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The Leadership of Catholic Sisters Who Have Served as College Presidents: The Impact of Gender and Religion on Leadership Efficacy

Karen M. Scolforo
University of North Florida

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The Leadership of Catholic Sisters Who Have Served as College Presidents:
The Impact of Gender and Religion on Leadership Efficacy

by

Karen M. Scolforo

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Leadership, School Counseling, and Sport Management
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

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The dissertation of Karen M. Scolforo is approved:

Signature Deleted

Marcia L. Lamkin, Ed. D., Chair

Signature Deleted

Katherine L. Kasten, Ph.D.

Signature Deleted

Elinor A. Scheirer, Ph.D.

Signature Deleted

Julie Ingersoll, Ph.D.

Accepting for the Department:

Signature Deleted

Jennifer J. Kane, Ph.D., Chair

Department of Leadership, School Counseling & Sport Management

Accepting for the College:

Signature Deleted

Larry G. Daniel, Ph.D., Dean

College of Education & Human Services

Accepting for the University:

Signature Deleted

Len Roberson, Ph.D., Dean

The Graduate School
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To all of the participants for inviting me into your lives, for your honesty, and for sharing your worlds with me.

To Matt, Kate, Dani, Joseph, Shannon, Ryan, Lindsay, and Leo, for unselfish support, incredible hugs, and willingness to eat fast food and microwave meals over and over again.

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To Mom for the long-distance encouragement.

And to Dad, whom I will miss always XXOO.
Dedication

For Matthew: my transcriptionist, my personal editor, my partner, and the love of my life.
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Abstract

For over a century, Catholic Sisters have assumed leadership roles in higher education. They have impacted the lives of future leaders and empowered women to explore options to domesticity. Despite their profound contribution to higher education leadership, their history is missing from textbooks and library shelves.

The purpose of this qualitative and phenomenological research study was to examine the lived experiences of Catholic Sisters who have served as college president; to gain an understanding of their perceptions and perspectives as they relate to leadership and leadership efficacy; to identify the role, if any, that gender and religion have played in institutional and societal acceptance of their leadership in higher education; and to present an argument for further research.

Eleven participants participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. They responded to 12 research questions and provided feedback and stories representing their experiences as leaders. In order to sharpen the focus of the study, a set of lenses was selected to frame the analysis: feminisms, constructed self, and Catholicism.

Participants perceived that gender and religion played key roles in their leadership construct. Religious authority impacted perceived societal acceptance of these participants as leaders, but participants perceived that individual characteristics contributed equally to that acceptance. Participants described the role of stereotypes as they pertained to societal expectations for leadership characteristics of a woman and for a Catholic Sister. Participants defined leadership efficacy in terms of success, which was directly related, in most cases, to the number of lives touched through education and service. These Catholic Sisters open doors for future women leaders through training,
high standards, and belief systems. Committed to social justice, most of the participants expressed concerns with the Church’s failure to change with the times and to promote gender equality. Most of the participants described personal conflict with conscience and the Church, especially in terms of women’s and gay rights.
Chapter One: Introduction of the Study

―Humanity is male. Man defined woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . .He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.‖

Simone de Beauvoir, 1952

For generations little girls have read stories of fairy princesses locked in castles, drugged into deep sleep, or forced into a life of servitude to (tiny) men. Each story has a common thread: female oppression. Meanwhile, the handsome prince leads the charge, fights his way through an angry army, slays a ferocious dragon, then climbs to the top of the tower, or through the window, or into the forest, and frees the beautiful princess. They marry and have children and live happily ever after.

Perhaps if each princess had been educated and permitted life experiences to develop the skills, she might have had the opportunity to fight that army or slay that dragon using wit instead of brawn. If given the chance, each princess might have pursued an education, developed valuable skills, and led her own charge!

In the real world, men dominate the professional arena. Inequities in executive-level leadership roles suggest that women continue to face barriers to advancement. Women are earning college degrees at a faster rate than men (Bradley, 2000; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007), and societal expectations appear to be shifting. However, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. Because professional success “is highly correlated with educational attainment, the incorporation of women into the
educational system has been widely believed to be an effective strategy for increasing
gender parity in the occupational structure” (Bradley, 2000, p. 1).

Global competition, a demand for varied perspectives, and commitment to social
justice warrant gender equality in leadership roles, regardless of the organization or
industry. Leading the way to change as early as the late 19th century, Catholic Sisters
pursued higher education as a means to counteract social injustice. Their commitment to
education, perpetual vows of service and chastity, and unflinching solidarity created an
“unprecedented female power base” (Coburn & Smith, 1999, p. 8) that enabled them to
found Catholic colleges and universities. As early leaders, Catholic Sisters negotiated
patriarchal interference while helping other women gain knowledge and independence
through higher education (Coburn & Smith, 1999).

Volumes of historical texts about male leaders in higher education or the male
influence on the Catholic Church of America are readily available in almost any library.
Missing from those shelves are the chronicles of Catholic Sisters who taught in parochial
schools, nursed patients in Catholic hospitals, and provided revolutionary opportunities
for women. “For every priest there were at least three sisters” (Fialka, 2003, p. 1). Their
contributions included building nonprofit hospital systems, establishing private schools,
and developing curriculum grounded in Catholic values to prepare women for the role of
Catholic wife and mother. Also missing are the chronicles of the Catholic Sisters who
served in prominent leadership roles, such as hospital administrator or Catholic college
president.

Through their work in education, Catholic Sisters instilled a newfound
independence in the Catholic laywomen they served and educated and prepared them to
take on their own leadership roles. According to Morey and Piderit (2006), “nuns have been the primary transmitters of Catholic culture in the history of the United States” (p. 245). Catholic Sisters founded the largest number of Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. Their knowledge and commitment have helped to sustain Catholic culture, and, as role models, Catholic Sisters promulgated Catholic ideals within their institutions (Morey & Piderit, 2006).

In this way, Catholic Sisters significantly impacted Catholic higher education for women. As conduits of the Catholic faith, Catholic Sisters have successfully broken through patriarchal barriers and with intellect, rigor, and academic leadership (Thibodeau, 2009) have developed the skills to compete with male-dominant secular institutions.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Catholic women who answered a calling to religious life were forced to leave their families, “renouncing their former lives, and embracing a new life of religious identity and consciousness” (Coburn & Smith, 1999, p. 67). These women, merely adolescents in most cases, chose a life of religious ritual, commitment, and service. According to Coburn and Smith (1999), they “were asked to become „dead to the world,“ to vow to live a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience” (p. 67). The religious congregation became the parents, the siblings, and the teachers. This community provided food, clothing, shelter, and education while preparing the nuns for a spiritual life of prayer and service (Coburn & Smith, 1999).

