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Crafting a Different Kind of Story: Experiences of Creative Writers Leading in Higher Education

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CRAFTING A DIFFERENT KIND OF STORY: EXPERIENCES OF CREATIVE WRITERS
LEADING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Connections between creativity and leadership often focus on how fostering creativity can help an organization. Despite the value that creativity can bring to organizations, Mueller et al. (2011) found that creative people themselves are not seen as leadership material. Yet many people with creative backgrounds do take on leadership roles, particularly in higher education.

This qualitative study explores the experiences of higher education leaders who have a background in creative writing and how those leaders perceive the interaction of the leadership role with their creative experience. The sample included 12 mid-level leaders in higher education who had an MFA or Ph.D. in creative writing and at least one creative publication. Data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using coding methods to develop themes and subthemes that reflected patterns in the experiences and perceptions of the leaders. The analysis led to seven themes and an additional 13 subthemes illustrating the influence of creative writing on leadership in terms of how participants conceive of leadership, how they understand their identities as a leader and a creative person, and the overlap of skills in the two areas.

The themes reveal that participants utilize aspects of Creative Leadership in their own work. Specifically, they view leadership as collaborative, open, and people-focused. They take a broad perspective on situations, and often navigate multiple realms both in their leadership roles and in other aspects of their lives. These leaders recognize that they integrate creativity in their identity and in their actions as leaders, even when their creative genre or outlet shifted. These

leaders distinguish themselves from other leaders, and they experience negative stereotypes from those outside of creative fields. Lastly, these leaders are able to describe skills from their creative writing training and history, particularly analytical skills, that transfer to leadership roles.

Overall, this study found that creative writers experience leadership as an open and collaborative process that draws from their creative writing talents. In their leadership they made use of the problem-solving abilities and perspective they developed from creating works of art. These skills and ways of perceiving leadership bring a unique value to the leaders and to institutions of higher education.

CRAFTING A DIFFERENT KIND OF STORY: EXPERIENCES OF CREATIVE
WRITERS LEADING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Meredith L. Dodson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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stop, which was what I needed to make the decision to continue. Her leadership, as well as Associate Provost Chaney's and President Corey's have been wonderful models for me as I learn what being an effective leader is all about. Each of these leaders have taken time to talk with me about leadership and been examples to emulate.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the effects on my family, my husband, children, parents, and siblings, over the past seven years as I trudged through this journey. My children, Lilly and Lucy, have never known me to not be in school, and I hope that this will open up more time and possibilities for our adventures.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge and thank my mother, Dr. Sharon Dodson, who watched my children, read my homework, helped me with stats classes, and was my outside researcher for this project. This dissertation is dedicated to her. I found myself unintentionally following her footsteps into this degree program, and I only hope that I can follow her lead in loving and supporting our family. I literally would not have been able to do any of this, the dissertation, my job, raising my children, without her help and example.

Meredith L. Dodson

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, the Master's of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing has become a popular degree in the U.S. In 2016, approximately 20,000 people applied to over 350 writing programs (So & Piper, 2016). These programs have not only gained popularity and students, but they have been a point of discussion for the changing world of work. Daniel Pink, a writer and best-selling author, stated that "the MFA is the new MBA" (Harney, 2005, p. 16). Pink clarified this stance by stating that an MFA in any artistic field prepares a person to utilize skills associated with the right side of the brain, such as empathy and the ability to compose, whether the medium of composition is oil paints or people who are being organized into an effective group (Hendrick, 2018). Pink's phrase caught on. A simple internet search reveals many pages of article and blogs, ranging from 2005 to the present day, referring to the phrase.

At the heart of this comparison is the idea that the MFA develops skills that are transferrable and useful to other industries and applications. A sampling of some of the skills noted for creative writing MFAs includes storytelling (Lo, 2015), the ability to view issues from multiple perspectives (Atkinson, 2014; Bell, 2008), the ability to take criticism and revise thinking (Bell, 2008), knowing when to stop an unsuccessful project (Bell, 2008), how to create an overarching vision (Lo, 2015), and an awareness of people's relationships and motivations (Atkinson, 2014; Bell, 2008).

Many of these creative skills are applicable to leadership; indeed, the need for creativity in leadership is pervasive, as noted by IBM's (2010) Global CEO study from over 1500 interviews with CEOs that creativity is the most valuable ability for leaders to have. The value in creativity for the CEOs in the IBM study was that it provided an answer to the new complexities

that are developing in business (IBM, 2010). Traditional solutions will not continue to work in a more complex environment. Leaders who can both work within complexity and find innovative solutions are necessary. The interplay between these two ideas, creativity and leadership, is what this study explored.

In particular, this study focused on leaders in higher education to explore how creativity may relate to increasingly complex and ambiguous leadership roles. Higher education is a complex system involving both vertical and horizontal relationships within a structure that has ambiguous purposes (Keeling et al., 2007). Every level of leadership in higher education requires a unique set of skills based on the particular contexts of the position and college. As Asif and Rodrigues (2015) note, leaders in education must develop creativity in order to function in contemporary times. Working in complex political, social, and economic contexts, leaders at all levels, from the president to the long-term faculty member who garners the respect of her peers, have to deal with a changing environment. A static reaction to a situation or continuing the "way it's always been" results in a university that is left behind.

The role of the mid-level administrator, whether the title is department chair, dean, or associate provost, is particularly complex. Though mid-level academic leaders share similar pressures with other middle management fields, the nature of the academy is unique (Rosser et al., 2003). As an example, Hendrickson et al. (2012) describe the department chair's conflict of being in the middle of the more tightly-coupled upper administration system and the more loosely-coupled academic system. Drawing on previous research, Rosser et al. (2003) describe the competing roles of the dean in over a dozen different ways. In general, it seems that mid-level leaders are being asked to appease all people and organizations they interact with. As the expectations of the position increase, Degn (2015) notes that those expectations affect the

leader's construction of their identity and their management practices. Degn further claims that "identity constructions…affect which patterns we deem appropriate and thereby our actions" (p. 1179). Those leaders in middle positions who bring creative experiences will act in these competing roles of middle management based partly on their understanding of their own creativity.

Problem Statement

Exploring art and creativity in relation to leadership is a shift from the traditional models of defining effective leadership. While many different classifications of leaders and leadership exist, Northouse (2016) has defined leadership as a "process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 6). Northouse further delineates two primary perspectives on leadership: trait-based and process-based.

As suggested by Northouse's (2016) definition, belief in trait-based leadership has been declining, and the traits themselves have shifted over the years to include more acknowledgement of the need for collaboration. Still, an antiquated image of leadership persists in the wider U.S. culture; a recent White House administration was based upon this blustering, heroic vision. To detail previous generations' conceptions of leaders, Mann's (1959) study ascertained that a leader's qualities include aspects that fit a narrow group of people; masculinity, dominance, conservatism were highly ranked as leadership traits. Obviously this list excludes a good number of people who express themselves differently but are able to inspire followers. It also, notably, excludes the idea of artistry.

While viewing leadership through a trait-based lens highlights inequalities, even some of the structural or skill-based conceptions of leadership are problematic in higher education. Bureaucratic or hierarchical models are more suited to situations in which leaders must manage

rather than inspire. Though many institutions of higher education utilize a hierarchy, reconciling this structure with the bifurcated system that most institutions claim is a challenge.

Instead, and taking into account Northouse's (2016) definition, a process-based approach provides a more useful conceptualization of leadership, and there are many that allow for creativity. Creativity itself can be described as an ordering process (Bleakley, 2004). Some recent models of leadership that lend themselves more easily to creativity include Transformational and Creative Leadership, which refers to leaders who both accept and dispute the traditional structures and processes of the institution (Kandiko, 2012).

Bolman and Deal (2016) describe leadership as an art. They call for leaders in higher education to develop artistry and creativity, to be able to take in the complexity of today's issues, and to create a sense of how disparate elements work together and can be best harnessed to get the desired results. What remains to be done, though, is an exploration of the link between traditional creative fields and the creative skills of leaders.

Many questions follow from this inquiry: What does it mean to be creative, and how can that creativity relate to leadership, especially within higher education? How do individuals with training in creative fields who are now educational leaders utilize those creative skills in their leadership methods? Do creative writers transfer those abilities to leadership? What other skills do they bring? Much is unknown about the process and experience of creativity in art overlapping with creativity in leadership. Despite the clear and specific need for leaders with creativity and a sense of art, a single model of creativity in leadership has not been developed.

Studies Addressing the Problem

Many studies address the need for creativity in leadership in a variety of settings (Adler, 2011; Mueller, 2017; Mumford et al., 2017; Taylor & Hanson, 2005). Mumford et al. (2017)

describe creativity as one of nine essential cognitive skills for leaders, while Adler (2011) describes creative solutions as a necessity for our current environmental and economic problems. In looking for a way to explain how creativity relates to leadership, research has often connected creativity and traits of creativity in to Burns' (1978/2010) Transformational Leadership (Hansen et al., 2007; Koh et al., 2019; Wang & Zhu, 2011).

A related group of studies examines what the arts can bring to leadership, which skills or perceptions may be useful to leaders. Some studies focus on using art to reframe how leadership and organizations are viewed, often using artistic concepts as metaphors for understanding what is happening in an organization (Cowan, 2007; Ladkin & Taylor, 2010; Morgan, 2010; Ropo & Sauer, 2008). For example, scholars have suggested that an improvisational jazz group may be an apt comparison to leadership (Legon et al., 2013); indeed, the journal *Organizational Science* dedicated an entire special issue to the relationship of jazz to organizing (Meyer et al., 1998). Others, like Ropo and Sauer (2008), used metaphors of a waltz and rave to discuss types of leadership, with the waltz representing more of a positivist view, and the rave a constructionist reinterpretation. In addition, Morgan (2010) examines the skills that leaders can develop through working with poetry, including the ability to see situations from different angles.

Despite the variety of skills and perspectives to be gained from the connection of leadership and the arts, previous research focusing on these two aspects often examine how leaders can foster creativity within those they lead, rather than the identity of the leader themselves. Koh et al. (2019), for instance, utilized a meta-analysis to suggest that transformational leaders can enhance the creativity of followers. Others have also found that creativity can be effectively led, or guided, by leaders (Koh et al., 2019, Wang & Zhu, 2011). Similarly, researchers have found that creativity can be developed in followers (Asif &

Rodrigues, 2015; Randel & Jaussi, 2019; Phelan & Young, 2003; Puccio et al., 2005). However, little research has been done on the creativity and creative identity of the leader themselves (Koh et al., 2019).

A few studies have examined leaders who are artistic, many of them addressing leaders who come from the performing arts. Brown (2019), for example, interviewed college presidents with performing arts backgrounds. Jenlink (2015) examines the poetics of leadership, and Ibottson and Darsø (2008) relate leadership to directing in theater. These studies also link to the research on the benefits that creativity and art may have on leadership.

Literature Deficiency Statement

Literature on creativity in leadership is broad. Since creativity itself is a popular word and common description for leaders, research has explored creativity in the workplace. However, much of the research on creativity and leadership has focused on the leader's ability to create space for follower creativity rather than looking at the effects of a leader's own creativity and the development of their own creative identity. Additionally, much of the research is in the field of for-profit business, and does not examine leaders in higher education, nor does it specifically examine mid-level leaders who, by the nature of the position, have tension between the upper-level administration and their own followers.

A few studies have examined how traditional training in an art may influence a leader, though none have focused specifically on the art of writing. Most of this research focuses on performance arts, and even in this segment of research, much of the work looks at applications of the art form that leaders can use with followers, rather than on the creative aspects of the leader themselves. The unique artistry of creative writers and how their own creativity and creative identity relates to their leadership has not yet been explored.

Significance of Study

There is a need for a deeper understanding of how mid-level leaders in academia might develop and express their creativity. One unexplored avenue is leaders whose specific background in creative writing gives them experience developing creativity within themselves. The more we know about the phenomenon, the better we can help leaders understand how their creative experience may relate to their development as effective leaders. My study examined creativity in leadership from a perspective of the leader's own sense of artistry in order to understand how leaders develop and harness their own ability to be creative in order to be effective in their professional roles.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of mid-level higher education leaders who have a degree in creative writing to understand how that background might relate to their leadership.

Research Questions

The principal research question for this study is: How do creative writers who become mid-level leaders in higher education make sense of their prior experiences as creative writers regarding their work as leaders? Specific research questions for the study are:

1. What role does a creative writing background play in the experience of leadership for mid-level leaders in higher education?

2. How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the process of shifting their social and individual identity from a writer to a leader?

3.   How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education

describe the overlap of creative writing and leadership skills?

Conceptual Framework and Narrative

A conceptual framework is a way of connecting the multitude of elements in a research

project, including the formal and informal theories that influence the approach (Ravitch &

Riggan, 2017). The framework for this study draws from a variety of perspectives and includes

both the influences on the leaders themselves and ways to understand the experience.

The phenomenon I explored is the experience of creative writers who have become

leaders in higher education. As leaders, they apply their experiences in creative writing to their

new craft of leadership. The top of the model shown in Figure 1 situates the leader in a specific

social context of how creativity and leadership are perceived in higher education. Glăveanu and

Tanggaard (2014) contend that creative identity is the interaction of the individual and society.

They describe a creative individual as "a *social actor* able to co-construct his or her own sense of

creative value in communication with others and in relation to societal discourses about what

creativity is" (p. 13). For this research, the value of the societal influence on creativity is vital;

because the leaders exist in different realms, that of creative writers and leaders in higher

education, understanding the societal perceptions of creativity in each of those realms allows for

a more complete examination of the leader's experiences.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Dodson (2021) Study
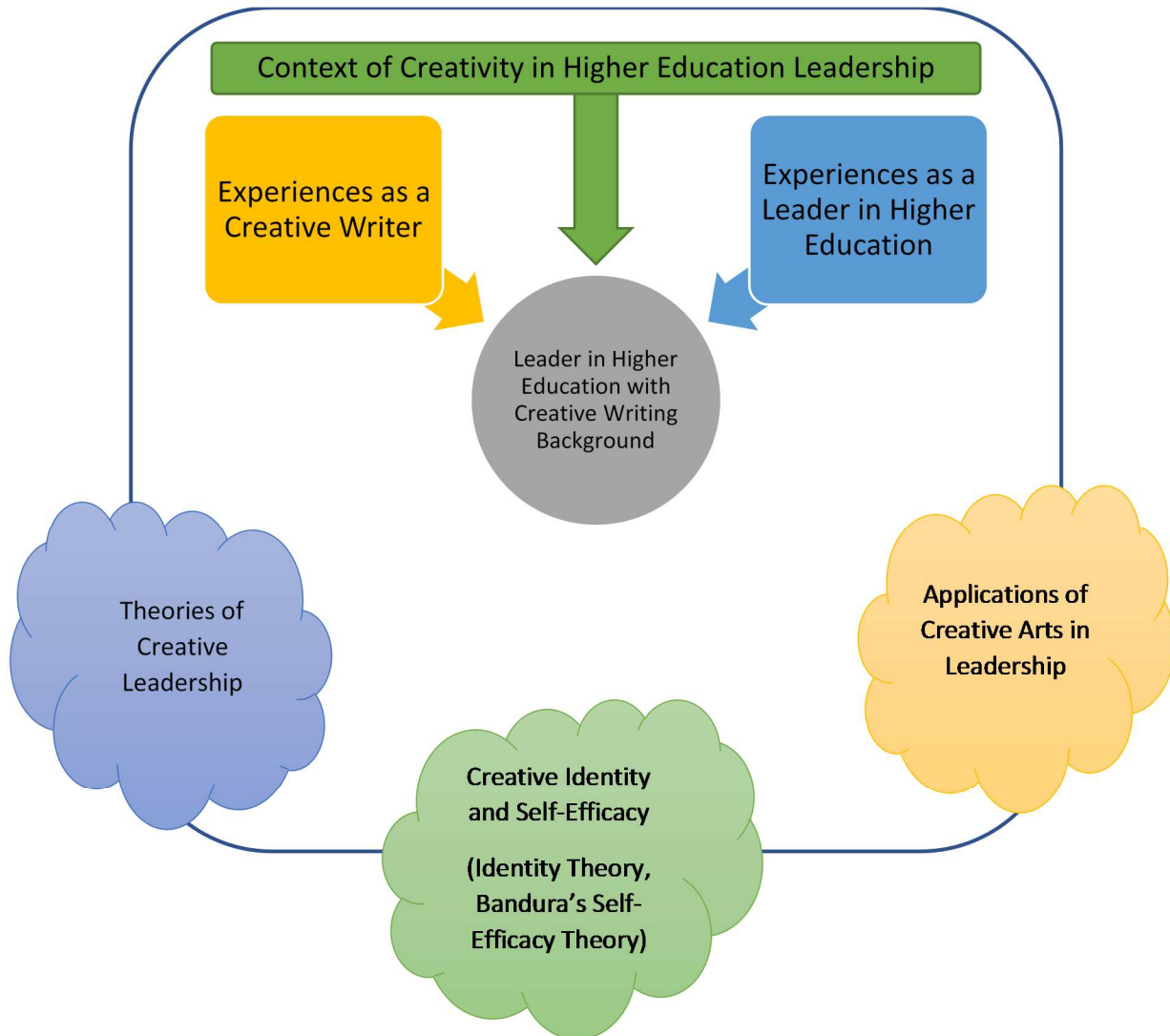
This framework centers on the leader themselves. The leader brings past experiences of creative writing, including a mastery of their craft skills, a creative identity, and metaphorical knowledge to their new role as a leader. Eddy (2013) argues that various experiences create a multi-dimensional leader who should draw upon lessons learned from those experiences. As

leaders, these writers apply their experience and knowledge gained from creative writing to create themselves as multi-dimensional leaders.

The first of three theoretical frames that shape this study is Creative Leadership. Many definitions of creative leadership exist, beginning with Phillip Selznick's exploration in the 1950s in an attempt to parse out the technical aspects of leadership from the generative ones (Mainemelis et al., 2018). Since then, Creative Leadership has become a wide-spread term, though no single definition has come forward. However, researchers have proposed qualities of creative leaders, such as forward-thinking, visionary, able to span boundaries, and relationship-oriented (Asif & Rodrigues, 2015; Ibottson & Darsø, 2008; Kandiko, 2012; Stoll & Temperly, 2009). Specifically, researchers have explored the concept of boundary spanning as it relates to mid-level leaders or leaders who bridge multiple disciplines (Kandiko, 2012; Prysor & Henley, 2018; Whitchurch, 2008). In addition, much research has linked Creative Leadership to Transformational Leadership (Forest, 2009; Kandiko, 2012; Koh et al., 2019; Lawson-Graves, 2012; Wang & Zhu, 2011; Waterwall et al., 2017). Many of these theories were utilized in developing an understanding of Creative Leadership for this study.

The middle frame that shapes this study involves *creative identity* and *creative self-efficacy*, concepts that have been studied as derivatives of Identity Theory and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory. Waterwall et al. (2017), drawing from Tierney and Famer (2002), describe creative self-efficacy as a person's belief in their creative abilities; this belief is seen as necessary for individuals to show creative behavior. Waterwall et al. found that the two concepts of creative identify and creative self-efficacy were closely intertwined, which is displayed in this framework by placing them together. Identity refers to the relationship of creativity to the

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person's idea of who they are at their core (Waterwall et al., 2017). The leader with a creative writing background negotiates different role identities as a leader than as a writer.

The last theoretical frame is the application of the skills that the leaders demonstrate through the interaction of the creative writing background and the responsibilities of their role. Some of these skills in include storytelling (Lo, 2015), an ability to see through unique perspectives (Atkinson, 2014; Bell, 2008; Morgan, 2010), a willingness to revise and take criticism (Bell, 2008), knowing when to call it quits (Bell, 2008), an ability to create a vision (Lo, 2015), and a strong sense of relational awareness (Atkinson, 2014; Bell, 2008).

As a whole, this conceptual framework recognizes that leaders in higher education with creative backgrounds negotiate a variety of identities and contexts. They are influenced by both their leadership experiences and their creative experiences, and those experiences can be examined through a variety of lenses in order to understand how the two relate.

Methods Overview

To address the research questions, this qualitative study involved in-depth interviews with approximately 12 leaders in higher education who have an advanced degree and publication in the field of creative writing. Data was classified into themes that provide a view of the experience of being a leader with this particular background. Details of the methods are presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 1 Closure

Creative writers who become leaders in higher education are often in a minority, yet these leaders at all levels of higher education may have much to give the field of leadership and much to add to the understanding of how creativity can serve to enhance leadership. In addition, the experiences of these leaders may give insights into how to develop creative skills in others.

Next, Chapter 2 will examine literature exploring creativity and leadership, including contextual discussions, the relationship between creativity and leadership types, creative identity, and applications of the arts to leadership.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review demonstrates the connections between various aspects of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this research, which examines the overlap between two concepts, creativity and leadership, the review also guides the analysis of these concepts and provide frames for understanding how they work together and separately.

This chapter begins with an exploration of research describing the context and interplay of creativity in leadership, including current definitions of creativity and leadership and the call for more creativity in leadership. From this overview of creativity, the chapter moves toward examining theories of boundary spanning and Creative Leadership.

The third section of this chapter presents an in-depth look at what is known about both creative identity and creative self-efficacy and how those concepts relate to leadership and the transfer from one role to another.

The fourth, and last, section of this literature review funnels toward the specific topic of creative writing, giving examples of how art and creativity have been used and studied in terms of leadership. This section looks at metaphors of art and leadership, then narrows to research on leaders and leadership development involving the performing arts. The chapter finishes by looking at skills related to leadership that are gained through the craft of creative writing.

Context of Creativity in Leadership

Definitions of creativity abound. Researchers in creativity and leadership often cite the many works of Teresa Amabile, which describe creativity as the "production of novel and appropriate solutions to open-ended problems in any domain of human activity" (Amabile, 1997, p. 18). However, Amabile and Pratt (2016) note that creativity is dynamic, and that despite this

broad understanding of creativity, no agreed-upon definition of creativity exists. One reason for this is that context is vital to the understanding of creativity, since it is the context that will define creativity for a specific discipline (Bleakley, 2004). Some interpretations of creativity, like Amabile's, treat creativity as a product. However, creativity can also be conceived of as a *process* or *rhythm* or even a *transgression*, each of which is a type of creativity noted by Bleakley (2004). Bleakley's10 types are flexible; they are not a set pattern, but rather are ways of approaching the concept and application of creativity in a variety of contexts.

In the specific context of higher education, some of Bleakley's (2004) types, such as *problem solving*, *problem stating*, and *ordering process*, fit well. In particular, *problem solving* seems to be a standard conceptual frame for creativity in leadership. Bleakley argues that because of the focus on application of creativity (the hard work of perseverance and revision available to all), this concept allows for craftwork (the skills of leadership) to be seen as creative.

One type Bleakley (2004) identified as most commonly used in art seems to hold promise for leaders in higher education who seek to create culture shifts or who need to successfully maintain a loosely-coupled system. The *irrational* type is associated with the breaking down of traditional structures. While this may at first seem to be destructive rather than creative, in art, there does not have to be a clear distinction.

A final typology that may also serve culture-changers is *resistance to the 'uncreative'*. Bleakley's (2004) designation refers to people who consistently eschew the ordinary, thereby ending up with creative options, though not intentionally seeking creativity. Again, leaders who seek a more effective or collaborative way to lead may find creative solutions simply by refusing to follow the status quo. Without intending creativity, leaders may embody it.

As Bleakley (2004) notes, these typologies complement and also contradict one another. It is entirely possible to create a pluralistic approach to creativity; indeed, Bleakley calls for an understanding that these are not rigid categories, nor should they be thought of as static (p. 466). Leaders in higher education will employ many of these types.

Complicating a definition of creativity are the terms "art" and "artistry," which often refers more to an attention to and talent for craft. However, "art" can also be used to describe the enactment of leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2017), and the phrase "the art of leadership" is prevalent (Ladkin & Taylor, 2010). Artistry and creativity are different terms, yet both are ways of discussing the phenomenon I am interested in exploring. If creativity produces new, valuable ideas, then artistry is producing those ideas or products with a sense of craft mastery, a sense that one has not simply stumbled on to the right answer. Despite the differences in these terms, I will keep the original terms used by other researchers and use both to describe the phenomenon.

Connecting Creativity to Leadership

Research into the connection of creativity and leadership often explores what a creative perspective can add to the quality of leadership. Starting with an overview of the organization may be helpful in clarifying the relationship between creativity and leadership. Taylor and Hanson (2005) created a framework to categorize the research field of organizational aesthetics. Aesthetics, in their conception, is how we create knowledge through our five senses, thoughts, and feelings. Taylor and Hanson's four categories are on two continuums: from artistic to intellectual (method), and from instrumental to aesthetic (content). In the artistic/instrumental category, arts can be used to work with issues within the individual organization. The artistic/aesthetic category uses art to share the experiences of the organization. The intellectual/aesthetic explores how industries can produce and be more aesthetic. The last

category is the most pertinent for this research; the intellectual/artistic research explores how art and aesthetics can be used to develop understanding of organizations. Included in this category is how metaphors from art can show truths about organizations and leadership (Taylor & Hanson, 2005).

Conroy and Batty (2019) examine research in the field of creative work and organizational theory to understand the potential of using creative writing theory in the field of organizational leadership. One piece of research they profiled is a case study of a dissertation by one of the authors, which was a screenplay. The authors place this art/work in the framework presented by Taylor and Hanson (2005), whereby Conroy's dissertation represents the artistic/aesthetic quadrant, in that the work presents the everyday experiences of organizational leadership. Conroy and Batty argue that this presentation allows for a more accurate experience and "critical reflexivity" necessary to better understand leadership.

Moving toward a concept of leadership and creativity more focused on individual leaders, Mueller (2017) argues that if organizations want to increase creativity, they need to change the stereotype of a successful leader. Instead of the Great Man model, organizations will benefit from a leader who knows how to work with a creative process and guide problem solving rather than provide solutions. In previous research, Mueller et al. (2011) developed three studies examining how perceptions of creativity and leadership are related. The first study involved 346 workers in India either answering a questionnaire on their intrinsic motivation and leadership potential or by rating those in the first group on their creativity and leadership. The second study, an experimental design, asked 194 U.S. students to either pitch or evaluate ideas. Some idea pitchers were instructed to present novel solutions, while others were told to find useful solutions. The evaluators rated pitchers on their leadership potential and other qualities. Mueller

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et al.'s third study exposed 183 U.S. students to priming with either charismatic leadership or general leadership. Students then responded to a scenario and rated the leadership potential of the team member in the scenario. Taken together, Mueller et al.'s three studies illustrated a consistent bias against the association of creativity and leadership. The expression of creative ideas is not compatible with people's view of leadership. However, the ability to find new and useful solutions may be exactly what organizations need.

Adler (2011) goes further, stating that creativity is necessary to save our planet. It is time, she argues, to take on new forms of leadership and to "invoke beauty." Adler presents three forms of courage that great leaders and artists have; these are qualities that leaders can gain. The first is the courage to see the situation as it really is, the second is to imagine possibilities, and the third is to inspire others to change. What creativity and beauty add, even more than a change strategy, is a focus on humanity. Businesses need to truly become part of our society and show concern for humanitarian issues. The vision offered by creativity is one way to allow for this.

Taylor and Ladkin (2009) present a list of additional ways that art may benefit leadership. They create a framework of four different processes or methods describing how the arts relate to leadership. The first is the transfer of skills, in which specific techniques or strategies from artistic fields can be applied to other fields. The second method is to use artistic means to reflect on practices, which allows the knowing of the situation to be much more nuanced. Thirdly, Taylor and Ladkin suggest that art can be used to show the essence of an organization or situation. As an example, they discuss that leaders might analyze *Hamlet* to discuss ineffective leadership. This section relates to the idea of using metaphors of art to describe leadership. The last category of art in leadership is making art. Taylor and Ladkin echo Adler (2011) in their

closing, which argues that by making use of art practices, organizations and people can become more in-tune with ourselves and "our potential as human beings" (p. 67).

Sohmen (2015) argues that true creativity is demonstrated by a useful output that requires strong focus and determination. It leads to change and is the impetus for innovation. Similar to Adler (2011) and Taylor and Ladkin (2009), Sohmen argues that because of the need for collaboration and understanding, a creative leader deeply understands humanity.

Human beings and the systems they create are complex, and a leader more connected to our social structure will be able to work with that complexity. Ladkin and Taylor (2010), in an introduction to an issue of *Leadership* dedicated to leadership as art develop a definition: leadership which is able to hold paradoxes, to understand the world as complex, and to work with the dichotomies inherent in that complexity. The motifs Ladkin and Taylor recognized in the work of the issue were that leadership happens through engagement with bodies, it requires sitting with contradictions, and that artistic leadership brings out artistic sensibilities.

One of the articles that Ladkin and Taylor (2010) draw from is Springborg (2010), which explores the idea that leaders should take a form of sense-making from artists. He defines this type of sense-making as the artist's appreciation, which is the ability to sense the situation or experience in the moment understand it for it is, rather than drawing conclusions based on previous experiences and reasoning. This type occurs instantaneously and is a matter of understanding in the moment. Then the analytical mind can get to work on the details. Too much focusing on the conceptual mind can be overwhelming because a person will be continually trying to find the right set of assumptions to work off of. Instead, Springborg argues that using artistic appreciation to grasp the situation can lend clarity.

The benefits of developing creativity in leadership are varied, but research presents that clarity, a sense of humanity, vision, guidance for problem-solving, and the ability to sit with complexities are some of the elements that may come from the interplay of creativity and leadership.

The Call for Creativity in Higher Education Mid-Level Leadership

Mumford et al. (2017) identify and explore nine cognitive skills that leaders use, one of which is creative thinking (visioning is another). Examining previous studies of leaders in various fields, they conclude that creative thinking is, in fact, needed by leaders. However, Mueller (2017) posits that creativity fails in businesses because organizations have been "managing creativity like it is a rational process of assessing risk, instead of as a psychological process of managing uncertainty" (p. 209). Higher education is rife with uncertainty, and it needs leaders who can use their creative skills to manage that uncertainty. Specifically, the position of mid-level leaders, who need to balance the needs of the administration and the faculty, requires an ability to manage uncertainty.

Further discussion of the ambiguity inherent in higher education is found in Hendrickson et al. (2012). They note that the most traditional characteristics of academic structure involve ambiguity and unclear decision-making processes. Additionally, when discussing the specific roles of mid-level leadership, dean and chair, Hendrickson et al. describe the departments under their control as idiosyncratic, complex, and open, with variations in structure and personality. In developing strategies to help these leaders to balance between the administration and faculty, Hendrickson et al.'s work focuses on "the creative act, the behavior, the hard work and courage, and the art and skill of academic leadership" (Ikenberry, 2012, p. xx).

Hendrickson et al. (2012) also suggest that effective leaders need to be able to utilize multiple frames found in Bolman and Deal's body of work, which similarly refers to leadership as an art. Bolman and Deal (2017) note that organizations (including educational institutions) are *complex*, *surprising*, *deceptive*, and *ambiguous*. They suggest that an artistic approach to leadership can enhance traditional approaches, noting that creative thinking can "release untapped individual energies and improve collective performance" (p. 22).

In addition to arguments about the need for creativity in higher education, some studies show that it is already a part of leaders' repertoires. Lawson-Graves (2012) interviewed four Ivy League female presidents. While she examined many aspects of their leadership, one of her research questions focused on creativity. She notes that all interviewees demonstrated creativity in one theme area, that the presidents can generate new ideas and strategies.

