria and Claudia accepted their jobs being aware of these challenging circumstances. They provided concrete examples of the situations confronted by
their institutions the moment they were promoted to their leadership roles, such as financial crisis and issues with an affected culture and organizational structures.

While they have been successful in accomplishing goals and in overcoming the challenging circumstances facing the institutions at the moment when they were hired, their perception was that they were chosen because they were capable of improving the organizations’ performance and felt proud for that recognition. However, the apparent unawareness of the risks behind taking on the challenges under detrimental conditions may have significant implications for them in future promotions towards even higher positions. Likewise, Smith et al. (2012) explained that the glass cliff metaphor suggests that under these circumstances, women reach leadership positions but do not see the risks implied. Existing research suggests that women may be promoted to leadership in times of crisis, not because they are expected to improve the situation, rather because they are perceived as capable of managing people and are willing to take the blame for organizational failure (Ryan et al., 2011). Ryan and colleagues (2011) confirmed that male managers were associated with contexts where organizations are successful, whereas, female managers were associated with contexts where organizations are in crisis. Similarly, my study’s findings suggest that gender and leader stereotypes influence the circumstances under which women are promoted to leadership positions, as three of the five women were promoted under precarious conditions.

Moreover, Acker’s (2014) research described the revolving door metaphor, in which the challenges encountered by women pushed them away from wanting to occupy leadership positions. An earlier study by Muller (2009) differs from Acker’s findings, suggesting that female leaders in higher education felt that working directly with people of power enabled their
drive toward challenging goals such as improving their departments’ profile. Similarly, participants in my study described being motivated by challenges and expressed that the difficulties they encountered encouraged them to overcome obstacles and pursue even greater trials. These findings may suggest that taking on the challenge, regardless of the risks, might be another form of the need they feel to prove themselves and prove that their gender does not define their competence, and that they are capable of working under demanding circumstances and of succeeding despite the challenges.

**The Obstacles: The Labyrinth**

Female leaders experience more judgment than male leaders (Cleaver, 2016; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Mishra & Mishra, 2016). Most of the obstacles that women encounter are subtle and implicit and caused by cultural beliefs regarding the roles women and men should enact (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Four of the five women identified difficulties they have encountered in their pathways to leadership related to gender stereotypes and age discrimination in their perceived effectiveness as leaders and in their interactions with supervisors, colleagues and members of their teams. Most of the obstacles seemed to be produced by the perceived incongruity between the female role and the leadership role.

The labyrinth metaphor describes the obstacles women face throughout their pathways to obtaining leadership positions. In contrast to the glass ceiling, which focuses on the barrier for women when they are close to high levels of leadership, the labyrinth suggests women face challenges early on and throughout their careers (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Eagly and Carli (2007) explained that the labyrinth suggests that finding the successful path to leadership is not assured and entails persistence and hard work. The labyrinth illustrates the diverse and
contextual barriers women face. Challenges for women in their journeys to leadership include prejudice caused by gender stereotypes, organizational obstacles, and family-work balance (Datta & Agarwal, 2017; Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Ellemers, 2018). The experiences narrated by the women in this study portray the labyrinth in that their journeys included various hardships and circumstances that challenged them continuously. However, the labyrinth metaphor implies that the women choose not to participate in the workplace (Eagly & Carli, 2007) due to the pressure produced by the dual life and many roles and responsibilities, as well as the prejudices that face them. Like the successful female leaders in Cheung and Halpern’s (2010) study, the women in my study have been able to navigate the labyrinth toward leadership despite the barriers encountered.

**Gender role incongruity.** Study findings suggest that gender influences female leaders’ experiences in different ways. Although they did not label the circumstances as such, the women provided examples of gender stereotypes and biases that have affected them in their roles as academic leaders. Crites et al. (2015) explained, “stereotypes are almost always perceived as negative because they can lead to discrimination” (p. 1). Patricia, Maria and Claudia shared they have to constantly prove they are competent and capable of enacting leadership roles, for example putting in extra effort to prepare for meetings and being overly cautious of the ideas they brought to the table. Constant proving was a strong theme that most of the women in my study expressed. They shared feeling frustrated for having to continuously demonstrate their capabilities. Williams and Dempsey’s (2014) study found women are held to higher standards than men and confirmed the prove-it-again phenomenon. The authors explained, “Men have to prove their competence. Women have to prove it again and, again and,
again” (p. 25). Findings in my study indicated that gender stereotypes result from the leadership role being traditionally associated with men. According to participants, they had to make an effort to demonstrate they were competent to assume their leadership roles, particularly with colleagues and members of their teams. Most of the women directly associated having to prove their worth to being female. Existing research corroborates these findings, suggesting the characteristics that a society assigns to men, to women, and to a leader, contribute to the difficulties that women face in their progress to leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008; Koenig et al., 2011). Paula also expressed she put in extra effort to prove herself. However, she perceived the need for proving to be related to being new to the position and the institution, rather than an issue of gender and age.

In terms of behavior, participants in my study shared concrete strategies they practiced in an effort to gain the respect of the men in their teams, such as intentionally occupying the main seat in the table and carefully choosing what to wear. They reported having to act like “men” to gain authority and be respected by them. This might imply that in scenarios where the women led a group of men, they adjusted to social norms that associate leadership characteristics to masculine behavior. However, Maria and Patricia reported concealing their natural personalities with both men and women as a result of preexisting gender stereotypes regarding leaders’ behavior. While they shared having to act tough with the men in their teams to gain their respect, they felt they had to act nurturing with the women to avoid being rejected. Another finding that supports this idea is that the woman who described her personality as tough (Patricia), reported having to act nurturing with the women in her team, and also was the
participant who acknowledged having challenging situations with women. In contrast, Maria, who regarded her personality as kind and soft, reported acting tough with the men in her team, and recognized struggles with men. Likewise, Acker’s (2014) study found that gendered expectations put forth a subtle force for women having to combine “toughness and nurturing” and doing excess emotional work. Participants in my study expressed concern for having to sacrifice their essences to adapt to the conduct men and women expected of them. A number of scholars (Ibarra et al., 2013; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Paxton & Hughes, 2014) argue that female leaders encounter a double bind in that if they display traditionally masculine leader traits, such as assertiveness and dominance, they are perceived as effective, but do not meet the expectations of their roles as women. Therefore, the incongruity people perceive between the traits socially expected of women and the characteristics of a leader role, contributes to prejudice against female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway, 2001; Fletcher, 2004).