The nuns who aspired to serve in faculty roles in higher education were forced to challenge their convent training and religious ideals, such as humility and self-effacement, in order to compete for a seat, excel in academics, and strive for the
individual awards and accomplishments necessary to complete master’s and doctoral degrees in secular institutions (Coburn & Smith, 1999). These nuns eschewed traditional female roles (e.g., wife, mother) and displayed unprecedented female independence. Pursuit of education under these circumstances contributed to the founding of Catholic colleges and universities.

It might be argued that these Catholic Sisters recognized the marginalization, subordination, and oppression of women (Forbes, 2002) and identified higher education as a means of societal change. This qualitative study adds to the body of knowledge about women leaders in higher education, specifically the complex contribution of Catholic Sisters who served in the role of college presidents, and to gain an understanding of the leadership construct of this complex cohort of women leaders.

**Context**

Catholic Sisters built the nation’s largest private school system. “They were the nation’s first large network of female professionals in an age when the pervading sentiment was that a woman’s place was in the home” (Fialka, 2003, p. 1). Catholic Sisters were the first feminists, fighting for women’s rights in the workplace, despite sometimes facing oppressive bishops and pastors, who expected Sisters to be obedient and submissive to the patriarchal hierarchy. For ambitious Catholic women, the convent was the only outlet for their skills and talent (Fialka, 2003). Despite their ground-breaking accomplishments in the education of women, there appears to be a dearth of literature about these early women leaders in higher education.

A review of the relevant literature offered a landscape perspective of leadership and an examination of the perceived impact of gender on efficacy in leadership roles.
Throughout the 20th century, leadership theories supported male-dominant traits, skills, and styles. For example, in the 1970s women were encouraged to adopt military-style techniques, yet female leaders who exhibited characteristics considered to be more masculine tended to be judged more harshly (Harragan, 1977; Helgesen, 1990; Hennig & Jardim, 1976).

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, social scientists explored the impact of gender on leadership approach and efficacy. Stereotypes and societal expectations were addressed in an attempt to identify actual traits and characteristics inherent to men and women and to measure the effectiveness of different approaches (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992; Barbuto, Fritz, Matkin, & Marx, 2007; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Eagley & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Women advanced in leadership roles in education, where collaborative decision-making and an employee-focused approach contributed to successful outcomes. However, many women maintained the role of primary care giver for their children and struggled to juggle family and career (Appelbaum, Audet, & Miller, 2002; Bone, 1997; Chliwniak, 1997; Epstein, 1981).

Catholic colleges and universities provided a venue for women to advance academically while developing the moral values they would later be expected to instill in their children (Curran, 1990; Daigler, 2001; Frankfort, 1977). The Catholic Sisters who founded these institutions committed their lives to their faith and to social justice (Coburn & Smith, 1999; Fialka, 2003). Recent literature has explored the relevance of gender and religious identity as they relate to leadership in higher education (Morey & Piderit, 2006).

Missing from the literature is the voice of the Catholic Sisters who served in the role of college president during times when women were discouraged from pursuing
higher education and expected to stay in the home to raise families. It was during this
time that, despite expanding population numbers, women continued to be
underrepresented in the classroom and in leadership roles (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007).

As early leaders in higher education, Catholic Sisters pursued higher education
and served in roles that few laywomen had the opportunity to pursue. Their perceptions
of leadership efficacy and lived experiences in leadership roles offer a unique viewpoint
of women leaders in higher education and insight into feminist perspectives.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In order to put research questions in perspective, a conceptual framework is
required. It would be impossible to investigate the leadership construct of Catholic
Sisters who have served as college presidents from all perspectives simultaneously. To
establish a vantage point, a set of lenses was selected: a logical framework to clarify and
sharpen the focus of the study. This explication of a theoretical and conceptual
framework provided focus to subsequent steps in planning and constructing the inquiry
(Patton, 2002). It also provided a basis for including or excluding literature based on
relevance to the inquiry.

As a feminist researcher and female leader in higher education, I wanted to
understand the impact of gender on the leadership construct of the participants. I selected
feminism as one of the lenses for the analytical process. In order to gain an
understanding of participant perceptions of their leadership, it was also important to
consider their constructed self based on social, environmental, and cultural experiences.
Through the lens of the constructed self, the lived experiences contributing to leadership
constructs were explored. Finally, the lens of Catholicism was selected in order to examine the impact of religion on perceptions of leadership.

The components of this framework might be applied to the opening metaphor as an example. From a feminist perspective, the fairy-tale princess was denied access to education, experiences, or equitable treatment. This oppression sealed her fate, leaving her vulnerable and submissive to a patriarchal order. From a perspective of the constructed self, environmental culture, societal norms, and the expectations and guidance of her parents contributed to a construction of reality in which she became a beautiful, albeit submissive, princess. She fell into the trappings of those who traveled before her, and she believed that she was only capable of being a beautiful princess. From a religious perspective, a princess learned to obey the patriarchal hierarchy, to feel guilt for her sins, and to believe she had earned her fate. She was convinced that one day she would be rescued as long as she followed the rules. Ultimately her faith would pull her through. The prince would rescue her and she would marry, have children, and live happily ever after. The following sections review the three components of the conceptual framework.

**Feminism**

Feminism is the first component of the conceptual framework. The Catholic Sisters who founded Catholic colleges and universities served as early feminists in their mission toward social justice and their dedication to the abolishment of oppression. In her study *Internalized Masculinity and Women’s Discourse: A Critical Analysis of the (Re)production of Masculinity in Organizations*, Diane Forbes (2002) suggested that “feminisms explore women”s marginalization, subordination and oppression and suggest
ways that direct individual, cultural, organizational, and societal change” (p. 269). It seems that Catholic Sisters provided a venue for that change. Feminist theory addresses issues of equity and access while exposing power relationships, implicit rules, and profound influences in education and workplace settings (Brisolara, 2003).