For mid-level leaders, this flexibility may be just as important, given the duality of the role. Litterst (1993), in her study of department chairs and their creativity, argues for the nurturing of creativity. She, like Asif and Rodrigues (2015), posits that her peers (department chairs) may not recognize themselves as being creative, though it is necessary for them to recognize and creatively embrace the positive challenge of the position. While this study was done over twenty-five years ago, the discussion is relevant; the formal instruction in enhancing creativity has yet to be standardized for department chair training. Additionally, Litterst describes an "organizational block" in creativity due to institutional factors that the chair has no control over. This issue is relevant for mid-level leaders who often are responsible for enforcing rules they do not have the power to change (Hendrickson et al., 2012).

In the areas mid-level leaders often have the power to change, creativity is a necessary skill. Beginning from an awareness of the dichotomy of mid-level leaders' roles as both leader

and subordinate, Rudhumbu (2015) expands the roles of these middle managers into six distinct functions taken on in the course of developing curriculum. Drawing from Floyd and Woodridge (2000), Rudhumbu specifies responsibilities that seem to require creativity in leadership rather than traditional hierarchical work. Some of these roles include relationship building and championing alternatives in addition to creating an environment of flexibility. Through these roles, the middle manager exerts both an upward and downward influence on the process; the leader is able to not only implement the changes but may also help to shape the upper administration's concept of the work that needs to be done.

In addition to the need to work within ambiguity, the nature of the mid-level position also lends itself to creative leaders. Ibottson and Darsø (2008), in an examination of how play directing may inform leadership, noted limitations in the types of positions that best allowed for artistic leaders. Specifically, leaders who take on the artistic vision should be in proximity to their groups and should have relatively small groups of direct reports. Ideally, the leaders will also have some knowledge of the field they are working in (Ibottson & Darsø, 2008). These limitations are likely to be met by mid-level leaders in education, who often come up from the ranks of faculty, or at least have extensive experience within the academy in various roles.

As an interesting note about leaders coming up through the ranks of the faculty, Garza Mitchell and Eddy (2008) found that mid-level leaders frequently do not aspire to their leadership positions. In a study of community college mid-level leaders, Garza Mitchell and Eddy noted that none of their nine participants had been searching for their positions, but rather became "accidental leaders." Perhaps because there is so little forethought about taking on leadership roles, formal training for these roles is lacking. Hendrickson et al. (2012) noted additionally that there is little consistency in departmental culture due to differences in the

disciplines, the institution, and individual departments. Not only do mid-level leaders often occupy a strange bridging space, but they do so in a unique way, making it hard to generalize about responsibilities or to prepare leaders for those responsibilities. Despite the real challenges, mid-level leadership creates opportunities for leaders to apply creativity in their work because of the ambiguous nature of the role.

Towards a Theory of Creative Leadership

The position of mid-level educational leaders lends itself to creativity, and also leads to questions of what that leadership would then look like. Koh et al. (2019) argue that developing an understanding of the creative nature of a leader can help show how creativity and leadership interact. Creative leaders are often described as having an ability to envision what might become. Stoll and Temperley (2009) define creative leadership as that which recognizes future challenges and opportunities. Harding (2010) focuses his understanding of creativity and leadership on the idea of change, arguing that the leadership act of visioning change in an organization is a similar process to how people use imagination to think about creative works. Additionally, Harding distinguishes between this creative thinking and creative acting, which is often more difficult and can require collaboration. Specifically, creative thinking is using imagination to develop answers to questions, while creative behaviors are required to lead change. Adler (2011) also sees visioning as a skill of both great artists and leaders. She argues that leaders and artists also share the courage to recognize reality and to inspire others.

Creative leaders are likewise described as having an ability to enact change. Creative Leadership, as defined by Kandiko (2012), refers to leaders who both accept and dispute the traditional structures and processes of the institution. As Ibottson and Darsø (2008) note, these leaders work within the confines of the script and stage yet create something new. They posit

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that this newness can only happen when leaders have put into place a "boundary zone," in which some constraints are presented, but there is enough flexibility in how the goal is achieved that the workers utilize their own creativity. A theater director is an example of this; creative leadership is described as a "balancing act between the emergent and the directed" (Ibottson & Darsø, 2008, p. 552). Creating that balance during change is the leader's role.

In addition to an ability to develop a vision, act on it, and balance the emergence of the vision, underpinning many of these definitions of creative leaders is a sense of their ability to develop or work with new ideas and other people. Asif and Rodrigues (2015) argue that creative leaders are those who are able to bring together new ideas and the people necessary to implement them. Harris (2009) concludes that creative people have a desire to try out new methods and take risks. They see the "potential possibility of innovation" and are willing to move toward innovation (p. 9). Similar to Asif and Rodrigues, Harris argues that creative leadership is collaborative in that it is about connecting and utilizing people. In order to utilize people, this leadership works to remove barriers for others.

These definitions begin to form a list of actions or abilities that researchers apply to theories of creative leadership. Though no standard definition exists, creative leaders can be understood to be forward-thinking and collaborative, able to see opportunities and act on them.

Creativity of, and for, Leadership

Kandiko (2012) notes that research into creativity has been done through various lenses, including that of management and education, which has led to a fragmented understanding. Not only has the philosophical lens varied, but research has further been hampered by focusing on one of two areas: *creativity of* and *creativity for* leadership. Both of these approaches focus more on the development of creativity within followers rather than a focus on the leader. Still, the

distinctions between the two areas are important for understanding the research into creativity and leadership as it stands.

Creativity of leadership examines how to develop and sustain creativity within individuals, or how leaders can support their followers' creativity. Vessey et al. (2014) argue that much of the work done on leadership and creativity focuses on leading people who are on the lower end of expressing creativity. To address this gap, they analyzed the biographies of 93 prominent scientists, highly creative people, using a historiometric case study. Findings indicate that highly creative people may need different leadership to enhance their creative endeavors. In order to accommodate the different, usually more complex work done by creative people, Vessey et al. propose a focus on strategic planning, championing of work, and the directing of the group's activities. They suggest that a Systems Exchange model is appropriate for modeling how highly creative people function in an organization.

Determining models for leading creative people leads into the concept of *creativity for leadership,* which examines the broader understanding of how to create space and environments conducive to inspiring creativity. This vein of research has clear value for organizations. Isaksen and Akkermans (2011) examined 140 surveys from creative and innovative professionals in 10 countries and 31 different industries about their work climate. They found that "leadership effectiveness influences innovative productivity, in part, through organizational climate" (p. 179). Having a leader who can develop an atmosphere of creativity sparks creativity in the organization.

In a metatheoretical examination of Creative Leadership, Mainemelis et al. (2018) recognized that all research focused on the idea of "leading others toward the attainment of a creative outcome" (para. 2). They divided the approaches for developing creativity within an

organization approaches into three methods: *facilitative*, *directive,* and *integrative.* The first

approach, *facilitative*, relates to Kandiko's (2012) conceptions. A facilitative leader will be

responsible for supporting the creative output of their followers. A directive leader, on the other

hand, holds more of the creative process. They guide the followers in the production of the

leader's own creative vision. The third approach expects both leaders and followers to contribute

to the creative development of the organization; the ideal outcome for this method is to develop a

creative synergy within the group. Mainemelis et al. argue that these various conceptualizations

should draw from the others in order to increase the knowledge of what creative leadership is.

Relation to Types of Leadership

A central theory of Creative Leadership has not been agreed on in the literature. As a

term, Creative Leadership is not clearly defined, though it is a theory. Certainly many of the

traits above are included in a variety of definitions. The qualities of creative leaders as defined

above appear in many other specific types of leadership methods. As an example, Harris (2009)

provides many definitions of creativity, including that creative people have a desire to try out

new methods and take risks. They see "potential possibility of innovation" (p. 9). She argues that

creative leadership is collaborative and works to remove barriers for others. Additionally,

creative leadership is about connecting and utilizing people. With all of these characteristics

described, Harris concludes that creative leadership is a form of Servant Leadership.

Furthermore, Creative Leadership is often related to Burns' (1978) Transformational

leadership (Forest, 2009; Kandiko, 2012; Koh et al., 2019; Lawson-Graves, 2012; Wang & Zhu,

2011; Waterwall et al., 2017). In an empirical meta-analysis, Koh et al. (2019) attempt to

discover the effects of transformational leadership on creativity; in the literature transformational

leadership is presumed to be beneficial to developing creativity in followers. Koh et al. found

that transformational leadership can, indeed, be beneficial when indirect effects are considered. They examined 68 studies, organizing those into three theory-based categories depending on the intended effect of the transformational leader. While this research identifies transformational leadership as a foundation of creativity in leadership, it did not find studies that examined the creativity of the transformational leaders themselves. Koh et al. argue that developing an understanding of the creative nature of a leader can help show how creativity and leadership interact.

Boundary Spanning

Creative leadership requires developing a balance between two forces. Kandiko (2012) notes creative leadership, "often positions the creativity within the leader, rather than with them supporting others or creating nurturing environments" (p. 197). The leaders themselves express the creativity, often to find ways to support others or to help projects come to fruition. As noted previously, Ibottson and Darsø (2008) compare leaders to theater directors in that leaders have to work with the logistics of managing but remain able to create space for creativity. That balance, in itself, is an art. Additionally, leaders use their creativity, their artistry, to make choices and solve problems (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Recognizing the variety of approaches to understanding and applying creativity in terms of leadership, Kandiko (2012) states that these different approaches cause conflict. Her analysis of creativity among educational leaders is an attempt to examine the concept of creativity in an interdisciplinary manner. She argues that creativity in leadership can be explored by studying how interdisciplinarity is "nurtured and promoted," since the fields share characteristics (p. 194). In a qualitative study of 10 interdisciplinary academics, Kandiko found that leaders saw themselves as facilitators and as boundary spanners. The leaders found ways to support the

creativity of others and saw their role as bringing together multiple stakeholders (p. 197).

Though she indicated further research was needed on the influence of environment, there was an

acknowledgement of the need for leaders to have and to create space for creativity. This seems to

be a clear statement of the issue for creative mid-level leaders in universities; they are challenged

not only to develop supportive spaces for their followers, but often for themselves. This unique

perspective joining two traditionally disparate realms creates multiple possibilities for effective

leadership.

Similarly, Lingo (2018), drawing upon previous work (Lingo & Mahoney, 2010),

describes this interplay as "creative brokerage." Leaders face three types of ambiguity: defining

success for the situation, jurisdictions, and process. Though this research focuses on music

production, these areas of ambiguity reflect issues in higher education as well. The "creative

brokerage" refers to being able to operate in and connect ideas in these areas of ambiguity.

Another term for the boundary is a "third space." Whitchurch (2018) explores the

experiences of 54 professional managers in higher education from the UK, the US, and Australia.

The participants had backgrounds as both academics and professional staff (for the purposes of

this study, academic leaders such as deans were not included). Using semi-structured interviews,

Whitchurch detailed three approaches the participants took in defining their space: some were

more "bounded" by the role expectations, some negotiated across their academic and

professional roles, and others stretched their work across the campus, unbounded. She found

implications pointing to the furthering of professionals working in the unbounded third space;

this creative approach allows for institutions to take advantage of the unique skills of their

employees.

Following these earlier studies describing the values of boundary spanning, Prysor and Henley (2018) directly explore Boundary Spanning Leadership (BSL), which requires leaders to draw from a variety of resources, skills, and ways of thinking in order to solve complex problems. Prysor and Henley conducted five in-depth, semi-structured interviews focused on what types of boundaries the higher education leaders perceived and how those leaders were able to describe the opportunities for using BSL. They identified a hierarchy of practices that fall into three categories similar to those Whitchurch (2008) noted: *managing boundaries*, *forging common ground*, and *discovering new frontiers*. Within each of those categories, two practices were described: *buffering* and *reflecting* correlate with managing boundaries; *connecting* and *mobilizing* correlate with forging common ground; and *weaving* and *transforming* correlate with discovering new frontiers. Prysor and Henley found that the leaders were able to identify many boundaries associated with their positions. However, in terms of the practices noted, participants more easily found opportunities for the lower practices, *mobilizing* and *reflection*. They assert that, at least in that particular university, leaders should be supported through leadership development that directly addresses concepts of boundary spanning.

A central theme in these articles is that creative leadership moves away from the static, hierarchical pattern of traditional business leadership, instead inviting leaders to see themselves as creators who develop the situations and opportunities for their group to flourish. This conception of a leader as a boundary-creator (or boundary-spanner) allows the flexibility to meet the unique needs of higher education institutions that were not designed to be run as businesses yet are pressured to behave as such.

Creative Identity and Leadership

Creative leaders can bring many new perspectives to an organization. They can straddle the boundaries of an organization or systems of belief and help create change in higher education. But determining who is creative and how to develop creativity is not answered by the call for more of it. This section addresses the development and identity of the creative leader and how that identity may impact leadership.

Being Creative

This section examines how creativity may be developed, how it influences a person's identity, and how self-efficacy relates to a person's ability to enact their creativity.

Developing Creativity

If creativity in leadership is a boon, then the question of how (and whether) it can be developed arises. Sternberg (2018) posits that creativity in leadership is a compilation of skills and attitude. While some abilities are necessary, he believes that leaders can decide to be creative. They can choose a creative attitude, which includes at least ten elements such as *problem redefinition* and *analysis, willingness to sell solutions*, a *belief in one's ability to accomplish the tasks that need to get done*, and a *willingness to tolerate periods of ambiguity*. In this way, developing creativity becomes an exercise in developing a mindset.

Several studies have shown that creativity can be developed through training (Asif & Rodrigues, 2015; Jaussi et al., 2019; Phelan & Young, 2003; Puccio et al., 2005; Sohmen, 2015). However, some aspects of creativity may not be easily developed.

For example, Phelan and Young (2003) surveyed 217 psychology master's students at southern California university. Half of the sample was first-year students who had not had any training in Creative Self-Leadership techniques, and the other half was second-year students who

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had been in the program and received training for one year. The researchers measured the impact of Creative Confidence (self-efficacy) and Creative Self-Leadership on Creative Style Preference, utilizing Kirton's (1976) scale of innovation to adaptation, where both ends of the continuum have creative value. Phelan and Young's findings did not support all of the hypotheses. In particular, a student's Creative Confidence did not correlate with a preference for innovation over adaptation in group two, though it did in the group without training. No correlation was found between the preference and Creative Self-Leadership. However, the training did seem to increase the Creative Self-Leadership of the participants. Even with a short-term training, some aspects of creative behaviors can be developed.

In other work, Puccio et al. (2005) approach their examination of research into Creative Problem Solving (CPS) from a business perspective, exploring the 50-year-old process of developing creative skills in workers. Their overview finds that there is "good evidence that CPS training can help maximize the 'creative capital' of employees and students" (Puccio et al., 2005, p. 53). Drawing from the literature, Puccio et al. then provide a modified model of CPS, the Thinking Skills Model. In this model, they identify specific thinking skills associated with the various steps of CPS. They assert that using this process will enhance a person's ability to deal with the complex, ambiguous problems in leadership.

Additionally, Asif and Rodrigues (2015) explored this question of teachability through a study of three master's students in educational leadership. The participants were presented with worksheets on developing creativity, then took part in focus groups and practiced implementing more creative solutions. Interviews were included as well. The participants did not originally see themselves as creative people before the intervention; they had a very specific view of creativity that needed to be expanded as they developed their own skills (Asif & Rodrigues, 2015).

However, by the end of the sessions, the participants were able to notice their own potential for creativity. One of the conclusions the authors emphasized was that creative leaders need to be developed early-on because these skills and this way of leaders viewing their own creativity cannot be quickly developed.

Randel and Jaussi (2019) take a different approach to developing creativity, focusing not on the individual leader, but examining contextual factors that foster creative leadership. They propose a model that includes 10 propositions that either enhance (or enable) leaders' creativity or are redundant. Randel and Jaussi list many enablers, such as heterogeneity, dynamism, and complexity, which "allow an individual with motivation to lead for creativity to mold the situation to manage the tensions inherent in these three distinguishing components and ultimately facilitate individual-level creativity" (p. 294). However, the authors also contend that redundant factors in the environment cause creative leadership to fade when not needed; in organizations that are strongly creative, the skills of creative leadership are redundant.

Creative Identity

Creative identity is a personal identity that "comes from one's own past experiences and formative opportunities to engage in creativity, either experienced alone or through relationships" (Jaussi et al., 2007, p. 248). Because prior research indicates that people who have creative personal identities will tend to show more creativity at work, Jaussi et al. (2007) examine whether creative identity offered more of an explanation of creativity displayed at work than just the concept of creative self-efficacy. They posit that those with a creative personal identity will be more inclined to display creativity at work to reinforce their identity. Using survey data from 179 senior managers from an insurance organization as well as peer and subordinate ratings on creativity for those managers, Jaussi et al. explore four hypotheses

relating to creative identities, creativity at work, and use of non-work solutions at work. Data indicated that a stronger creative identity led to creativity at work beyond what is expected from creative self-efficacy. They suggest that managers enhance the creative identities of their workers to promote more creativity at work.

Further examining the relationship between business and creative identities, Gotsi et al. (2010) use a comparative case study of new product design firms in the US to explore strategies for regulating the tension of identity. There is often a conflict between creative expression and expected business performance. To explore this tension, Gotsi et al. use paradox literature to interpret the 86 interviews with an eye toward finding a balance between these multiple necessary identities. They find that these workers should strive for a "meta-identity" rather than trying to lean toward the creative or the business side. By being able to navigate between all sides by taking on a "practical artist" approach, workers will be better able to cope with the identity tensions.

Despite the previously mentioned studies, Glăveanu and Tanggaard (2014) contend that creative identity has been neglected in the research and that most research focuses on individuals' creativity separate from the context. To counter this failing, their theory presents creativity identity through a socio-cultural approach wherein creative identity is developed as project of an individual, is changeable, is dependent on the cultural and social context, is multiple, and is mediated by "social interaction…societal discourses and ideologies" (p. 19). Furthermore, Glăveanu and Tanggaard recognize three types of creative identities developed through these interactions: *promoted, denied*, and *problematic*. These types take into account the influence of the social context the creative person is in, which often reinforces behaviors.

One social context reinforcement that Wang and Zhu (2011) identified was having a transformational leader. Wang and Zhu's empirical study used survey data from 71 supervisors and 212 linked subordinates from 55 organizations to examine whether transformational leadership's effect on creativity was mediated by follower's creative identity in individuals and in groups. The researchers used survey items from the Multi-Factor Leadership questionnaire. Findings suggest that transformational leadership can influence followers' creativity though developing a creative self-concept.

Creative Self-Efficacy

Creative self-efficacy is the belief a person has about their ability to be creative. Koh et al. (2019) provides justification for combining creative self-efficacy and creative identity as constructs. However, Glăveanu and Tanggaard (2014) argue that while creative self-efficacy is closely related to creative identity, they differ in that identity is more about the value and importance a person attaches to their creative ability.

Tierney and Farmer (2011) found that when creative self-efficacy increases, the ability to produce creatively increases. In their study creativity, social-cognitive, and self-efficacy theories were used to examine whether creative self-efficacy was a variable characteristic. Specifically, Tierney and Farmer tested creative self-efficacy changes in relation to "creative role identity, job creativity requirement, and supervisor creative expectation" (pp. 277-278). This longitudinal survey study of 145 individuals in non-profit organizations measured both leaders and followers. One finding is that creative self-efficacy is not a static measure, and can be increased or decreased by various factors. The researchers also note a relationship between creative identity and self-efficacy, but were not able to determine the exact nature of that relationship. For

example, does seeing oneself as creative lead to a stronger belief in skills? Or does the demonstration of skills lead to claiming an identity of creativity?

Like Tierney and Farmer (2011), Jaussi et al. (2007) recognize the influence creative self-efficacy has on being creative at work. As noted above, though their first hypothesis of creative identity offering more explanation of creativity at work was supported, this did not replace the value of creative self-efficacy. Both are predictive of the ability to be creative at work.

Interestingly, Waterwall et al. (2017) found that creative self-efficacy and creative identity were too correlated to indicate they were separate constructs, though they acknowledged that perhaps we have not yet found a successful way to measure them. Using 110 articles relating to creative self-efficacy at work, Waterwall et al. performed a meta-analysis with Hunter and Schmidt's (1990, 2004) random effects model. The many hypotheses focused on the relationship of five researched elements to creative self-efficacy: the Big Five personality traits, creative personality, job self-efficacy, creative identity, and demographics. Study design and culture were examined as moderating effects. Results indicate that two personalities, openness to experience and creative personality, are related to creative self-efficacy. Additionally, creative self-efficacy and job self-efficacy were found to have similar personality profiles ("a moderate positive relationship"), which the researchers understood to show that job competency may be a precursor to creative self-efficacy. Demographics (specifically age, tenure, and education) showed little effect: education was the strongest, but still a weak correlation. Waterwall et al. found a small positive correlation between creative self-efficacy and job complexity.

Value of Identity in Leadership

Bolden et al. (2008) examine factors that contribute to leadership in the context of higher education. Based in a framework of distributive leadership, the authors explore social, personal,

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and structural elements of leadership influenced by context and time. Bolden et al.'s research involved 152 semi-structured interviews with higher education leaders. From this research, they note the importance of both social capital and social identity in "bridging" individual agency and the confines of the organizational structure. They suggest that a shared identity is necessary in order to have members of the organization moving toward the same goal rather than focusing on individual or departmental needs.

In looking at individuals, Bolden et al. (2008) found that leaders shift from an experience of "doing" the discipline to supporting. They posit that the leader's shifting identity is a "fundamental part of the transition from 'academic' to 'leader' and could be central to reframing academic management positions in a way that does not undermine the individual's academic profile" (pp. 369-70). The ability to utilize skills and identities that leaders come to their positions with is an echo of Prysor and Henley's (2018) support of leadership that spans boundaries, in this case the identities of the leader.

Constructing Identity in Leadership

The previous section indicated that the identity of a leader is a developing construct based on many different influences, including the change from an academic role to an administrative one. Blackmore (2007) suggests that another influence in the leader's identity is the discipline the leader comes from, and that this connection has been underdeveloped in contemporary research.

Becher (1994) explored the differences between disciplines through two long-term studies including about 350 interviews. He found a correlation between the "nature of knowledge domains and the nature of the associated disciplinary cultures" (p. 153). Though Becher's differences may be more subtle in the 21st century, one benefit of examining discipline-specific

tendencies is that leadership training may be adapted for different groups (Blackmore, 2007).

Blackmore's (2007) literature review examines work focused on disciplinary differences and

leadership. Specifically included is the idea of identity. He argues that "the human need for a

coherent life narrative, with some consistency in beliefs and values, is important in relation to the

transition into [leadership and management]" (p. 236). Even when individuals become leaders,

they will keep some of the values associated with their earlier training in their discipline. At

times, these leaders who maintain part of their previous identity while taking on a new role may

develop multiple ways of interacting and behaving. Because of the continuous connection to the

original discipline, recognizing the discipline's influence on identity is vital to tailoring

professional development.

Degn (2015) develops this idea of the inherent connection of identity construction to

leadership. While not focused specifically on discipline, she claims that by exploring how

academic leaders construct their identity, researchers can learn about leaders' actions. In her

study of 16 department heads from two Danish universities, Degn articulates three categories of

leaders: *shielders*, *coordinators*, and *agenda-setters*. Each of these types of leaders has a

different approach to constructing their identity. For example, the *shielders* typically maintain

their academic identity, while the *agenda-setters* more fully embrace the administrative role. The

identities, Degn found, also affect the leader's actions. The shielders are more likely to be defiant

about required changes, while the *agenda-setters* take on the goal themselves and are more

active leaders.

Transference of Skills

Having a creative identity and a belief in oneself as a creative person both suggest a

proclivity for displaying creativity. Additionally, some research also suggests that a person who

is creative will demonstrate those skills in multiple arenas, such as in their personal identity and in the workplace, especially within a specific academic discipline. Sohmen (2015) examines the constructs of both creativity and leadership, finding that leaders with creative skills can bring good ideas to fruition. Sohmen also maintains that Puccio et al.'s (2011) creative thinking skills can be developed and that they relate to creative leadership.

Jaussi et al.'s (2007) research uses the concepts of creative identity and efficacy to explore how people using nonwork solutions at work correlates with the display of creativity at work. They found "a significant interaction between one's creative personal identity and one's ability to cross-apply nonwork experiences to work" (p. 255). People who often used experiences from another arena to solve problems at work and who had a creative identity had higher levels of demonstrating creative skills at work. Jaussi et al. suggest that managers who want to foster more creativity in the workplace hire people with creative identities and train them to cross-apply problem solving strategies.

Another study that connects creativity in the workplace to other aspects of identity is Wang and Tsai's (2014) quantitative study using longitudinal survey data from 586 leader/follower dyads from the service industry in Taiwan. Overall, they found evidence of a reciprocal relationship between innovation and creativity. While they put forth many hypotheses about creativity and mediating factors, part of their second hypothesis, that "creativity skills are positively related to creativity" (p. 318), was supported by a strong correlation. Additionally, this research shows a correlation between having creative skills and demonstrating creativity in the workplace.

Artists, Leadership, and Creative Applications

Much research extolls the value of creativity in both leadership and leadership development. This section explores both the reasoning for that valuing and the specific skills or advantages that creativity brings to leadership. First, the idea of art as a metaphor for leadership is explored. Since metaphor is a way to combine elements to achieve a deeper understanding, it relates closely to the responsibility of a leader to combine elements as a boundary-spanner. The next segment explores specific ways in which skills from various arts have been applied to leadership and leadership development. Finally, specific applications and benefits from creative writing to leadership are presented.

Art as a Metaphor for Leadership

Morgan (2011) states that people use metaphor as way of connecting the known with the unknown, and this is "fundamental to human knowing and experience as we carry over one element of life to understand and cope with another" (p. 463). Metaphor may be used to provide connections between the ambiguity or as a presentation of a new way to understanding a concept, such as leadership, through a lens of creativity.

As an illustration, Ropo and Sauer (2008) offer a concrete example of how creativity and the arts can be useful for redefining leadership. They utilize symbols of dancers: a waltzing couple and people at raves. Ropo and Sauer suggest that in the transition from the positivist view of leadership to the constructionist, the idea of one person (the male waltzer) leading by setting the rhythm is changing to a more egalitarian, collaborative understanding that a leader instead works with the rhythms of others. A deeper understanding of collaborative leadership is demonstrated through the metaphor.

Van Buskirk et al. (2015) illustrate the power of metaphor in poetry through a discussion of their poetry gallery workshop used at West Point. In addition to the idea that metaphor can help develop insight by connecting two concepts, the authors suggest that it may also be valuable for bringing out emotions and challenging values. Through activities that encourage students to delve into the metaphor, they are faced with complexities and depth that help develop their ability to think about ethical situations in a more complex way.

Along these same lines, Warwick (2016) uses elements of fiction to stand in for traditional understandings of leadership development. In his autoethnographic approach, Warwick examines a situation in which he felt "doubt, uncertainty, and anxiety," as did others in the situation (p. 129). Writings on management and leadership did not provide the kind of reflective tools that Warwick sought to engage with that negative experience. Instead, Warwick turned to three classic fictional pieces to allow him to explore that experience. He examined three elements of leadership, such as how leaders' intentions and actual events interact, through the lens of literature. Through this research, Warwick found that "literature offers a way of developing bridges between experiences and how we might think of it, discuss it and develop reflexivity" (p. 134). Again, the ability to relate disparate concepts in order to deepen one's understanding is shown.

Using language from the arts to discuss leadership is only one way to link the two fields. The creative act of metaphor making can also be used as a tool itself to help leaders develop their authentic sense of leadership. Cairns-Lee (2015), exploring the use of metaphor to help leaders "surface" their authentic understanding of leadership, interviewed eight leaders from different countries and industries who had participated in a common leadership development program the year prior. Cairns-Lee used clean language to avoid leading the participants to discuss given

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metaphors for their leadership, allowing them to develop their own. Her work suggests that this type of reflection might be useful for helping leaders grasp their own leadership style rather than trying to fit into a given type. By tapping into their ability to use metaphors, leaders can unearth their authentic perspectives and apply them to their own leadership.

Other studies have examined how people who acknowledge themselves as creative or artistic can bring unique perspectives in which to view their leadership roles. Edwards et al. (2015) focus on ways to incorporate creative techniques into leadership development. The authors present three aspects of arts learning that are beneficial to leaders: mastering the craft (which is focused on transferrable skills), metaphorical knowledge (using the arts to reframe issues of organizational change), and organizational aesthetics (bringing out the more subjective aspects of business). The middle aspect, metaphorical knowledge, is the recognition that these creative leaders are able to deepen their understanding of leadership situations by relating them to their creative knowledge. The perspectives that the leaders developed as writers are a lens that they will use to understand their new roles.

Related to the idea of using patterns of thinking from artists, Springborg (2010) explores the idea that leaders should take a form of sense-making from artists. He defines this type of sense-making as the artist's appreciation, which is the ability to sense the situation or experience in the moment and understand it for what it is, rather than drawing conclusions based on previous experiences and reasoning. This type of sensing occurs instantaneously and is a matter of understanding in the moment. Then the analytical mind can get to work on the details. Too much focusing on the conceptual mind can be overwhelming because a person will be continually trying to find the right set of assumptions to work off of. Instead, using artistic appreciation to grasp the situation can lend clarity and prevent the same type of

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thinking/problem-solving that creates the same problems.

Much of leadership theory seems to be about using these prior assumptions and theories by honing them. Eddy (2013), in particular, discusses how various experiences create a multi-dimensional leader who should draw upon lessons learned from those experiences. Because creative leaders can bring in nontraditional connections from their artistic past, they may have an advantage in being able to see situations from different angles.

Applications of Creative Leadership within the Arts

Cowan (2007) claims that the artistic nature of leadership is undervalued in a study that examines the benefits of acknowledging that artistic nature and presents ways to enhance the creativity of leaders. Cowan's developed theory involves a circular figure that relates four core human potentialities to characteristics of art at work (drawing from Sandelands & Buckner, 1989) to four dimensions of artistic leadership: vision, improvisation, reflection, and inclusion (p. 159). However, it is not simply the integration of these elements that create artistry in leadership, but the ability to form something new or guide the change that the leader themselves brings to the table.

With the potential value in having differing perspectives and other qualities and skills related to creativity, much research and action research has focused on using elements of creativity in leadership development. Other studies have examined the effects or experiences of leaders with creative backgrounds and training.

The Arts in Leadership Development

Arts-based leadership examples cover the gamut of the artistic world. Practitioners have used many forms including music, drawing, literature, and drama (Garavan et al., 2015). Despite the amount of examples in the literature, there is a dearth of experimental research. Operating

under the assumption that no experimental studies existed on the subject of using arts-based activites for leadership development, Garavan et al. (2015) used a quasi-experiemental design with pre- and post-test to assess the impact of an arts-basd intervention for leaders. They focused on four realms of leadership: *emotional intelligence*, *leader identity*, *openness to experience*, and *feedback orientation*. The 164 participant leaders from a large pharmaceutical company were divided into two groups, one receiving the arts-based intervention of a drawing activity, and the other receiving traditional training. Garavan et al.'s study shows significant differences in the development of emotional intelligence, leader identity, and feedback orientation. The research suggests that arts-based interventions may be a useful tool to help develop leaders.