The experiences of one participant challenged the common theme of gender influence on experiences of female leaders in the study. Paula reported, “I believe that I have tried to be at their level,” referring to her peer male deans, suggesting she unconsciously regards men at a higher level than her. Interestingly, Paula highlighted throughout her interview that she has felt supported and protected by her male colleagues and did not mention having experienced prejudice. However, this study participant acknowledged gender inequality in the highest ranks in universities and, like the other women, ascribed it to the DR’s traditional culture, but the explanation she gave for the phenomenon was that women themselves are responsible. She believes that women currently have open roads and conditions that favor them to reach the highest leadership levels, but in her opinion, women choose not to undertake the challenge. As
mentioned in Chapter Five, Paula seemed to be giving socially appropriate responses regarding the influence of gender, which might reflect a lack of awareness on her part and the influence of Dominican traditional culture that defines and normalizes social norms that favor men over women.

**Gender stereotyping of emotions.** Another study finding was gender stereotyping of emotions. One study participant reported feeling judged, particularly by men in her team, as men perceived her as “neurotic” and did not take her seriously when she brought up concerns about risks that she anticipated might jeopardize the institution. Recent research posits that stereotyping of emotions affect women in leadership (Brescoll, 2016; Fischbach et al., 2015). These studies explain that this form of stereotyping causes prejudice towards female leaders based on the belief that women are not capable of controlling their emotions. This finding is also connected to the women having to adapt to masculine behavior to gain authority from the men in their teams. Studies have found that the emotional characteristics of successful leaders (aggressiveness and fearlessness) are generally associated with men (Fischbach et al., 2015; Heilman et al., 1989) and are produced by gender stereotypes that affect female leaders Ellemers (2018).

**Female rivalry.** Similar to the women in Dunn et al.’s, (2014) study, women in my study found that colleagues and peers made intentional efforts to stall their promotions. They described challenges with colleagues who felt threatened by their growth and power struggles with men and women at their same levels, as well as with members of their teams. Nonetheless, another finding of this study was that many of the struggles women faced involved other women. A theme that emerged throughout the interviews was women’s rivalry. Although four
of the women acknowledged leading men had been difficult for them, in their experiences, Patricia’s, Anna’s and Maria’s interactions with women confronted them with disloyalty, discrimination, and judgment. Like the American women in Tanenbaum’s (2011) research, this study confirmed that Dominican women regard each other as rivals instead of allies. An earlier study by Aschcraft and Pacanowsky (1996) on organizational oppression examined the practice of women in organizations and found that women participate in the devaluation of women. Likewise, Kaiser and Spalding (2015) argued that an obstacle that may also delay women’s progress is other women’s bias. Therefore, my study findings suggest that women participate in each other’s subordination.

It is important to highlight that this study found power struggles particularly with female supervisors. Anna and Paula are deans and directly reported to female vice chancellors. Anna reported that her female boss denied her promotion opportunities, which might suggest that there is an existence of the queen bee phenomenon (Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016). In organizations where women are underrepresented, the queen bee effect is described in literature as a circumstance in which women adapt to the organization’s masculine culture and detach themselves from other women (Kaiser & Spalding, 2015). Likewise, Derks and colleagues (2016) explained that senior level female executives in male dominated organizations see other women as rivals and that this situation legitimizes gender inequality in organizations. Interestingly, the women in my study who directly report to men, in this case directly report to male chancellors, expressed feeling supported and appreciated the opportunities their supervisors had offered them. Studies that have examined masculine self-presentation and have looked into the queen bee effect posit that the phenomenon contradicts the common assumption
that men perpetuate gender inequality. Derks et al. (2016) suggested that female leaders who adapt to masculine behavior in organizations and push other women aside might be responding to the gender discrimination and identity threat that they themselves experience in the workplace.

**Intersectionality.** This study found that gender interrelates with other constructs in women’s identity, which they feel marginalize and cause prejudice against them. Like gender, a major finding in this study was the influence of young age on the female leaders’ experiences. Patricia, Claudia and Maria reported feeling judged about being female and younger than most of their colleagues, and having to prove their capabilities repeatedly. Maria expressed that age is traditionally associated with inexperience, and identified it had been a barrier she has had to confront throughout her leadership journey. While there is significant evidence in the literature of ageism as a form of discrimination against older workers (Antecol & Kuhn, 2000; Bertolino, Truxillo, & Fraccaroli, 2012; Finkelstein & Burke, 1998), other research and scholarly work do confirm that young age is associated to inexperience among other negative and positive traits (Greta, 2016; Snape & Redman, 2003). My study found that three of the five female leaders identified these two intersecting identities as obstacles in their lived experiences as leaders and seemed to express them as interrelated constructs that place them at a disadvantage as leaders. Greta (2016) argued that ageism affects women in a double way, for being women and for being young.

Intersectionality is especially relevant for feminist research since it examines marginalization of women, particularly black women, from different perspectives and experiences. It is the framework that studies the intersection of gender, race and social class,
catalyzed by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Collins, 2012). Although my study did not find race and class influenced female leaders’ lived experiences, age and gender appeared reiterated in the women’s narratives about their journeys, as two interconnected dimensions that affected them. Since the black feminist thought appeared in the 1960s, research has broadened the scope of intersectionality by including other identities such as citizenship, sexuality, religion, and age (Bose, 2012). Choo and Ferree (2010) described the social groups that are affected by dimensions that go beyond gender, race and class as marginalized in multiple ways. A large amount of research has examined the intersectionality of age, gender and other dimensions that influence individuals’ experiences, particularly for women (Collins, Dumas, & Moyer, 2017; Ortbals & Rincker, 2009; Steffensmeier, Painter-Davis, & Ulmer, 2017). Gander’s (2014) study is particularly relevant to my study’s findings since it confirmed young female leaders in higher education in the United Kingdom face gender and age discrimination. The author’s findings support two important aspects of my research. First, all the women in her study reported age and gender related discrimination that influenced their experiences throughout their careers; and second, the women in her study, like the women in my study, also reported having to act like men and deny their femininity in order to be accepted. Therefore, findings from my study corroborate study findings globally that suggest that age discrimination is not limited to older women because women experience discrimination at almost every age.