From the mid-nineteenth century through the end of the twentieth century, three waves of feminism contributed to the changing landscape of women and feminism, each focusing on a different aspect of gender oppression, yet rooted in activism and social change (Hart, 2001). Chapter Two of the present study provides a review of the current research and literature about women and work, historically and chronologically, across these waves. I approached research and analysis using a feminist perspective, which considers the place and history of women in society and seeks gender parity. Table 1 provides a snapshot of feminist waves and the issues in the forefront of each time period.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waves of Feminism</th>
<th>Timeline of Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Wave</td>
<td>1848 through 1920s, women’s suffrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Wave</td>
<td>1960s and 80s, equity in the workplace, power suit, birth control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Wave</td>
<td>1990s and 2000s, substantive equality versus formal equality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section considers the second component of the conceptual framework, the constructed self. This lens was used to examine the impact of lived experiences on participants’ perceptions of leadership.
**Constructed Self**

The second component of the conceptual framework was the constructed self. Claes (1999) suggested that gender is a social construct, and Hartman (1999) asserted “the social construction of self includes the shaping of social roles, such as those within contexts of gender, class, and race” (p. 83). Social construction is influenced by popular culture, the media, the hidden social class, and historical and religious texts. In this way, evolving societal symbols influence the definition of male characteristics or female characteristics (Claes, 1999, 2006; Hartman, 1999). According to Hartman, “gender as a category. . . is always contextually dependent and dynamic” (p. 84). Both intrinsic and extrinsic influences impact the constructed self. Chee, Pino, and Smith (2005) asserted “what differentiates men and women seems to be their ethical and behavioral approaches to their academic pursuits, social environment, and more or less traditional gender ideology” (p. 605).

For the past century, the Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents negotiated leadership roles within the context of a patriarchal structure, the Catholic Church, while challenging societal expectations for women and education, women and family. In her in-depth study of academic feminists who have challenged traditional norms and values, Lynn Safarik (2002) explored feminist scholarship and the influence of patriarchal values in shaping the content and structure of knowledge. She stated that “academic feminisms, like other ‘emancipatory knowledges’ have gained legitimacy in the academy” (p.1719) and that these “new epistemologies provide contradiction and conflict in academic organizations that serve to reveal structures that marginalize certain members of the community” (p. 1719). These different constructions of reality “challenge
the basic theoretical and structural foundations of our institutions, offering new insights for how we might reshape them” (Safarik, 2002, p. 1719).

Safarik (2002) viewed academic feminism as a transformative force, challenging traditional knowledge construction. I approached the present research and analysis on the leadership of Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents from a perspective of the constructed self, challenging stereotypical assumptions. Further, I attempted to identify constructed knowledge based on the lived experiences of the Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents. The next section explores the third and final component of the conceptual framework: Catholicism.

**Religion: Catholicism**

The third component of the conceptual framework for this study was Catholicism and its impact on participant perceptions of leadership. For centuries religious life has offered an alternative to traditional societal expectations that a woman’s place was in the home serving as a wife and mother. However, this escape from subordination in a marital relationship “was a life vowed to virginity, described for both men and women as a marriage to Christ” (Head, 1990, p. 151). The Church defined a woman’s place in the order. In the late Middle Ages, “because of the fragility of their sex, women could not preach and had to be protected and isolated . . . and under control” (Osheim, 1990, p. 80). Women were forced to submit to a patriarchal hierarchy regardless of their life choices. According to Coon, Haldane, and Sommer (1990):

The relationship of women and Christianity can be approached from within the confines of religious orders and from lay piety. Women have exerted a special influence on Christian life and have been profoundly affected by spirituality, but
the exact nature of this relationship has yet to be fully understood. Holy women throughout history have struggled over the nature of women’s calling within the Church. Christianity has been both a liberating force for women and the cause of their oppression. (p. 2)

Catholicism was “both constraining and emancipatory” (Redmont, 1992, p. 58). The Church’s rules and boundaries provided structure, but also limitations. Good Catholic women learned to repress emotions and sensuality, embrace the mystery and security of the Church, and accept responsibility for their sins through feelings of shame and guilt. The guilt contributed to feelings of perpetual responsibility, and the shame fostered low self-esteem (Redmont, 1992). Lacking in self-confidence, these Catholic women fell in line in the patriarchal hierarchy, submissive and obedient. This research and analysis on the leadership of Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents was approached from the perspective of religion in consideration of Catholic traditions and influences and their impact on Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents.

**Research Questions**

This study was designed to answer the following central research question:

How do Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents perceive their leadership?

The following sub-questions were developed to examine key dimensions of the central research question:

1. How do Catholic Sisters who have served in the role of college president define their success?

2. How do Catholic Sisters perceive their acceptance in society as leaders, and what factors contribute to those perceptions?
3. How did these Catholic Sisters exhibit qualities that challenged gender stereotypes?

4. How do Catholic Sisters who have served in the role of college president define gender and religion as they pertain to leadership and the culture of the institution?

**Definition of Terms**

The following table provides a list of terms that are used throughout this document. Definitions apply within the context of this research study.

Table 2

*Definition of Terms Relating to Methodology, Catholicism, and Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Theory</td>
<td>An extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse; aims to understand the nature of gender inequality (Kvale &amp; Brinkman, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>A philosophical perspective based upon careful descriptions and analyses of consciousness, with a focus on the subject's life world; it attempts to bracket foreknowledge and involves a search for invariant essential meanings of the described phenomena (Kvale &amp; Brinkman, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phronesis</td>
<td>The intellectual virtue of recognizing and responding to what is most important in a situation; this Greek term may be translated as &quot;prudence&quot; or &quot;practical wisdom&quot; (Kvale &amp; Brinkman, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodernism</td>
<td>A philosophy characterized by a disbelief in modern universal systems of knowledge; it emphasizes the conversational, the narrative, the linguistic, the contextual and the interrelational nature of knowledge (Kvale &amp; Brinkman, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charism</td>
<td>Spiritual gifts (McDannell, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation</td>
<td>Religious order, e.g., congregation of sisters (McDannell, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Nonreligious, lay (McDannell, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatican II</td>
<td>Defining religious moment when Pope John XXIII convened a worldwide meeting of bishops and facilitated a constellation of changes including increased roles for laity in the Church and increased opportunities for women (1959-1965) (McDannell, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructed Self</td>
<td>A process by which we learn by reflecting on our lived experiences and constructing our own knowledge and understanding of ourselves and our world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>Belief about capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. They include cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes (Bandura, 1994)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodological Design

Catholic Sisters served as social activists, committed to social justice and the mitigation of oppression (Coburn & Smith, 1999; Daigler, 2001; Fialka, 2003). As social activists for the empowerment of women, Catholic Sisters founded colleges and universities to educate the daughters of working class families and provide them with a venue for academic achievement and spiritual development at a time when women were expected to work in the home. The Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents have perpetuated a rich tradition of academic excellence, responsible citizenship, and a culture of service (Coburn & Smith, 1999; Daigler, 2001).