Research into the value of arts as a leadership development tool is often action or theoretical research. Kerr and Darsø (2008) conceptualize ways to use art in leadership training for business, noting that though there may be some pushback, the more creative discourse would allow for management as a field to be enhanced. They argue that a change in how the discipline of leadership is viewed is occurring, necessitating the integration of the two fields of management and art. The first few examples of integration are simplistic; they noted that the arts can be used for decoration or for entertainment. However, the third and fourth methods, art as instruments and art used in developing a "strategic process of transformation," are more in-line with the idea of creative leadership (p. 477). For this last example, Kerr and Darsø depict a company that encouraged its employees to develop a children's story in order to see how the company understood its target consumers (children). That type of creative leadership (not necessarily the children's book, but the directive from leadership to explore their clients' desires in a new way) allowed for the restraints and open creativity that Ibottson and Darsø (2008) describe in their discussion of boundaries.

Edwards et al. (2015), in an introduction to the August 2015 issue of *Advances in Developing Human Resources,* present an argument for the value of the arts as a leadership development tool. Based on an overview of the articles selected, the authors claim that having professional leadership development in the arts can help people relate cognitive and emotional processes, help them question their assumptions of reality, and help them focus on leadership's relational aspects.

Sutherland and Jelinek's (2015) qualitative research involved observing and interviewing executives from three different leadership training programs who particpated in a choral conducting masterclass. The leaders watched and discussed how the masterclass related to learning about leadership, and even received feedback on their own conducting. Using Hansen et al.'s (2007) description of the end goal as developing aesthetic knowing, the theoretical framework was based on an understanding of the three prominent forms of research into aesthetic leadership presented in Edwards et al. (2015): mastering the craft, engaging with the arts metaphorically, and utilizing organizational aesthetics. Sutherland and Jelinek found that participants' outcomes related to two major themes, relationships in leadership and the implications of power and responsibility. While specific skills can be developed through this type of training, the authors posit that creating connection between the art and the leadership offers "more potential to transform people's fundamental understandings of leadership and organizational life" (p. 302).

The visual arts have also been explored as an avenue for developing leadership. Cowan's (2015) research explores specific ways in which the visual arts can help prepare students to be stronger leaders. Using a variety of artwork and associated activities, Cowan guides student development in four areas: vision, improvisation, reflection, and inclusion. Part of his rationale

for utilizing these methods is that leaders are artists, though they are often not seen as such; rather than the traditional forms of art, "leadership media typically involve processes such as crafting an inspirational vision, orchestrating interorganizational relationships, improvising during a business conflict, and enriching the lives of everyone involved" (p. 158). By exposing students to the artwork and requiring engagement with the ideas of leadership, Cowan allows students to recognize and apply creativity in leadership.

Overall, arts-based trainings and development have been utilized and are becoming more mainstream (Garavan et al., 2015). Examples of how leadership instructors and developers use the arts to activate a deeper understanding of leadership abound; however, research into the effectiveness is still lacking.

Leaders with Prior Creative Experiences

Mohnot (2019) surveyed 372 academic leaders in India to explore how various demographics may influence their leaderhip preparation. Drawing from Bolman and Gallos (2011), Mohnot recognizes that leadership preparation involves both intellectual and behavioral aspects. The Academic Leadership Preparedness Survey assessed both knowledge and skills in order to determine if the participants' gender, experience as leaders, age, type of institution, or discipline was a factor in their preparation. Discipline was divided into four sections: humanities, biomedical, formal science, and creative arts. Findings indicated that the effect of discipline on leadership preparedness was significant. In particular, the leaders with the natural science backgrounds were found to be less prepared than others (including the creative arts).

Others have researched creative qualities apparent in leaders with prior creative training. Morgan (2010) notes that creative people are seven times more likely to have synesthesia than others (p. 210). Synesthesia is a kind of crossing of the senses, where something that is normally

perceived with one sense is perceived with another (such as specific words being experienced as a color). Morgan suggests that those with this ability are also "more adept at making cross-modal connections, including connections through metaphor" (p. 210). Based on this, leaders who come with experience in this way of thinking may apply it to their leadership work.

O'Dell's (2015) research supports this application of thinking. She conducted five case studies (a two-interview process) with higher education leaders who had prior performing arts experiences to explore their perceptions of leadership. In answer to her second research question about common characteristics, "prevailing qualities," O'Dell found that these leaders were willing to take risks, could visualize the big picture, had strong skills in analyzing, could collaborate, were open and flexible, and focused on finding solutions.

As another example, Brown (2019) interviewed eight university presidents with performing arts degrees to explore their work as an artist-practictioner, their work as a leader, and how their art affected their presidency. In addtion to findings that reinforced aspects of creative leadership, such as a tendancy to enjoy creative problem solving and a level of comfort with ambiguity, Brown notes three significant findings related to the integration of artisty and leadership. Specifically, he found that these leaders utilized creative problem-solving and artitistic processes in their leadership. Additionally, the leaders showed a high degree of empathy. This study suggests that artists who become leaders make use of the some of the skills they develop through their art.

Much like the catalog of qualities of creative leaders noted previously, leaders with creative backgrounds may have a mindset that allows them to engage with situations from a different perspective than a traditional leader.

Creative Writing Benefits

While fewer studies have focused on the field of creative writing and its application to leadership, those that do find the skills learned in creative writing correlate with and enhance leadership skills (Atkinson, 2014; Jenlink, 2015; Forest, 2009; Morgan, 2010). Realistically, the overlap between leadership and creative writing is not a complete match. As noted previously, Mueller (2011) found that people associate creativity with less leadership potential. Additionally, Morgan (2010) notes that decisiveness is often a problem for creative leaders. However, in developing leaders and understanding how current leaders utilize their previous creative writing experiences, a focus on the beneficial elements is useful.

Anecdotally, Bell (2014), the former editor of HBR.org, took two years away from her management position to get an MFA in creative writing. She found that the creative training was directly applicable to her work as a leader. Specficially, she found that the MFA prepared her to be more willing to take criticism, to understand others' motivations, to be able to keep a team engaged, and to know when to stop moving forward on an idea. Lo (2015) drew from Bell (2008) to describe the personal journey of his MFA and its subsequent impact on his leadership. In addition to Bell's findings, Lo suggests that other benefits to an MFA include learning to have a vision and set a goal as well as the power of storytelling.

Evidence beyond the anecdotal tends to focus on specific skills in creative writing and their application to leadership. Forest (2009) draws from an arts-based autoethnography in order to examine the creative process of storytelling in relation to leadership for change. She proposes that storytelling competencies are vital for change agents and provide "experiential knowledge about innovative thinking and an appreciation for the power of story and metaphor to convey ideas" (p. 73). The author used a qualitative constructivist perspective to examine the nature of

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the creative process through a creative process (her journal). Forest notes similarities between storytellers and change leaders, including crafting a vision. Much of the article is devoted to exploring these types of similarities, especially the power of metaphor and the importance of using it ethically. Because storytelling allows for a deep analysis of the past and the sharing of a vision for future, Forest argues that change leaders would benefit from developing the skills of storytellers.

Morgan's (2010) book, *What Poetry Brings to Business*, is a manifesto and guidebook for using poetry in leadership development. For her, the link between the two disciplines is the ability to tolerate and work within ambiguity. Reading and grappling with poetry, Morgan claims, can change the way a person thinks. Specifically, Morgan produces a list of 13 criteria used to determine a successful poetry-leadership initiative, including an ability to a) think about issues differently, b) appreciate ambiguities, c) question situations, d) "treat facts and reality and data as valuable provisional assessments of a world in motion," and e) perceive the world with feelings (p. 138).

Another study that explores the application of creative writing to leadership is Atkinson's (2014) action research, which examines the effects of using creative writing skills and exercises with reverse cases studies for leadership students. The author used his class to pilot the instructional method; their survey responses formed the basis of his analysis. Through student responses, Atkinson found four emergent themes of a) students successfully learning theories, b) building rapport with classmates, c) showing creativity, and d) understanding different perspectives. By utilizing specific creative writing skills, such as plot development and conflict, students enhanced their knowledge of leadership.

Jenlink (2015) presents a research study utilizing a philosophical approach to poetics and a framework of scholar-practitioner leadership. Data were collected from 136 doctoral students in leadership over a period of eight years. Their coursework included a poetics as a leadership element, and their chosen poetic elements were analyzed along with longitudinal interview data to look at how poetics can engage with analysis. Jenlink found that incorporating this poetics as leadership element created a pedagogy that allowed for deep and important reflection. Students noticed it allowed for a safe way to examine personal experiences and beliefs and to make sense of those experiences. Some of the elements this pedagogy focused on were moral creativity, practical wisdom, and imaginative projection.

When looking at the impact of creative writing on leadership, many elements seem to relate to the idea of creative leadership, such as the ability to perceive situations in multiple frames and to span those boundaries.

Chapter 2 Closure

Leadership and creativity are connected in multitude of ways. The relationship between the two concepts varies as well; context, art form, industry, identity, and self-efficacy are only some of the aspects that effect how creativity and leadership may converge in individuals. Mainemelis (2018) notes that "contextual variability generates conceptual variability" (para. 4) and suggests that deep qualitative research in that variety of contexts is required to gain a more complete understanding of the interrelation between the two concepts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study examined the ways in which creative writers who become mid-level leaders in higher education make sense of how their prior experience and current leadership role interact. Specifically, this research asked

1. What role does a creative writing background play in the experience of leadership for mid-level leaders in higher education?

2. How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the process of shifting their social and individual identity from a writer to a leader?

3. How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the overlap of creative writing and leadership skills?

Research Design, Approach, and Rationale

Because the purpose of this project is to explore the experiences of mid-level administrators with creative writing backgrounds, a basic qualitative structure provided the best avenue for research. All qualitative research asks how people make sense of and understand the situations and experiences they live through (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015); in this case, I examined the lived experiences of a variety of leaders who bring a history of creativity in one artform to their current positions.

One of the goals of this study was to explore the ways in which a person's previous experiences with creative work inform their current role as a leader in higher education. As with any effective piece of creative writing, the goal of qualitative research is not only to grasp the exactness of an experience but to also add insight and revelations (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Similarly, Creswell (2013) describes qualitative research as approach to analyzing a problem that results in a broad depiction of the issue. Framing this research as exploring a problem is helpful for seeing how the results may affect me and others who are venturing into academic leadership from creative writing by showing possible links between our experiences. The study also revealed ways in which creative backgrounds may benefit leaders or highlight strengths that creative writers bring to leadership.

Basic qualitative research relies on a constructivist approach that explores how people make sense of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). This study employed a social constructivist framework, which recognizes that individuals will have unique, subjective experiences that are shaped by the world around them (Creswell, 2013). The leaders I studied have taken different approaches to becoming leaders, have varied histories with writing, and have had different interactions with those around them. All of those experiences may factor in to how the participants come to make sense of their overall experience as leaders with creative writing backgrounds. According to Creswell (2013), the social constructivist framework generally makes use of inductive methods to develop patterns of meaning. I interviewed leaders through open-ended questions and collected any creative work connected with their understanding of leadership. These data were then used to develop categories and themes that explore the experience of being a leader in higher education with a background in creative writing.

Researcher Positionality

As a mid-level leader in higher education (a current department chair with prior dean experience) and a background in creative writing, this research is closely related to my journey. This section provides a discussion of my own experience with this phenomenon in order to let

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me bring my own preconceptions to the surface (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Creswell (2013) notes that it is important to "be self-conscious about how [the researcher's] experiences may potentially have shaped the findings, the conclusions, and the interpretations drawn in a study" (p. 216). I detailed my experiences with deciding upon researching this topic and some of the assumptions I brought into the research. My recognition of these biases helped me bracket my assumptions as I conducted my research.

The impetus for this research was frustration that the career path I had set myself on was far from where I wanted to be. Throughout the early years of my career, I consistently said that I loved teaching and I loved writing. My career reflects this: I have an MA in Teaching English and an MFA in Creative Writing. For the past twenty years, I have taught students ranging from elementary to upper-level undergraduates.

I also consider myself an artist, though I am not currently creating in my art. Instead, I was finding myself becoming more firmly entrenched in leadership positions. This work requires a touch of artistry (Bolman & Deal, 2017), though it is quite different from the act of creating stories and reaching for truths to hold up to the light. Despite "being caught" in leadership, I have a strong desire to hold on to my identity as a writer and creator. How do I reconcile that with traditional views of leadership?

At the same time, I was noticing that fewer people with my qualifications or focus, the creative writing MFA, rise up through the leadership ranks in higher education, which left me with fewer ways of understanding how I want to be a leader incorporating my artistic gifts and loves. Eddy (2015) calls for a new kind of multi-dimensional leader heavily based on the idea that a leader will bring all of their personal history to the new role. I was interested in exploring how creative writing, a traditionally undervalued gift, can bring guidance to leadership roles. My

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assumption was that there are many ways in which a creative background assists in leadership, and that the struggle to maintain a writer identity actually benefits the leader.

My background has allowed for much thinking about these issues, which was a benefit. I was able to focus on learning the participants' stories because I know my own so well. I had no problems connecting with participants, as they were all eager to have their stories told. My most pressing concern was bracketing my own experiences as I analyzed the data. For that, I used extensive memoing.

Population and Sample

The research population was a typical case sample taken from mid-level leaders at higher education institutions in the United States. Participants held an MFA or Ph.D. in creative writing and had at least one creative publication. Participants were higher education professionals with at least a half-time appointment to administrative duties. For this study, mid-level leadership in higher education may include department chairs, program directors, center directors, assistant/associate deans, deans, and associate provosts. Mid-level leadership titles can vary depending on the size and structure of the institution. Rather than using the title alone, considering the challenges in various roles may provide a clearer understanding of who these leaders are.

A sample of 12 leaders drawn from a variety of universities and colleges were interviewed. This number falls within the ranges cited by Creswell (2013) necessary for understanding a phenomenon, and I also looked for signs of saturation, the point at which little new data emerge, to ensure I sampled enough (Guest et al., 2013; Richards & Morse, 2013). Purposeful sampling was used to attempt to minimize the effects of other variables; specifically, I tried for maximum variation through criterion selection. The various criterion I considered

include participants' age, gender, type of university, time as an administrator, time in the creative writing field, genre, and level of publication. From the 12 participants, I had six identify as male and six identify as female. Ages ranges from 30s to 60s, and each person had a unique combination of time spent as a writer and time spent as an administrator. Demographic variety was seen in all of the criterion.

The process of identifying potential participants began with contacts I have made through various positions and organizations I have been associated with, such as the International Writing Center Association and various creative writing programs. Additionally, I attempted to create new contacts utilizing networking events for Chairs and Deans as well as listservs, academic Twitter, and LinkedIn. Social media was not an effective tool for networking; however, I was able to find a few participants through searching qualifications on LinkedIn. The sample was also expanded through snowballing, having participants identify other potential participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Formal requests to participate were in written form and sent through email. The requesting documents are shown in Appendix A. Follow-up emails and postings varied depending on my relationship with the individuals contacted. In all cases, the opportunity to pass the invitation on to someone else with the qualifications was included.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Instrumentation

Interviews are typical when studying people experiencing the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants in order to guide the conversation as well as to allow for it to develop according to the participants' understanding (Guest et al., 2013). Questions were formed from my professional experiences and gleanings

from the literature review, and relate directly to this study's sub-questions, focusing on roles, identity, and skills in relation to both creative writing and academic leadership. Questions provided opportunities for participants to reflect on and make sense of their experiences as a leader and as a writer. The semi-structured format ensured that participants were asked the same questions, and also allowed for individual follow-up questions to probe topics that develop in each interview. The interview protocol is presented in Appendix B.

As an additional form of data, I attempted to collect documents to analyze. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if they had any creative writing samples that attempt to make sense of their leadership experience that they would be willing to share. A few participants mentioned things they had read, and only one sent an example. Appendix C provides a table demonstrating the relationship of the interview questions and the document collection to the research questions. Patterns emerged from the data in ways that this chart does not account for; however, it is a useful representation of how the interview questions may relate to the major ideas this study explores.

Before embarking on the study, I pilot-tested the questions with a small, qualified sample, as suggested by Creswell (2013). Specifically, I conducted sample interviews with two acquaintances who have leadership experience and creative writing backgrounds. This initial run provided information for refining the interview protocol, clarifying the questions, determining the most effective questions, finding additional questions, and developing interviewing techniques (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015).

Data Collection Procedures

After participants were identified through the purposeful sampling described above, I scheduled virtual sessions to answer questions about the Consent Form (Appendix D). If

participants were agreeable, which all were, this was directly followed by a 60- to 90-minute interview. All participants consented to utilize video technology to record the conversation.

Meetings took place over WebEX due to the Covid-19 pandemic and wide-spread locations of interviewees. Due to connection problems, one interview was hosted through Zoom. A virtual interview allows for both video and audio recording or a separate audio recording of the session if the participant prefers to not be filmed. As noted previously, the interviews were semi-structured; each participant were asked the same primary questions with the possibility of unique probing questions as a follow-up for each original question (Guest et al., 2013). Reflective notes from directly after reviewing the transcriptions of the interview were developed as well as memos.

All participant information will be kept confidential, with only myself having access to identifying information. Participants were given the option to choose a pseudonym to be used for data organization and discussion in the study; the master list of names and pseudonyms was destroyed. Video and audio recordings will be stored on a private computer in password-protected files. Transcripts will be stored on the web (I utilized Dedoose to assist with coding) but will not contain identifying data. The handwritten notes will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

Institutional Review Board

Since this project involves human subjects who will be sharing information about their experiences, I sought HSIRB approval before beginning. As part of this approval, participants were presented with a consent form (Appendix D) detailing the rights of the participant and the basic outline of the study. Since all interviews were conducted virtually, participants were

informed through the consent form that their agreement to participate indicates consent for their answers to be used. Participants were told that they could withdraw at any point.

All participants were professionals in the field of higher education who discussed their work as creative writers and leaders. This is not an identified vulnerable population, and limited negative effects were anticipated. HSIRB approval is found in Appendix E.

Validity and Reliability

Various stages of the research process provided opportunities to ensure overall trustworthiness. In all states of this project, from development of the structure to collecting data to analyzing data to interpreting data, I utilized recognized methods for enhancing the validity of the study. For data collection, the focus is on whether the data are credible and the process is transparent. Creswell (2013) describes validation as the process of striving to create accurate data, and suggests using at least two of eight validation strategies he presents. For collection, Creswell suggests that reliability may be enhanced by the use of *rich, thick description*. I attempted to enhance transferability though this use of detail as well as through the use of a maximum variability sample.

Merriam and Tisdale (2015) suggest eight strategies for validity and reliability. In addition to the extensive description and maximum variation sample Creswell (2013) notes, Merriam and Tisdale recommend keeping an audit trail. This trail, or log of processes, explains how the decisions on collection and analysis are made. This took the form of memos throughout various stages of the research, which would allow other researchers to follow the process. Another strategy was being engaged thoroughly in the research until the point of saturation, when the interviews start yielding no new data. Listening, reading and rereading multiple times

helped with this experience. Additionally, I was careful to not share my own experience, as that could influence what participants chose to share.

Data Analysis

The strategies of data analysis are related to the methods of collection and the purpose of the inquiry (Richards & Morse, 2013), so no set pattern of analysis exists for every study. Though this study is a basic qualitative study, many strategies from phenomenological research will be utilized; Guest et al. (2013) recognize that phenomenology includes many concepts that are inherent in more general qualitative analysis. Much like creative writing, analysis of qualitative data is a recursive process that requires viewing and reviewing, writing and revising (Richards & Morse, 2013). The process of analysis for this study was developed as a synthesis of strategies, a hybrid project. Basic steps included coding, theming, and relating to the literature for meaningful presentation.

The three research questions are connected elements of the primary question: How do creative writers who become mid-level leaders in higher education make sense of their prior experiences as creative writers regarding their work as leaders? Though individual interview questions may be more pertinent to specific research questions (see Appendix C) the interconnected nature of the study requires and openness to research questions being addressed through any portion of the interview. To that end, the entirety of the transcripts and the collected creative work were analyzed through the following process.

Process

To begin the analysis, I read through the transcripts to clean up the language as much as possible because the transcript was created by WebEx. After that, I listened to the recordings at least one more time to ensure that punctuation matched the emphasis participants expressed. At

that point, I began my initial analysis, where I looked over notes and transcripts to pick up on initial themes. I also read through my own reflective journals multiple times to create an understanding of the specific data that had been collected; during these multiple readings, I took further notes, or memos, as suggested by Creswell (2013). Another strategy in these initial readings was to look at the broad evidence rather than focusing on individual questions in order to allow for early categorization of ideas for the entire experience (Creswell, 2013). That early categorization was not all-encompassing, but it did create a strong list of codes to begin with.

The primary classification step, coding, is a method for describing the data and finding the "significant statements" that emerge (Creswell, 2013). The intent is to approach this initial search for emerging points with an open mind, seeking statements that might be repeated or that might have been emphasized. During the beginning, or discovery, portion of coding, I looked looking for significant phrases and patterns of responses. These I developed through the multiple listenings and rereadings as I wrote narratives for each of the participants. For these units, I looked for words and sections that related to the research question topics (identity, leadership skills, and role development). Since I used inductive reasoning to begin, I was open to the emergence of codes beyond these elements, and especially welcoming of codes that described an experience across these elements. At this point, before going too much further, I emailed participants a copy of their narrative and a list of initial patterns. They were encouraged to provide feedback on the accuracy of the narrative, though only five of the 12 chose to do so.

To begin the actual coding, I then reread the transcripts in their entirety and marked sections that seemed significant. I made use of Dedoose, an analysis software, to house the transcripts and the codes. However, in the process of developing the themes, I used a more traditional method of printing out each code and physically grouping them, which allowed me to

see how the piles of codes related, to make changes in the grouping, and to get a clearer picture of where the pieces fit.

Thematic classification of the significant statements and developing a master list of categories are the next elements of the process, though the steps are recursive. As suggested by Foss and Waters (2007), I rearranged these categories multiple times, rather than just taking the first combination. I was continually utilizing the full transcripts in this process, which helped me revise the themes to be more reflective of the data. As another precaution, I followed Marshall and Rossman's (2016) suggestion to use negative instances of established patterns to help search for alternative explanations and hone the categories. Merriam and Tisdale (2015) suggest four guidelines for aspects to look for in addition to responding to the research questions: enough categories must be present to *exhaust* the data, the categories should be *mutually exclusive*, they should be *sensitive* to the data, and they should be *conceptually congruent*. Even after selecting a schema that made sense and fit with the guidelines, I tinkered with how the pieces fit together, trying to accurately represent what the participants had said and follow the suggested guidelines.

Developing themes allowed me to have categories of information that I could then interpret. Interpretation requires "abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). I began to make sense of the data through visualizing and developing metaphors. In this approach, I kept in mind the essence of the study: how these leaders make sense of how their writing background relates to their leadership. As a writer, interpretation is the aspect I am most interested in. What is the heart of this story? What is this experience about? How is this experience universal? Since I am asking questions relating to identity and roles and skills in creative writing, my approach with theming drew from literary analysis, specifically strategies of thematic analysis and character development. In fact, as I was

analyzing, my process was much like discovering a thesis statement for each section. Each

category represented a topic idea but figuring out what the data were saying was the challenge.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this study relates to the credibility, or whether the process creates an

accurate reflection of reality. Because there were differences in how people understand and share

their experiences in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015), this research allows for a

rich picture of the experiences that reflect the multiplicity of reality. Yet this does not allow for a

free-for-all. For this research project, I used multiple strategies during analysis to ensure that the

data reflects the experiences of the participants rather than my own biases. In the initial reading, I

included my own reflexive journaling so that I could= recognize and put away my own

preconceptions and biases based on my experiences. This bracketing of my perspective allowed

me to focus more completely on the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Another strategy for ensuring credibility in analysis includes being attentive to the

constructs that emerge through open-mindedness while coding. Since this study deals with

experiences from a variety of participants, some ambiguity is expected. I made use of member

checking by providing participants with an overview of my preliminary themes and analyses

(Creswell, 2013). Merriam and Tisdale (2015) recognize this as the most important way to

ensure that participants' meaning is not misinterpreted. I requested that participants assess

whether or not the interpretations match their experience.

As one further step to ensure that the research is pulling from the participants'

experiences is to make use of peer examination. This strategy requires a peer to examine the raw

data and examine whether the coding reflects the themes another may discern (Merriam &

Tisdale, 2015). I worked with a peer who does not have familiarity with this topic but has extensive research experience.

Limitations and Delimitations

Delimitations for this study include a smaller sample size due to the depth of interviews I hosted. Though I attempted to interview individuals with maximum variability according to many demographic markers, the generalizability of the study may be affected by the participants I was able to find. Additionally, though I searched for participants who are mid-level leaders, there are few ways to ensure that the requirements of leadership are similar for participants. This study may not account for the disparity in the roles of, say, department chair and dean.

Limitations include the nature of personal experiences. Much like the delimitations of unmatched leadership experiences, the personal history and the nature of memory and self-visualization may have inhibited getting at the essence of the experience. The individual experiences of the interviews, because they were semi-structured, may have affected the responses of the participants.

Chapter 3 Closure

A qualitative study conducted through one-on-one, in-depth interviews allowed me to create data about the lived experiences of mid-level academic leaders who have backgrounds in creative writing. Data was analyzed using coding and theming methods, with particular attention paid to strategies to enhance trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

Chapter 4 presents individual narratives for each of the 12 participants. In addition to providing an overview of the conversations, the purpose of this section is to demonstrate how each of the interviews related to the three research questions. Most of the wording in this chapter comes directly from the transcripts in order to provide a sense of the voice and intent of each participant.

After a brief overview of the participants' paths to creative writing and leadership, each profile begins with a description of the participants' sense of their leadership identity and creative identity ("Identity"). While this connects to the second research question (how the leaders describe the process of shifting their social and individual identity from a writer to a leader), I have chosen to focus on it first in the narrative because the participants' views of their identities lead into a discussion of how they saw those identities affecting their actions. The second section of each narrative, "Influence of Creative Writing," examines both the skills and habits that participants noticed in their leadership that they attributed to or related to their creative writing background. The third and last section, "Creative Writers and Leadership," details their experiences with how others perceived them as leaders with creative writing degrees and how the participants believed creativity relates to leadership in general.

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographic information collected at the end of each interview. The goal of collecting this information was to look at patterns that may have occurred in line with these factors. The information also provides context for the individual narratives.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years as Writer	Years as Leader	Carnegie Classification of Workplace	Level of Publication	Position Title
Daniel	M	50-59	20-24	15-19	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus	multiple books	Dean
Mike	M	40-49	10-14	20-24	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity	Awards/ pubs up to one book	Assoc. VP AA
Jenny	F	30-39	25-29	5-9	Associate's Colleges: Mixed Transfer/Career & Technical-High	Awards/ pubs up to one book	Chair of curriculum/ school
Liz	F	60-69	35-39	20-24	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs; Professions plus arts & sciences, some graduate coexistence	multiple books	Program Director
Sharon	F	60-69	40-44	10-14	Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity	multiple books	Program Director
Jeanette	F	60-69	20-24	15-19	Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity	multiple books	Chair of Department
Scott	M	60-69	50-54	30-34	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity	multiple books	Chair of Department
Jill	F	50-59	20-24	10-14	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs; Professions plus arts & sciences, some graduate coexistence	multiple books	Program Director
John	M	40-49	15-19	15-19	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus	Awards/ pubs up to one book	Program Director
Paige	F	30-39	15-19	10-14	Doctoral Universities: Very High Research Activity	Awards/ pubs up to one book	Associate Dean
Rich	M	50-59	35-39	10-14	Doctoral/Professional Universities	multiple books	Dean
Jared	M	40-49	30-34	10-14	Master's Colleges & Universities: Medium Programs	Awards/ pubs up to one book	Dean

Daniel

Daniel is a male in his 50s who is a dean at a small liberal arts college. He has published multiple books of fiction. His path to creative writing started a little later than others; he had been teaching and chairing an English department for ten years when he decided to earn an MFA to fulfill his desires to write and publish, and also to be able to teach creative writing.

His path to leadership began much earlier, even before the department chair position. In graduate school, he was "lucky enough" to get an administrative fellowship for six years working in the dean's office. From that position, he was able to learn many strategies for both

management and leadership and to observe both positive and negative examples of deans. He noted:

> I had a lot of instinctive built-in intuition about how to do administrative things and how to link people that I didn't even realize I had learned until they just seemed to come naturally to me. And I saw colleagues in other departments and other similar positions that are struggling because they had no experience in administrative work or leadership, higher education leadership, before…Seeing a number of deans come and go, seeing good deans and bad deans and good assistant and associate deans and bad assistant and associate deans. So that sort of prepared me from the very beginning.

Despite the preparation, leadership was not always a perfect fit. In his first 10-year stint as chair, Daniel had what he referred to as "a false start":

> I had really felt sort of burned both by the higher administration at the University, their not backing me up. And I had made some sort of rookie mistakes. I had made some bad mistakes that sort of fueled the fire of these personalities who had turned against me, and I wouldn't do that today. Much wiser, I think, about how to deal with personality conflicts than I was at the beginning. So I had that very bad first experience and sort of ran away from the administrative work.

> At his next college appointment, after receiving his MFA and again becoming chair, Daniel "got the administrative bug," eventually being promoted to dean, a position he had held for a year at the time of the interview.

Identity

As a leader, Daniel described himself as "radically open and honest." He stated that he does not take part in political strategizing but does strategize in terms of planning and

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implementing plans. When there is a hard decision to make, he wants people to see all the reasons he comes to a particular conclusion so that they can also understand. However, Daniel recognizes that he is the decision-maker, and believes that those he leads need to trust "that I've thought about [the decisions] as deeply, as carefully as possible and come to the right conclusion."

When thinking about his identity as a writer, Daniel focused much more on the internal process rather than the relationships to people.

> I'm sort of meticulous, and I would much rather have a sort of small object that's well-honed rather than a bigger sloppier object let's say…And maybe that lends itself well to doing academic administration well, this attention to detail, precision.

> But I'm also sort of… I like things that have everything but the kitchen sink in them, but that the things that are in them are very controlled and precise, if that makes any sense at all. And that's the way my brain works. It's very expansive. And then it sort of clears the clutter away down to hopefully something well-honed. But at first it's a mess, I can tell you, it's a complete mess.

Overall, who Daniel is as creative person while a dean has less to do with his creative writing because of the time that the administrative work takes. He noted that he has "to be so creative with that problem solving, that I do that far more than I actually do writing and creative work these days." In fact, Daniel described the shift when moving to a more involved administrative role as affecting two different elements, both his physical time available as well as his bandwidth:

> There's the world that has to do with time, and that shifted incredibly because there is so little time I have now to do creative work. So, part of it is just a pure clock issue that has

to do with that. And part of it has to do with, again, using that part of my brain creatively in every day administrative university work doesn't leave much energy or space regardless of time.

After the interview, Daniel responded to the member check opportunity and informed me that he had left his administrative role in order to focus more on his creative writing.

Influence of Creative Writing

Daniel made a distinction between his habit of being precise and the requirements of academic administration in the previous section. He provided examples of both internal processes and external skills that he contributes to being a creative person and a creative writer in particular:

> It seems silly to say. I think I may be able to be more creative in coming up with solutions to things because of the amount of time I've had to sort of give my mind free rein to be creative. So that lends itself to being creative in finding solutions to things… It's a very practical thing, but I think creative writers are very good at doing things with words…If you ever read any of my fiction, you would know I'm all about clarity, simplicity, clarity and directedness….So that I think I communicate that way as a dean. And that's directly related to sort of the way I like to write, you know, clarity is a virtue for me in writing. I think I communicate that way. But also, I know how to put into words an argument to convince people of things, and that might come from the creative writing part of my brain as well.