Acknowledging Gender Inequality

Findings of this study confirm data that report gender inequality in the highest ranks in universities in the DR (Ministerio de Educación Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología [Ministry of
Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic], 2017). Claudia attributed the inequality in the highest positions to the biased belief that women are discriminated against because they are expected to take time off for parenting and to be absent from work for taking care of their children when they become ill. All the women in my study reported male chancellors in their institutions and they all acknowledged that most vice chancellor positions held by women in their institutions pertain to the academic area. Three of the five women believed that women are mostly occupying the academic vice chancellor position in Dominican universities because it relates to roles that are traditionally expected of women (educating). They raised concerns regarding the underrepresentation of women particularly in the chancellor position. Concurrent to these findings, recent figures on the gender-gap in higher education in the United States confirm that only 30% of university presidents are women (American Council on Education, 2017). Scholars posit that middle management or their equivalent in higher education structures is the most common position for women in higher education (Albalkhail, 2017; Jacobs, 1996; St. Germain-Driscoll, 2014). Therefore, my study suggests the presence of the glass ceiling phenomenon, as women have advanced to leadership positions, but their absence in the chancellor role and university boards is predominant.

A Man’s World: The Glass Ceiling

While all the women in this study expressed that women have made progress in Dominican society because they now participate in important social, political, and economic settings, they all recognized gender inequality in the highest positions. Their perspectives of the reasons for women’s underrepresentation in high level leadership varied, but they all raised concerns about the fact that men continue to occupy the most important positions in the
country, highlighting the higher education setting. Study findings suggest that men outnumber women in the chancellor positions, academic councils and boards of regents in Dominican universities.

The glass ceiling metaphor represents women’s lack of access to the highest ranks in organizational structures (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986; Smith et al., 2012). The glass ceiling illustrates the invisible and impenetrable barrier to women of elite positions (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Scholars argue that the glass ceiling metaphor indicates that women work their way to leadership positions facing many obstacles only to find a barrier that is not evident to them until they are very close to reaching the highest organizational echelon (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Hurley & Choudhary, 2016; Mishra & Mishra, 2016; Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012; Waller, 2016). Maria and Claudia expressed that the chancellor position is a political role that is associated with men and assigned by the boards, which are mostly made up of men. Findings suggest that the women reach the vice chancellor position, but recognize that the chancellor position is reserved for men, which implies there is no moving forward.

**Gender roles.** Findings from this study relate to other research that states that the difference between male and female leadership is primarily based on the assumptions and expectations that society assigns to women and men’s social roles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Mendez & Busenbark, 2013). Anna and Maria identified the influence of gender on their experiences was highlighted in roles that are traditionally associated with men. For instance, Maria reported men being preferred over her for projects with “masculinized” responsibilities that related to statistics and managing financial resources.
Also related to gender roles, my study found that women are challenged by the multiple roles they have to enact. All the women in my study have a family. They shared that in addition to their demanding leadership role, the main responsibility of raising their children, and housework rests on their shoulders. These findings suggest that traditional expectations of women’s and men’s social roles in the DR continue to affect women, and confirm existing research that suggests that stereotyped expectations influence female leaders’ experiences (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This study’s findings also imply the influence of the DR’s traditional culture on female leaders’ experiences. As such, four of the women in my study expressed that caregiving and nurturing are roles for which they have the most responsibility within their households. An idea in existing research that supports this finding is that society’s beliefs about social groups stem from seeing women more often than men in roles such as caring for children (Eagly & Heilman, 2016). As mentioned in Chapters Four and Five, Maria identified experiences with gender role stereotypes in the workplace, and expressed that women are expected to serve. Likewise, the women in Acker’s (2014) research explained that they had to "clean up messes, like housework" (p. 79). Mullen’s (2009) research also found female administrators in universities in the United States did most of the service work, while their male counterparts focused on research and more strategic work. Therefore, my study confirms that role segregation for men and women affect women in the DR.

Understanding Dominican Culture

Considering the dynamics and norms that function in higher education organizations is relevant for understanding the circumstances keeping women from gaining equality with men in the highest leadership levels in the DR, particularly the chancellor position and board
membership. Allen (2011) said that higher education institutions replicate norms of the larger culture to which they belong. Therefore, understanding the influence of DR’s traditional culture helps to shed light on women’s experiences towards leadership. Brooks (2007) argued that feminist standpoint epistemology defies us to critically examine society through women’s experiences and their diverse roles in society. Critical theories seek to deeply analyze and understand social life and to uncover the assumptions that ground standard understandings of social dynamics (Crossman, 2018). The women in my study communicated the varied roles that they are expected to enact, but also, the roles they feel they have to enact. In this sense, Baez (1985) stated that marriage and motherhood for Dominican women are their most important social aspirations. Women’s roles in their families determines their access to education and the scope of their participation in the workforce and political settings (Baez, 1985). In addition, the author argued that a general stereotyped belief in the DR is that men are the main providers in their homes and therefore, posses the highest rank within a family’s hierarchy, reflecting patriarchy. A study finding that confirms this idea is Patricia’s belief that women’s primary responsibility is their families.

**Patriarchy and Machismo**

A predominant theme that emerged in my study was that all the women regarded Dominican culture as *machista* and they recognized patriarchal dynamics that have been dragged from Dominican history that continue to influence social norms, which affect women. Lamas (2007) argued that societies in the LAC region continue to be guided by deeply rooted patriarchal social structures. In her work *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Lerner (1986) described how gender was created and established through history, displayed first in the earliest
civilizations, and reproduced in the patriarchal family structure. The author highlighted that although throughout history, power was conferred to women, for example, royal wife and daughter, they were the representation of their husbands and fathers, and power was generally interceded by men.

Most of the women in my study claimed that culture in the DR and women’s standing as of today are a reflection of its patriarchal legacy. The five participants mentioned the influence of the traditions that have been dragged from Dominican culture from the past that perpetuate men’s authority over women. This study’s findings evidence that Dominican culture places men’s authority over women, and that girls are raised to serve men, confirming that a traditional patriarchal and *machista* culture permeates social norms in the country, placing women in an oppressed and subordinated position. Existing literature addresses that in traditional patriarchal cultures, women are considered men’s property and as a commodity in the context of marriage (Chaudhuri, Morash, & Yingling, 2014; Klein, 1981). Most women explained that despite women’s increased participation in leadership roles, men continue to have the power and dominance in society. For example, an idea expressed by Patricia that seems to shed light and helps in further understanding the influence of the reiterated theme of patriarchy and *machismo* is that men do not accept being led by women. In patriarchal cultures, women are perceived as inferior to men (Shehabat, 2016).