In order to gain an understanding of the construct of leadership and the experiences that have shaped the lives of Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents, this qualitative phenomenological study utilized personal interviews to investigate their perception of leadership and to explore the personal experiences that have impacted them. Interview questions facilitated an examination of the factors that contributed to leadership characteristics and roles within respective institutions, while providing a voice to the participants.

The particulars of this study served to illuminate larger issues that hold potential significance for the field of educational leadership. The use of probing questions in a semi-structured interview format promoted quality and depth, and through thick rich description and systematic and detailed analysis, the results yielded new knowledge about these women leaders (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

This research provided a voice to the participating Catholic Sisters who had served as college presidents and who had perpetuated a rich tradition of social justice and
a plight for the powerless (Coburn & Smith, 1999; Daigler, 2001; Fialka, 2003). The research sought rich cultural description, evoked constructed realities through a holistic approach, and elicited subjective interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In order to facilitate this process, a qualitative design was selected.

A purposive sample was used, with participants selected from a list of Catholic Sisters serving at the time of data collection, or having served, as presidents of Catholic colleges or universities. For most of the participants, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted at their respective campuses in order to facilitate knowledge construction in a natural setting. Three of the interviews were conducted using Skype software. These participants dialed in from their offices on campus or at home for the latter interviews.

As a connoisseur of higher education leadership, I served as a tool in the interpretation process (Eisner, 1998), and I promoted understanding through thick, rich description. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by a third party, and transcripts of the interview were shared with the participants for an accuracy check. Recommended changes were made, and data were interpreted and analyzed using typological analysis (Hatch, 2002) and a coding system (Boyatzis, 1998) to reflect major categories and themes.

**Significance of the Research**

Across industries, women leaders continue to be underrepresented when compared to the number of men in leadership roles (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Yet, in the early 20th century, Catholic Sisters served in leadership roles in higher education during a time when society expected women to stay in the home and embrace the role of
These Catholic Sisters exhibited a profound ability to apply intellect and rigor with “boundless energy and faith” (Thibodeau, 2009, p. 16) to found women’s colleges and universities. As these institutions shifted cultural norms in modern times, greater numbers of the laity have taken on leadership roles in Catholic institutions and replaced those who served before them. As a result, the significance of the leadership of many of the Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents has been overlooked. Their service and their legacy will soon become history. An understanding of the leadership of Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents can inform leadership of a broader range of women leaders, both in education and in corporate society.

This research was critical to capturing that knowledge and gaining an understanding of the scope of leadership, the cultural experiences, and the personal impact of the Catholic Sisters who educated women to become future leaders. This research is also significant because it focused on major social issues: social justice and gender equity. These issues are relevant to women in leadership roles regardless of their discipline or leadership venue.

**Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

Catholic Sisters who serve or have served as college presidents in colleges and universities are decreasing in numbers. Their leadership has been revolutionary in times when women were expected only to marry and have children. Failure to include their contribution to leadership in our libraries would mean a grave disservice to the history of women leaders in higher education. Furthermore, the lived experiences of Catholic
Sisters who served as college presidents can inform leadership constructs for women leaders in higher education and in other industries.

Although this chapter serves as an introduction to the specific cohort of women who have served as early leaders in higher education, the Catholic Sisters who founded Catholic colleges and universities, Chapter Two presents a review of literature pertaining to women leaders and historical factors contributing to societal expectations, hegemonic stereotypes, and cultural transitions. In Chapter Three, a description of the research design for disciplined inquiry, ethical issues related to the research, and limitations of the study are discussed. Chapter Four provides an in-depth interpretation and analysis of participants’ responses to interview questions, and Chapter Five discusses conclusions, implications of this research study, and recommendations for future studies.
Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

—Woman needs no introduction, a book on woman does.”

George H. Tavard, 1973

—Because ‘woman’s work’ was considered unimportant in the grand scope of history, very little published material existed except for the lives of those few extraordinary women who had achieved outstanding success in the man’s world of politics, economics, and the arts and sciences. Even these women were treated as aberrations, deviants, or important because of sexual characteristics.”

Susan S. Arpad, 1984

In order to understand the significance of women leaders in higher education and their progression in a male-dominated workplace, the phenomenon must be traced in relation to historical events: the impact of feminism, the shift in societal culture, and the accomplishments of the women who have paved the way. Catholic Sisters founded colleges and universities to educate women during a time when women were expected to stay in the home, rearing children and providing for their families (Coburn & Smith, 1999).

Education has been instrumental to women’s increased access to workplace advancement, personal empowerment and independence, and liberation. Societal understanding of gender differences has evolved significantly, and gender equality has become a focus of the social sciences (Harragan, 1977; Helgesen, 1990; Hennig & Jardim, 1976). The Catholic Sisters who served in roles as college presidents committed to social justice and cessation of oppression as a commitment to their faith (Coburn & Smith, 1999; Daigler, 2001; Fialka, 2003), and these women established venues through which other women might access intellectual growth and spiritual development.
Despite their historical significance, there seems to be an absence of literature on the leadership, nuances, and/or challenges of Catholic Sisters who served in the role of college president. “Women, in general, and Catholic Sisters to an even more detrimental degree, have been unable to take center stage and to spend time and energy to make their accomplishments known” (Daigler, 2001, p. 2). It has been estimated that almost half of women’s colleges in the United States were founded by religious Sisters (Schier & Russet, 2002), yet their voices are not present in the scholarly literature on women leaders in higher education.

The purpose of this chapter is to review current and historical literature by examining the leadership contributions of Catholic Sisters in higher education and exploring the impact of their roles as they relate to public perception, influence on authority, and promotion of obedience. This literature review first describes leadership theories of past and present generations, including stereotypes and societal expectations and norms. It then provides a definition of gender and an overview of its impact on leadership and women leaders in higher education.