In addition to the skills of communication and problem solving, Daniel explored some of the internal habits that writing may lend to leadership:

…I think to be a great writer you have to have discipline, so there's this sort of discipline that's the sitting down at the desk and doing the work kind of discipline…Part of it is dealing with sort of complex structures. If you're writing a novel, you have a lot of balls you're juggling, and in many ways that's sort of maybe the skill that's most important to do in academic administration, is juggling.

Daniel also mentioned two ways of perceiving others and situations that may have derived from his creative experience. The first related to understanding people leaders work with:

I think creative writers spend a lot of time thinking about people's personalities and the reasons and motivation why people do things because we're doing it with our characters. And the personality negotiating that one has to do as an administrator, I think that skill of having thought long and hard about one's own but also other people's personalities through characters, is important.

The second perspective that may be different was the willingness to see a situation from a unique perspective. For example, Daniel recounted a small problem a program had with its course designation system. They were not able to reconcile the different courses within the numbering system they had, so Daniel suggested that they look at altering the letters associated with the courses to better clarify where particular courses were situated within the tracks of the program. He related this to having a different view than non-creative people:

I'm not sure I can extrapolate from my own experience, but that's what it feels like to me is that I'm broader and open and willing to question: Well, why has it always been done that way? Why can't we come up with a new way to do it? For some reason? No one said that's the only way you can solve that problem. You can come up with another way to do

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it. And I think a creative person may turn to that, whereas someone from a different field who hasn't, maybe, developed the creative nature wouldn't necessarily think that way.

Creative Writers and Leadership

While Daniel was able to discuss many habits of creative writers that lend themselves to leadership work, he also noted that being a creative writer often means being viewed negatively by others in academia. He believes people have stereotypes about creative types, such as that they "aren't connected to or based in the real world, and that [they're] sort of out there somewhere with this creative nonsense… depending on the discipline, people may have less respect for creative activities, in the academy anyway." To him, there seemed to be some trepidation or ignorance about what a creative writer may be able to offer in a leadership position. Daniel suggested that how he is

> perceived by others may have a lot to do with where they're coming from and the relationship of their discipline, or their field, or where they're coming from, in relation to creativity in general. So there's a range. People in sort of allied creative fields I think welcomed me in this post and find it really interesting that we have someone who's creative in this position. And other people are very suspicious, I think.

Daniel felt that others might perceive him in a negative way because of his creative background, and that that perception is harmful:

> But I think that the perception that creative people aren't the best administrators, that we're sort of too in our heads, and not practical enough, or we're too pie in the sky or something. There's these impressions, and I think that's a detriment because, especially these days with things changing the way they are and people having to be as flexible and institutions having to be as nimble as they are, I think, having as many creative people as

possible in administrative roles makes the institutions more flexible and nimble as well. So I take offense at that assumption that we were not as good at administration as other fields because I don't think it's true.

Perhaps part of the reason that Daniel appreciated flexibility that creativity can bring is that he recognized some overlap between the creative activity and the administrative activity. He discussed how the problem solving that he does as part of his leadership role is "coming from the same part of [his] brain that solves those kind of problems narratively," and he related the solution-finding process in academia to the same process in writing plot for fiction. And though Daniel may not have as much time as he once did for creative writing, this type of problem-solving creativity seemed "gratifying because it feels like it comes from the same part of [his] brain as when [he's] writing."

Before the conversation ended, Daniel mentioned that some creative writers in leadership roles did an excellent job, while others did not. When asked what skills or habits he perceived in those that were effective, he noted:

> They're able to sort of code switch, if you want to think of it in a linguistic way. They're able to turn on the sort of purely creative and be that way. And at the same time, they're able to step back into a more practical world and not leave your creativity behind. When they're in the practical world, they can still be creative. And that may be the key. Because the problems that I see with poorly administered creative programs, regardless of what kind of creative activity we're talking about, is that people simply want to be that creative way without the practical side of things. So it's the people who have that sort of two sides or two strings to their bow or whatever we want to call it, the two, or balance, we might call it, between the purely creative and the practical. And people who were able to bridge

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those two seem to be the people who are able to do it well. Because most people are just on one side or just on the other, but it's people who can do both sides of that street or who can bring a balance between those two poles that seem to be… and it's also it's interesting because the same creative writers that I know who are very good with the discipline of their writing, which is a more practical side of it, rather than the purely creative side of it, they tend to be the ones who would also do the sort of administrative things well. So, it's something to do with this balance between the real world practical and the purely, purely creative. And the people who can bridge that, or can balance those two, I think that there's something there that might explain that.

Mike

Mike was the only participant who had spent more years in leadership than as a creative writer. As there was no set definition of what participants defined as "in the creative writing field," some chose to consider any time spent writing, while others considered only the time they were actively engaged in publishing. Mike does still write, though it is for his own benefit. As a leader, Mike is an Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs. He has been in leadership roles for over 20 years.

His path to both writing and administration were rooted in his youth. He described wanting to be a writer since elementary school, and likewise, "back in the high school, elementary school, [he] had official positions of leadership, presidents of organizations, captain the Quiz Bowl team…" The MFA route was chosen from a desire to keep writing and a lack of interest in other options he had available with a history degree. However, Mike realized that his path was not in teaching, and then "found administration." While he is a naturally introverted

person, he realized that he had an ability to organize and facilitate, and that leadership offered an opportunity to move forward and to have an impact on people:

> If I was going to have to be a part of an organization, and I wasn't just going to be subject to whatever other people wanted to do then I might have to step up and actually be a person of leadership…And that's not to say that I certainly wanted to do it, but I just felt like we could do things.

Identity

As a person who not only leads but also teaches leadership, Mike has had many opportunities to reflect on his own leadership practice, which centers on the concept of being useful to others in similar ways to Servant Leadership:

> I always wanted to just be of use to the organization, of use to those that I work with, of use to those that that I literally report to, of use to the students we serve. I want to be able to walk away at the end of the day and say that I led an initiative that I think was useful to other people. Maybe not the most grandiose, but we don't all get the opportunity to be at the right place, the right time of history, right? And I don't think they're going to put my name on a building when I'm done. And I don't think I'm going to go in some history book when it's all said and done. But I look back and I literally think about how many students have gone to college because of the work that I was connected with, or because of the modality that I helped coordinate. I can't take credit for almost anything as a sole entity, as a university administrator, but I think I've been helpful to many initiatives that have helped promote the institutions and the people that they serve. And I think that's my theory of leadership.

Mike's identity as a writer shared that sense of usefulness. He noted:

I'm not sure I fully view myself as being creative in the way that I think other people would…I think I always wanted to do things that would be of benefit or use to other people. Even when I wanted to, back at the beginning, when I wanted to be creative, I wanted to make the world a better place. I wasn't out there just doing stuff. It was never my purpose to have people say that he's created something beautiful or creative, or something that they would put in a museum. I wanted to be a writer that people would say: that book made me think, or that book led me to understand something a little bit differently.

Though Mike no longer considers himself a creative person, nor a creative writer in the sense that he is not writing for an audience, he does still write creatively, "far more fantasy and science fiction and therefore more therapy, more idea-driven than it would have been before." He also saw creativity in his leadership work, noting that "leadership in itself is a creative environment."

Influence of Creative Writing

Mike listed many technical skills he has developed or enhanced because of his creative writing background. Those include basic skills such as being able to present his own work as well as his writing and typing skills, since, as he noted, "in the modern world the written word is the primary means of communication." Additionally, "the lyrical side and the emotional side of creative writing certainly helps" with his marketing responsibilities.

The workshopping and reading experiences from a creative writing background were also discussed. Mike values the ability to take criticism, stating that "if I didn't have the thick skin from my creative writing world, I would probably not be as resilient because I hadn't faced that

as well as rejection letters galore from publishers out there." The other end of taking criticism is to be able to effectively critique, which is experienced through the extensive study of literature:

> Being exposed to literature and particularly trying to look at literature from a constructional point of view, from how did it get made, and then how does it get read and what is the writer…That ability to take something that's written and trying to understand where it came from and the different perspectives and to judge it on its merit, from where it was coming from, I think that that helps me do the same thing with the work and with other people's opinions. I think that ability to sit there and say, "Okay, I may not like this piece of work, I may be offended by this piece of work. But where does this piece of work come from? What are they really trying to do? What merit does it have to other people? What value does it have to people that I need to pay attention to?" I think there's a lot of that stuff that I don't think I would have had if I hadn't been forced to sit in a room and have my work discussed, have other people's works discussed.

In many ways, Mike's approach to leadership showed a difference from his colleagues, a more creative approach to communication: "I draw a lot. I'm really known to jump up and use the whiteboard, almost to the point where they're probably taking bets as to when I'm going to do that in a meeting." He also referenced "a lot of creative works, whether it's movies or fables, myths, books," explaining that people learn through story, so he will often make use of movie clips to show examples rather than lecturing. In fact, his most often-used metaphor of leadership is the ending of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where Scout's perspective shifts, which is useful because "As a leader, you constantly have to look at things through different people's perspectives and lenses."

On the other hand, his penchant for telling stories may lead him to be a little "long-winded," and perhaps appearing "too simplistic" because he does not always use academic-speak.

Creative Writers and Leadership

While Mike uses creative idea-developing and draws from the arts in his meeting and teaching styles, he noted that he "would strive probably not to be overly perceived as creative" because that would not be "a positive, necessarily." In his experience, it was "far more beneficial to have promoted a more serious perspective." Due in part to a youthful appearance early in his career, "there was even a time when [he] was probably highly unlikely to disclose [his] creative writing background even though [he] definitely understood where [his] background was."

Despite occasionally not claiming that background, Mike recognized a relationship between creative writing and leadership:

I think that at its core leadership is taking people where they either don't know or don't want to go. And so part of leadership is always about imagining a world--and now I'm talking about leadership, I'm not talking about management, which I'm sure you're making a differentiation on, but I'm talking about leadership—is about taking people someplace that 9 times out of 10 they have no idea that or they actively don't want to go. And so that in and of itself to me is a creative environment. You have to imagine what that place looks like. You have to imagine in a way that the audience wants to go there. You know that you've got an audience. I'm a big believer that art should play a role, should communicate, should be… it's not just there to sit on a shelf. It's there to be a part of society and community. Leadership in and of itself is that way. And I think there's an art form to it. I think not everybody's got it. Certainly, nobody does it the same way. I'm

a very different leader than my colleagues would be. And we can disagree about that.

We've got our own way of going about it, but I'm going to handle my leadership

paintbrush the way I want to, the way I can do it. And that is informed by what I've

learned, where I've come from, what my skills are, what my biological and sociological

background is. That is all informative. If that isn't a creative environment, I don't really

know what is.

Jenny

Jenny has multiple program director-type roles, ranging from individual units to her

current roles as chair of the curriculum, chair of Academic study skills, and chair of the English

department. She is a 37-yr-old who has been a writer for most of her life and an administrator for

eight years. She began her MFA program after studying English in her undergraduate work

because of a commercial for her college—she saw the advertisement and the opportunity fit with

her interests in exploring writing and editing. Through connections in the program, she found a

position teaching at her current institution, a two-year community college.

Her path to administration began shortly after that, when she was appointed to a chair

position, then to a division chair position. Though some of that work falls into a more managerial

category, Jenny believes she now does more leadership work. For example, she is now "over

three faculty-lead initiatives," and has had "to establish faculty buy-in."

Identity

Becoming a leader was a fraught time for Jenny. She was a fairly new hire, and her

appointment was seen by some as favoritism.

It was just as scary for me as it was the department. So I worked really hard at trying to

be respectful to my administrator at that time who would promoted me and making them

confident in their selection. But also letting the department know, I'm not, you know, I'm not here to get you. I'm not here because I chose to—this is something that has been appointed to me, and I'll make the best of it, and I will earn your trust along the way.

From that start, Jenny sees herself as a protective leader whose job "is to make sure that [she's] serving her faculty and her students the best way that [she] can." She described herself as a "yes girl," stating:

I serve in a lot of leadership roles when it comes to advisory boards for other institutions. Anything…where you're kind of willing to go out on a ledge yourself or try new technology, people come to me for that. I honestly think it's just kind of the way I approach things. I'm really open-minded to new ideas, but I'm also not afraid to set things down if it's not in the best interest of my students or my faculty. I am a yes girl. If you ask me for help, I always say yes.

As she has developed new interests and new initiatives, Jenny's focus on creative writing has shifted to more of an application to her leadership:

Now that I think about it, I don't do a lot of creative writing anymore. I don't read a lot anymore, simply because I don't have time. But the cool thing about it is, you know, the background that I have educationally, what I grew up doing, what I grew up loving, I have been able to apply differently in my job to make me a good leader and, therefore, peer to my colleagues.

Her creativity also gets expressed in different ways. As a child and teenager, Jenny wrote creatively every day, filling many books and journals. However, her outlooked changed after about 15 years of this when she started with her formal training:

But since then I went through the formal training and the degree, and the books and the

editing and all that fun stuff. And I think that it's kind of what taught me the creative

processes and the ways of thinking. But I don't think it was my identity anymore.

The process of publishing "depleted some of that wonder." She noted that her appearance is now

more telling of her creative nature (tattoos, interesting glasses, etc.), and she has developed other

creative outlets, such as baking macarons.

Influence of Creative Writing

In addition to being the "grammar guru," Jenny credits her ability to visualize the big

picture to her training as a writer, as well as her skills in "anticipating things, forecasting,

foreshadowing." As an example of how she looks forward, she mentioned she was always

"looking for new approaches," which she related to her study of literature through her writing

training. She interprets her faculty much like literature: "All of my faculty are very different

people and so they're all different pieces of literature that I have to kind of work down to figure

out how I'm going to get in."

After describing an example of using creativity for problem-solving in her current role,

Jenny outlined how emotional transparency developed from writing:

It definitely brings me from a place of empathy for sure. I'm very tapped into my own

feelings and my emotions and my strengths, my setbacks, things like that. And because of

that, I think it makes me more approachable as a leader, definitely as an instructor, my

goodness. Creative writing taught me to be very transparent, sometimes to the dismay of

my family… I had some hard moments through creative writing conveying myself and

being really raw. I'm not afraid to do it now. And that's a really empowering thing, for a

faculty member to ask you a question, and you just simply say. "You know, well, here's

the real answer, you know, I'm not going to tell you the political answer. I'm not going to tell you what you want to hear. Like, "this is what it is." Or if I hear some grumbling, or if I hear a scary rumor from my faculty, I just lay it out there. Like, "this is what I've heard, but this is how we're gonna deal with it." So, it's definitely made me more open as a person.

In general, Jenny related many types of perception to her writing training. The empathy previously mentioned connects with her ability to see situations from multiple perspectives and to see herself critically:

It told me how to break down large problems, pieces of literature. It's taught me how to speak about things that are academic but personal as well or emotional. It taught me how to approach things from all aspects. It made me more critical of myself, but more empathetic toward others. And I think there's a self-awareness that comes with creative writing and creative writers that you don't see in a lot of other aspects or fields. I think it's made me a better person, better leader, even if it doesn't serve my purpose now.

Some elements of her leadership process were also found to be connected to her experiences as a writer. For example, Jenny described her process of communicating and of navigating the expectations of her administration in terms of her creative writing process:

And so I'm always challenging myself, honestly, to make sure that whatever I introduce to talk about or support or whatever is supporting both sides, that I am providing it to [faculty] in a way that is easy for them, that it's user friendly for students, and that it serves them in some way. So, I usually take processes that the college gives us and then I break down the steps and I eliminate the ones that I feel are repetitive or unnecessary. And I'm known for bucking the system in that way because I'm always trying to create a

more creative or more succinct approach to any process because it still yields the same thing. We're still getting there, but they don't need to do eight steps when they can do three. And that's really similar to the way I used to write. I used to throw everything on the page for everything I could think of regarding that topic. And then I would trim down as much as I could, just eliminate. And when you finally get to the point, then I remember asking myself: "Okay, well, does this poem and this format still say the same thing that it did in this? Yes." This exact same thing, I do it at this college. Exact same thing.

Creative Writers and Leadership

Jenny noticed many ways in which her study of creative writing has benefited her as she's taken on leadership roles:

I think it helps with the way I approach everything. I'm very detail oriented and because of that, I'm really good at my job. I can balance a lot. Creative writing and the practice and the study teaches you to think in so many different ways in so many different times. So I think that's really important for what I do. I'm a big picture person, but I like details too. I still recognize all of the details, but I also know how to align them to get to the big picture.

There have been some elements related to the study of creative writing that may have been detrimental, such as when Jenny is "a little too creative" and doesn't "always understand the limitations of certain ideas or creative thought processes." Another negative that perhaps derives from the workshop experience is that she doesn't take criticism well. She noted that she "used to hate small group when they rip your stuff apart…so maybe that carried over."

Externally, the degree itself has been "a barrier" for her. She felt others perceived her negatively early on:

[I was] looked down on for the first year or two of my leadership roles at the college. But that could have also been because I was young. But definitely I've gotten some negative feedback about my degree. I've been questioned numerous times by our accreditation body. I had to provide a portfolio in order to prove that I was credentialed to teach multiple times…I've definitely been questioned about having a creative writing MFA and being in the role that I am in now, you know, "How does that even apply to teaching?" and "How does that apply to what you do now?" And I think, because I'm so involved in technology now, I think people are like, "Oh, okay, cool. What did you go to school for?" And then I'm like, "Well, creative writing" and they're like "What?" So I don't think it meshes well for them, that they don't see the connection the way that I do. I think I have not been viewed fairly in the past, but since kind of earning my place and people getting to know not only who I am, but my drive and my passions for helping others… now I don't think it's even an issue anymore.

Part of the reason how others view her as a leader now has to do with her providing evidence of effective leadership over the years, but Jenny also believes that people are seeing how her creative nature can be a benefit:

They realized that being creative means you have a duplexity of approaches, and therefore, you're more understanding, you are willing to solve more problems than those that are real, that are more rigid. I'm not a black and white kind of person, unless it's expectation. So if you expect this of me, those can be black and white. But if I just have to yield something, I'm in the gray area because I'm going to figure out a better way to get there.

As an example of how her creativity is valued now, Jenny related experiences of how her administration now relies on her to instigate change:

They always come to me if they have tried something in the past, it's always been done this way and it's not working. I'm always the one they bring it to debunk it or to break it apart and start over. And I think that has to do with creative writing and creative approaches. I know a lot of others that are my peers that are in similar roles that don't think like me, and they never go to them for those same things. So, I think that just makes you more valuable in a sense.

Liz

Liz is a female program director who has identified as a writer for about 35 years and been in administration for 20 years. In addition to her program director role, she has had significant leadership roles in a national organization. While she has had a long-time interest in writing, her path to her MFA was nontraditional. Having a hard time choosing a major, Liz took about ten years to complete her undergraduate degree. Winning a writing contest was affirming to her, allowing her to decide: "if I'm going to get through my degree, I have to do what I want." A writing community helped guide her to the MFA after her undergraduate degree.

Her path to higher education leadership began with a serendipitous request to teach a last-minute class. Liz realized that she enjoyed teaching, and eventually was hired to teach creative writing at her current institution, where she's been for about 25 years. In this position, she has assisted in running the program as well as developed the writing program into a school. Additionally, Liz's national leadership role allowed her to be influential in creating organizing principles for the group.

Identity

Some of Liz's work outside of the university was what led her to be contacted to help run the MFA program at the beginning of her career. She'd created a strong network of writers in the state:

One of the reasons that the program director, my former teacher, was interested in bringing me in is because she knew that I had built this network across the state and we'd be helpful recruiting. She knew I could go out and do certain things. I could present, I can hold myself in a meeting. I had the confidence to do those sorts of things. I just always have. I don't know how. I've sort of fallen into it. I'm a little mouthy. I tried to be considered of people and put myself in the shoes of other people all the time.

Noting that she is "sort of bent that way," Liz described her leadership identity both in terms of her personality and her relationship to others:

I think I am a little spunky, but I also try to put myself in the shoes of other people. I really like collaborative work. I think there's no reason to have a wonderful staff if you're not going to invite them into the conversation and to tap into their own particular expertise.

Additionally, much of how Liz described herself as a leader is connected to the development of her school and program:

I loved my [program she graduated from], but the way we were taught to workshop was just to destroy each other. And the person who was left standing was a real writer. So we kind of adapted—we don't really talk about it this way—but we've kind of adapted a feminist pedagogy when we support each other here and we tell each other the truth. But we find a way to tell it to each other in a way that's constructive. We're talking about my

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leadership style. That's sort of the way that I operate as a leader. It's not that I'm not going to tell you when I want you to do something differently or when I'm not as happy as I might be, but I'm going to tell you in a way that you can accept it and grow and get better and advance your writing or your professional skills or whatever.

Writing is vital to Liz's sense of creative identity:

I would say that I feel most like myself when I'm writing. So, for me, it's not necessarily about publishing, and probably if I were not in the academy, I wouldn't give a fig about publication…I want to be a good role model for [my students], and I want to stay active and be in the national conversation for them. But for me, it's not about publications, it's about really writing. I don't write every day, but if I don't write for a few days, I begin to sort of separate from my real self. That sounds very, very urgent, but it's not always urgent after a few days to say I need to, I need write because I'm just not feeling like myself.

Influence of Creative Writing

Liz's experience and training in creative writing has contributed to a variety of skills that are helpful in leadership. For example, her training has helped her in "modeling new ways of thinking, modeling ways to work outside of the status quo." Because she has often presented her own work to a broad public, she has developed "confidence to even just stand up and say what [she] think[s] in different meetings." As a side note, she stated that "there's a lot of joking about me being a wordsmith so I can help with reports."

She credits her leadership focus on collaboration to her training:

Definitely being trained in workshop, which is a collaborative kind of experience where everyone has a say, and also just my pedagogy. I realized early on in teaching, even

though I loved it, I wasn't going to be able to, I wasn't going to able to sustain a teaching career that was satisfying to me if I taught the way I was taught. So I went to look for creative models of teaching. So, Paolo Freire was extremely important to me as a young teacher, the banking concept of education, pedagogy of the oppressed. That was slightly Marxist, but very interesting in shifting the idea that the classroom is a collaborative space, which was not generally, particularly outside my creative writing classes, that was not the way that classrooms operated. But I find that now, more and more, especially when we're having conversations about bringing in students who have been marginalized in the past in various ways, I think it's really important to be sensitive, to bring them into the conversation and to hear what they need.

Her reflections on how she was taught and readings on other possibilities has allowed her to help create a program that is unique on her campus. She sees creativity at play in the development of that program:

In my own program, it allows all of us to dream. I have the weirdest program on campus because we're a low residency MFA, creative writing program, only 20 years old. Our semesters don't line up. We have often allowed our students a ton of flexibility, just because we're nimble thinkers, I think, and we're used to looking for something that's fresh and innovative right? I mean, we don't want to create work that's like everyone else's in our scholarship. I don't want to create a program that's necessarily like everyone else's anyway…I find that I'm much more willing to blur sort of traditional thinking.

Lastly, Liz noted that putting words out there on the page has given her "a certain confidence about, confidence in leadership," though she is uncertain about the effect her leadership may have had on her writing:

I don't know that it works the other way around…I mean, it's holistic, I guess. I don't know that being chair of this department has made me a better a poet, except that, maybe I have a little more agency over my time.

Creative Writers and Leadership

Liz noted that the writing degree itself may be seen as an anomaly in her leadership work. However, her personal experience is that she is viewed by others in academia as having "parity with other leaders," due to her previous experiences as being senate president and a program chair. She has not experienced the overt stereotypes of creative people not being viewed as leadership material:

For instance, my experience with [national organization]: everyone on our board is a creative person, and they're all, many of them, are on the board in order to get that leadership experience, which you know has its own value and also goes back to the community. But also they see it as a leg up in their career. I don't really see people being separated out because of the creative discipline they're in. I mean, when I first came to teach here, my dean was the art professor…so I guess I've had really good role models.

Additionally, Liz described her experience in her particular college as unique; due to the success of her program, she has never felt that being a creative writer has been a detriment. However, she does recognize that she has had flexibility to run the program in the way it needs in part because of the uniqueness of the field:

I think [having a creative writing degree has] always been a benefit, but I'm in a unique place. I have been here 25 years now, and I'm kind of part of the institution at this point. I've been allowed to do pretty much what I want to do. I will say that this program was sort of formed and brought here as an idea. Part of the reason it was brought here is

because I was here and I knew this teacher…Because it was so alien to what everyone was doing, I think it gave us a lot of leeway. People didn't understand it. So you go onto the road, you're an artist and it's pretty hard. This culture's not necessarily nice to its artists no matter what genre you're working or what discipline. But here people are kind of bamboozled by what we're doing, and so we just we just off and said, "well this is just what we do." And they would say, "oh, well, then you must do it."

Though her particular program is the "odd duck" at her college, Liz also believes that her creativity (and the creativity of her program) may have an effect on university as a whole.

I think that having me here reminds them that creativity is at the foundation of all we do. For instance, I'm constantly talking to them when they're talking about the critical reading skills of our students. It's not critical reading. It's creative reading. What you think is critical reading, it's not. It's born out of creativity, and we need to approach it that way. The end is still the same, the end product, if they want to be crass about it… goals that they want their students to meet are the same kind of goals, but I'm just trying to shift the language a little bit, and to open it up a little bit in order for them to [see] creativity is really at the essence of humanity. People don't have to be poets, but people are meant to make things and to create things. So that's something I always bring to the conversation.

Sharon

Sharon is a 62-year-old female who has been in a leadership position for at least 10 years and a writer for approximately 44 years. She is currently a Program Director, a role she has been in for six years most recently and also held previously. Sharon followed an undergraduate degree with her MFA after learning about the degree from a professor. She then pursued a PhD with a

creative dissertation with the encouragement of a different professor. After those degrees, she began teaching in tenure-track positions.

As a first-generation college student with few people close to mentor her, Sharon noted that on her path to leadership, "the learning curve was pretty steep." Her interest in editing had led her to work with journals throughout her schooling, and early on at her current university, she was part of the initiative to create the MFA program. After receiving tenure, she became the program director. Her current directorship is part of a planned rotation for faculty.

Identity

Sharon's traits as a leader focus on how she works with other people:

I would say that I'm a Libra, so I'm a little indecisive, and I want everybody to just get along… I would never speak of myself as a dynamic leader. However, I am thoughtful… I would say I have tolerance, sensitivity, attention to detail, and a desire, a true sincere desire, to make things better for my students and my colleagues than I had it as a student and a new academic.

She also described herself as "hyper attentive and aware of what's going on with whom, when." She noted that she is a good listener, and that perhaps this attentiveness is due to her experiences as a poet.

In her discussion of her journey to becoming a leader, Sharon focused on the concept of mentorship. She did not have the type of guidance or example she would have wished for: "Even at that time in the late eighties, early nineties, there were so few women full professors. There were no women chairs then. Now, of course, there are many women in leadership positions. Still underpaid, but in leadership positions."

However, Sharon did have an experience that not all leaders with MFAs have; she continued her education, receiving a Ph.D. that provided skills that have proven helpful to leadership.

> I certainly am glad for my Ph.D., my five years in the Ph.D. program at [university] in this regard. I think that as a Ph.D. student, one begins to learn the language of academia and the ins and outs of getting things done in an academic setting that perhaps we don't have time to learn in an MFA program. And so that was also extremely helpful to me…I have a higher tolerance perhaps for academic discourse than some other leaders who have only the MFA background.

Relating to the distinction she makes between the skills gained from the Ph.D. and the MFA, Sharon also distinguished between her writing work and her academic work. Though noticed a chance, it was not when she took on a formal leadership role, but since she became a full professor:

> Since becoming a full professor, which I've been for a while now, I feel as if the stress levels have dropped enough so that even though I'm busier and more invested in the life of the department, and certainly in the success of the program and our students, I'm able to separate doing my own work from the work that I get paid to do much, much more successfully than I was when I was a young person. I think because the job simply doesn't depend on whether or not I publish anymore. I'm doing it just for me. I'm making poems just for me. No one is giving me raises for each book I publish. You know, we're barely keeping up with cost of living increases at [university] if at all. So anything that I do for my art is strictly for me.

Influence of Creative writing

Sharon referred to program development for examples of her leadership. Much of the MFA program development work Sharon took on was in reaction to her own experiences (and those of others working with her) in a creative writing program. When she and other faculty created the program, they wanted specific elements, including having a fully-funded three-year program. Additionally, the creation of a "community that wasn't competitive" was important. Sharon noted that "that's not something really that leaders can do without the help of, without setting an example, and then getting the students on board with that." This building and modeling is part of what Sharon recognizes as the leadership of problem solving:

> I think that artists just generally tend to think a little bit more creatively about solutions to problems… I remember the first time I was ever at McDowell Colony, and the visual artists were building their own frames and I said, "okay, so poets don't do that, but in many ways we build our own frames for other kinds of structures or communities that we're building."

Other elements that she noticed about her abilities that relate to her experience as a poet included holding a variety of perspectives and paying attention to detail:

> I'm a firm believer and adherent to Keats' notion of negative capability, being able to hold opposing notions in one's head at the same time. There is no single, there is no one way, there's no sort of single right answer…I think that I am able to, at this point in my career and at my age, I feel comfortable enough to say what's on my mind as diplomatically as possible and with a kind of decades long historical sense of where we have been and where we're going. I feel like I'm doing that in my poems now. I feel like I'm able to sort of think historically, and also, if it's not my history, I can research history

or historical moments in a way that I wasn't as interested in when I was in my thirties. Unearthing the past is a really, really great skill to bring to leadership, to the class, to teaching. And understanding that it's not just, you know, making poems, running a program is not just, you know, pep squad and emoting. It's about paying attention to detail, remembering what's worked in the past, what hasn't worked in the past, where we've been, and where we need to get to.

Creative Writers and Leadership

Sharon consistently noted differences between administration and creative arts, both in how value is perceived and in general approaches to issues:

The university wants us to justify our existence. My partner is a scientist, and in the sciences they bring in millions of dollars' worth of grants. And of course, in the humanities we don't do that. And so what do we do? How do we fund things if the university isn't willing to understand that? They're dealing with apples and oranges and probably several other fruits that they need to sort of care for.

Creative writers, though, are not alone in not being "cared for." After joining the arts directors in campus meetings, Sharon noted that all of the arts disciplines feel like "outsiders at the larger table begging for the scraps." But this is only one perspective:

In academia, certainly, I think I'm looked upon as slightly peculiar. On the other hand, as I mentioned, my partner is a scientist, and in that community, I'm considered a special, precious creature, like *the* poet. So not in a negative way, but in an extremely positive way, where artists are rare but cherished in a way that they aren't necessarily in academia in general.

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In noting these differences, Sharon sees herself as someone who would not be in a higher administrative role, in part because it would interfere with her ability to continue her own work:

I do think like an artist, even though I have a Ph.D. That has been proven to me again and again and again in faculty meetings and when I've been on hiring committees, as I frequently have been, particularly for writers, and when I'm in other service positions. I think it's just an occupational hazard that I don't think like an administrator. I could never be a true higher-level administrator. We recently had elections for a new chair. She's amazing, but I had been nominated, and I thought, "no, get thee behind me, that's not gonna happen." I think that my leadership of the MFA program has been helpful to the students and the MFA faculty and collegial within the department, but to run an entire English department is not possible because I can't do dean speak or chair speak. I don't know how to do that. Nor do I really… I think I would be a fine manager of the staff. But I don't want to. I just don't want to do that. And I feel like that's the kind of brain space that I don't have enough of to get my own work done and do a good job, and I'm not even talking about an outstanding job, I'm talking about just a good job. So yeah, that kind of thing is off the table.