The women attributed gendered situations they lived to the influence of Dominican traditional culture. Particularly, as mentioned earlier, all the women recognized that chancellors in Dominican universities are mostly men because it is traditionally a man’s role. Their explanations communicated that both patriarchy and *machismo* pervade organizational
dynamics and affect women’s progress. However, all five women said their institutions are not
gendered. The ambiguity they displayed suggests a lack of awareness and that gendered
dynamics are legitimized and internalized by the women. This finding is particularly important
because being unaware of the circumstances that directly affect them may perpetuate their and
other women’s subordination in the different roles they enact in society. Related to this finding,
the women seemed to communicate recognition of the importance of society’s awareness of
issues pertaining marginalized groups. As such, the women expressed that overall, people in
Dominican society lack awareness and knowledge to defend their rights. They discussed that
Dominicans must be critical to make better decisions that have a positive impact in society’s
development and to become empowered and demand basic rights.

Shehabat’s (2016) study found women complicit in their own and other women’s
oppression. Lerner’s (1986) work supports this idea as well. My study findings coincide with
the authors’ perspectives in two ways. First, Patricia and Anna expressed that women in the DR
raise their daughters to get married and serve men; and second, as mentioned earlier in this
chapter, a common theme that surfaced was female rivalry, which according to Derks et al.
(2016) is a response from women who experience gender discrimination themselves in the
workplace. These circumstances function as forces that perpetuate gendered dynamics.
Therefore, both findings imply that patriarchal influences are embedded in Dominican culture,
which generate material and symbolic oppression and marginalize women.

Other evidence of the influence of patriarchal culture in DR is reflected in the women’s
accounts regarding their appreciation of the chancellors. Four of the women highlighted their
gratitude towards the chancellors for hiring them and believing in their capability. Their
expressions seemed to communicate a hierarchical respect and a special admiration toward the figure of the chancellors, echoing men’s position of power over women. As mentioned previously, the women undertook their leadership roles facing challenges. Patricia, Maria, and Claudia directly report to male chancellors. Patricia and Claudia are two of the women who expressed deep gratitude and respect for the chancellors, and although they communicated the chancellors do not engage in discriminating and stereotyped practices, study findings may imply the chancellors hired them because they have the stereotyped belief that women are willing to take the blame if things go wrong and engage in positive relationships of nurturing and support in times of crisis (Ryan and colleagues, 2011). Regarding the chancellor, Claudia mentioned “the chancellor believes women work well and that they are detail oriented.”

**The Influence of Religion**

All the women expressed their faith in God and communicated knowledge and embrace of religious beliefs. My study found the influence of religion on women’s experiences towards leadership in two ways. First, one of the women believes that women’s primary role is caregiving and educating. Her profound belief in this idea is based on the Bible’s teachings, which she expressed assign women the primary responsibility of taking care of their children and serving their husbands, and that men are a family’s main provider. This study participant expressed concern regarding women neglecting their primary responsibilities as a result of their participation in the workforce and of pursuing demanding careers. Findings of this study suggest there is an influence of religion particularly on women’s self-conception regarding their roles. The women’s convictions cause ambiguity in their self-conceptions in that they aspire to excel at work, but feel that their primary role is caretaking. Supporting this idea,
Gangoli (2017) argued, “the predominant family structure in the Biblical narrative continued to be the patriarchal family” (p. 129). An abundance of literature addresses the relation between religion and patriarchal attitudes (Civettini & Glass, 2008; Engin & Pals, 2018; Goldscheider, Goldscheider, & Rico-Gonzalez, 2014; Seguino, 2011). For instance, Goldscheider et al.’s (2014) study found that religiosity was associated with patriarchal views regarding gender roles in the home in Sweden. Similarly, Seguino’s (2011) research confirmed that religious beliefs perpetuate hierarchal gender systems, norms, and stereotypes. As a consequence, findings from my study may imply that the women’s own deeply rooted religious beliefs legitimize patriarchal structures and women’s subordination.

The second finding that I interpret as an influence of religion on the women’s experiences is that two women in the study recognized the Catholic Church’s hierarchical structure mirrors men’s authority over women in the DR. Anna and Maria associated women’s underrepresentation in the chancellor position in universities in the DR with the hierarchical structure of the Church. In a Church’s structure, priests represent the highest authority and nuns serve priests. Religion, particularly Catholicism, is considered to be the basis of Latin American culture (De la Torre & Martín, 2016; Wood, 2014). Therefore, findings from my study evidence the influence of religion on social attitudes that contribute to gender inequality.

**Additional Findings**

The women communicated that narrating their experiences towards leadership allowed them to reflect on their meanings. This study found that, although the women described situations where they felt prejudice against them, while sharing their experiences and after reading the transcriptions of their interviews they seemed to have developed deeper knowledge
and awareness of the meanings of those experiences. The feminist critical and hermeneutic approaches that guided interview questions and discussions helped them develop a sense of their concrete experiences and, as a consequence, they transformed their self-knowledge (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Brooks, 2007). This finding is particularly relevant since study findings confirmed that deeply rooted traditional beliefs of gendered roles are engrained and legitimized in Dominican culture. Becoming aware of the meanings of their concrete experiences that were mainly influenced by gender may have a positive impact in transforming their perspectives and their responses to situations that put them and other women at a disadvantage. An additional finding related to this idea is that most of the women seemed to feel they could not complain about the circumstances and adversities they faced, appearing to communicate they were lucky and that they had to be grateful for the blessings they have for being able to enact multiple roles (mothers, wives, work) despite the pressures. As such, the study found a discrepancy in that the women complained about the many roles they undertake compared to men, but have self-conceptions of primary family caretakers and perceive their many roles as blessings by benevolent chancellors and God.