Subsequent sections within this chapter discuss a specific group of women: the Catholic sisters who have served in educational leadership roles. In order to contextualize the practices of these women leaders, an understanding of Catholic traditions and historical influences is necessary. Categories evident in the literature include traditional concepts of leadership and the patriarchal mold, changing expectations for women leaders, and gender and religious identity as they relate to the vocation of Sisterhood and the development of espoused single-sex Catholic institutions. Although “research on women in academic administration is remarkably sparse, undoubtedly
owing both to the relative scarcity of such women and the short span of time since research awareness has turned to this sector of academe” (Moore & Wollitzer, 1979, p. 65), this review provides a foundation for future research.

**Leadership**

Peter Northouse (2007) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Despite implied power, the relationship between a leader and a follower is not socially hierarchal, but rather should be understood in terms of a leader-follower relationship—interactive as opposed to linear (Burns, 1978). Leadership may be assigned or emergent (Northouse, 2007), stemming from referent, expert, legitimate, reward, or coercive power (French & Raven, 1959).

During most of the twentieth century, leadership theories encompassed a variety of male-dominated approaches, including “great man” theories focused on identifying the traits of influential societal leaders, all of whom were men (Bass, 1990). Subsequent approaches focused on skills, style, and situation, all categorized and applied within a patriarchal mold (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Katz, 1955; Stogdill, 1948).

In 1978, James MacGregor Burns shifted the focus of leadership from the characteristics of the leader to the transformation of the follower. He described transactional and transformational leadership as dichotomous approaches to the leader-follower relationship, each with its appropriate application depending upon the desired motivation level of the follower and the need for follower developmental transformation. “In transformational leadership, the leader establishes a vision and involves the followers
in its development while considering their individual needs and providing opportunities for intellectual stimulation” (Daughtry & Finch, 1997, p. 174).

Several studies in the past decade found no significant difference between male and female transactional and transformational leadership (Maher, 1997; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003); however, female participants appeared to set higher expectations for female managers. Female leaders who exhibited male-stereotypical behaviors were also judged more harshly by followers than their male counterparts (Barbuto et al., 2007; Cellar, Sidle, Goudy, & O’Brien, 2001). Age, educational level, and gender-inconsistent behavior (that which contradicts stereotypical expectations) impacted follower perception and acceptance of female leaders (Barbuto et al., 2007; Cellar et al., 2001). Richard Weaver (1995), a proponent for leadership change and a balanced perspective, wrote

The idea that women should translate their experiences into the male code in order to express themselves effectively, or in order to be accepted in a male-dominated workplace is an outmoded, inconsistent, subservient notion that should no longer be given credibility in modern society. (p. 439)

Weaver (1995) shifted the definition of leadership in terms of empowerment, advocating for *power to* as opposed to *power over* and emphasizing human values.

Women are underrepresented in leadership roles across industries, and female upward mobility within organizations lags behind that of male counterparts (Powell, 1999; Schein, 2001; Tarr-Whelan, 2009). Although women represent half of the United States population, they occupy only 16%-20% of the leadership positions across major industries (Tarr-Whelan, 2009).
Managers view desirable top management traits as predominantly male due to the power of the informal organization, which includes hidden attitudes and stereotyping that “underpin informal ideas of acceptable management roles for men and women” (Vinnicombe & Harris, 2000, p. 28). According to Maher (1997), leadership style differences between men and women, and gender stereotypes in the leadership domain, have contributed to the dearth of women at executive levels.

In the late twentieth century, the long-accepted patriarchal ideology of “think male, think leader” still held among young men, despite generational differences, but young women were shifting away from this mentality (Jackson, Engstrom, & Emmers-Sommer, 2007; Sczesny, 2003). In a study designed to compare gender-stereotypical perception of leadership among management students, Sczesny (2003) found a less gender-stereotypic view, especially in the female participants, despite previous research suggesting that “successful managers are perceived as possessing characteristics that belong to a global masculine stereotype” (p. 353).

In 2005, Jim Collins introduced “Level 5” leadership, encouraging a humble, collaborative approach to leadership, and incorporating ambition and a drive toward results. This theory married traits traditionally associated with women, collaboration and humility, with those historically attributed to men, ambition and results-orientation.

The progression of broad leadership theories offered a transition from the great man theories of Bass, the situational theories of Hersey and Blanchard, the role theories of Katz, and the trait theories of Stogdill, to the dichotomous transactional and transformational leadership theories of Burns, Maher, and Mendell and Pherwai. As women entered the leadership arena, societal expectations contributed to acceptable
leadership behaviors. The next section of this chapter explores the literature relating to women and leadership.

**Women and Leadership**

“Gender is a social construct” (Claes, 1999, p. 431), and the term *gender* may be used to convey psychological, social, and cultural differences between women and men, whereas the term *sex* may be used to indicate the biological difference between women and men. One aspect of male identification is the cultural description of masculinity, which reflects the core values of society as a whole: control, strength, efficiency, competitiveness, toughness, composure, forcefulness, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy, and self-sufficiency (Johnson, 1998). These masculine qualities are readily associated with leadership roles in careers such as business, politics, athletics, military, law, and medicine (Johnson, 1998). Johnson (1998) offered a unique perspective of the dichotomy of male and female characteristics:

In contrast, qualities such as inefficiency, cooperation, mutuality, equality, sharing, compassion, caring, vulnerability, a readiness to negotiate and compromise, emotional expressiveness, and intuitive and other nonlinear ways of thinking are all devalued and culturally associated with femininity and femaleness. (pp. 166-167)

To suggest that a woman’s point of view rested on traditional gender stereotypes, based on a feminine perspective in a confined domestic sphere (Friedan, 1963) was tantamount to the suggestion that female qualities were a mismatch for those required to lead (Claes, 1999; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Paris, 2002). Loh (1993) described women in the leadership arena as “smart, principled, professional, and cordial” (p. 122) and men
as “conniving, crude, backbiting, and lively” (p. 122). According to Johnson, a man might have to learn to see himself as a manager, but “a woman has to be able to see herself as a woman manager who can succeed in spite of the fact that she isn’t a man” (1998, p. 167).