Despite Sharon's aversity to taking on formal leadership roles in her own career, she believes that creative people have the ability to be effective leaders. When asked how she viewed the research about creative people not being quality leaders, she said

That's nonsense. We have the Renaissance to prove otherwise. Artists are the leaders. Was it Shelley who said that poets are the legislators of the world? I just I think that we are creating the consciousness and the conscience of our time. And always have. Now, does that mean that we will each be individually remembered in the way that Leonardo

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was? No, but that doesn't matter. It's about that kind of collective energy to sort of move forward with compassion and—I don't want to use the word creativity—but with some sense of open mindedness, which I think helps create art and also change…I don't want to canonize artists. I know as well as anyone just how rotten to the core many of them can be. But I do also think that they have the ability to change things in a way that your captains of industry might not have.

Jeanette

Jeanette is a 64-year-old female who, at the time of the interview, was days away from retirement after at least 15 years in administration at an R1 institution. She has considered herself a writer for 21 years, since she went to graduate school for an MA in creative writing that she earned before transitioning into a PhD in creative writing in the same program.

Her path to leadership began early and is part of who she is. She described that as a child, she was "the one that wants her way, and that involved co-opting other people to get that." She is also a goal-oriented planner. However, she asserted that while these traits were important factors in her taking on a leadership role, "actually there were no other people who wanted to do it…there wasn't a lot of competition to be a leader."

Identity

When asked about her identity as a leader, Jeanette focused on how she works with others in decision-making. She described her developing sense of leadership in terms of trust, noting that she is "really learning to trust people more, to trust them to be." Because of this trust, the collaborative model is important. However, that collaborative model does not always work in higher education:

I try to be as collaborative as I can, but I know that I'm also pragmatist. And my worst

flaw as a leader is tending to expedite. Sometimes that means making unilateral decisions

that others may or may not be comfortable with. But I try as much as I can to be

collaborative, and I think I do a good job of serving up those unilateral decisions in a way

that I haven't met too much pushback, or any really. But I personally see it as a flaw to be

making unilateral decisions that make an impact on others even if they don't care. I

would rather have the time, and that's the problem, having the time to soliciting the

feelings and opinions of others. Because when I do it is more enriching and we end up

with better decisions. But sometimes we don't have that time.

When thinking about her own leadership skills and identity, Jeanette conceded that she

has traits that may lend themselves to leadership:

I want things to go in a certain way. I see there's a goal and I know what we have to do to

get there. And I think that's part. But also I have a lot of high level organizational skills

that many people in the creative arts don't necessarily have. They tend to be more…I

think it's a weird combination of wanting to be a creative writer, but also having this

nature that is not bureaucratic-averse really. So it's not that I wanted to necessarily…I do

want my way and I do see the path and I do see the goal.

Writing is central to Jeanette's identity, and the leadership can be seen in contrast to that.

She noted that she has always had a goal of being "a writer who does nothing but write…It's

frustrating to be in a leadership role a lot of the time. And time consuming. And while it's

inspirational to your writing, it takes time away from your writing." As stated previously,

Jeanette was about to step down from her academic roles, which would allow her to highlight her

writing identity:

So now I'm making that paradigm shift from as a person who has to portion out time to deal with email, to deal with colleague and student problems, to organize meetings, to make/generate reports, to the person who can just turn that off and write all the time. It's what I've always wanted, really…I see myself as a writer who has long worked toward this goal of just writing and that's what I wanted to do.

When asked if she had any other thoughts to share about leadership and creativity, Jeanette concluded her interview with some reflective thoughts:

I guess I would share that I really don't know why I've done this. Just speaking about it now and thinking about all of the things that I have done that were so important, like establishing Latino & Latina studies. That was very important to me to do that, to build that program from the ground up. I can walk away from [university] and say when I came to [university] there was no program. I built that program and that program is still there. So I feel that was really important, but now at this point in my life and my career I look back and I'm baffled. Like who was that person who cared so mightily? Now that I'm detaching, it's hard to reconcile. So I don't know. I don't know what good I did, but I hope I didn't do much harm.

Influence of Creative Writing

Jeanette recognized some differences in her approach to leadership that were not apparent in leaders she had seen previously. When she became a leader, she noted that she wanted "to do things in different ways and [she] didn't want to continue with the same old patterns that we had that were numbing to the point of stultifying. So meetings were different. They only lasted an hour." Her program "didn't have to follow the old formats anymore," which she attributed to creativity bringing "a bit of difference to how you do things."

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Her creativity also lends itself to her interactions with people and problem solving:

> You have to understand that every person in front of you wants something different and how to get that person some kind of buy-in to what you see for the program and you have to very creative about that. And you deal with each person as a problem that you have to be creative about solving. Not a problem in a bad way, it's more like a question that you have to…you have to be extremely perceptive to understand, well that person, their eyes are glazing over—I have to change it up a bit. So it is this in-the-moment way of dealing with problems. You do have to be very creative. And sometimes things don't work and you have come back and figure out a way for them to work.

Some of the habits and techniques that are useful in writing are also useful for leadership. Jeanette remarked that her habit of being "kind of reticent to speak, sort of a fly on the wall type person…is part of being a writer. You want to listen and absorb."

Other habits or ways of being have also influenced Jeanette's leadership, such as her "sense that [she] can organize and control. Or I can set the conditions so that the outcome I think is best will occur. That definitely." She also mentioned the value of understanding people and being organized:

> And the understanding of the human heart in conflict with itself comes in. And understanding motivation, which is really important to fiction writers. It's also very important for leaders to try to understand the people you're trying to direct. But organization. I'm a deeply organized fiction writer, a deeply organized thinker and I think that has really helped a lot. I think that helps with credibility with my colleagues to know that I've got it going on.

Even writing emails quickly has been a benefit because Jeanette believes that an inability to do this "really disqualifies people for consideration as leaders." Additionally, writing strategies for her primary genre, fiction, resonate with leadership:

> I'm a fiction writer, so I'm used to, in a sense, playing with dolls. The characters, I want them to do certain things. There's a high level of control in writing fiction, but there's also a bit of surrender where you give over to the creation and you see the drama that ensues from the characters you create. And I think that control is something that feeds the leadership and understanding how people work and understanding how to herd them in certain directions. And how to put them in conditions where they can reach consensus or they can reject ideas that don't work. I think all of that is interfaced for me, and I rely on my creative writing understanding of human nature to help me facilitate meetings. And also facilitating those meetings inspires and feeds my creative writing.

> While she has been very productive with her creative writing, Jeanette admitted that the time spent in administration "sidelined" the writing work.

Creative Writers and Leadership

When discussing how creativity might be seen in her administrative work, Jeanette recounted a problem she worked on during the pandemic. Because the regular recruiting strategies such as on-campus visits were prohibited, programs needed to develop new strategies to bring in students, or, as Jeanette stated, programs were "liberated" to find new ways to recruit.

> And that was really quite fun to do, to just come up with a different way to do things. I noticed on the PhD side in critical studies, they did nothing. They really didn't…It wasn't an exciting thing for them as it was for us. And I think that was because as creative

writers we're open to doing things in new ways. It proves really an exciting challenge. But for them it was a stop sign.

When asked about the research on creative people and leadership, Jeanette noted that "In many institutions creative writers are looked at in kind of suspiciously or skeptically by the lit crit people. Many of them don't have PhDs." However, in her experience, which she described as "rather singular, there's no such enmity. If it's there, it's not part of the culture." But there were elements of the negative perception of creative people as leaders that might relate to her experience:

> Because if you really love your work, you become very possessive of your time. And I do love my work, and I am possessive of my time. I have been more productive than my colleagues in terms of book publication, and I've been an administrator. And I've started a Latino and Latina studies program at [university] and I've directed two programs simultaneously, which no one has ever done.

She noted that many of the people she works with are focused exclusively on their writing and would not function in leadership roles. However, she also sees leadership differently than they do:

> I see leadership as something that should be shared. If you're going to be a part of an organization, there's something you have to give, and everybody needs to do this. So I don't see it as something I would always want to do, but now I'll share my time for this period of time and then I'm out.

Despite leadership not being for everyone, she did not perceive that her creative writing background had been a detriment, though occasionally it led to an overflowing of ideas. She stated that "there does get to be a point where you have so many ideas—we can do this and this

and this. And you have to reality check yourself. But that happens before any harm is done, before anything is presented."

Scott

Scott is a male poet, 65 years old, who has been an administrator for about 30 years and a writer for over 50 years. He currently works as a department chair at an R2 institution.

The longevity of his writing career stems from an early interest in poetry. While that interest did not waiver, Scott began his career outside of academia as a steel painter. After about ten years of this work, he entered a low-residency MFA program, "and that really changed everything." He found that he enjoyed teaching and so began his career in academia.

The administrative roles soon followed. Scott described being "thrust into issues having to do with the administration and that kind of thing relatively early on." Because of this experience and the fact that "not everybody wants to do it," Scott found himself in more leadership roles. While these roles may have not been his goal, Scott discovered value in them: "I figured out that it was something that I can do and gave me an element of control over my own situation. So I've done it."

Identity

Scott began taking leadership roles because he saw opportunities and needs:

It just seemed to be like wherever I went things needed to be done. I guess I'm somebody who tends to pitch in and do things. That's what I mean. It wasn't so much someone holding a gun to my head and telling me that I had to do this, but it was just there and had to be done. And it wasn't like I could expect everybody else to necessarily do it. And I had that feeling that if they did do it, they wouldn't do it as well. I guess I was a little self-assured in that sense or cocky. Be better if I did it.

Throughout his thirty years as a leader and in his various roles, Scott has gained

perspective and developed his understanding of who he is and who he wants to be as a leader:

> In my early incarnations when I was younger, I guess I was described as a force of
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> nature. I really threw myself into things. I took a lot of personal initiative in getting things
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> done. And I took a certain kind of pride in protecting my faculty from having to do some
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> things that impinge on their writing and their writing time, and their ability to do what
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> they really wanted to do, which was publish, right?...I took that quite seriously because in
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> a way, because nobody had ever protected me…But that ultimately is a mistake, kind of a
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> rookie mistake really, to take it on in that way. You may convince the right people for the
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> resources that you need and may force some things into play, and you can ultimately get
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> a whole hell of a lot done, too. But you end up with a faculty community that feels a little
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> bit divorced from what's happened, or it feels like they don't have the same investment in
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> things that you have in part because you kept them from participating in the process in
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> the way that would have been healthy and wise.

Instead of taking on so much, Scott has learned to let others take on responsibilities of

leadership.

> But I'm much more easy going, much more delegating, much more looking for other
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> people to step up and do things much more. I try to be directive and set the right tone and
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> certainly kind of keep a sense of vision and direction. But I take my cues from the faculty
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> and their needs and their desires. And I'm putting together a retreat and a handful of
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> things that I think would be really valuable for us to talk about too. And maybe in the old
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> days, I almost would have just kind of followed those things which I thought were
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> important for the department to do. Now I'll send that out and have people prioritize how

they feel about those things and add anything else that they want to add in terms of what their chief concerns are. And I will look at that, and I'll ultimately create an agenda based on how strongly people feel about these different topics. So I think I'm much better aware of how my actions have repercussions, sometimes unwanted repercussions in the rest of the faculty…I guess when I was young I saw myself as a strategist, but I wasn't really thinking three steps ahead, you know. I was only one or two steps. And I think as you get older you're really thinking a lot more about the effects of what you do, about your decisions and what they ultimately mean to people. That can reverberate right down through to individual faculty and individual students.

Another way to think about his development as a leader is in terms of becoming a stronger writer:

That's a large part of the creative process, too, right? Being patient to a degree about your work and letting things happen and following things organically and naturally to places, instead of forcing them places. That's actually a good analogy for a change in my leadership over time. I probably, when I was young, tried to force my poems to become something that I thought that they should be, and I probably tried to kind of shape the department's vision or something to something that I thought that it should be. And I'm much more inclined now to think about my poems as telling me what they tell me. They tell me what they want to be, and they tell me how they want to be shaped. And if they want to be written in prose blocks or in alternating quatrains, and I do a lot more listening to my creative process now than talking. And I think that's true in my leadership style as well. I will be here towards the end of any administration that I will ever do, and in a way, I've probably figured out how to do it in the last couple of years. I'm sure there's

plenty more to learn. I'll be much more patient. I'll be much more organic about the way

things happen. I'll be much more willing to let things meander and find their way instead

of feeling like I have to force them into a particular way of being or into a particular kind

of happening. You just realize that the water flows no matter what you do. The water

flows. You can try and direct it, and good luck with that.

Despite the years spent practicing and the reflection on his time as an administrator, Scott

described himself as "just a poet who manages to know how to do it. I never had any designs on

becoming an associate dean on my way up to become Dean or Provost or something." But the

administrative work has contributed to a shift in how he views himself as a writer. He sees

himself "as a much more capable person now." Rather than believe that he was either going to be

able to publish a book or "fail miserably," the administrative positions have given him

perspective:

If I feel like I've contributed in some way to the development, and a few individuals have

really benefited from the work that I've done both bureaucratically and in terms of

teaching, that's of much higher value to me now than having a poem taken somewhere,

competitions or prizes or something. I'm much more tickled by having a student write me

after 25 years and say, "I'm still thinking about something that you told me all those years

ago and I just felt like looking you up." That pleases me a lot more than getting an

acceptance in the mail. Priorities shift here when you think about yourself and what

you've done, your values are different over time, and I'm sure the administration has

helped me to do that.

Influence of Creative Writing

The sense of being a creative person in general seems to have helped Scott with his leadership roles:

I don't know that it's necessarily the background as the creative writer. I think it really helps to be a creative person in a job like this. It takes a degree of empathy and being able to get outside yourself and see from somebody else's point of view.

While describing these necessary attributes, Scott began to describe how they relate to the work he has done as a writer:

And since you're trying to build consensus and you're trying to make everybody feel like they're a part of things, that sense of piecing together a jigsaw puzzle of sorts in order to form a clear picture or vision, there's something that's like that about our work and our revision work, I suppose, in building, structuring the writing that we do. Transports our sense of vision onto the page.

Some of the traits and skills he has developed as a creative writer are also helpful in leadership, though he noted that some of the skills, such as an ability to schedule, is from the "professional side of the writing where you just have to be stubborn and you have to find time to do it." Likewise, persistence is invaluable in both aspects:

That persistence that you feel when you're creating, and when you're trying to make something happen, and you're trying both at a professional level to make something happen for your career and you're trying with ambition to do the very best work that you can do. Persistence ends up being a pretty dominant, necessary trait. And I think persistence is also a very important trait in administration. Just simply being persistent

and sticking with it and following through on things, making sure that you're advocating as well as you can advocate for the things that really are important.

Problem solving was one of the first elements that Scott mentioned in terms of how he might see creativity in the context of leadership. In particular, solving personnel problems often provides opportunities for creativity. He noted that beside the "minutiae of bureaucracy and process… really the hardest biggest challenge is personnel, dealing with multiple personalities, soft and strong personalities, clashes between people, problems of all sorts that you end up dealing with." The creativity comes in when leaders need to look "beyond just the initial problem and [see] what can be done and what ripple effect that is going to have."

Scott's creativity plays another role in his administrative work. He uses it to calm down:

I think I'll just catch myself being such a bureaucrat and existing in this world and being hunched over my computer, and I'd have to remind myself that I'm a poet, and that there's another way of looking at the day, and there's another way of being in the world that is even more open to experience and less judgmental in a way than the place where I presently am. If I can catch sight of that guy during a tough day, that's a good thing to just remind me that I have a kind of personal, creative space that exists for me that I worked in and have been successful to a degree in and that still belongs to me. I can still find some sense of resonance and psychological well-being.

An additional thought on the intersection of his creative writing life and his administrative life, Scott believes that he has learned to focus on his priorities. As an example, he chooses to "get in front of the Dean and find a way to get that position" and to write his poems rather than organize his paperwork. Despite prioritizing, as he mentioned a couple of times, people only have a limited amount of energy to expend:

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There's no doubt in my mind that my life as an administrator has been very valuable in a

lot of ways. And it certainly is part of what allowed me to move between institutions and

better myself, and therefore better my family's standard of living. But there's also no

doubt that it's cost me a couple of books along the way, just the things that just simply

didn't get written that should have been. Or things that were written that just were never

high quality enough for me to do anything with. So, there's a price be to be paid, too.

Some people can manage to both be very productive as an administrator and also very

productive as a writer. I admire them, but something's got to give.

Creative Writers and Leadership

How other people view Scott as a leader may be affected by his career as a creative

writer. Interestingly, Scott remarked on having people get to know a writer through their work

before meeting. However, he also noted that there are stereotypes associated with poets in

leadership roles:

It's not hard when you're a poet and an administrator to be under-estimated. But there are

many people who think of the idea of the flighty poet, you know, all about the art and

about him or herself, and really unable to take care of very basic ordinary daily quotidian

things because they're in the stratosphere with their thoughts or something. People have

weird ideas about who poets are. So anybody who's stuck with that kind of a stereotype is

surprised by me, just in my bearing and what I do. I guess that that can kind of come in

play…There is an element of respect that an administrator, a writer-administrator, gets

for being a good substantial writer first.

Scott has known creative people who have made excellent leaders, who have "risen to the

occasion in the big ways to lead the department to advocate for resources." He believes that the

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capability to be an effective leader and a creative person exists but that some people do not have the temperament for dealing with the "dissatisfaction that comes along with the job." He noted:

Invariably they're going to disappoint somebody or somebody's going to see you in a way that you don't understand. You get your administrator evaluation at the end of the year, and there's always one person who's unhappy about something. It's just the way. But you have to be able to function knowing that that's the case. And then you can't please absolutely everybody. You can try and you're doing the best you can, but it's not ultimately probably going to happen. Some people just don't want to be in a place where they're making those decisions or be in a place where they're thought of in that way. And some people can get very harried by people or personnel issues that are insistent, are badgering, or over the top in terms of needs and contact. And I don't think everybody creative necessarily has the same level of the patience. Some things that the leaders do, you have to be a very patient person in this racket. You have to be willing to take punishment in the process of what you're doing.

That idea of patience arose again at the end of the conversation when Scott was reflecting on the differences between this stint as chair and previous leadership work. He does not look at inflammatory emails (or other emails) after the workday ends at 5p.m. He waits before sending emails that may lead to conflict. And, he stated:

Whereas I didn't get as much writing done during the last time that I was chair—and had some issues with just having enough hours in the day to be a dad and the chair and a teacher and a poet—now I will find a way to basically kind of say, "You know what, I'm not opening my email until 9:30." And from 7:30 to 9:30, that's my time, that's work on revisions, or work on a story, or do something… That's the secret of one of the pieces of

advice that was given to me by an old-time chair… he said, "solve no problem before it's ripe." Let it in other words, make sure it's a problem before you solve it. And don't turn it into a problem by itself by solving something that wasn't a problem to begin with. So being a little bit patient, letting things happen a little bit more organically, and being willing to watch things play out.

Jill

Jill is a 55-year-old female writer and program director who has been in a leadership role for about 15 years. She has considered herself a poet for approximately 24 years. However, she has been writing for longer than that. Jill attended a public arts high school for creative writing, and while she did not major in writing in college, she did continue to take creative writing courses in both poetry and fiction. After college, she received her MFA. To reach her goal of teaching, she continued on with her education, receiving a Ph.D. in American Literature and Women's Studies.

While working on her Ph.D., Jill continued to write, and she had a published book of poetry by the time she was on the job market. In her first tenure-track position, Jill had a mentor who was an exceptional leader and also a poet, which provided her with an opportunity to see how to lead in the ways she wanted while also being a writer. Jill began her own journey to leadership in her second position when she worked in a place with a "really bad" creative writing program. She, with others, redesigned the entire program, creating an MFA that was unique to the school and built "from the ground up." Jill became the program director; however, she noted that "part of the reason this was working was the spirit of collaboration that was behind it."

Identity

In addition to being "at the head of the impulse to found" the program, Jill became the director partly because "no one else wanted to do it, but also [she] did want to do it." When she addressed her identity, she thought of herself "primarily as a writer and a teacher, and then this [administrative] work." But it isn't a separate part of herself: "It's not that my work as an administrator is 3rd, because it's sort of part of all of that. It's like all of a piece."

In terms of who she is a leader, Jill spoke repeatedly about collaboration:

I think it's also really important as a leader, as an administrator, as a person, to get along well with your colleagues… the spirit of collaboration, but also just modeling for the students how people interact in academia and get along, and that we're all in this shared endeavor together.

Jill also sees her purpose as a leader to be a role model for students:

I also seek to be, in some sense, a feminist role model for students because I'm running this program, I'm teaching, I have children, I have a life outside of the program, I'm trying to be a writer. I'm doing all those things…But I do feel like it's important for them to see someone doing all these things. You know what I mean? And without me coming into class and talking about my child but doing all these things and really showing that it's possible to have a creative life. And also to have an administrative piece of your life. And also to have a family.

Another aspect of her working identity that Jill models for students is what a writing life looks like:

As a writer myself, I also am aware of what the writer's life is like and what the artist's life is like, and how, basically, you cannot sit around. Well, first of all, I think if you're

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teaching creative writing, you need to be a writer. But you also can't sit around waiting

for the perfect moment, I tell my students. To write, you have to steal the moments. You

have to write on the subway, you have to force yourself to do when you don't want to.

And I'm always happy to impart those lessons to people from my own experience

because when I was a grad student, I really did think you needed 10 hours, a gorgeous

journal, and a beautiful, sunlit desk. And that's completely ridiculous. But I really believe

that. And that no wonder I was struggling because that's not life.

While all of these aspects are important to her identity, Jill noted that "the administrative

work does take some time away from [her] writing, but it doesn't make [her] identity as a writer

any lesser in terms of [her] self-conception." Jill's identity as a writer has been prevalent

throughout her career:

And the whole while I was there getting my PhD, which had nothing to do with creative

writing…I was writing all the time because I was like, "well, nobody cares if I write

anything, so I really better work on it." So I worked really hard during my PhD and I

wrote a novel, which was published in 1998 when I was still kind of a fiction writer, and I

wrote my 1st book of poetry, which got accepted and published in 1996 while I was a

grad student.

Influence of Creative Writing

Much of Jill's experience with leadership relates to the development of the MFA program

she created. As she developed the program, the choices the team made often came from wanting

to do the opposite of their own MFA experiences:

I guess I've mainly focused on the negative examples of my own grad school experience,

which is perhaps unfair, it's like, what do I not want to be? I'm always thinking I want to

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be the kind of mentor for students that I didn't have…But I also think for me, having an

MFA in fiction has been super helpful through all this. Being someone who feels equally

comfortable in classes and students with prose and poetry is a big plus for me in terms of

teaching, and in terms of engaging with students, and in terms of leading the program.

Additionally, Jill has many skills that help her be an effective leader. Some of those she

views as supplements to her creative side, like having "a very strong practical side," which helps

with problem solving. While she did not feel that she would be able to be effective in upper

administration, she recognized that her problem-solving skills are quite valuable. Another trait

that helps is that she is a "very scheduled person [with] a typed to-do list for every day and a date

book." She also noted that some of her internal approaches and habits are useful:

> I do think kind of logically and practically, which also helps. I'm also very organized,
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> which I think also helps. I mean, it would be kind of a disaster, actually, if you weren't
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> organized and you had any kind of administrative job…And I think time management is
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> huge too, right? And I also try to show that to students, try to be someone who promptly
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> answers emails, responds to questions and problems, doesn't let things slide, that kind of
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> thing.

There is always a balance, though. Jill promptly responds to others, but as a leader she

believes that setting boundaries is important. She does not "respond to student emails at 10 PM

on Saturday, just in the same way that [she's] not going to be texting [her] students and going out

with them." She notes that it is very important that students know that she is "present." Beyond

her boundaries with students, Jill sets rules for herself "because the administrative job could take

over every minute of the day."

Jill noted one other skill that has been beneficial in leadership and writing:

I'm a very good multitasker, which probably helps. I think that during my MFA, when I was taking my fiction workshops and also writing poetry on the side, I was writing my first book on my own at the same time. I was comfortable doing that, and then when I was getting my Ph.D., I was working on my creative writing at the same time. I'm good with setting my own goals. So, I think those things definitely help. I'm able to switch gears pretty quickly.

Lastly, one direct connection with her creative writing experience is the idea of flexibility. Jill remarked that "the creativity comes in with being flexible, which God knows has really been tested in the past 2 years." She also noted that much of the work she does, whether teaching, writing, or administrative, requires creativity: "In the same way that teaching is creative, like sequencing a class, I think sequencing and running a program, I think all of that is also deeply creative."

Creative Writers and Leadership

Jill recognized that there are stereotypes associated with creative writers and leadership, noting that "in academia people tend to see creative writers as sort of ditsy with no practical skills." However, her experience and models were quite different. Her father was also a poet and an academic, which provided her with a unique perspective:

I saw my father and I heard stories about academia all the time, and I was sort of filing those away in my mind, too…I'm sure that was forming my thinking as I was teaching at the places where I taught, and as I was a graduate student. I think it's really been purely a positive [to have an MFA]. I mean, just thinking of being an artist, making an artist's life, thinking of how to be flexible, how to do many things at the same time…So I think that that spirit of creativity that I had growing up, and especially my undergrad, I think is

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really helpful to me as a leader. I kind of take that into my administrative work. If the worst thing I do all day is somebody at accounting—this happened yesterday—gets mad at me, okay, fine. You know what I mean? It's academia. As somebody said to me in grad school, there's no such thing as an academic emergency. There just isn't, especially when we look at the past two years. I think that's really true. I think it's really, really true. You can always fix things. I think it's important to model that for students, that this is the Academy. We're not operating on people's brains. We can always turn things around. Everything is flexible. Everything is a change process. All of that. And if you make a mistake, you can fix it.

Jill still does have to face the perceptions of others:

It is really funny. In my town when people ask me what I do, and I say I'm a creative writing professor, everybody's always like, "Oh," like complete confusion. One person said to me, "That's so esoteric." But when I say that I'm the director of an MFA program, they perk up. Maybe it's the word *director*. It's interesting to think about. I wish we could have more of a melding of worlds.

Creative writing is not alone in being maligned, and Jill had an opportunity to work with a variety of arts administrators while adjudicating arts prizes for a foundation, an experience which allowed her to think about leadership and creativity more generally:

Being around all of these arts administrators, I was also thinking about this, and what it's like to be them, and how they all have, writing, dance, music, whatever backgrounds, and are working in admin. I think it's really interesting. You see what they bring to those administrative roles right? It's just a different perspective, which is super useful.

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John is a 47-year-old man who has been an administrator for about 16 years. He considers himself a very creative person, a musician and songwriter, though he has hung up his poet hat, considering himself "retired" after about fifteen years of pursuing creative writing. His journey to an MFA began in college; he was a first-generation student and found himself excelling in his writing and music classes. After accumulating many creative writing and English credits, he decided that was his direction. The MFA began similarly. John did not know what to do next (but he knew that he liked writing) and he had the opportunity to go to a program that paid for his education and allowed him to live in the heart of Cajun country where he had family roots.

John continued with his music and also got a job as a night manager for a community college writing center, which allowed him to start "to kind of get a taste of what makes the show." At the same time, he was also learning a lot about management through his work with bands. His path to leadership became clearer through the mentors he had who were excellent leaders and guided him. At the center of it, though, John got into leadership "because the job had to be done." He is a person who does things, and he thought the work was interesting.

He became a graduate assistant at a large university's writing center while in a Ph.D. program, and then was hired to teach, create a writing major, and revamp a writing center at his current university where still directs the Writing Center and the Writing Program.

Identity

When asked about who he is as a leader, John stated:

I like to think of myself as the leader who refuses to lead. I don't like words like "boss." I just don't. I am a facilitator. I put people in conversations. I listen to what people have to

say, try to figure out what is the goal and how to do this, how do we benefit from the

process as well as the product.

Throughout the discussion, John referred to himself a "connector of creatives." His

natural extroversion gives him the opportunity to do that connection:

My favorite thing is to introduce a smart person to another smart person and see if they

can pull something off. I'm very much about team alignment…I am partially in charge of

a rethinking of some core writing classes, and I creatively thought about who do I want in

the room for those conversations. I'm not saying everyone who agrees with me. In fact, I

purposely picked someone who would not agree with me from the outset but I knew

would bring something amazing to the table. And I needed someone who wouldn't derail

the conversation…Putting a team together is like putting a band together. And it's not just

the ability to play instrument…What do you bring to that instrument? Where are you

coming from? What do you have to say? You have something to say?

In this way, John's leadership is very much a creative act of connection for him, and he has

looked for ways in which to use his creativity to serve others:

I think I just kind of looked for opportunities where I could be a creative. But outside of

me being a guitar player, or a bass player, or a synth player, or a pianist, or a drummer, or

sometimes a singer, I liked being in the back and I like seeing how do I get the spotlight

to shine on as many people as possible.

In addition to the list of musical talents he described in the previous paragraph, John

styled himself in even broader terms as a creative person:

I'm a songwriter, I'm a guitar player, I'm a show booker, I'm an event planner, a problem

solver. I write in a variety of genres on a daily basis, from emails to my dean to a grant

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proposal I turned in this morning to a persuasive note to faculty to get them to rethink

how they talk about writing centers in their classrooms.

He has been developing this broad sense of creativity for years, and sees connections between

people who are creative in different ways:

So most of the conversations I have aren't with academics. They're with people who were

doing creative things with food. And there are people who were doing creative things

with social justice. And there are people who are doing creative things with public art.

And there are people who do digital and video editing. And I love it when I can connect

Person A from that world to Person B in academic bubble bullshit world and see "Can

you all to make something? Come on let's do this." So a connector of creatives, a

problem solver, an event planner.

In taking on more leadership roles and having such an expansive view of creativity, John

has had to develop a sense of priorities:

I've had to be more decisive with my time, I've had to learn how to prioritize value. I had

to learn how to make sure that my wife and I make time to take a walk every day.

Influence of Creative Writing

For John, creative writers develop habits vital to success, one of which is that "writers

write every day":

I don't believe in inspiration. I don't. I think you put your butt in a chair for 90 minutes a

day. You have a list. And some days suck. Most days suck. But you fill your antennae up

every day. My wife [a poet] does the same thing. She's better than I am. She takes two

days off a year. I'm not kidding… So what I learned, I think you have to plan your work

and work your plan.

However, having a plan is only half of the challenge. John asserts that it is also important to understand "that it is not going to go according to plan":

So you better have a couple of backup plans and be ready to think on your feet. Because no one has the time for you to throw a hissy fit. No one has the time for you to abandon ship. I think also creatives, really good creatives, know how to manage their time well. And they know what they can say no to… Because as you get older, there's other demands on your time. That's not a bad thing. That's a good thing. But there are more demands on your time, and so I have to be more intentional about my choices.

Having plans, dedication, and being able to think on your feet are some of the creative skills John notices. He also talked about more technical skills:

I think the best academic writers have a little bit of a fiction writer in them. Not because they're making stuff up, but because they understand rhythm and tone. They understand the differences between short sentence, short sentence, short sentence, long.

And the ability to start thinking of those creative options is another skill. John noted that when faced with a problem, people "can sit there and be intimidated by it, and sometimes [he is], or you can take out a giant sheet of butcher paper and draw a map."