An additional study finding pertains to the women’s own machista narratives that seem to condemn them and perpetuate gender inequality. An example is Patricia’s idea regarding the future she foresees for women in the DR. She said, “little by little, society will give women the chance and it will be allowed. Society will allow, will give women the chance to occupy high leadership.” Moreover, Maria’s expression reflected stereotypical roles associated to men, “Everything that has to do with finance, administrative resources, and research, well, those are areas that men handle better, math and statistics.” Also related to gender roles, Patricia said, “A
woman is an educator.” These finding suggests that the women themselves hold gender stereotypical beliefs that contribute to their own subordination.

Despite the progress women’s status has had in the DR in the past decades catalyzed by the feminist and other social movements that had a positive impact on women’s increased participation in important settings, equality in the DR is far from being reached. Lamas (2007) stated that societies in the LAC region continue to be guided by deeply rooted patriarchal social structures. This study confirms this is the case for Dominican society.

**Study Implications**

A host of research posits the importance of mentoring programs and the establishment of structures and organizational practices that assign female leaders sponsorship and support for other women and aid in ensuring women’s career progress and success (Brown, 2005; Cleaver, 2016; Mullen, 2009; Searby, Ballenger, & Tripses, 2015). The creation of workplace mentors that advocate for women’s attainment of elite leadership in higher education institutions may serve as a catalyst for gender equality in Dominican universities. Moreover, Mullen (2009) suggested that when female leaders are properly transitioned into the role and effectively mentored by other leaders within the institution their probabilities of success increase. In addition, scholars have argued that an increase in the number of women in leadership may produce change in the traditional concept of leadership and reduce bias toward prospective female leaders (Koenig et al., 2011).

Another implication for practice is consciousness-raising initiatives regarding traditional practices that explicitly and implicitly hinder women’s progress. Female leaders expressed deeper understandings of the meanings of their experiences as a result of the reflection process.
they underwent through the interviews, particularly the influence of gendered dynamics. Therefore, institutionalized programs and practices that promote and encourage gender equality and inclusion in higher education institutions in the DR could aid in raising awareness and women’s self-knowledge aimed at challenging traditional norms and practices that discriminate against women.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Recent figures evidence a continued wage gap among female and male faculty in the United States, as women earn less than their male counterparts (Hannum et al., 2015). Likewise, two of the women in my study expressed that women in higher education earn less than men in the same positions. Scholars have extensively discussed the wage gap and women’s absence in the highest levels of leadership (Cleaver, 2016; Muller, 2009; Schein, 2001). For instance, Cleaver (2016) argued “The absence of senior women exacerbates the gender pay gap and becomes self-perpetuating when rising women see no further upward path for them” (para. 1). The women in this study expressed feeling supported by the male chancellors they directly report to. This study confirmed that their promotions were a result of the recognition of their capabilities and of their successes; however, the apparent admiration of some of the women towards the chancellors seemed to communicate they were compliant and submissive in their relationships with the chancellors. Kennedy and Kray’s (2015) study identified cognitive barriers that are a result of the negative stereotypes about women’s negotiating abilities, demonstrating how stereotypes affect women. Further research is recommended to examine the existence of a wage gap in female leadership in higher education in the DR. These sorts of studies may illuminate women’s attitudes and self-valuation in order to determine the factors accounting for women’s reports regarding
female leaders being paid less than their male counterparts and of the persistent underrepresentation of women in the chancellor position.

Another recommendation I offer as a result of my study is conducting further research on how other social constructs intersect with and influence female leaders’ experiences towards leadership. Although this study did not find social class and race as domains intersecting with gender and age, research that examines women’s social class and race, as well as other spheres such as marital status, within particular organizational contexts (private and public universities), may aid in further analyzing women’s experiences as marginalized groups in DR’s male dominated culture.

As mentioned in the prior sections of this chapter, this study found traditional religious beliefs influence female leaders’ experiences and affect women in their advancements to elite positions in universities. I recommend research that examines the extent to which religion and particular religious beliefs regarding traditional gender roles are hindering women’s progress. Religious narratives across many faiths place women as inferior to men and prevent women from playing a full and equal role. Research that studies the relation between religiousness and gender role attitudes may help in further understanding if the discrimination attributed to a higher authority is providing an excuse for the prevention of women’s equality in the higher education setting in the DR. The findings of my study related to some of the women’s self-conception regarding their subjugation to men might be preserving inequality and even violence towards women. The DR has alarmingly high rates of gender violence and deaths caused by femicides (Pola, 2003). Research has found a relationship between women’s workforce participation and gender-based violence in the DR (Bogaert, 2014), stating that when women do not work outside
their homes, domestic violence is reduced. Although laws and legislations that protect women have been created, deeply rooted traditional beliefs that suppress women and assign men authority and ownership over women, continue to permeate social dynamics in the country. As such, Bogaert (2014) argued that as women’s workforce participation and income increase, as well as their education levels and access to information, their perceptions of their rights increase and, they are less likely to justify being abused by men. Further research on the gender dynamics involving work-role identity is relevant for Dominican society.

Finally, as mentioned before, the five women in my study have families. A relevant recommendation for research is to conduct a study to understand the experiences towards leadership of female leaders without families. This sort of research may suggest a more inclusive perspective and aid in further examining the larger society related to traditional gender roles.

**Conclusion**

My study found that women’s experiences were mainly influenced by gender and age. Women in higher education in the DR are mostly occupying leadership in academic areas, which is a role traditionally associated with women. They acknowledged progress in their careers and having been recognized for their capabilities by being assigned to their leadership roles; however, study findings suggest the women see no further advancement to higher positions in universities’ structures. This perception is based on the fact that women are the exception in the chancellor positions because it is a role of power and influence traditionally associated to men. The study suggests the existence of gender-based role stereotyping triggered by traditional cultural beliefs. Patriarchal and *machista* attitudes were the primary findings of
this study, and imply that female leaders’ experiences are influenced by traditional social norms perpetuated from the country’s historical roots.

Religion was another strong theme in the study. Study participants demonstrated having developed self-conceptions as caregivers and educators, as natural roles that pertain to them as women. They communicated these ideas with reassurance, supported by their religious beliefs. The patriarchal structure established and encouraged by the church influences social dynamics in the DR, assigning men and women specific roles according to their gender and causing stereotypes and discrimination, especially towards women.