Despite a fundamental transformation over the last century, leadership opportunities for women in the early twenty-first century are still not equal to those available to men (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). “The statistics are sobering. Women account for less than a fifth of law firm partners, federal judges, college presidents, and congressional representatives; they are only two percent of Fortune 500 CEOs and hold only eight percent of corporate leadership positions” (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p. xiii).

According to Kellerman and Rhode (2007), women continue to be expected to take on disproportionate responsibilities in the home, a place that is “not and perhaps will never be an equal opportunity employer” (p. xiv). As a result, women have faced obstacles to leadership opportunities. This phenomenon has hindered societal access to a diversified talent pool and to women’s contributions to leadership, such as decision-making processes, critical thinking, and problem solving. According to Johnson (1998), “At the heart of patriarchy is the oppression of women” (p. 169), and because patriarchy is male-identified and male-centered, “women and the work they do tends to be devalued, if not made invisible” (p. 169).

The dispositions and characteristics of women leaders “carry with them great significance for effective, empathetic and assertive leadership for postmodern women leaders in higher education” (Lupi & Martin, 2005, p.4). However, according to Landrine and Klonoff (1997), a man is a natural leader, while a woman has to work
harder than a man to have success, and “a man’s resume, even though identical to a woman’s, is rated higher” (p. 10).

Hegemonic stereotypes contribute to public perception of leadership. According to Kloot (2004), “masculinity is an implicit construct in the perception of leadership, and what women do is rarely defined as leadership” (p. 472). The idea that “the same behavior in men and women is judged differently” (Kloot, 2004, p. 472) suggested that gender imbalance was more about public perception than about capabilities. Emergence of leadership through attitude, self-confidence, intelligence, and masculinity—traits that have been traditionally considered desirable leadership characteristics—have contributed to public perceptions about appropriate gender roles and leadership (Kloot, 2004).

Concerns have arisen when women, through roles they have been taught to play, have assumed a second class status or lacked self-confidence necessary to face barriers in traditional work place environments, such as the old boys” network (Appelbaum et al., 2002). Despite new expectations for political correctness in the United States, the old boys” network was a sophisticated method of discrimination that was alive and well at the end of the twentieth century (Rigg & Sparrow, 1994). The old boys” members generated “institutional impediments to stall women’s advance in organizations. At a cultural level, they foster solidarity between men and sexualize, threaten, marginalize, control and divide women” (Appelbaum et al., 2003, p. 47). Actions that were acceptable, and even desirable, for men were considered unacceptable for women. According to Kellerman and Rhode (2007):

What is assertive in a man can appear abrasive in a woman, and female leaders risk appearing too feminine or not feminine enough. On one hand, they may
appear too “soft”—unable or unwilling to make the tough calls required in positions of greatest influence. On the other hand, those who mimic the “male model” are often viewed as strident and overly aggressive or ambitious. “Attila the Hen” and “Dragon Lady” have difficulty enlisting respect, support, and cooperation from coworkers. (p. 7)

According to research conducted by the Center for Developing Women Business Leaders at Cranfield School of Management, in 2000, managers still viewed desirable top management traits as predominantly male, and the answer “lies in the power of the informal organization,” defined as “the way we actually do things” as opposed to “the way we say we do things” (Vinnicombe & Harris, 2000, p. 28). The study contested that “hidden attitudes and stereotyping underpinned [ned] informal ideas of acceptable management roles for men and women” (Vinnicombe & Harris, 2000, p. 28). This has mostly influenced women’s opportunities for promotion and their perceptions of career success. According to Nidiffer and Bashaw (2001),

In a patriarchal society, leadership and power are the roles, responsibilities, and privileges assigned to men. Because men fill these roles, our cultural images, attitudes, and beliefs associate men with leadership. Skills and attributes valued in men become the qualities prized in leaders. As a result, members of society begin to accept with little question or hesitation that leadership simply must be associated with time-honored masculine traits. (p. 101)

In addition to overcoming stereotypes and societal expectations, many women in top administrative positions have attained their goals with the sacrifice of husband and family (Welch, 1990).
Lupi and Martin (2005) asserted that to be effective, a leader needed to be able, adequately and strategically, to use human and other resources to accomplish the task at hand. Based on their research, they suggested that women and men have offered different leadership traits and styles. Women tended to be more employee-focused, more willing to share information, and collaborative in decision-making. Women were more likely to demonstrate transformational leadership skills (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), while men were more problem-focused, competitive, ambitious, and aggressive. Men focused on job performance and tended to be more task-oriented and autocratic than women (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000).

According to Appelbaum et al. (2002), descriptors attributed to males included transactional, autocratic, instruction-giving, and business-oriented, whereas female descriptors included considerate, transformational, participative, socio-expressive, and people-oriented, suggesting that female leadership is significantly different from male leadership. In contrast, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) argued that the gender-stereotypic expectation that women lead in an interpersonal-oriented style and men in a task-oriented style was not shown in organizational studies, but instead that styles did not significantly differ. However, consistent with expectations, women tended to lead democratically, while men tended toward an autocratic or directive approach.

Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) identified 25 leadership behaviors of women leaders and clustered them into six central traits: empowerment (women reward rather than punish, invite feedback and input, motivate, value creativity, and focus on vision), ability to restructure (women seek to change rather than control, connect rather than rank, establish a network rather than hierarchy, and are flexible rather than rigid),
teaching (women facilitate rather than give orders), role model (women act as role models), openness (women cultivate a nourishing environment for growth, reaching out rather than up or down), and questioner (women ask the right questions rather than know all the answers). Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) asserted that the key characteristics of employee expectations of leaders included integrity, including consistency and dependability, moral and intellectual honesty, and general trustworthiness; interest for the organization and the greater good, as opposed to self-interest; and commitment to high quality. These traits have tended to be characteristic of female leadership, in the interest of caring, nurturing, and sharing, while male leaders utilize position power and the “right to compel compliance” (Bone, 1997, p. 17). Because of this assessment, female leadership has been viewed as appropriate in an educational environment in which a collaborative team approach, respect for colleagues and subordinates, and attention to detail were critical to the success of the organization (Bone, 1997).