One way in which John sees himself growing as a leader is in his understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI):

So the way I hope I've grown, I took a lot of seminars and DEI, and I took a lot of seminars in anti-racism, trying to read as much as I can because I want [university] to be more diverse, and I want our writing center to reflect the diversity I think makes the world beautiful. I have a lot of learning to do on that, but I think one of the ways is sitting down with creatives, sitting down with people who were underrepresented in the arts and

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in the academy, and asking them, "What do you see here? What do you see in this writing center? How does it translate to your experience?" And so maybe I'm better listener and maybe I'm a little more patient.

Some of that understanding and appreciation of diverse perspective may have come from the ways in which John needed to develop to success as a leader, which was in itself a creative process:

I had to figure out really fast that you can't speak French in Spain. What I mean by that is my dean did not give a shit about qualitative data. I learned that the hard way. And so I had to learn some numbers games, and I had to learn how to translate what I thought was...My old dean was great, by the way, we were different people, are persuaded by different things… So that's one way I had to kind of like overcome and change creatively.

Creative Writers and Leadership

From his experiences, John believes that having a degree in creative writing does affect how others view him. He noted:

In Fine Arts at [university], it's given me some sense of cultural capital. My friends in Humanities, they're like, "well, he's a writing center guy, but he likes lit too, so he's okay or whatever." My natural science folks, they are like, "well, he's the guy that comes in and solves our writing problem with these pre-health workshops." That's cool.

However, he has noted a cultural understanding of creativity in the broader U.S. culture that is much narrower than how John would define it:

Americans have this weird thing. We associate creativity with a solo writer, probably with a beard looking at a window on some beautiful vista. And it's so romantic. And I think that's dumb…Because moms have to be creative and carpenters. Read Mike Rose's

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The Mind at Work and you tell me that plumbers and carpenters and washer machine

repair guys, and whatever… They have to be creative all the time.

Rather than creativity being a detriment to leaders, John recognizes it as something that

people are always doing, and that they need to do in order to be their most effective.

You want to solve problems, you want to come up with new ways of doing things, you

want to make things more effective or more affordable then… We're never not in the act

of communication. I think we are always in the act of, as long as you harness it and build

upon it, we are always creating...I really think we could spend a little more time coloring.

I really think we could spend a little more time working with Legos. I think we can spend

a little more time playing an instrument that you're never going to play in front of

someone. And sucking. I'm not saying that that is in the place of learning how to draw

statistical data analysis from WC Online [appointment tracking software]. It does not take

the place of learning what is the conversation that led us to rethinking creative

connections between classrooms and writing centers spaces. But it fuels it. And if you

ain't got no fuel, you ain't going nowhere.

In general, John recognizes creativity as essential to functioning, whether as a leader or

simply as a developing person. The importance of purposeful repetition is vital for creative work

and also sets the stage for leadership:

I think the arts are the key to the liberal arts. I'm not saying we should all be painters and

sculptors. What I'm saying is that we should have a deep understanding of process, and

we should have a deep understanding of craft as a thing you practice. I don't think there's

anything mystical about this. I love baseball. A major league pitcher will throw in

practice probably 100 to 150 pitches a day. There's nothing mystical about that. There is

just you throw a baseball and you move your body and you make adjustments. And I

think writing is a lot like that and running a writing center is a lot like that.

Because of this, "we have to think about how we include innovation and creativity in the

curriculum." John believes students would benefit from exposure to creative studies "because

you're going to learn a lot of stuff about trial and error and choices and aesthetics and audience

and genre."

There is much to learn from the arts:

I really, really wish we could come up with a way to show the importance of those things

across economic lines. I wish the university leaders would recognize there is amazing

value in theater because of communication skills, collaboration skills, rhetorical work,

joy. I wish they'd see value in visual arts and museum spaces and maker spaces, not at the

expense of other things, but we've kind of gotten a little STEM-sick.

Paige

Paige is a 38-year-old woman who works as an Associate Dean and Assistant Curator in

the Division of Libraries at an RI institution. She has been a writer for 15 years and an

administrator for 10 years. While her MFA is a relatively new degree, Paige has loved writing

since she was a child. She noted that she "started writing because [she] didn't remember," and

writing was a way to remember. She then began writing fiction because she "was writing

nonfiction at first and it was too painful to recall reality." When young, she created a newsletter,

a small publishing company, and was "on the board for a black LGBT writers' organization." In

these ways and others, she was always involved in writing, so the MFA was "always hovering."

Before the MFA, Paige became a librarian, then found she needed a second Master's degree to

become an academic librarian. At that point, she began her MFA with the understanding that she wanted to keep her job and creative work separate:

> I didn't want my art to be my job, I think that was an important distinction for me. I'm very much a compartmentalizer. And so I find that I want to have my art because it makes me feel good, and I don't want it to be the stress of eating and furnishing my life. I want it to be the retreat space that I have.

Leadership responsibilities have arisen for Paige as a natural extension of her work to bring more of her own talents for presentation and creative energy to academia:

> I was doing things differently. And people were, they were compelled to learn more and then started giving me jobs. I became a leader. Because it wasn't necessarily that I was like, "Oh, I'm going to do this and lead." It was more like, "We want to see more of that, and we want to see more of that. And so I'd like you to come here and tell us more and talk about this and keynote this and present here." And it just snowballs into everyone wanting to also feel the things that they haven't been feeling in the world of work. People wanted that element to add to their institutions or to their works. I think that the leadership portion of it just came from people wanting more of that and wanting to be led through that.

Identity

Paige's formal leadership role includes supervising both faculty and administrators. She noted that "leading those two groups requires a bit of flexibility…[to] bend and weave among the two groups." She also expects flexibility in her staff:

> I'm not the easiest person, the easiest manager for people, because I'm not very straightforward, and I want them to solve the problems on their own. Or not on their own,

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but they have to participate in solving the problem or identify what even the problem is. And maybe it's not a problem, but an opportunity, et cetera, et cetera. So I think that that's how the creativity informs my leadership.

As a leader, Paige sees her role as one of collaboration and finding ways for people to work within the systems:

It's why there are these middle management positions…The people need to be coalesced in some way and that takes someone who gets paid more to do it because it's not a fun job and nobody wants to. And so I'd say that the only way it can become an enjoyable experience is if you apply creativity to it, if you think outside of the box as much as possible, or you participate in a collaborative way with the people with whom you're trying to fit into the structures. I definitely have a non-hierarchical way of leading, like I really push people to be less directed and more so facilitated into how they want to do their work and how they want to do their jobs—mostly because we're librarians, we're not, you know, child pediatric physicians, right? We can be a little bit more flexible with how we move through things and nobody will die.

Paige defined her leadership in terms of creativity and defined her creative identity in terms of a broad array of communities and identities: they "often included my lesbian identities, so I would always bring to my creativity, my communities, my home community, my queer community." The idea of a collective history is vital to both her creative and academic work:

And I sort of walked with all of that. I feel like I walk with my grandmothers, my ancestors… And I bring that to my creative writing for sure. And then I bring it to my scholarship and my academic writing and my leadership because I will use language that is not traditional language… So always just finding ways to bring people outside of the

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white box of the sterile institutional space, and allow them to bring themselves into the room as well is important because I think we're always walking with who we are and our identities.

Another of the creative identities that influences Paige is the work she did in cabaret theatre: "I used to be a performer and I think that that had become part of my identity, the performance, and the presentation being on stage, and giving people an experience."

However, one thing has changed since Paige became a leader. She found that she is "less creative after becoming a leader because [she doesn't] have the time to do as much writing and [she has] to do more academic writing. Even this has a possible silver lining in that her "academic writing has become more creative."

Influence of Creative Writing

As a fiction writer, Paige made many direct connections between her leadership strategies and the creation of a story, starting with the broad perspective a writer is required to have. She encourages "people to have a sort of external perspective," and she related that "to creating characters in a story."

She further developed this idea of character by connecting identity with characterization:

> I'm thinking about setting and thinking about place and thinking about dialogue and what is it that we're actually saying and doing, almost like having a bird's eye view to the way that we move through our workplace and identify our character, caricatures we built for ourselves, right? Like who are we being in this moment? And what is the likely outcome of the scene based on the characters in this room? And what if we wanted to do something differently? How do we write that in? And so, I sort of move through the dynamics of my own work that way and my own character. I say character intentionally,

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my character, because of tropes, right? And we move through the world that way, and I think that we don't have to. So if we just use an eraser and start from scratch or think about switching roles in some way, or rewriting our own, I think it's really challenging for people to think about what that would look like for them, if they were to sort of carry their own narrative, write their own story.

That "ability to rewrite and to move outside of what things are" is a skill she has gained in her work.

Specifically, her leadership work in libraries relates directly to revision and perspective through the construction of identity and authority:

Libraries are houses of information. We store it, we preserve it, we disseminate it, we describe it, we share it, and it's all centered around information. And I think that what information is, something that information science also plays around with a bit, is to reimagine and reconsider or aims to expand so that it's not what we think it is. It's not what we have been taught it is, or it can be more than what the narrow definition of information has been told to us. Or rather that information is constructed, and so is authority, and so we can actually author a different kind of information. All people can from any standpoint. I think that fiction definitely feeds into that. And internally I would say that I walk with that concept in both realms, the idea that authority is constructed. In fact, it's actually a framework within the ALA association with college research libraries frameworks for information literacy…but I definitely pull that from these frameworks into fiction as well, that it's all constructed, and use that in my teaching and in how I move through my own fiction work, writing work.

While perhaps not directly related to writing work, Paige draws on her creative experience in cabaret theater to enhance her presentation skills. She spoke of the "juxtaposed experience" she had between cabaret performance and dry academic presentations. She brings more creativity and engaging presentations because of this. Additionally, she is able to "see it all as one big performance" with a broader perspective because of her personal and family background. In a clarifying email, Paige noted that she wanted to

acknowledge the complication of life as a person from a world outside of a Western context, and how remarkable all of this is…All is to say, it's difficult for me to be in a meeting on, say, faculty governance or stare at a spreadsheet or consider yet another committee and not lose grip of reality—whose reality, and how can any of this matter?!

Paige also experiences some drawbacks to being a writer in a leadership position, primarily the sense of having continual work rather than being able to complete tasks:

And then I think that the bad skills that come from it is the incompleteness of writing. I think that I have a million unfinished stories. Not a million, probably 50 unfinished stories. That's ok. That's part of it, starting a draft or multiple drafts of something… But in work you have to be done with this. So I see things as an ever-flowing process, and that's not true. I probably end either too soon, or I keep thinking I'm always building upon something and I keep things going. And so that can be hard when you're working in committee, and in process with people, and they want more structure and less ebbs and flows to a project.

Creative Writers and Leadership

Following on her consistent belief that "Leadership does require a lot of creativity," Paige noted that "there is a point at which there are no rules to how it's done. It's a process of

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coordinating between structures and then the unstructured." She provided an example of a situation during the pandemic in which she had to make a determination not only about how to use space to continue serving students, but how to create a physically and emotionally safe environment for her faculty and staff. Addressing those needs in a creative way led to a positive outcome. As she shared:

> The creativity that had to come from that had to take into account every single angle of the experience, like the students being vaccinated, the international students who didn't have a choice, the President's office, every department, having multiple conversations, who are the stakeholders, think about all the people at play. And how do we have a beautiful outcome? Right? How do we have an outcome that feels good? Feels safe and warm and makes people feel heard and envision what makes it an easier experience for the students?... And I think that definitely takes creativity.

One challenge that Paige identified with being a creative person in leadership is that some people are not used to or comfortable with having a more creative leader who is less structural:

> I think if it is anything, it's that idea of unfinished business, and potentially, it's harder, like, everybody has different management styles and different supervisory needs. And I think that people who need more structure are challenged by me.

Rich

Rich is a 55-year-old male who said his writing career as beginning about 39 years ago. He has been an administrator for about 14 years, though he asserts that becoming a leader was "never intentional." In fact, he "was just amazed that you could go to school and study creative writing and get away with it." While he recalled an "early leadership gesture" in graduate school

when he was a representative, Rich's primary focus was on finding a job and being able to write stories and novels.

However, as he began to get into more leadership roles, he became more ambitious about them. He began with smaller roles, such as being on many search committees. At the same time, he was editing a literary journal, which also gave him experience with "these sort of leadership issues within, especially problem solving, especially leading a small organization, especially hiring and bringing people aboard and sort of divining a purpose and mission." Some aspects of these roles were concerning, such as the networking that often led to hiring. However, seeing the inner workings led him to ask, "How can I be a part of this now?"

Through a connection made at a conference, Rich was brought in to talk at a university. The acquaintance then told his dean that Rich needed to be part of their organization. So Rich was hired to be the Humanities Division Chair, a position that had just been created. He noted, "the very thing that kind of initially concerned me about being on search committees was the very thing that kind of got me into a leadership position."

Identity

Rich has a strong sense of who he is as a leader, though he shies away from creating a specific declaration:

> My kind of cheeky answer is to quote the 90s rapper Big Daddy Kane and say, "I get the job done. I work." That's my leadership philosophy. It's I don't have one. I feel like it's malleable, it's something that to me, to have a leadership philosophy means to sort of risk becoming just calcified and unable to adapt to new people.

At some point, though, Rich realized that "one finds a kind of limit to their capacity to get things done for the good of the college or the good of the unit, and then wants to sort of move

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to that next place." In order to keep that adaptability and be an effective leader, Rich believes

that he needs to connect with the people he is leading:

> I've tried to combine the two things that we generally think are kind of separate. I want to
> be a kind of visionary mission-based leader who has a full and complete touch with every
> member… I'm not aloof. I'm not in my office just working on 5- and 10-year plans. I'm
> always somebody that's accessible. I'm always somebody who never turns down an
> invitation to meet with junior faculty, member department, whatever. And that's not just
> the good things, but the bad things too.

In a similar vein, Rich noted that being able to see the impact of decisions that he and

others make is vital to successful leadership. He has learned to expect the unexpected and to

keep focused on the work:

> So our job as leaders is to see is that decision going to kind of have some long term
> challenges or can we get this thing taken care of soon? And I just think that that vision,
> the vision that I finally—that I have vision that I had always because I've always been in
> two to three areas. Been in an area where I've been among African Americans, been
> around my dad's relatives and seen them as themselves. Been around white Americans.
> Same thing… In each case, sort of accepted as one, and then the other one is where I'm
> kind of like, not known or sort of work as a kind of spy here. And so I've seen kind of
> like—I'll be frank—white people have said the worst racist thing in the world around me,
> expecting me to have a similar reaction. African Americans similarly. I had seen
> everybody operate at these kind of crazy levels. So I'm just not surprised. And I think by
> not being surprised about things that I don't spend a lot of time, thinking, *well, how could*
> *this have happened?* I just go back to my philosophy. I get the job done. I work.

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While Rich's leadership identity can be discussed separately from his creative writing identity, he noted that he "can't separate that part of my identity [the creativity] from who I am as a leader because that inspired me first, that drove me first. It can't be separated." One clear connection between the two is that because of his creativity, he is not surprised by the unexpected, as mentioned previously:

> My creative identity is as someone who sees who sees the world's humorous moments and doesn't decide to offer any kind of solution for that. But I think that what that does, what that allows me as a leader, is that none of this stuff surprises me. I like to say that, and these last few years have demonstrated this in an enormous way.

> In developing his sense of self as a writer, Rich learned that it wasn't possible or

necessary to make everyone happy. Early in his writing career, that presented a struggle for him:

> I often tell students that I had a real, real rough time. I didn't have a hard time writing, I just had a hard time being involved in the whole writing workshop process. I was often, I was almost entirely throughout there, the only person of color in these workshops, and I didn't really want to hear much about the work that I was sharing by a number of those students. So I didn't participate and I got Cs, and our last semester I got a D.

The workshop experience led to Rich feeling constrained, but he was able to shift that feeling. He "started to find, as we say, find [his] voice and wrote a lot more and was willing to kind of share it a little bit more":

> Part of my breakthrough as a fiction writer was, and it was not like one single epiphany and then things change totally from there…as a workshop leader, I always tried to kind of move away from the old Iowa model, right? Because I felt it silenced a lot of students. But when I was in it, and when I was in where I was both as my age, my racial identity

and background, I mean, you're trying to please the workshop leader, you're trying to be beloved by the other students, and there's a kind of certain measure of, I want to say, kind of conformity. When I felt comfortable enough to write about issues that were more autobiographical, I had a sense, as I think a lot of writers of color do, is that I had… to be to be responsible to the community… You didn't have to make everybody happy. You didn't. And then that extended beyond the workshop, because you didn't have to make this community of people of color feel like you'd done a good job in representing things well… And I think that just really kind of helped me out so much. I had to write a lot of serious fiction in between the time I got my Ph.D. and then the time I really started to have some better successes with stories.

As noted previously, Rich's experiences as a writer and as a writer in a graduate creative writing program cannot be separated from his leadership because those experience influenced his decision to become a leader:

Most of my instructors were, of course, white writers and I never had a minority writer who was a faculty member…That's really important toward my kind of wanting to continue to be an instructor. But I think even more important to be an administrator.

Influence of Creative Writing

Rich began discussing the influence of his writing background in terms of the technical skills he has developed in written communication. He labors over emails before sending them and believes he does a very good job communicating. Additionally, he recognizes experience with characterization and revision as useful skills for leadership:

I've said this as a joke, but it's not a joke. Fiction writers know how to deal with characters. We know what are consistencies and we know what are inconsistent

consistencies, and I think I read people really well. And I think I read them in relationship to their settings, and I think that I just know how to deal with them. The other thing is a focus on revision, a focus on trying to never let something go out that hasn't been kind of, and not endlessly worried over, but worried over to a point where there's little ambiguity. The authority is appropriate to the communication.

The experience of submitting work for publication has relates to leadership as well in that writers develop patience:

It's funny I hear somebody say, "Well, this article was rejected four times." It's like, "Well, this story was rejected 40 times and then it got published." So that kind of resilience I think isn't a bad thing either. I don't know if it's Chekov or James or somebody says something about talent is a long patience…I published a novel in 2015 that I started work on in 1998, finished, not that I wasn't working on it, completely finished in 2004, submitted through my then-agent to every publisher in New York or Boston. It was rejected by all of them. And then picked up [by a] small independent press. That to me, that kind of revise and work on, that kind of patience, and that resilience kind of makes things that so when you hear you don't get what you want in this, well, you know, there's next year. It's like these things don't just crush me or kill me.

As a leader, Rich is wary of some of the same types of problems that he is as a writer. In particular, he told of an engaging way he had of using video to communicate with his faculty. While the first few were well-received, he worried that he could not keep doing the videos because of what he calls "a writer's problem," where once something has been done, it no longer serves:

It looks like, if I go back to it, that's the only thing I've got, I'm a one-trick pony. And I

don't want to be perceived that way. Always got to be doing something different…

Nothing worse. Nothing worse than being identified in workshop as that writer. Or that's

his thing. And he does that all the time.

Some aspects of leadership, though, have been helpful for his writing. Before the

pandemic, the lighter teaching load that came with chair and dean positions "opened up more

space" for the writing, though Rich noted that "revision's a different story," since revision

requires longer blocks of time to focus. Despite this, the predictability of the day was "greatly

helpful" for Rich to continue his writing. He does not believe that "becoming a leader has made

has had any deleterious impact on [his] productivity or creativity":

> I wasn't this multi-colored figure who's grayed over the years because of the
>
> responsibilities…I will wear a coat and tie for the rest of my life, Monday through
>
> Friday, but underneath, I'm just as…I've never been a wacky kind of person, but just the
>
> kind of things I write about, I think are and I'll always still do that.

Creative Writers and Leadership

When others in academia realize that Rich is a creative writer in addition to being a

leader, "everybody's always surprised, everybody's always super surprised." He attributed that

surprise to his humorous vision. But he was quick to note that "it's a seriously human vision":

> It's one in which I don't at all want to not take seriously people's concerns, things of that
>
> nature, but I do think that what ends up happening is that people start to see that the kind
>
> of things that we kind of assume about a writer, that they are kind of patient and serious
>
> about certain things, it just does show up…And that while I may superficially

demonstrate a kind of humor about things, that I still take everything very seriously and

do want to see things and do want to see a project through.

In general, Rich sees creativity as a benefit in leadership:

Creative people solve problems all the time. On the canvas, on the page. My Art and

Design Chair is a sculptor, and I think, this is somebody who a mistake he makes with his

medium could be colossal. So that's somebody I'd love to have on my team.

In fact, failing to recognize the benefits that creative people can bring is a mistake for Rich:

It's just such a mistake because what it's doing is privileging a kind of sense that creative

people are kind of absent of necessary gravity. And I think another thing is that they don't

know how to work with others, and I think that's a mistake too. It's that, the solitary artist

and things… nobody works in total isolation…A good writer often has a good editor.

Rich related working with an editor to working with his department chairs. They are able to give

him feedback on ideas, and he is able to utilize it.

Jared

Jared has two MFA degrees. He is a 43-year-old who has been a writer for about 30 years

and an administrator for 12 years. While he has been a writer since he was young, he had not

thought about an MFA while in college. However, his undergraduate university was starting up

an MFA and he was invited to participate in it due to his experience with writing and work in

theater. After completing the first program in scriptwriting, he considered his career options:

I thought maybe I'd like to teach or something. I tried to position myself in such a way

like I could go to an MFA program, study something beyond play writing, and see if I

can try out teaching, so that's why I went to a different one [in fiction/ nonfiction].

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He never meant to be a leader, but shortly after getting a job at his current university after his second MFA, he had the opportunity to become department chair and found he was "pretty good at it," as evidenced by programs and students that did exceptionally well. The Fine Arts department began having some struggles, so Jared was asked to step in over that department. It "seemed like a new challenge," so he took the position. He was then asked to be the dean because the school "had a few major initiatives that we needed to get done." Jared had to be asked a few times, but eventually he took the position and has been there for seven years.

Identity

Jared is a reflective leader who early on decided to take emotion out of his arguments and instead focus on framing issues in terms of "pedagogy, institutional resources, student needs." He also is a "forthright human being," which has positive and negative effects:

> The virtue is very rarely am I accused of lying…But the consequence is that sometimes that suffer in tact… I think people trust me to be thoughtful, and I think people trust me to not dillydally about the thing that needs to be said, even if sometimes that's hard to hear. And I think that's from faculty and from administrators. I think people, faculty, like that about me, often because they think I'm fighting for them, and I am. Probably more often than not I'm a pain in the ass for vice presidents and presidents, but I think they appreciate that I am a pain in the ass, if that makes sense.

> Being dedicated to his position is important to Jared. His work ethic is one of his strengths, but also tends to take away from the writing:

> I mean, it's not a good thing, maybe, that I have such a work ethic, like a refusal to not suck at my job. I don't want to be just good at it. I wanna be really, really great at it. That takes time and energy…It sounds like I'm just flattering myself to death, but that's not

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what I'm trying to do at all. Because I think it's actually detrimental to me because I think I get way more fulfillment in this other thing, right? Personal fulfillment. I get fulfillment in seeing a student succeed and all that. But…there's a difference. It's a part of my life that I think is not attended to enough and I think it hurts.

When he can attend to his writing, Jared is involved in a wide variety of creative works. Jared claimed multiple genres as his primary creative focus. At the time of the interview, he was working on a novel, which he had not attempted before. Developing an interest in a new aspect of creative writing is part of his identity as a writer, as he has had formal schooling in screenwriting, fiction, and nonfiction.

All I knew was writing plays, and the moment I started realizing "oh, I can do this," like, I can be good at it, I just got interested in something else. I went to fiction writing. And then when I went to, when I was there, at the other school, I took this nonfiction class and I was like, Jesus Christ. I got to do this, right? And then it's just been a buggy mess.

Influence of Creative Writing

Like many of the other participants, Jared spoke about his abilities to write and use words in an effective way. As a specific example, Jared mentioned that during the beginning times of the pandemic, faculty, staff, and administrators "found it comforting, helpful" that he could use words to "maybe not make things better, but bring it back to earth, when we all went online."

Beyond skills in communication, he also can view things through a lens of creative writing. During the same time period of the pandemic, Jared saw an opportunity to "to bring people together in such a way to make sense of it." He stated, "It occurred to me we weren't in the best shape to begin with here. Right? And I thought, 'well, we need to do something to change the narrative.' And that's very creative writing." What he created was a virtual lecture

series open to the public that addressed the pandemic from various disciplines. This project "created a narrative to help people understand it, feel more comfortable, and also value the institution in a way that maybe they hadn't before."

Jared saw many connections with leadership skills and creativity in how creative writing trains a person to dig deeply into essential human questions. He explained that "it's really just sort of the human condition on the individual level. I mean, in creative writing, what are you doing when you're thinking character and stuff?" He also noted:

> Creative writers, they're trained, if you get some good training, to question sort of basic-ass thinking, to see beyond the surface so that you can dive into the human condition. And I think that helps, right? Just to be able to start from questions as opposed to thinking that you're going to provide answers all the time.

Despite there being beneficial crossover in skills, part of the influence creative writing has on Jared's leadership is to emphasize the need for balance, which is something that is lacking. He noted that he had learned skills for shutting off the leadership role when he was burnt out, but that the essence of balance, having the time to also write, was lacking:

> If you're going to be a successful creative writer, if you're going to be successful anything, I don't know why it's just creative writing, you got to find a way to balance your life in such a way to make that a possibility… not doing the writing thing as much nearly as I used to… is kind of soul sucking, honestly, because balance is important, and the thing that you find fulfilling you need to make a part of your life. And so I find that hard to do.

Creative Writers and Leadership

Before discussing the relationship of creative writing to leadership, Jared articulated a difference between being faculty and being in an administrative role. He noted that

You become a dean, and then everybody makes the same damn joke right? Like "Welcome to the dark side." It's the same. It doesn't matter if you're talking to a faculty member or you're talking to an administrator, they all say, "Welcome to the dark side." I didn't know what I was really getting myself into… And people start treating you in two different ways, well three different ways. Some people act like normal to you, just like nothing really changed. And then there are people who just sort of like "Whatever you say has got to be correct—You're the Dean." And then there's somebody who's never gonna trust you again, right? And I got all of that.

When speaking specifically about being a creative writer in leadership, Jared mentioned the presumed rarity of that position: "For a while there, I thought I was the only MFA in the world to be a dean, and I felt like such a fraud, but then I kept seeing a couple more every now and again."

Interactions with others echo the supposed singularity of having a creative person in a decanal position. Jared shared an anecdote in which he was meeting with a nursing dean:

I remember I was in her office because we always had to go to her office, right? She was in charge, that type of person, but we were bouncing these ideas about our—I forget what we were talking about—when we were talking and then she just stops and looks at me and says, "You really are a creative thinker, aren't you?" But it wasn't that she said it, it's the way that she said it. She did not look impressed. You know what I'm trying to say?....I mean, I didn't get the impression from her that that was necessarily a good thing.

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Over the years, though, Jared's creative background seems to have less impact on how people perceive him:

> I'm not sure people notice anymore. I don't know. I do think I have enough confidence to say that I think people think I'm pretty smart. And I have enough confidence to say that I think people think generally I'm a creative thinker, whatever that means. And I think if people ever wonder why, they probably do track my background in that way.

When asked his opinion about creative people not being viewed as leadership material, Jared focused on the necessary skills for leaders that a creative background can develop:

> It's been a decade where people running Fortune 500 companies have known that maybe we should consider an MFA over an MBA. The truth is that… what is leadership? Leadership—it's not predictable, right? Whatever leader you want to be, it's not a predictable enterprise. And so you have to be able to negotiate the mystery and catastrophe, and you have to be able to do all of these things that are just sort of the unknown, the thing that might happen…Humanities is the exact thing that teaches you that. It's not the sciences. It's not business. Hell, it's not even psychology. So I just don't buy this nonsense.

He also discussed the importance of not only recognizing the value that the humanities and creating can bring to leadership, but also the possibility of encouraging engagement in these disciplines: "Maybe we ought to start sort of grabbing onto things like the humanities and these disciplines that are real liberal arts that are designed specifically to help you think and to help you navigate the unknown."

Chapter 4 Closure

This chapter provided summaries of the interviews conducted with the 12 participants. Participants answered the questions fully and expressed interest in the topics we discussed. The semi-structured, open-ended questions allowed for individual conversations that highlighted each person's unique experience as a leader, a writer, and a person moving through this world. Through these individual discussions, patterns and themes revealed themselves. My analysis of those themes will be shared in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The process of analyzing the data from the 12 interviews was recursive, much like any

form of drafting and writing. Since I was able to use WebEx for the interviews (one interview

was through Zoom because of technology problems), I had access to the interviews for re-

watching. First, though, I read through the provided transcripts to gain an overall feel for the

session and to begin to clean up the transcripts that the WebEx program provided. After the

initial pass, I listened to the interviews each again, then read through for initial coding.

Throughout the process, I was open to new ideas. As mentioned in Chapter 3, given my

experience as a leader with a creative writing background, I was most concerned that I would

have a bias based on my expectations and what I'd found in the Literature Review. To address

this concern, I followed a process suggested by Foss and Waters (2007) of grouping and

regrouping codes until new patterns emerged that fit the criteria the authors propose. At this

point, I began sharing, discussing, and revising my coding and theming with an outside

researcher. Only after that did I return specifically to my conceptual framework and research

questions to examine how those groupings related. Through further discussion and questioning in

consultation with the other researcher, I was able to develop a schema, as defined by Foss and

Waters (2007), that would "*encompass all of the major categories of your data,*" "be marked by

an *organic and coherent relationship among the labels,*" use "*reasonable inference,*"

demonstrate "*insightfulness,*" and create an "*ah-ha feeling*" (pp. 206-207).

Analysis of the data in this way allowed for seven categories of themes and 13 subthemes

to be developed. These categories relate, with some overlap, to the research questions. The first

two categories address Research Question 1: the role a creative writing background might play in

the experience of leadership. The next three categories (3, 4, and 5) address Research Question 2: how the leaders describe the experience of shifting their identity. The final two categories (6 and 7) relate to Research Question 3: how the leaders describe the overlap of skills in creative writing and leadership. Chapter 6 will more fully explore how these themes relate to the research questions:

1. Creative leaders conceive of leadership as people-focused

    1.1. Leadership is a collaborative and open endeavor

    1.2. Leadership is about serving others

2. A creative background gives leaders a broad perspective on their role

    2.1. Creative leaders navigate multiple boundaries and dualities

3. Creative leaders carry their creativity with them

    3.1. Creative leaders value the arts

    3.2. Leaders face negative stereotypes from those outside of creative fields

4. Creative leaders have extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for leading

    4.1. Leaders had early leadership experiences

    4.2. Leaders were influenced by others

    4.3. Leaders have intrinsic motivation for leadership

5. Creative leaders recognize differences between themselves and traditional leaders

    5.1. Creative leaders experienced challenges due to their background

    5.2. Creative leaders describe positive qualities derived from their background

    5.3. Creative leaders need to balance their work and art

6. Creative leaders approach their roles through the lens of their experience

    6.1. Creative writing relates to analytical abilities as a leader

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6.2. Creative writing develops abilities to understand and connect with people

7. Functional skills from creative writing experiences transfer to leadership

These seven themes and their subthemes will be discussed in the sections of this chapter.