In conclusion, I believe that this research study is valuable for providing insight into the lived experiences of women who have developed a career in academic leadership, and to women in the country overall. It was an opportunity to illuminate traditional social dynamics that are hidden in Dominican culture and continue to suppress women. The study allowed the examination of implicit gendered social norms, but also explicit stereotypes and biases that still hold true in the twenty-first century in Dominican culture. The study’s approach helped develop awareness in the female leader participants in universities in the DR, as some of them indicated that by discussing their experiences they had acknowledged the meaning of their experiences.

Personally, it was rewarding to be able to give the five women in my study the chance to narrate their stories and share their perspectives. Further research on the influence of religion and the social dynamics in the DR that continue to place men’s power over women in the personal and professional spheres is relevant for further understanding Dominican society.
Building further knowledge related to this phenomenon will work as a force that influences change in deeply internalized traditional beliefs.
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Appendix A

HSIRB Approval Letter

Date: June 3, 2019

To: Andrea Beach, Principal Investigator
   Laura Sartori, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 19-05-27

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Women's Lived Experiences in their Pathways to Leadership Positions” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., add an investigator, increase number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

A status report is required on or prior to (no more than 30 days) June 2, 2020 and each year thereafter until closing of the study.

When this study closes, submit the required Final Report found at https://wmich.edu/research/forms.

Note: All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three (3) years after the study closes.
Appendix B

Recruitment E-mail

Dear [potential participant’s name],

I am a Ph.D. student at Western Michigan University, and I am working on my dissertation for attainment of the doctoral degree. You have been contacted to invite you to participate in a study that seeks to explore women’s experience with leadership in universities in the Dominican Republic. In order to be eligible to participate in the study, you must be a woman who occupies or has occupied a leadership position at a university in the Dominican Republic. For study purposes, a “leadership position” or “female leaders” is defined as a woman who occupies or has occupied dean, vice chancellor or chancellor positions in one of the universities in the Dominican Republic, and who’s responsibilities include leading a team, involvement in academic decisions, as well as resource management and allocation.

The goal of this study is to give voice to women who have worked their way to positions of leadership in higher education, providing a better understanding of the current context for female leadership in Dominican society. This qualitative study will serve to establish an initial framework of information about female leaders in higher education institutions in the Dominican Republic. It will provide higher education institutions in the Dominican Republic information on the lived experiences of female leaders in order to work to consciously foster an environment of equality, and to promote opportunities for qualified females in higher education settings to attain leadership positions and achieve success in leadership roles.

If you decide to participate, the study will require you to participate in a 60 to 90-minute interview, and a second follow-up meeting, which will be confidential. The interview will be conducted at the site of your convenience. If you meet the criteria requirements to participate in the study and have further questions, please reply to this email confirming interest or contact me at 809-722-4106.

Regards,

Laura Sartori
Correo Electrónico de Reclutamiento

Estimada [nombre de potencial participante]:

Soy estudiante de Ph.D. del Departamento de Liderazgo Educativo, Investigación y Tecnología de Western Michigan University, y estoy trabajando en la disertación para la obtención del título de doctorado. Usted ha sido contactada para invitarla a participar en el estudio que busca explorar las experiencias de mujeres líderes en universidades en la República Dominicana. Para ser elegible para participar en el estudio, usted debe ser una mujer que ocupa o haya ocupado un puesto de liderazgo en una universidad en la República Dominicana. Para fines del estudio, una “mujer líder” o “posición de liderazgo” son aquellas mujeres que ocupan o hayan ocupado posiciones de decana, vicerrectora o rectora y cuyas responsabilidades incluyen liderar un equipo e involucramiento en la toma de decisiones relacionadas a aspectos académicos, como también financieras.

Este estudio busca dar voz a las mujeres que han logrado llegar a posiciones de liderazgo en educación superior, proporcionando una mejor comprensión del contexto actual del liderazgo femenino en la sociedad dominicana. Este estudio servirá para establecer un marco inicial de información sobre mujeres líderes en instituciones de educación superior en la República Dominicana, además de proporcionar información a las instituciones sobre las experiencias vividas por mujeres líderes, buscando fomentar intencionalmente un entorno de equidad, para facilitar oportunidades a mujeres calificadas de alcanzar las posiciones más altas de liderazgo y de desempeñarse con éxito en sus roles.

El estudio requerrirá que participe en una entrevista confidencial de 60 a 90 minutos y en un segundo encuentro de seguimiento. La entrevista se llevará a cabo en el lugar de su conveniencia. Si usted cumple con los criterios requeridos y acepta participar en el estudio, responda este correo electrónico para confirmar su interés o comuníquese conmigo al 809-722-4106.

Saludos,

Laura Sartori
Appendix C

Women’s Representation of Their Journeys

Patricia: The Butterfly
Anna: The Spiral
Claudia: The Iceberg
Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Date of interview:

Place of interview:

Interviewer:

Participant pseudonym:

Leadership position of interviewee:

Years in leadership position:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The interview length will range from 60 to 90 minutes. All identifying information from the interview is strictly confidential and will be removed.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of female leaders in their pathways to the highest positions in universities in the Dominican Republic. This study seeks to describe how female leaders make meaning of their experiences and how their experiences influence how they see and conduct themselves as leaders.

1. Tell me about your pathway to leadership
   a. Who helped you most? What opportunities were available to you and how did you take them? What barriers did you experience and how did you overcome them?

2. Please describe Dominican culture as you understand it.

3. How would you describe women’s role and standing in Dominican society?

4. How does gender influence your experience as a leader?
5. What is your leadership style or approach?

6. How does gender influence your approach to leadership?

7. Beyond gender, what else has influenced your experience as a leader in higher education?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share?
Protocolo de Entrevista

Fecha de la entrevista:
Lugar de entrevista:
Entrevistadora:
Pseudónimo de la participante:
Posición de liderazgo ocupada por la participante:
Años en la posición de liderazgo:

Gracias por aceptar participar en este estudio. La duración de la entrevista oscilará entre 60 y 90 minutos. Toda la información que delata su identidad es estrictamente confidencial y será eliminada.

El propósito de este estudio es explorar las experiencias de mujeres que ocupan o han ocupado posiciones de liderazgo en universidades dominicanas. Este estudio busca describir cómo las mujeres líderes experimentan las experiencias y cómo sus experiencias influyen en la manera en que se ven y se comportan como líderes.