Public stereotypes in the early twenty-first century have continued to create barriers for women pursuing leadership roles (Dana, 2009; Derrington & Sharratt, 2009). Education on the topic of gender awareness and diversity have promoted change and encouraged opportunities while helping women to overcome some of the obstacles they face (Andrews & Ridenour, 2006). “According to leadership attribution theory, leadership success is not exclusively defined by the competencies of leaders; it is also facilitated by social reality as constructed by subordinates” (Rodler, Kirchler, & Holzl, 2002, p. 827). Women have been more likely than men to incur a backlash for behaviors perceived as inappropriate for this gender; behaviors that may help a man can harm a woman in the same position (Schichor, 2009).
These behaviors can be mitigated through pre-service learning programs, which inform prospective educational leaders about gender differences and ways women might effectively contribute to leadership roles. According to Astin and Leland (1991), “leaders emerge from the critical interplay of personal values and commitments, special circumstances or historical influences, and personal events that motivate and mobilize people’s actions” (p. 66). Through education, leaders can learn from each other and find role models and mentors who can help them to develop their own innate skills and applicable traits. In this way, effective leaders will gain a wide variety of leadership skills, abilities, and competencies through life experience and interaction with other potential leaders (Madsen, 2008).

When the composition of the workforce changed during World War II and married women joined the ranks of workers, legislators designed federal policies to assist in the juggling of work and family demands (Spalter-Roth & Erskine, 2005). As colleges and universities hired women faculty members, many of them promoted additional work and family policies such as flexible work schedules (Spalter-Roth & Erskine, 2005).

The Family and Medical Leave Act was designed to provide support for employees caring for new or ailing family while keeping careers on track. However, many faculty parents were afraid to use work/family policies (Spalter-Roth & Erskine, 2005). Women with children tended to work less, whereas men with children tended to work more—increasing the gap of potential leadership between men and women in the workplace. Women in middle management positions left corporate positions, venturing out in entrepreneurial small businesses, or staying home full time (Burke & Vinnicombe, 2005).
Not only have work/family policies failed to offer a balance to the majority of women leaders, women seeking leadership positions needed strong credentials, extensive work experience, and documented results (Shavlik & Touchton, 1988). According to Shavlik and Touchton (1988), “these expectations have caused many women to over-prepare, doubt themselves, and limit their aspirations” (p. 101).

Powney (1997) asserted, “one of the prevalent excuses given for male pre-eminence in management posts is that female candidates rarely put themselves forward” (p. 49). Public perceptions that prejudice women’s attainment of executive positions included the belief that men should serve in higher level leadership roles, men would not agree to work for a woman, and even women preferred a man as a supervisor. These public perceptions undermined the confidence levels of women leaders (Powney, 1997).

According to Cummings (1979), social myths about women in the work environment have created obstacles to success—these included the belief that women’s leadership styles were inept, piercing, and wrought with emotion, and, as a result, women faced limitations and barriers in career choices. Women have been associated with leadership behaviors like nurturing and caring, focusing on relationships and negotiation for consensus. These traits were considered desirable in the field of education.

As women’s leadership traits became more focal in the late 70s and early 80s, women leaders provided a viable option for educational leadership roles. Despite acceptance into the field of education, women faced new challenges with colleagues and subordinates.

Spurling (1997) described ways that the behavior of female colleagues undermined personal and collective energy in her work for change in an educational
setting. “Such behavior was not uncommon at meetings among women who wanted the benefits of change but who, for a variety of reasons, would not commit themselves to working for it” (p. 38). Arguments and competition between women in the workplace prevented them from identifying and implementing solutions. One reason for this behavior might be that women felt the need to work harder for recognition—to be heard—and in turn, challenged female authority.

In their study *Prejudice Against Women in Male-Congenial Environments: Perceptions of Gender Role Congruity in Leadership*, Garcia-Retamero and Lopez-Zafra (2006) presented evidence that “participants showed prejudice against the female candidate, especially when she worked in an industry incongruent with her gender role . . . Female and older participants showed more prejudice against the female leaders than did male and younger participants” (p. 51). Their research provided just one example of workplace expectations for leadership roles.

Biases against women continued to be evident in the early 21st century. In 2005, the president of Harvard University offended a number of women at an academic conference when he described the innate differences in aptitude between men and women, specifically in the area of science and engineering (Dillon, 2005). Eagly et al. (2000) explored the value of women in leadership roles, and Rosser (2001) found that women leaders, “regardless of the organization or occupation, were evaluated more negatively than men when exhibiting autocratic behavior . . . Female leaders . . . [were] especially devalued when they directed male subordinates” (p. 73).

In 2001, Dobie and Hummel described a school district which denied promotion to a female candidate for superintendent because the district “wasn”t ready for a woman.”
Cubillo and Brown (2003) examined the under-representation of women in senior management positions in education, concluding that glass ceilings and glass walls created barriers to equitable promotion of women. Because of subordinate biases, leadership effectiveness has been influenced by gender or role expectations, and because of societal biases, women have been slow to gain on the numbers of men in educational leadership roles.

In her 1998 study, Carless examined gender differences in transformational leadership from multiple perspectives. Her findings suggested that “superiors evaluated female managers as more transformational than male managers, female managers rated themselves as more transformational than males, and subordinates evaluated their female and male leaders equally” (p. 887).

In their longitudinal study of over 4,000 senior managers (2,372 male and 1,768 female) from 1984 to 2002, Robinson and Lipman-Blumen (2003) concluded that traditional gender role stereotypes did not hold up and, furthermore, counter-stereotypical patterns existed. Using a Connective Leadership Model, they found that men’s competitive scores had dropped, whereas women’s had remained consistent, and men’s collaborative behaviors had held steady, while women’s had increased.

Kezar and Lester (2010) argued that an understanding of leadership remains partial when succumbing to a traditional, simplistic view of social identity, such as race and gender. They suggested that there are multiple layers of context that affect a single individual, and that “life histories are helpful in demonstrating the complexities of experiences that impact individual views of leadership” (p 178). It was simplistic to suggest that women displayed feminine leadership attributes, and, furthermore, this
stance failed to recognize the role society played in creating gendered behaviors (Paris, 2002).

In Thompson’s (2000) study of 57 educational leaders, rated by 472 subordinate participants, the findings suggested that “male and female educational leaders are perceived to be equally effective in their respective organizations despite the stereotypical connotations asserted in previous research” (p. 969), and there were no statistically significant differences in the leadership characteristics between men and women.