Table 2 presents these themes and subthemes with an x denoting when a particular theme held true for a participant. In addition to the overview of how participants related to the themes shown in Table 2, each individual section of this chapter includes a table presenting how these leaders related to the main ideas of that theme. For some categories, I have also included relevant non-themes. In general, an element was determined to be a theme or subtheme if it held true for nine out of the 12 participants. However, some themes had closely related elements that a majority of the participants recognized. These I deemed as non-themes and included in the individual section tables and discussion when appropriate. These non-themes serve to deepen the conversation and the understanding of how the participants conceived of the themes themselves.

Table 2

Presentation of Themes and Participant Acknowledgement

Themes and Subthemes	Daniel	Mike	Jenny	Liz	Sharon	Jeanette	Scott	Jill	John	Paige	Rich	Jared
Theme 1: Leadership is people-focused	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Subtheme 1.1 Collaborative and open endeavor	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Subtheme 1.2 Serving others		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x
Theme 2: Broader perspective	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Subtheme 2.1 Navigate multiple boundaries and dualities	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	
Theme 3: See self as creative	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Subtheme 3.1 Value creative outlets	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X
Subtheme 3.2 Face negative stereotypes	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X

Table 2 – continued

Theme 4: External and intrinsic motivation to lead	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
Subtheme 4.1 Early leadership	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Subtheme 4.2 Influence of Others	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Subtheme 4.3 Internal impetus	X	X	X	X		X		X	X		X	X
Theme 5: Recognize differences in leadership	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Subtheme 5.1 Experienced challenges due to background	X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X	X
Subtheme 5.2 Positive internal qualities	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
Subtheme 5.3 Balance art and work	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Theme 6: Lens of creative writing experience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Subtheme 6.1: Analytical abilities	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Subtheme 6.1 Understand and connect with people	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	
Theme 7: Functional Skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Theme 1: Creative Leaders Conceive of Leadership as People-Focused

A focus on the people the participants led was apparent in all interviews. Each participant expressed an understanding of leadership based on the ideas of working for or working with others. Two primary subthemes emerged describing *how* the participants engaged with others: Collaboration and Serving Others. Table 3 presents these two subthemes and related areas.

Table 3

Subthemes for Theme 1

Subthemes and Significant Non-Themes	Daniel	Mike	Jenny	Liz	Sharon	Jeanette	Scott	Jill	John	Paige	Rich	Jared
Collaborative Work	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Openness/ Transparency (non-theme)	x	x	x		x			x		x	x	x
Serving Others		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x
Guiding Others (non-theme)	x	x							x	x		

Subtheme 1.1: Leadership is a Collaborative and Open Endeavor

As noted in Table 3, all 12 participants described their leadership as collaborative, which relates to Harris's (2009) finding that creative leadership is collaborative. For example, Jenny noted: "I don't have people behind me anymore. I have people beside me that kind of step into the light at the same time that I do." Many others spoke about work they had done with different areas of their colleges, such as sharing resources with other departments or consulting with the rest of the department before setting a meeting agenda. Throughout the interviews, there was a sense that leadership is most successful when it is done with others, as Jill noted when talking about developing an MFA program: "It really helped that it was a community already. It was a collaborative experience. Otherwise I don't think any of this would've been possible."

Some, like Jeannette, spoke about the idea of leadership itself being a collaborative endeavor. She saw "leadership as something that should be shared. If you're going to be a part of an organization, there's something you have to give, and everybody needs to do this."

Over half of the participants noted that they tried to be transparent and open leaders. Most spoke about themselves being open with people they worked with, preferring not to play games. Daniel described himself as "radically open," noting that he doesn't "play political games because [he doesn't] have the memory and [he's] not very good at it." Jenny connected the transparency directly to her writing, reflecting on a time when she wrote about a family member who didn't like the portrayal. But that was a growth experience for her:

We all have our own way that we perceive things, and that we represent them, and that's how I remember it. That's how I still remember it… I had some hard moments through creative writing and conveying myself and being really raw. I'm not afraid to do it now. And that's a really empowering thing, for a faculty member to ask you a question, and you just simply say, "You know, well, here's the real answer. I'm not going to tell you the political answer. I'm not going to tell you what you want to hear, like, this is what it is." Or if I hear some grumbling, or if I hear, like, a scary rumor from my faculty, I just lay it out there. Like this is what I've heard, but this is how we're gonna deal with it. So, it's definitely made me more open as a person.

Subtheme 1.2: Leadership is About Serving Others

Along with collaboration, the idea of connection arose frequently. Some participants spoke of their responsibility to connect other people as a form of serving their needs, of facilitating relationships and growth. John describes himself in these terms:

> I am a facilitator. I put people in conversations. I listen to what people have to say, try to figure out what is the goal, and how to do this, how do we benefit from the process as well as the product.

Four participants mentioned guiding or facilitating the work of others, which in this study seemed to relate to the concept of serving others. For these leaders, guiding is a way of helping others find their strengths and abilities. Paige described her "non-hierarchical way of leading" as pushing people "to be less directed and more so facilitated into how they want to do their work and how they want to do their jobs."

Nine of the 12 participants specifically spoke to serving others as part of their leadership philosophy. Since the purpose of higher education is to instruct students, it is perhaps not

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surprising that many of the leaders mentioned serving students in addition to the faculty and staff they work with. Scott, when discussing the leadership of program coordination, shared that "you immediately feel, begin to feel, responsible for individual students" because of the type of work. He conceived of his role

> as having to do with the kind of community that you're trying to create and the tenor of
> things, the atmosphere of things, making sure that individual needs are met and that the
> people are oriented well and in a position to learn where they're in a safe, secure in an
> exciting and challenging environment that allows them to do what they're supposed to do,
> which is write and learn.

Participants also discussed serving the faculty and staff they work with. For some of them, their desire to serve comes from a place of wanting to provide better for the people they lead than they had it. Sharon noted "a true, sincere desire to make things better for [her] students and [her] colleagues than [she] had it as a student and a new academic." Jenny perceived of this serving as a type of protection or fighting:

> My faculty often called me their bulldog. I don't mess with others. I don't stir anything.
> But if they come for my faculty or come for my students, then I'm pretty protective. I am
> willing to sacrifice myself for anyone else. So I'm always in the trenches. I teach as many
> overloads as all of my faculty. It's not fair to ask them to do that if I'm not willing to.

Theme 2: A Creative Background Gives Leaders a Broad Perspective on Their Role

Having an ability to step back from a situation and to realize that there is more than one solution is a skill that all participants mentioned, as noted in Table 4. Sharon connected this to a familiar poetry concept, that of "Keats's notion of negative capability, being able to sort of hold opposing notions in one's head at the same time." There is no absolute right way to lead, and

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being able to understand opposing viewpoints or sides of an issue allows a leader to make thought-out decisions.

Table 4

Subthemes for Theme 2

Themes, Subthemes and Significant Non-Themes	Daniel	Mike	Jenny	Liz	Sharon	Jeanette	Scott	Jill	John	Paige	Rich	Jared
Broader Perspective (theme)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x
Framing (non-theme)		x	x			x	x		X	x	x	x
Boundary Crossing	x	x	x		x		x	x	X	x	x	

Similarly, Mike referenced *To Kill a Mockingbird* as an example he often uses in leadership classes to help students understand the value of having a broad perspective. He described that story as being

> the perfect metaphor for why you've got to look at the world through somebody else's shoes. You can't just always assume that the spooky house, the person behind in the shadows in the spooky house, is just out to get you. Sometimes they're there watching you for your safety. You have to figure out which one, and sometimes you have to reinterpret that. And so, as a leader, you constantly have to look at things through different people's perspectives and lenses.

Jenny credited her creative background, saying that "the practice and the study teaches you to think in so many different ways in so many different times." Likewise, Daniel sees himself and other creative leaders as "broader and open and willing to question...and I think a

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creative person may turn to that, whereas someone from a different field who hasn't sort of maybe developed the creative nature wouldn't necessarily think that way."

When talking about seeing the "big picture," leaders spoke of how they framed situations in their mind. Eight out of 12 leaders noted thinking ahead or thinking about "plotting" out situations. Paige described her approach using vocabulary from fiction:

[I] have to encourage people to have a sort of external perspective, and I often compare that to the creating characters in a story. I'm thinking about setting and thinking about place and thinking about dialogue and what is it that we're actually saying and doing, almost like having a bird's eye view to the way that we move through our workplace.

Creativity also plays a large role in Mike's concept of thinking ahead as well:

Leadership is about taking people someplace that nine times out of 10 they have no idea that or they actively don't want to go. And so that in and of itself to me is a creative environment. You have to imagine what that place looks like. You have to imagine in a way that the audience wants to go there.

Both Jared and Jeanette described recent situations in which their creative framing was a benefit. Jared depicted his project for community outreach during the pandemic as creating "a narrative to help people understand." Jeanette's example related to developing new recruiting strategies, which she saw an opportunity to explore different avenues rather than as a roadblock the way some of her colleagues did.

Another approach to framing is to see how the situation at hand relates to a broader world. Multiple people noted that there are no academic emergencies. Certainly, bad days and pressure situations emerge, but, as Paige stated, we're not "pediatric physicians." Understanding that while this work is important, it is only part of life, helps to create a balance for the leaders.

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Subtheme 2.1 Creative Leaders Navigate Multiple Boundaries and Dualities

In addition to the broader perspective that participants discussed, the specific ideas of duality and boundary crossing emerged. Nine of the 12 leaders discussed different types of boundary crossing from their experiences that helped them develop a broader perspective. Some spoke of their lives outside of academia preparing them for boundary crossing, and others spoke directly to their experiences as creative leaders.

Life experiences, naturally, varied from participant to participant. However, many leaders saw themselves as outsiders or as belonging in multiple spaces. Jeanette was older than most of her MFA cohort. Sharon mentioned that her Ph.D. gave her a different perspective than her colleagues who only had the MFA. Additionally, she noted differences about herself that she attributed to belonging to dual spheres:

> My process is fundamentally queer in the sense that it's just a little off-centered and sort of truly not in line with the mainstream thinking about anything. Not just sexuality or gender, but about anything, and again, part of that might be informed by coming from a working-class background into the world of art and academia and then not feeling comfortable in either space. But that that experience certainly has informed my work, never quite feeling comfortable with the one way in any aspect of my personal life or my professional life.

To continue with examples, Jill is a poet with an MFA in fiction, which she described as a "strange background" that helps her move between various aspects of her program. John spoke of his connections with creatives outside of academia and his desire to move freely in academia and in the arts world. Rich described the experience of being around African American relatives

and White Americans and both being accepted and also not being known. Always being in multiple areas led to the vision he has.

Paige spoke of how she brought many identities with her in her work; however, she also specifically shared the duality of being in academic and also being in cabaret, which has "women taking their clothes off, and there's fire, there's an altar, there's water, there's steam, there's heat. We're actually actively in this space." For her, there was a disconnect in academia "everyone else couldn't see because they didn't have that juxtaposed experience that [she] had on a continuous basis." Because of the different presentation approach Paige could bring, she was asked to lead others. Jenny also was valued for her unique abilities to be in the gray area, to have a different approach. She explained that others do not understand how the creativity can benefit leadership and academia. She does not believe the duality "meshes well for them…they don't see the connection the way that [she does].

Despite the apparent disconnect, duality in life experiences often helped guide the leaders in their own approach; many saw value in being able to cross boundaries related to work. Paige brings the multiplicity of herself to her "creative writing…scholarship and [her] academic writing and [her] leadership." And Liz sees the creativity and the leadership as holistic. Daniel spoke about skills that make creative leaders effective. He believes "it's something to do with this balance between the real world practical and the purely creative. And the people who can bridge that, or can balance those two, I think that there's something there that might explain that."

Rich embraces the duality, wanting to "combine the two things that we generally think are kind of separate. [He wants] to be a kind of visionary mission-based leader who has a full and complete touch with every member." He also wants to maintain the dual roles:

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I will wear a coat and tie for the rest of my life, Monday through Friday, but underneath,

I'm just as…I've never been a wacky kind of person, but just the kind of things I write

about, I think are, and I'll always still do that.

Interestingly, Jeanette spoke about being offended when a colleague suggested she join higher

administration. "What about me says 9-5 and pantyhose?" she asked. However, she does see

herself as a practical person with a leaning toward administration. Both Rich and Jeanette's

statements, then, speak to people who are aware of the dual aspects of their work and art yet

wear them differently.

The perception of duality makes sense with both the role of a mid-level leader and the role

of being a creative in a bureaucratic system. Previous experience in other realms of crossing

boundaries and belonging in separate spheres guides leadership in academia as well.

Theme 3: Creative Leaders Carry Their Creativity with Them

As noted throughout the literature review, the idea of creativity itself is broad and

undefined. Because of this, participants were asked how they would define their creative

identity; all except one spoke to that in some way, whether they focused on themselves as

writers, musicians, or creative thinkers (see Table 5). Mike was the leader who said that he

wouldn't define himself as creative in the way that other people think of creativity. However, he

does still write creatively. His mode of writing had changed, as had the modes of many others, so

that he was writing genre fiction instead of poetry, but creative writing was still a part of his

experience.

Table 5

Subthemes for Theme 3

Theme and Subthemes	Daniel	Mike	Jenny	Liz	Sharon	Jeanette	Scott	Jill	John	Paige	Rich	Jared
See self as creative (theme)	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Value creative outlets	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x			x
Face negative stereotypes	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x

Many participants, when describing their creative identity, shared the specific creative act that they connected with. While Bolden et al. (2008) suggested that creative people shift their identity when becoming leaders from being creators to supporters, this study did not support that finding. Many participants saw creativity as the identity, and writing was often an expression of that. Because of this, they still saw themselves as people who create. A good number of them were still producing work in the field.

Perhaps because many participants saw themselves as creative people, and not only creative writers, nine out of 12 noted creative thinking as part of their identity. Creative thinking was defined as being open-minded, thinking like an artist, and modeling new ways of thinking.

Sharon noted that she does "think like an artist," even with a Ph.D. An example of what she meant by this is that "artists just generally tend to think a little bit more creatively about solutions to problems." She related an anecdote:

> I remember the first time I was ever at McDowell colony, and the visual artists were building their own frames, and I said, "Okay, so poets don't do that, but in many ways we build our own frames for other kinds of structures or communities that we're building." And I think that we've done that in the MFA program.

Other shared examples of when they'd used creativity in their work, often noting that people around them were surprised. For example, Daniel came up with a "natural" idea that a colleague thought was "wildly creative." Scott described two different situations in which he

developed a work-around after having an idea turned down. He said, "you gotta kind of sneak up on people sometimes." That sneaking up requires thinking about a different approach. It also may require a broader sense of what creativity is. Mike noted that "creativity can be recreating a form. It could be creating a process. Generally, that's probably what I'm doing more than anything else. It's not doing something that people would traditionally think of as creative." However, this understanding of creativity meshes well with Bleakley's (2004) description of creativity as a process. Having an artistic or creative approach as well as engaging in a creative activity is part of the experience for these leaders.

Subtheme 3.1 Creative Leaders Value the Arts

The subthemes for this aspect show various ways in which creativity influences the leaders. Many spoke of the inherent value in their creativity, though most have faced negative stereotypes from others in academia because of their creative identity.

The creative leaders value what they personally gain from their craft. Liz described a phenomenon that others note as well: "I would say that I feel most like myself when I'm writing. So, for me, it's not necessarily about publishing, and probably if I were not in the Academy, I wouldn't give a fig." Some leaders admitted that they did care about the publishing and the awards earlier in life, but many made comments along the lines of Jeanette's: "But I really want to do the thing I want to do and that's it." Another positive about writing is the ability for leaders to use their art as a way to destress, as Mike, Paige, and Scott noted. As Jenny shifted from having a creative identity as a writer to one where the creative process is internalized, she began making macarons as a stress reliever.

Jenny is not the only leader who has redefined how they express their creativity. Eight participants noted that they either have shifted their creative outlet or genre or have started to

find creative fulfilment in different ways. Though Liz had switched genres, she finds it "really satisfying to sort of know that that the door just didn't close, that there are new places to go." Daniel approaches the problem-solving he does for his administrative position creatively, which is gratifying to him. He said that "it feels like it comes from the same part of my brain as when I'm writing." Jared also feels that accomplishment: "I get fulfillment and seeing a student succeed and all that. Right? But… there's a difference. It's a part of my life that I think is not attended to enough, and I think it hurts."

In addition to the personal fulfillment and value that being a creative writer brings, seven out of 12 expressed that the arts in general were valuable for people. Sharon emphasized the revolutionary aspects of art:

I think that we are creating the consciousness and the contents of our time. And always have. Now, does that mean that we will each be individually remembered in the way that Leonardo was? No, but that doesn't matter. It's about that kind of collective energy to sort of move forward with compassion and—I don't want to use the word creativity—but with some sense of open mindedness, which I think helps create art and also change.

As Liz noted, "People don't have to be poets, but people are meant to make things and to create things." She believes that "creativity is really at the essence of humanity." Likewise, others saw creativity at the core of the liberal arts, and noted the joy, the confidence, and the compassion that can develop through writing. Creativity creates the fuel for our other endeavors.

Subtheme 3.2 Leaders Face Negative Stereotypes from Those Outside of Creative Fields

Ten of the12 participants have faced negative stereotypes about their creative field. The general perceptions the leaders mentioned were that people believe writers are disconnected from the "real" world and that people believe writing is a solitary task (usually done at a beautiful

desk with a stunning landscape out the window). Neither of those perceptions rung true for the participants, though Jill mentioned having believed that she needed a beautiful, solitary space to write when she was younger. In general, the participants had experienced others not perceiving creative writers as leadership material.

To perhaps explain this general perception, Daniel noted that

depending on the discipline, people may have less respect for creative activities in the academy… how I'm perceived by others may have a lot to do with where they're coming from and the relationship of their discipline, or their field, or where they're coming from, in relation to creativity in general. So there's a range.

The negativity has not been the experience that Liz has had, though she explained that in her experience on a national board, she works with many creative writers who are effective leaders and who expect other creative writers to be effective.

Theme 4: Creative Leaders Have Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations for Becoming Leaders

None of the leaders in this study began their educational journey with the idea of becoming a leader, which echoes Garza Mitchell and Eddy's (2008) finding that most mid-level leadership is not by design. As noted in Table 6, external motivators, such as having had an early leadership position and having someone invite the writer to a leadership position, were the primary ways that these participants began to engage with leadership.

Table 6

Subthemes for Theme 4

Subthemes and Significant Non-Themes	Daniel	Mike	Jenny	Liz	Sharon	Jeanette	Scott	Jill	John	Paige	Rich	Jared

Table 6 - continued

Early leadership	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Influence of Others	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Internal impetus	X	X	X	X		X		X	X		X	X

Subthemes 4.1 Early Leadership Experience

All of the leaders experienced some sort of external motivation for leadership. Ten had an early leadership position that, upon reflection, opened up the possibility of leadership at their current level. The early experience often gave these leaders skills that others saw, and that they came to see in themselves. Scott described his path to leadership in that way:

> Gradually I was thrust into issues having to do with the administration and that kind of thing relatively early on and a lot of committee work as a young professor. And that led to fairly early administrative assignments that had to be taken care of, and ultimately why I find myself where I am because I just had that experience and not everybody wants to do it.

The variety of early positions was large; some worked on creating or editing journals, while others had roles in offices. While not all early attempts at leadership were successful, the leaders generally found that they had a talent for the art.

Subtheme 4.2 Influence of Others on Leadership

In addition to these early experiences, nine of the participants first became leaders because someone asked them to. In some cases that was because of networking, as in Liz's example of being asked to come help a former teacher. Other instances of networking included Rich's connection he made at a conference that led to a presentation that then led to a job offer. Jenny was promoted to a leadership role when her school moved another person and found

themselves with an opening. In most cases, these leaders did not take the first step toward the leadership position.

The influence of others did not stop with being urged to lead. Some leaders spoke of having mentors that supported their work and allowed them to develop as leaders. Others became the type of leader they are precisely to model a different form of leadership. Whether the leaders were encouraged, asked, inspired, or taught to be leaders, all but one noted they were influenced by those around them.

Subtheme 4.3 Intrinsic Motivation for Leadership

Despite seven participants saying that they had no plans for leadership, no future aspirations, and only led because no one else wanted to, nine out of 12 also described an internal impetus for leading. While few expressed an overt desire to be a leader, many of those nine enjoyed taking on challenges and felt like they were naturally inclined toward leadership. Mike expressed:

> If I was going to have to be a part of an organization, and I wasn't just going to be subject to whatever other people wanted to do, then I might have to step up and actually be a person of leadership. And that's not to say that I certainly wanted to do it, but I just felt like we could do things. And that I needed not to be shy about my ideas, and if I really did care then I needed to actually do something about what I was going to do.

Others described themselves as do-ers; they saw a need for leadership, and they stepped up because that is how they operate. John perhaps described it most clearly: "So what led me to leadership? Because the job had to be done. And I thought it was interesting, and I think there's people who do shit and people who have shit done for them."

Having someone recognize the creative writers as potential leaders was the driving force in many of them stepping into leadership, though many also had an inclination toward the position and a desire for seeing it done well.

Theme 5: Creative Leaders Recognize Differences Between Themselves and Other Leaders

Every leader will bring a unique mix of experiences that will impact how they approach the role. All of the participants in this study recognized themselves as different in some way than what many of them termed "traditional" leaders (see Table 7). Some differences included leaders who shared information in different ways (through videos), who changed how meetings are done, leaders who are more participatory and less directive. Three specifically mentioned that they were fun leaders. Mike, who has the highest-ranking position, noted:

> I never really realized that I had unique things that I could add to the mix. I thought that everything that I could add to the mix was something either other people could do and chose not to, or they just didn't have the training, and that that would be something fairly simple for them to put into place. So I never really understood that there was something intrinsic to me...and that my experience had built me in such a way that I was of unique value to the organization.

Table 7

Subthemes for Theme 5

Subthemes and Significant Non-Themes	Daniel	Mike	Jenny	Liz	Sharon	Jeanette	Scott	Jill	John	Paige	Rich	Jared
Experienced challenges	x	x		x	x		x	x	x		x	x
Positive internal qualities	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Need to balance art and work	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Subtheme 5.1 Creative Leaders Experience Challenges Due to Their Background

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As shown in Table 7, nine out of 12 participants recognized differences that created challenges for them as leaders. One specific difference that many leaders found is the language of academia (seven participants). These leaders are trained in a form of communication, yet many of them struggled with learning academic leadership jargon. As Jill detailed, "Everything is very weird and shrouded in acronyms and strange and difficult." A couple of people mentioned that their Ph.D. provided more professional training than the MFA, and so they were able to move into administration in part because of that background. Others simply learned as they went along, like John, who devoted himself to learning how to communicate quantitative information to his supervisor so that he could get the resources he needed. Or they didn't learn. Sharon stated that she will not go higher in administration because she "can't do Dean speak or Chair speak."

Subtheme 5.2 Creative Leaders Offer Positive Qualities Derived from Their Background

When looking at the differences in how these leaders described themselves versus traditional leaders, most of the qualities they focused on were internal qualities. Nine participants contributed to this understanding. Flexibility appeared as an essential quality for five of the participants. Daniel highlighted this importance by stating:

> These days with things changing the way they are and people having to be as flexible and institutions having to be as nimble as they are, I think having as creative people as possible in administrative roles makes the institutions more flexible and nimble as well.

Others described intentionality, patience, persistence, introspection, and listening. None of these qualities are brash or bold (or flighty and disconnected from the real world), but the kinds of qualities that create steadiness in a program.

Subtheme 5.3 Creative Leaders Need to Balance Their Work and Art

Given that there are only so many hours in a day, it is natural that many of the participants spoke about the simple lack of time they had to fully engage with their academic and their creative work. Seven participants bemoaned the lack of time to devote to their craft.

However, six of the 12 found that being an administrator gave them more agency over their time. For some, like Rich, this "actually sort of opened up more space for what [he does]." But for most, that agency has not translated into more time available to write. Jeanette believes that her creative work "got sidelined by the leadership work." She has published 10 books, seven which are single-author, but she still wonders what she would have been able to produce if she had not had the administrative work.

Part of the issue goes beyond the time needed to be effective at both being a leader and a writer. Both roles require intense concentration and problem-solving—they take a lot of brain space. Daniel's experience demonstrates this:

> I have a finite amount of creative activity I can do in a day. And in some ways, my creative part of my brain gets tired, so that it feels like more work to actually then try to do creative writing and to be creative outside of the administrative activity I have.

Similarly, Jared sees his deanship as "a job that requires a lot of attention to a lot of different things and even though…[he's] been doing it for so long that it's not so complicated," he is still mentally exhausted at the end of the day. Having a mentally taxing job and a mentally taxing artform is perhaps an even tougher obstacle to overcome than the time constraints.

Theme 6: Creative Leaders Approach Their Roles Through the Lens of Their Experience

Each of the creative leaders was asked how their background in creative writing might have influenced their leadership. All of them made connections between the creative writing training or experience and their current leadership approach that focused on analytical or

problem-solving skills. Nine participants discussed how their creative background assisted them in understanding and connecting with others (see Table 8).

Table 8

Subthemes for Theme 6

Subthemes and Significant Non-Themes	Daniel	Mike	Jenny	Liz	Sharon	Jeanette	Scott	Jill	John	Paige	Rich	Jared
Analytical Abilities	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Understand and Connect with People	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	

The process of creation itself seemed to mirror the approach that the leaders took. Sharon framed the similarities in terms of understanding a circular process. She noted:

> Unearthing the past is a really, really great skill to bring to leadership, to the class, to teaching. And understanding that it's not just making poems, running a program is not just pep squad and emoting. It's about paying attention to detail, remembering what's worked in the past, what hasn't worked in the past, where we've been, and where we need to get to.

Scott gave an overview of how the two processes connected for him:

> That's a large part of the creative process too…being patient to a degree about your work and letting things happen and following things organically and naturally to places, instead of forcing them places. That's actually a good analogy for a change in my leadership over time. I probably, when I was young, tried to force my poems to become something that I thought that they should be, and I probably tried to kind of shape the department's vision to something that I thought that it should be. And I'm much more inclined now to think about my poems as telling me what they tell me. They tell me what they want to be, and they tell me how they want to be shaped and if they want to be written in prose blocks or

in alternating quatrains. And I do a lot more listening to my creative process now than talking. And I think that's true in my leadership style as well. I will be here towards the end of any administration that I will ever do, and in a way, I've probably figured out how to do it in the last couple of years. I'm sure there's plenty more to learn. I'll be much more patient. I'll be much more organic about the way things happen. I'll be much more willing to let things meander and find their way, instead of feeling like I have to force them into a particular way of being or into a particular kind of happening.

Subtheme 6.1: Creative Writing Relates to Analytical Abilities as a Leader

Critical thinking and problem solving were discussed extensively. All participants noted that their experience related to their analytic skills. Jared argued that these kinds of thinking skills are the basis of most MFA programs: "Creative writers, they're trained, if you get some good training, to question sort of basic-ass thinking, to see beyond the surface so that you can dive into the human condition."

Problem Solving

Problem solving as a specific skill related to creative writing was mentioned by seven out of 12 of the participants. Scott perhaps stated it most succinctly: "problem solving is a creative issue, and God only knows you spend most of your time in administration solving problems." Sharon believes that "artists just generally tend to think a little bit more creatively about solutions to problems."

John discussed this subtheme in terms of problem solving being an expression of creativity. He noted the creativity inherent in any task:

You want to solve problems, you want to come up with new ways of doing things, you want to make things more effective or more affordable…I think we are always in the act of, as long as you harness it and build upon it, we are always creating.

Jenny explicitly connected her strategies as a writer to her problem-solving as a leader though her process:

And then whenever I talk, or I'm asking questions or problem solving, I'm a very visual person. So I will literally sit there and picture it and try to come up with the next steps and the domino effect. I'm always thinking about if I do this, what is it going to yield? And I think that's something you learn as a writer. Well, if I put in this adjective here, then that's going to connect with the last line.

Workshop Experiences

Workshops are the hallmark of a creative writing program; writers share their pieces and receive feedback to help them revise. That feedback is seen as a vital part of the writing process, and the workshop experience has directly affected the leadership of seven of the study participants. Primarily, leaders discussed the effect of giving and receiving criticism. Liz notes:

That's sort of the way that I operate as a leader. It's not that I'm not going to tell you when I want you to do something differently or when I'm not as happy as I might be, but I'm going to tell you in a way that you can accept it and grow and get better and advance your writing or your professional skills or whatever.

Because writers are used to receiving criticism and rejection, they sometimes develop a resilience or patience, as Rich notes: "It's funny, I hear somebody say, well, this article was rejected four times. Well, this story was rejected 40 times and then it got published. So that kind of resilience I think isn't a bad thing either." That resilience is important not only for written

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work, but for interactions with others. Rich also is good at taking feedback from others. He connects it to his writing process: "A good writer often has a good editor…I know that a lot of my chairs will tell me and I'm not going to be upset about that, because somebody didn't love my idea."

Mike also discussed how workshopping has helped him in his interactions as both a critic and one taking criticism:

I've critiqued people's work in a non-harsh way, and I can tell that they're going to be in tears. And I'm like, "Look, this is nothing, like, you got to develop." And I've been called some pretty evil things by some colleagues that I don't feel is really very fair, but if I didn't have the thick skin from my creative writing world, I would probably not be as resilient because I hadn't faced that as well as rejection letters galore from publishers out there.

Another common analytic skill to come out of the workshop experience is the ability to revise. Paige noted that one of the things she gained in the "workplace that come[s] from that is that ability to rewrite and to move outside of what things are." Rich also mentioned revision, saying that he has gained "a focus on revision, a focus on trying to never let something go out that hasn't been, not endlessly worried over, but worried over to a point where there's little ambiguity."

One interesting side note is that five of the participants directly referenced the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. As the first degree-granting creative writing program in the U.S., Iowa has often been held up as the gold standard; however, the cutthroat methods previously used there have fallen out of favor with the MFA world. The five participants that discussed this

method were over 50 years old and they all discussed it in terms of doing the opposite of what was done at Iowa because it was a bad experience for them.

Subtheme 6.2: Creative Writing Influences How Creative Leaders Connect with People

A previous theme (Theme 1) described how the leadership of these creative writers was people-focused. This subtheme relates to that idea, but focuses on how these leaders think about people, how they approach understanding the people they work with. Nine participants contributed to this subtheme. Jeanette explains how this method of thinking about people as a writer relates to her writing experience:

> You have to understand that every person in front of you wants something different and how to get that person some kind of buy-in to what you see for the program and you have to [be] very creative about that. And you deal with each person as a problem that you have to be creative about solving. Not a problem in a bad way, it's more like a question that you have to…you have to be extremely perceptive to understand, well that person, their eyes are glazing over—I have to change it up a bit. So it is this in-the-moment way of dealing with problems. So you do have to be very creative.

Five of the writers acknowledged the connection between understanding people and characterization, perhaps because, as Daniel noted, "creative writers spend a lot of time thinking about people's personalities and the reasons and motivation why people do things because we're doing it with our characters." That understanding can lead to effective leadership, a connection Rich made:

> Fiction writers know how to deal with characters. We know what are consistencies and we know what are inconsistent consistencies, and I think I read people really well. And I

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think I read them in relationship to their settings, I think that I just know how to deal with

them.

Jeanette also attributed her understanding of how to deal with people to her experiences in

writing:

And I think that control is something that feeds the leadership, and understanding how

people work and understanding how to herd them in certain directions. And how to put

them in conditions where they can reach consensus or they can reject ideas that don't

work. I think all of that is interfaced for me and I rely on my creative writing

understanding of human nature to help me facilitate meetings.