1. Cuéntame sobre tu trayectoria hacia posiciones de liderazgo
   ¿Quién te ayudó más? ¿Qué oportunidades tenías a tu disposición y cómo las has tenido?
   ¿Qué barreras experimentaste y cómo las superaste?

2. Por favor describe la cultura dominicana como tú la entiendes.

3. ¿Cómo descriptirías el rol de las mujeres y su posición en la sociedad dominicana?

4. ¿Cómo influye el género en tu experiencia como líder?

5. ¿Cuál es tu estilo de liderazgo o enfoque?

6. ¿Cómo influye el género en tu enfoque de liderazgo?
7. Más allá del género, ¿Qué más ha influido en tu experiencia como líder en educación superior?

8. ¿Hay algo más que te gustaría compartir?
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Western Michigan University
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Advisor: Dr. Andrea Beach, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator: Laura Sartori
Title of Study: Women’s Lived Experiences in their Pathways to Leadership Positions

STUDY SUMMARY: This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The purpose of the research is to: understand the experience of women who occupy or have occupied the highest leadership positions in universities in the Dominican Republic and will serve as Laura Sartori’s dissertation for the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to share your experience as a female leader in higher education in the Dominican Republic in an interview, and to participate in a second follow-up meeting to collect additional information and to further explore your experiences. You will be asked to share a picture or image to reflect and further explain your experience with leadership. Your time in the study will take between 60-90 minutes for each meeting. Possible risk and costs to you for taking part in the study may be discomfort from answering sensitive questions, and your time to complete the interview. There are no direct benefits for you other than sharing the results with you. Your alternative to taking part in the research study is not to take part in it.

You are invited to participate in this research project titled "Women’s Lived Experiences in their Pathways to Leadership Positions" and the following information in this consent form will provide more detail about the research study. Please ask any questions if you need more clarification and to assist you in deciding if you wish to participate in the research study. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by agreeing to take part in this research or by signing this consent form. After all of your questions have been answered and the consent document reviewed, if you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women who occupy or have occupied dean, vice chancellor and vice chancellor leadership positions in Dominican universities. This study seeks to describe how female leaders experience their pathways to
leadership, and how their experiences influence how they see and conduct themselves as leaders.

**Who can participate in this study?**
You must be a woman who occupies or has occupied dean, vice chancellor or chancellor positions in universities in the Dominican Republic. For study purposes, a “leadership position” or “female leaders” is defined as a woman who has led or leads a department or unit in a university in the Dominican Republic, and who’s responsibilities include leading a team, involvement in academic decisions, as well as resource management and allocation. Since the study purpose is to explore women’s experience in their pathways to leadership and how their experiences influence how they see and conduct themselves as leaders, the exclusionary criteria for subjects are men leaders and women who do not occupy or have not occupied dean, vice chancellor or chancellor leadership positions in Dominican universities.

**Where will this study take place?**
The interviews will be conducted at the site of convenience for you.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**
If you decide to participate in the study, your time commitment will be one session of approximately 60 to 90-minute interview, and to participate in a second follow-up meeting.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**
You will be asked to participate in an interview where you will answer questions by sharing and explaining your lived experiences in your pathways to leadership positions in higher education in the Dominican Republic. You will be asked to draw a picture or share an image to illustrate your experience as a female leader.

**What information is being measured during the study?**
Through the study, I want to learn about your lived experiences as female leaders in Dominican universities.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**
If you participate in this study, the interview questions might make you feel uncomfortable, because you will be sharing personal information. However, interviews will be kept strictly confidential, participation in the study is voluntary and you may decide to withdraw at any moment, or to not answer questions that are posed.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**
There are no direct benefits for you. This study might have indirect benefits for you since it will give voice to women who have worked their way to positions of leadership in higher education in the Dominican Republic, providing a better understanding of the current context for female leadership in Dominican society. This study may serve to establish an initial framework of information about female leaders in the Dominican Republic that will allow
higher education institutions to work to consciously foster an environment of gender equality, and to ensure opportunities for qualified females in higher education settings to attain leadership positions and achieve success in leadership roles.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**
There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
There is no compensation for participating in the study.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
This research is for Laura Sartori’s dissertation project, and researchers may use the results to present at a conference, journal or other. Your identity will be kept confidential at all times, including the institutions where you work or have worked as a leader. Dr. Andrea Beach will also have access to data for supervision during the time of the study.

**What will happen to my information collected for this research after the study is over?**
Should another research study be conducted, you will be contacted to obtain your consent for use of the data. The use of identifiable data collected as part of this study will not be used or distributed without your consent. If I am unable to contact you for your consent, your data will not be used for another study.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences if you choose to withdraw from this study even if it is after the interview has been conducted. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact me, Laura Sartori, at lauraluisa.sartori@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

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I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

___________________________________
Please Print Your Name:

___________________________________  ________________
Participant’s signature                  Date
Formulario de Consentimiento Informado

Universidad Western Michigan
Departamento de Liderazgo Educativo, Investigación y Tecnología

Asesora: Dr. Andrea Beach, Ph.D
Investigadora Principal: Laura Sartori
Título del Estudio: Experiencias Vividas por Mujeres en sus Caminos hacia Posiciones de Liderazgo.

RESUMEN DEL ESTUDIO: Este formulario de consentimiento es parte de un proceso de consentimiento informado para un estudio de investigación y proporcionará información que lo ayudará a decidir si desea participar en este estudio. La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. El propósito de la investigación es: comprender la experiencia de mujeres que ocupan o han ocupado los puestos de liderazgo más altos en las universidades de la República Dominicana y servirán como la disertación de Laura Sartori para los requisitos del grado de Doctor en Filosofía. Si participa en la investigación, se le pedirá que comparta su experiencia como mujer líder en educación superior en la República Dominicana en una entrevista, y que participe en una segunda reunión de seguimiento para recopilar información adicional y explorar más a fondo sus experiencias. Se le pedirá que comparta una imagen o dibujo para reflexionar y explicar con más detalle su experiencia con el liderazgo. Su tiempo en el estudio tomará entre 60 y 90 minutos para cada reunión. Los posibles riesgos y costos para usted por participar en el estudio pueden ser la incomodidad de responder preguntas delicadas y su tiempo para completar la entrevista. No hay beneficios directos para usted más que compartir los resultados con usted. Su alternativa a participar en el estudio de investigación es no participar en él.

Le invitamos a participar en este proyecto de investigación titulado "Experiencias Vividas por Mujeres en sus Caminos hacia Posiciones de Liderazgo" y la siguiente información en este formulario de consentimiento proporcionará más detalles sobre el estudio de investigación. Haga cualquier pregunta si necesita más aclaraciones y para ayudarla a decidir si desea participar en el estudio de investigación. No está renunciando a ninguno de sus derechos legales al aceptar participar en esta investigación o al firmar este formulario de consentimiento. Una vez que haya respondido a todas sus preguntas y se haya revisado el documento de consentimiento, si decide participar en este estudio, se le pedirá que firme este formulario de consentimiento.

¿Qué estamos tratando de descubrir con este estudio?
El propósito de este estudio es explore las experiencias de las mujeres que ocupan o han ocupado puestos de liderazgo en las universidades dominicanas. Este estudio busca describir cómo las lideres mujeres experimentan sus caminos hacia el liderazgo y cómo sus experiencias influyen en cómo se ven y se comportan como líderes.

¿Quién puede participar en este estudio?
Debe ser una mujer que ocupe o ha ocupado puestos de liderazgo en universidades de la República Dominicana. Para propósitos del estudio, una “posición de liderazgo” o “líderes femeninas” se define como una mujer que ocupa o haya ocupado una posición de decana, vicerrectora o rectora y que ha dirigido un departamento o unidad en universidades dominicanas, y entre sus responsabilidades se incluye liderar un equipo, involucrarse en decisiones académicas, como también la gestión y asignación de recursos. Dado que el propósito del estudio es explorar la experiencia de las mujeres en sus caminos hacia el liderazgo y cómo sus experiencias influyen en cómo se ven y se comportan como líderes, los criterios de exclusión para los sujetos son hombres líderes y mujeres que no ocupan o no han ocupado posiciones de decana, vicerrectora o rectora en universidades en la República Dominicana.

¿Dónde se llevará a cabo este estudio?
Las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo en el sitio que le resulte conveniente a usted.

¿Cuál es el tiempo de compromiso para participar en este estudio?
Si decide participar en el estudio, su compromiso de tiempo será una sesión de aproximadamente 60 a 90 minutos de entrevista, y un segundo encuentro de seguimiento.

¿Qué se te pedirá que hagas si eliges participar en este estudio?
Se le pedirá que participe en una entrevista en la que responderá preguntas compartiendo y explicando sus experiencias vividas en su camino hacia posiciones de liderazgo. Se le pedirá que dibuje o comparta una imagen que ilustre su experiencia en su camino hacia posiciones de liderazgo.

¿Qué información se mide durante el estudio?
A través del estudio, quiero aprender sobre tus experiencias vividas en el camino hacia posiciones de liderazgo y como líder mujer en educación superior dominicana.

¿Cuáles son los riesgos de participar en este estudio y cómo se minimizarán estos riesgos?
Si decides participar en este estudio, las preguntas de la entrevista pueden hacer que te sientas incómoda, ya que compartirás información personal. Sin embargo, las entrevistas se mantendrán estrictamente confidenciales, la participación en el estudio es voluntaria y puedes decidir retirarte en cualquier momento o no responder las preguntas realizadas.

¿Cuáles son los beneficios de participar en este estudio?
El estudio no tiene beneficios directos para ti. Este estudio podría tener beneficios indirectos para usted, ya que dará voz a las mujeres que han trabajado para obtener puestos de liderazgo en la educación superior en la República Dominicana, brindando una mejor comprensión del contexto actual del liderazgo femenino en la sociedad dominicana. Este estudio puede servir para establecer un marco inicial de información sobre mujeres líderes en la República Dominicana que permitirá a las instituciones de educación superior trabajar para fomentar conscientemente un entorno de igualdad de género y garantizar oportunidades para
mujeres calificadas en entornos de educación superior para alcanzar posiciones de liderazgo y lograr el éxito en los roles de liderazgo.

¿Hay algún costo asociado con la participación en este estudio?
No hay costos asociados con la participación en este estudio.

¿Hay alguna compensación por participar en este estudio?
No hay compensación por participar en el estudio.

¿Quién tendrá acceso a la información recopilada durante este estudio?
Esta investigación es para la disertación de Laura Sartori y pudiera usarse los resultados para presentar en una conferencia, publicar en una revista u otro medio. Su identidad se mantendrá confidencial en todo momento, incluidas las instituciones donde trabaja o ha trabajado como líder. La Dra. Andrea Beach también tendrá acceso a los datos para la supervisión durante el tiempo del estudio.

¿Qué pasará con mi información recopilada para esta investigación después de que termine el estudio?
En caso de que se realice otro estudio de investigación, se lo contactará para obtener su consentimiento para el uso de los datos. El uso de los datos identificables recopilados como parte de este estudio no se utilizará ni se distribuirá sin su consentimiento. Si no puedo comunicarme con usted para su consentimiento, sus datos no serán utilizados para otro estudio.

¿Qué pasa si quieres dejar de participar en este estudio?
Puede decidir dejar de participar en el estudio en cualquier momento y por cualquier motivo. No sufrirá ningún perjuicio o penalización por su decisión de detener su participación. No experimentará NINGUNA consecuencia si decide retirarse de este estudio, incluso si es posterior a la entrevista. La investigadora también puede decidir suspender su participación en el estudio sin su consentimiento.

Si tiene alguna pregunta antes o durante el estudio, puede contactarme, Laura Sartori, a lauraluisa.sartori@wmich.edu. También puede comunicarse con la Presidencia, la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Sujetos Humanos al 269-387-8293 o el Vicepresidente de Investigación al 269-387-8298 si surgen preguntas durante el curso del estudio.

Este documento de consentimiento ha sido aprobado para su uso durante un año por la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Sujetos Humanos (HSIRB) según lo indicado por la fecha y firma del presidente de la junta en la esquina superior derecha. No participe en este estudio si la fecha del sello es anterior a un año.

He leído este documento de consentimiento informado. Los riesgos y beneficios me han sido explicados. Acepto tomar parte en este estudio.
Por favor imprime tu nombre:

________________________________________

Firma del participante

Fecha