That understanding of human nature relates to another common connection the

participants found. Some shared that their writing experiences and background led to a greater

sense of empathy for others. For Jenny, the personal writing "definitely brings me from a place

of empathy…I'm very tapped into my own feelings and my emotions and my strengths, my

setbacks, things like that. And because of that, I think it makes me more approachable as a

leader." While Scott does not specifically attribute creative writing to these skills, he noted that

"it really helps to be a creative person in a job like this. It takes a degree of empathy and being

able to get outside yourself and see from somebody else's point of view."

Theme 7: Functional Skills from Creative Writing Experiences Transfer to Leadership

All of the leaders interviewed found lower-level skills derived from their creative writing

experiences that benefited them in their leadership roles as noted in Table 9. Multiple people

acknowledged skills such as managing time, compartmentalizing, multi-tasking, being detail-

oriented, prioritizing work, and presenting to others as abilities coming from their writing

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background. Seven of the 12 participants discussed their writing skills as being important to their leadership as well.

Table 9

Subthemes for Theme 7

Subtheme and Significant Non-Theme	Daniel	Mike	Jenny	Liz	Sharon	Jeanette	Scott	Jill	John	Paige	Rich	Jared
Functional Skills	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Writing Skills (non-theme)	x	x	x	x					x		x	

In many cases, leaders were able to directly connect the leadership skill to an activity in creative writing. For example, Mike explained how both have do to with "complex structures." He stated, "If you're writing a novel you have a lot of balls you're juggling, and in many ways that's sort of maybe the skill that's most important to do in academic administration, is juggling."

On a more personal level, Sharon described herself this way: "I am thoughtful. I am hyper-attentive and aware of what's going on with whom, when. As a poet, certainly, I think I bring, weirdly, those skills to my leadership roles. I listen well." Daniel brings his precision to his leadership: "I'm sort of meticulous, and I would much rather have a small object that's well-honed rather than a bigger sloppier object let's say…And maybe that lends itself well to doing academic administration well, this attention to detail, precision."

Despite the perceptions of creative people being out of touch, many leaders spoke about creative writers being strong managers of their time and being able to multi-task well, to take on multiple projects at one time. Another common thread was the ability to present. Four participants discussed how their creative writing experience helped them develop presentation skills. In particular, Mike credits it for his current skills:

Having to give public readings of your own work—that was a big deal, especially for an introvert to get up there and present your work. Now I'd get up in front of hundreds of people and talk about whatever I have to. I'm exhausted afterwards, but I'm really not fazed by it. But in the beginning that was a huge deal and that definitely mattered.

Liz connected her presentation skills to her confidence as a leader: "I'm used to going out and presenting my work to a wider community, and I think that that has given me confidence to even just stand up and say what I think in different meetings and all."

An obvious element that these leaders spoke about was their ability to write. Some mentioned the simple necessity of responding to email promptly, and most (seven of the 12) believed that their ability in writing transferred to their leadership. "It's a very practical thing," Daniel noted, "but I think creative writers are very good at doing things with words." This ability is something that others notice, too. Jared recalled:

When the pandemic happened, I think that faculty and staff, and even administrators found it comforting, helpful, that I could use words to sort of, maybe not make things better, but bring it back to earth, when we all went online and did all this stuff.

A creative writer's skills are not limited to creative writing. John believes the "best academic writers have a little bit of a fiction writer in them. Not because they're making stuff up, but because they understand rhythm and tone. They understand the differences between short sentence, short sentence, short sentence, long." Understanding and using the rhythm and sense of art helps all written communication.

Chapter 5 Closure

Chapter 5 presented and analyzed the themes and subthemes found in the data. Seven themes emerged, with various subthemes supporting deeper understanding. The next chapter will

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examine how these patterns relate to the research questions as well as to previous research

discussed in the literature review.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mid-level leadership in higher education is a complex role to hold. As with any leadership role, leaders will draw from their previous experiences to help them understand and navigate situations that arise. The purpose of this study was to investigate how creative writers might draw from their background in writing when they become leaders. The questions were developed from theories in Creative Leadership, Creative Identity, and the application of the Creative Arts.

This study examined the ways in which creative writers who become mid-level leaders in higher education make sense of how their prior experience and current leadership role interact. Specifically, this research asked

1. What role does a creative writing background play in the experience of leadership for mid-level leaders in higher education?

2. How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the process of shifting their social and individual identity from a writer to a leader?

3. How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the overlap of creative writing and leadership skills?

To address these questions, I interviewed 12 mid-level leaders who hold a master's degree or doctorate in creative writing. Through the interviews and subsequent coding and analysis, seven themes emerged as well as 13 subthemes and various supporting elements that illustrate the value that a creative writing background might have for a leader. This final chapter

examines the relationship of the findings, the themes and subthemes, to these research questions and to previous research in the areas of creativity and leadership.

The research questions and themes roughly align, with some overlap as described within this chapter, as demonstrated in the following list:

Research Question 1: What role does a creative writing background play in the experience of leadership for mid-level leaders in higher education?

Theme 1: Creative leaders conceive of leadership as people-focused

1.1. Leadership is a collaborative and open endeavor

1.2. Leadership is about serving others

Theme 2: A creative background gives leaders a broad perspective on their role

2.1. Creative leaders navigate multiple boundaries and dualities

Research Question 2: How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the process of shifting their social and individual identity from a writer to a leader?

Theme 3: Creative leaders carry their creativity with them

3.1. Creative leaders value the arts

3.2. Leaders face negative stereotypes from those outside of creative fields

Theme 4: Creative leaders have intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for leading

4.1. Leaders had early leadership experiences

4.2. Leaders were influenced by others

4.3. Leaders have intrinsic motivation for leadership

Theme 5: Creative leaders recognize differences between themselves and traditional leaders

5.1. Creative leaders experienced challenges due to their background

5.2. Creative leaders describe positive qualities derived from their background

5.3. Creative leaders need to balance their work and art

Research Question 3: How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the overlap of creative writing and leadership skills?

Theme 6: Creative leaders approach their roles through the lens of their experience

6.1. Creative writing relates to analytical abilities as a leader

6.2. Creative writing develops abilities to connect with people

Theme 7: Functional skills from creative writing experiences transfer to leadership

Research Questions Analysis and Discussion

Research Question 1

What role does a creative writing background play in the experience of leadership for mid-level leaders in higher education?

The first research question opens a broad topic exploring the role of the creative background in the experience of leadership. Looking at patterns of statements on leadership itself, the concept of people-centered leading became a clear focus for the participants (Theme 1, Subtheme 6.2). The idea of service was a consistent pattern, as was the idea of collaboration (Theme 1, Subtheme 1.1, Subtheme 1.2). These leaders believe that leadership should be open and straight-forward, and they did not want to participate in game-playing or the politics of academia, though they did strategize creatively through thinking ahead, which some referred to as "plotting," using the language of creative writing (Theme 3).

These leaders understand leadership to be collaborative and designed to serve the people they lead, which aligns with Harris's (2009) conclusions about Creative Leadership being both

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collaborative and a form of Servant Leadership. It is not a given that these leaders will follow the tenets of Creative Leadership, but they do tend to (Theme 1). The creative leaders are open to facilitate and to provide opportunities for their colleagues. Additionally, Adler (2011) wrote of the importance of the focus on humanity for leaders in the present day. These creative leaders, with their dedication to being open and working with others, seem to demonstrate that aspect of Creative Leadership.

To answer the question partially, then, a background in creative writing tends to develop leaders who experience leadership as a service and as a human endeavor, utilizing a framework related to Creative Leadership.

Another aspect of that experience is that leaders have a broad perspective on leadership, perhaps related to the experience of boundary crossing that was prevalent (Theme 2, Subtheme 2.1). The leaders spoke of having belonged to multiple groups and to being able to understand situations from a variety of sides. They experience leadership from a perspective that recognized the validity of other experiences, ideas, and possibilities. As Jenny noted, they can operate within ambiguity, within the "gray area." Their experience of mid-level leadership in academia echoes experiences from their past belonging to multiple groups. They balance the creative and the practical, following the suggestion of Gotsi et al. (2010). For these leaders, the background of creative writing plays a role in being able to see from various viewpoints.

One other element relating to the experience of being a creative leader in higher education is the sense of being different or moving among various groups (Theme 5). These leaders experience leadership, administration specifically, as a different language (element of Theme 5). Higher education leadership is becoming a specialized field. People are groomed for these posts through their studies, so that others, like these leaders who have a different

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background, start their leadership experience a step behind. They have to learn a new way of communicating. So they experience leadership as something that others have prepared for or are more familiar with from their experiences. The MFA does not prepare people to communicate as leaders.

Research Question 2

How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the process of shifting their social and individual identity from a writer to a leader?

This question asked about the process of shifting from a creative identity to a leadership identity. I developed this question based on research stemming from Identity Theory and Self-Efficacy, with the understanding of how important a sense of identity is to being effective. As discussed in Chapter 2, no single definition for creativity exists, so part of the way to address this Research Question is to first gain an understanding of how the creative leaders conceive of creativity as well as leadership. All of the leaders except one described themselves as creative. However, not all of these leaders connected their writing art to their creativity. One no longer saw himself as a poet but as a musician. Another expressed herself through baking macarons (and through her leadership). Overall, they conceived of themselves as creative people, whether that creativity was related to writing or not. The participants did not discuss this understanding of creativity as a shift; instead, they discussed how their creative identity was still with them, though the expression of that identity did often shift. For the most part, they experienced leadership as an extension of their creativity (Theme 3). Some, like Daniel, even noted that the problem-solving he does as a leader seems to come from the same type of problem-solving he does as a writer.

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To answer the first part Question 2, a shift in the creative identity, these leaders do not describe a shift in their identity, but they do often identify a different way of expressing that creative identity, and they also identify aspects of themselves that led to the shift in roles. One interesting finding relating to their shift to becoming a leader is that many of these participants had an early leadership experience (Subtheme 4.1). Leadership later in their career, then, was not new, and perhaps was something that they already had integrated into their individual identity. As noted in the data, many of these leaders enjoy a challenge. They are doers, and they step in when needed or when asked to. They rarely initiate the move into leadership positions, but they agree to do the work that needs to get done. This finding aligns with Harris's (2009) supposition that creative people want to be risk-takers and to try out new ideas.

However, the social identity of these participants did shift for many as they became leaders. Data from Theme 3.2 demonstrates stereotypes participant experienced. Some leaders experienced direct criticism, such as Jared recalling people welcoming him to "the dark side." Others recognized that people viewed them differently than they viewed themselves, such as Jeannette being offended that a colleague thought she would be a good dean. The shift from being seen as a writer to being seen as a leader seems more pronounced than any change in the leaders' perception of their own creative identity.

Interestingly, in general, the data show that these leaders notice differences between themselves and traditional leaders (Theme 5). These leaders experience a shift in their social identity, how they are seen by others. But their social identity does not shift to that of a traditional leader. The participants did not picture themselves as traditional leaders, and this is often part of the duality the leaders experience (Subtheme 2.1). Perhaps one way to describe this is through Rich's image of how he will still be writing about "wacky" things even though he will

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"wear a coat and tie for the rest of [his] life." Or, the same idea presented in a different way is that Jenny now chooses to be more outlandish in her appearance to help center her own creative identity while in a leadership role.

One last aspect of identity that affected these leaders is the need to balance their leadership work and their art (Theme 3). Most of them spoke of the challenges of maintaining the time and the brain space required for creative work. They saw themselves as creative, but in many cases, did not actively practice as much as they would like. Jeanette was retiring with the goal of focusing only on her writing. Between his interview and the member checking, Daniel stepped down from his administrative role to do the same.

Research Question 3

How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe
the overlap of creative writing and leadership skills?

The third research question explored skills from creative writing that overlap with skills useful in leading. All of the participants noted skills that they had used in both creative writing and in leadership (Theme 3, Theme 6). Primarily critical thinking and problem-solving were discussed with an overarching focus on analytical skills (Subtheme 6.1).

Creativity and problem-solving have been linked in previous literature (Bleakley, 2005; Brown, 2019; Mumford et al., 2017; Puccio et al., 2005). Amabile (1997) defined creativity as the production of solutions. The data align with this understanding of problem-solving, and also frame creativity as a unique, broad method of analysis. Many participants spoke of their creative thinking being an analysis of individuals: how to help people, how to find the best solution, how to see from someone else's perspective, and how "to see beyond the surface so that you can dive into the human condition" (Jared).

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While understanding people is an echo of Theme 1, participants also framed their ability to connect with people as a useful skill in leadership (Subtheme 6.2). Many of the participants noted that they understand people because writing involves understanding character and motivation. For Jenny and Scott, writing creates empathy for others as well. Writers are trained to develop whole characters, to not operate on quick perceptions or stereotypes. Because they have this broad analytical perspective, these leaders are able to relate to various viewpoints and find solutions that others may not see. An interesting connection to the literature here is that creative training (specific for those who are already leaders) can help people develop specific thinking skills (Atkinson, 2014; Morgan, 2010; Puccio et al., 2005). My study indicates that traditional creative training also achieves this goal.

While there was not much consensus on which functional skills were developed through the experience of creative writing training, leaders did find that their training was useful in a variety of ways (Theme 7). Participants mentioned skills such as multi-tasking, organizing their time, writing in various forms, being detail-oriented, and engaging presenting. Previous studies have indicated that creative writing skills are applicable to leadership skills (Atkinson, 2014; Forest, 2009; Jenlink, 2015; Morgan, 2010). My study agrees with this finding.

In general, these leaders were able to take their previous training and use those strategies as they developed their leadership approach. The overlap of specific skills is unique to each leader; however, the skills they use as writers are transferrable to leadership.

Connections to Prior Research

The principal research question for this study is: How do creative writers who become mid-level leaders in higher education make sense of their prior experiences as creative writers regarding their work as leaders?

To answer this broad question, the research in Chapter 2 examined the overlap of creativity and leadership. Because there was limited prior research about the field of creative writing specifically, Chapter 2 examined the broader ideas of creativity related to Creative Leadership, Creative Identity, and Creative Skills. Most of the data from this study aligned with findings from these areas. Additionally, because of the specific subgroup of creative writers being studied, the data revealed new findings. Table 10 presents the major findings from my research aligned with previous research.

Table 10

Major Findings Related to Previous Research

Dodson (2022) Findings	Related Findings
Leaders in the study experience leadership as a collaborative and open endeavor focused on people (Theme 1 & Subtheme 6.2).	Aligns with Brown (2019) who found creative leaders focus on collaboration Aligns with O'Dell (2015) who found collaboration and openness were prevailing qualities Relates to Sutherland and Jelinek (2015) who show relationships as a major theme for leaders who participated in a conducting masterclass.
Leaders in the study demonstrate approaches associated with a Creative Leadership theory (Theme 1 & Theme 6)	No previous research found; Dodson (2022) is a new finding
Leaders in the study take a broad perspective on situations and leadership (Theme 2).	Aligns with Ladkin and Taylor's (2010) definition of leadership as an art
Leaders in the study navigate multiple groups or spaces outside of their multiple roles in academia (Subtheme 2.1).	Relates to Kandiko (2012) who found interdisciplinary leaders saw themselves as boundary spanners
Leaders in the study bring their creative identity with them to leadership (Theme 3).	Relates to Jaussi et al. (2007) who found a stronger creative identity shows more creativity Relates to Gotsi et al. (2010) who found creative workers should develop a "meta-identity" Aligns with Blackmore (2007) who found that leaders were influenced by their discipline

Table 10 – continued

Dodson (2022) Findings	Related Findings
Leaders in the study conceive of leadership as requiring creative thinking: they have gained analytical and problem-solving skills useful in leadership (Theme 3 & Subtheme 6.1).	Aligns with Bleakley (2004) who defines problem-solving as a form of creativity Aligns with Morgan (2010) who argues that working with poetry can change thinking skills Relates to Brown (2019) who found leaders use creative problem solving Relates to Puccio et al. (2005) who found creative training can develop specific thinking skills
Leaders in the study face negative stereotypes from those outside of creative fields (Subtheme 3.2).	Aligns with Mueller et al. (2011) who found creative people are not seen as leadership material
Leaders in the study often had an early experience with leadership (Subtheme 4.1).	No previous research found for this subgroup; Dodson (2022) is a new finding
Leaders with a creative writing background experience a sense of being different than non-creative leaders (Theme 5 & Subtheme 3.2).	No previous research found; Dodson (2022) is a new finding
Creative writing training and experience provides leaders in the study with functional skills that are useful in leadership (Theme 7).	Aligns with Atkinson (2014) who found that creative training enhanced leadership Aligns with Forest (2009) who found storytelling enhanced leadership

One finding in particular seems to address the overarching question: These leaders tend to make sense of their prior experiences as creative writers by adopting a Creative Leadership approach. They use critical thinking to analyze, they focus on people, and they see themselves situated both inside and outside of the traditional leadership structure.

Recommendations

This section provides suggestions for three distinct groups: individuals with creative backgrounds who are in mid-level leadership positions in higher education; institutions of higher education; and further research into creativity and leadership. In the field of writing, one typical approach to workshopping and revision is to notice what is working well and to replicate those

aspects. Therefore, the recommendations for the leaders and for higher education developed from the positives and the benefits that the participants recognized in their situations. Recommendations for further research stem from questions that arose during the analysis and elements of interest that were beyond the scope of this study.

Recommendations for Leaders with Creative Writing Backgrounds

Connect with Other Creatives

Creative writers face special challenges because of the perceptions about their abilities as leaders and the negative stereotypes that many outside of creative fields hold. Having connections with other creatives seems to mitigate some of the challenges. Liz had not experienced negative stereotypes in her work, which she attributed to being surrounded by people who were in the creative writing field.

Scott found joy in facilitating the connection of creative people in multiple disciplines. The camaraderie formed with other creative people by moving different groups helps to keep the affirmation of the self as a creative. It can be helpful to have a sense of not being alone, as Sharon noted when she attended a meeting with all of the arts directors at her university who also "perennially feel as if [they're] outsiders at the larger table begging for the scraps." Developing a network of people who appreciate a creative viewpoint can create a sense of solidarity and support for these leaders who still see themselves as creative.

Consider How Creativity Is Manifesting at Any Given Point

Writing takes time. Revision takes even more time. Many of the participants were writing in different ways or not writing, yet still felt as though they were creative people. In thinking about balance, my recommendation is not simply to find more time to write, since that is often beyond a person's ability. Instead, I recommend that writers consider how their creativity is

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manifesting at each point in their life, with the understanding that this can change as needed. Conceiving of creativity as an identity, rather than being a "writer," might help leaders be able to utilize their creativity in multiple spaces.

Acknowledge the Value of Creative Skills in Leadership

The third recommendation I have for creative writers in leadership is to acknowledge that the skills they have as writers are valuable as leaders. Even if the language of academia is a challenge, their ability to understand motivation and think in terms of plot and vision are skills that will serve them well as leaders.

Recommendations for Higher Education

To address the negative perceptions of creative leadership, higher education (and the business world) needs to shift the cultural understanding of creativity so that, as Jill put it, "critical thinking is creative thinking." Institutions that recognize the value that creative training can bring will create more opportunities for diverse voices to help guide the institution.

The first way to begin this culture change is to demonstrate the value creative training has for leadership. As part of a professional development program for leaders, institutions should make use of the strategies suggested by researchers who study creative professional development, such as Morgan (2010). These strategies are beneficial for leaders from any discipline and help all leaders learn to embrace more ambiguity, hold various viewpoints, and gain empathy (Morgan, 2010).

My second recommendation for institutions is to support those doers by helping them navigate the new landscape. Jill had a mentor who helped her navigate the intricacies of the system she works in. Others spoke of the difficulty in having to learn on their own. The support I suggest includes training in the language of academia as well as providing professional

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development that acknowledges and supports the boundary spanning these leaders are called to do, as suggested by Prysor and Henley (2018).

The third and last recommendation is to provide support for maintaining a creative life. Administrative work that allows for large breaks throughout the year, or explicit guidelines that support administrators disconnecting from their work would be helpful in allowing them to maintain their work and creativity energy. This culture shift would benefit not only creatives, but all people, since everyone has multiple aspects to their identity that need to be nurtured.

Recommendations for Further Research

As noted in Chapter 1, research into this particular subgroup of creative leaders is sparse. This study, while providing rich data, left many avenues open for further exploration. Because this is a smaller study, my first recommendation is to increase the scale of this research. Not only would a larger study provide more nuanced data about the patterns noticed, but it would also provide an opportunity to examine the findings in relation to demographic information or other moderating variables.

A second recommendation is to delve into creative identity for this subgroup, which seems to be an especially rich area. Further research might explore how creative leaders present their creativity, whether it is under a coat and tie or shown through drawings on a whiteboard. If these leaders see themselves as creative, how do they believe they are showing that creativity to others? And why? It would also be interesting to see further research with creative writers who become leaders and how their sense of efficacy is tied to their identity in creativity and leadership.

Research of application is my third recommendation. This is especially intriguing since this study and other research have indicated that creative thinking skills are transferrable.

Participants in this study demonstrated a clear leadership focus on the relationships they have with the people that they lead. The focus on people found in this study and also acknowledged as an element of Creative Leadership is a valuable leadership trait; research into how to develop this trait in others would be beneficial in creating institutions that were more empathetic and in-tune with the needs of employees.

A fourth recommendation relates to Creative Leadership itself, which has no absolute definition. This method of leadership appears to relate to the participants in this study. Further research may explore that connection or even lead to a common definition of this types of leadership.

Chapter 6 Closure

The purpose of this study was to examine the role that a creative writing background had on mid-level leaders in higher education. Despite the perception that creative writers are not leadership material, the skills and understandings that can develop from creative writing training are skills that are useful to leadership. In fact, these leaders demonstrate many qualities of Creative Leadership, in particular, having a people-centered philosophy and creative thinking skills. Additionally, these leaders can articulate a variety of skills from creative writing that have been beneficial to them as leaders.

Navigating multiple groups was a common experience for these leaders, which seems to relate to the need to balance the practical world of administration and the creative world. Crossing boundaries and moving between groups gives creative leaders a broad perspective on their work as leaders. They are often able to view situations from multiple perspectives and to understand people's needs and motivations.

This study has added to the literature examining the intersection of leadership and creativity. It reaffirms the assertion that creative writing skills can transfer to leadership and enhance a leader's skills. While not everyone will be a creative writer, as we move farther away from the Great Man theory of leadership, Creative Leadership offers a people-centered approach that allows for a variety of viewpoints. Creative writing training can provide leaders with creative thinking approaches to enhance their leadership. However, there is much work to be done to alter the perception of the value of creativity in leadership.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Scripts

Appendix A
Email Recruitment Scripts

For listservs:

My name is Meredith Dodson, and I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University in the Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology Department. In addition, I am an Assistant Professor of Writing and Chair of the Arts and Humanities Department at Olivet College. My dissertation explores the lived experiences of mid-level higher education leaders who have a degree in creative writing to understand how that background might relate to their leadership role.

I am searching for participants who are leaders in higher education who also hold an MFA in creative writing. I will be hosting individual WebEX interviews with participants (approximately 60-90 minutes) to talk about their experiences as writers and leaders.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please email me at meredith.dodson@wmich.edu. Please feel free to pass this email along to colleagues who may fit the criteria of being leaders in higher education who hold an MFA in creative writing.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Meredith L. Dodson

For identified leaders with MFAs:

Dear <Potential Participant>,

My name is Meredith Dodson, and I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University in the Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology Department. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research. <OR Thank you for your interest in my research.>

My dissertation explores the lived experiences of mid-level higher education leaders who have a degree in creative writing to understand how that background might relate to their leadership role. To examine these ideas, I would like to host a WebEX interview with you (approximately 60-90 minutes) to talk about your experiences as a writer and a leader.

Participation in the study is voluntary and completely confidential. I will also be soliciting copies any creative works leaders may have written related to their leadership experience.

Lastly, I am also searching to expand my pool of interviewees so that I can achieve a widely varied sample. Please feel free to forward this email to colleagues who may fit the criteria of being leaders in higher education who also hold an MFA in creative writing.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please send an email to meredith.dodson@wmich.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Meredith L. Dodson

Tweet

(1/4) Hi! I'm Meredith Dodson, a PhD candidate at Western MI. If you have an MFA in creative writing and are a leader in higher ed., I'd love to talk with you!

(2/4) I'm hosting virtual 60-90 minute interviews with creative writers with at least a ½ time appt. as a leader (chairs, directors, deans, etc.).

(3/4) The study will explore the ways in which creative writers who become mid-level leaders in higher education make sense of how their prior experience and current leadership role interact.

(4/4) If you're interested or want more info, please DM me or email Meredith.dodson@wmich.edu. Contact me with any questions, and please share! Thanks!

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Appendix B
Interview Protocol

Opening

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I appreciate your willingness to share your time and experiences to support my study.

To assist with my notetaking, I will be turning on the recording feature on WebEX today and recording audio as well. You are welcome to ask me to stop recording at any point if you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw from the study at any time. All of your responses will be kept confidential, and the recordings will be destroyed after completion of the project.

This interview should last between 60 and 90 minutes. I have several questions planned for this time, starting with a brief overview of your writing and leadership careers. Please feel free to share descriptive stories or examples that address the questions or follow-up questions. Again, thank you, and if you're ready to begin, then let's start with an overview of your background.

Background Questions

1. Describe your path to receiving your MFA—your motivations, timeline, goals, etc.

2. Describe your path to becoming a leader in higher education—your motivations, timeline, goals, etc.

Interview Questions

1. What was it like for you becoming a formal leader?
    a. How would you describe yourself as a leader?

2. In what ways, if any, do you feel your background as a creative writer influences your actions and decisions as a leader?
    a. What, if any, skills from your creative writing background do you use as a leader?
    b. Would you share examples of using creativity in the context of leadership?

3. Would you share specific instances when your creative training was a benefit or detriment in leadership?

4. In what ways, if any, do you feel your background as a creative writer influences your identity as a leader or your approach to leadership?
    a. In what ways has your creative identity changed, if it has, now that you are in a leadership role?
    b. How might your background as a writer affect how you are viewed as a leader by others?

5. How does your role as a leader allow for creativity, if it does?
    a. How might your background in creative writing relate to your leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic?

6. Creative people are often not viewed as leadership material. What is your opinion about that?

7. What haven't we touched on that you would like share about your experiences?

Additional probing prompts to be used as needed: "Tell me more about…?; Can you describe… more?; What do you mean when you say…?"

Thank you for your time today. As part of my study, I am also collecting creative pieces about experiences with leadership. If you have any writings that might relate to that idea, I would appreciate gaining access to them.

Again, your responses and identity will be kept confidential. I also will be providing you with an overview of my preliminary themes and analysis. This type of member checking is to ensure that I am interpreting the data in a reasonable way. If you have any questions between now and then, please feel free to email me.

Thank you, again.

Appendix C

Crosswalk of Research Questions and Interview Questions

Appendix C
Crosswalk of Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions and Documents Collected
1. What role does a creative writing background play in the experience of leadership for mid-level leaders in higher education?	1. a. How would you describe yourself as a leader?
	2. In what ways, if any, do you feel your background as a creative writer influences your actions and decisions as a leader?
	3. Would you share specific instances when your creative training was a benefit or detriment in leadership?
	5. a. How might your background in creative writing relate to your leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the process of shifting their social and individual identity from a writer to a leader?	1. What was it like for you becoming a formal leader?
	1. a. How would you describe yourself as a leader?
	4. In what ways, if any, do you feel your background as a creative writer influences your identity as a leader or your approach to leadership?
	4. a. In what ways has your creative identity changed, if it has, now that you are in a leadership role?
	4. b. How might your background as a writer affect how you are viewed as a leader by others?
	Creative documents relating to participants' experiences as a leader
3. How do such creative writers who became mid-level leaders in higher education describe the overlap of creative writing and leadership skills?	2. a. What, if any, skills from your creative writing background do you use as a leader?
	2. b. Would you share examples of using creativity in the context of leadership?
	5. How does your role as a leader allow for creativity, if it does?
	5. a. How might your background in creative writing relate to your leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic?

	6. Creative people are often not viewed as leadership material. What is your opinion about that?

Appendix D

Consent Form

Appendix D
Consent Form

<u>Western Michigan University</u>
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology

Principal Investigator: Jianping Shen
Student Investigator: Meredith Dodson
Title of Study: How Creative Writers Become Creative Leaders

You are invited to participate in this research project titled "*How Creative Writers Become Creative Leaders*"

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: examine the ways in which creative writers who become mid-level leaders in higher education make sense of how their prior experience and current leadership role interact and to serve as Meredith Dodson's dissertation for the requirements of the Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to share your experiences as a creative writer and leader in higher education. Your time in the study will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Possible risk and costs to you for taking part in the study may be discomfort from sensitive questions, and potential benefits of taking part may be a deeper understanding of the interaction of your creative writing and leadership experiences. Your alternative to taking part in the research study is to not take part in it.

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. After all of your questions have been answered and the consent document reviewed, if you decide to participate in this study, your continuation with the online interview will signal consent.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of mid-level higher education leaders who have a degree in creative writing to understand how that background might relate to their leadership.

Who can participate in this study?
Participants will hold an MFA or PhD in creative writing and have at least one creative publication. Participants will be higher education professionals with at least a half-time appointment to administrative duties. For this study, mid-level leadership in higher education may include faculty leads, department chairs, program directors, center directors, assistant/associate deans, and deans.

Where will this study take place?
Interviews will take place virtually, utilizing WebEX in order to accommodate participants across the United States and to observe safety measures during a pandemic.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
Each participant will be invited to one interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. Potential follow-up questions and clarifications may take up to an additional 30 minutes. No more than two hours of a participant's time is expected.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
Participants will be asked to share their experiences as creative writers and as leaders in higher education. Written creative words relating to the topic of leadership experiences will also be requested. After the interview, participants may be asked to review initial analysis of the data to assure accuracy.

What information is being measured during the study?
This section will describe the measurements that we are going to take during your participation in the study. Participants' responses to interview questions about their experiences as creative writers and leaders in higher education will be recorded (video and audio) and thematically analyzed. Specifically, participants will be asked to reflect on how their background in creative writing may affect their leadership identity and skills.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
There are minimal foreseeable risks for this study. Participants may have uncomfortable feelings, depending on the experiences shared during the interview.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
Potential benefits include a deeper understanding of the ways in which participants' creative writing and leadership experiences may interact.

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 this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
All participant information will be kept confidential, with only the student researcher having access to identifying information. Participants may choose a pseudonym to be used for data organization and discussion in the study; once data is transcribed, the master list of names and pseudonyms will be destroyed. Video and audio recordings will be stored on a private computer in password-protected files. Transcriptions will be stored on the web but will not contain identifying data. I will also take handwritten notes during the interviews as part of the record that will be destroyed at the completion of the project.

What will happen to my information or biospecimens collected for this research project after the study is over?
The information collected about you for this research will not be used by or distributed to investigators for other research.

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 either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. Participants who do not consent to the video recording through WebEX may still participate by consenting to audio recording.

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 Dr. Jianping Shen at 269 387-3887 or jianping.shen@wmich.edu or Meredith Dodson, the student investigator, at 269-998-2592 or meredith.dodson@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, 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 Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) 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.

Participating in this interview indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply.

Appendix E

HSIRB Approval Letter

Date: July 19, 2021

To: Jianping Shen, Principal Investigator
       Meredith Dodson, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: IRB Project Number 21-07-10

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Crafting a Different Kind of Story: Experiences of Creative Writers Leading in Higher Education" 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) July 18, 2022 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.