According to Kellerman and Rhode (2007), “an overview of more than a hundred studies confirms that women are rated lower as leaders when they adopt authoritative and seemingly masculine styles, particularly when the evaluators are men, or when the role is one typically occupied by men” (p. 7). However, women with masculine styles were more likely to emerge as leaders. This would suggest the women must act like men to secure a leadership role, but those very behaviors that gained them leadership positions might prevent them from achieving long-term acceptance and success.

In summary, masculine qualities have been associated with leadership roles in business, politics, athletics, military, law, and medicine (Johnson, 1998). As women stepped into the leadership arena, they juggled disproportionate responsibilities in the home (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). This obstacle contributed to career growth challenges. In addition, throughout the mid to late 20th century, men’s resumes were rated higher than women’s, even if credentials and experiences were comparable (Landrine & Klonoff, 1997). Good old boys” networks, which served as a sophisticated
method of discrimination, created additional barriers for women leaders (Applebaum et al., 2003; Rigg & Sparrow, 1994).

Despite barriers to acceptance in leadership positions, women were more likely to demonstrate desirable transformational leadership skills (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). However, to be successful, women had to navigate complex corporate environments and societal paradigms relating to gender (Kezar & Lester, 2010). The following section examines the historical factors that have impacted women leaders.

**The Historical Context of Women Leaders and Education**

Many factors contribute to perceptions and truths about women in leadership roles. For centuries, women worked in the home, tending to family needs and raising children. Considered to be morally superior to men, women were expected to spiritually guide their offspring and serve in a subordinate role to their male counterparts (Frankfort, 1977). According to Ginzberg (1990), “to many nineteenth-century observers, women’s presumably sheltered environment sustained their truer morality. As long as a woman did not leave her sphere, God had ordained that she be protected by some degree of inherent goodness . . . piety and moral virtue had come to be associated with female qualities” (p 11). Women were not only expected to provide a solid moral upbringing for their children, they were expected to provide benevolent service in their communities. Purveyors of compassion, women had “a special responsibility to alleviate harsh conditions” (Ginzberg, 1990, p. 15). Further, according to Ginzberg (1990), “an ideology about morality and gender was central to a process by which an emerging middle and upper-middle class would identify its own social station . . . . Women played an active role in shaping culture institutions—and, indeed, the culture of class itself” (p. 18).
Society revered the values of individual achievement, wealth, power, and fame—values that “fit the aspirations of men of the professional, entrepreneurial, and trading classes . . . [while] women were being confined to domesticity and thus excluded from the concerns most valued in their own milieus” (Epstein, 1981, p. 67). According to Weaver (1985), “Trade unionists, novelists, religious leaders, doctors, and most women apparently believed that employment of women, especially wives, violated natural law and endangered the nation” (p. 21).

MacDonald (1980) suggested that the subordination of women was a key element of capitalistic society:

Within a capitalistic mode of production, patriarchal relations which are characterized by male-female hierarchy and dominance assume specific historical forms, at the economic, the political and ideological levels. Even though patriarchal forms of control existed prior to the advent of capitalism, the economic and social subordination of women has, nevertheless, become an integral element of the capitalist social formation . . . . In the capitalist economy, patriarchal relations have a specific material base in, for example, the separation of the family from the production process, in the economic dependence of women on men. (p. 13)

From the 1800s until well into the twentieth century, debates continued over the appropriateness of higher education for American women. According to Chamberlain (1988), “it was widely believed the intellectual activity was contrary to feminine nature and harmful to women’s health and reproductive capacity” (p. 5). According to Weaver (1985), “physicians argued that their [women’s] brains were smaller than those of men
and that intellectual stimulation would have a deleterious effect on their reproductive abilities” (p. 39).

Despite popular disapproval, the number of women entering higher education continued to grow. “In the 1870s, one of five college students was female, and, by 1920, 47 percent of all college students were women” (Coburn & Smith, 1999, p. 178). This increase was a direct result of the initiatives of educators, professionals, politicians, feminists and, eventually, the general public. However, women continued to face challenges. In the forefront were considerations of women’s appropriate roles in society, the believed dire physical consequences awaiting women who attended colleges, and the idea that women would only distract males and lower academic standards (Chamberlain, 1988).

In the late 1920s, women’s colleges were founded more “to create a center for missionary activities and to provide a place where young ladies might be given an opportunity to cultivate moral virtues rather than to foster intellectual development” (Hassenger, 1967, p. 83). It was also during this time period that the fight for women’s suffrage was perceived as “the means by which certain benevolent reforms concerning moral welfare might be enacted, rather than representing a woman’s right to participate fully in political and professional life” (Brody, 1975, p. lxii).

A woman’s role was clearly defined and attempts to challenge that role were met with disdain. According to Coburn and Smith (1999),

Former Harvard professor Dr. Edward Clarke labeled women’s higher education as „a crime before God and humanity” and so damaging to the female apparatus that American males would have to import European women to be mothers of the
race. Charles Darwin concluded that motherhood disadvantaged females and that through natural selection they gradually fell behind their male counterparts. The medical and psychiatric establishment published scientific data providing that women had smaller brains, so mental and physical breakdown was assured. (p. 178)

In the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, “the women’s club movement, volunteer work, and civic activism... provided opportunities for women to develop leadership skills” (Rosenthal, 1998, p. 848), collaborative influence, and a consensual leadership style. This less hierarchal and more consensual style of leadership has provided a successful approach for women leaders (Helgesen, 1990) in education and corporate venues.

It was not until the twentieth century that society began to consider male and female differences in the workplace, as many women went to work to support the national efforts in World Wars I and II. “The growth of modern administration brought women into domination in the office, but left them absent in management” (Kanter, 1977, p. 26).

After World War II, two out of three girls who entered college dropped out before they even finished (Gardner, 1993). Even as women began to access higher education, they faced new challenges. In her essay What’s a Nice Working-Class Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?, Gardner (1993) described her experience as a woman pursuing higher education in the 1950s: “As women, we were well aware of our anomalous position within an institution whose structure and ideology reinforced patriarchal values. As a consequence, we frequently saw ourselves as outside the
mainstream of university life, alienated and invisible” (p. 50). Despite increased access to higher education, women faced discrimination in traditionally male professions, resulting in gender-segregated careers. “For women this meant specializing in education, child development, home economics, social welfare, or fine arts” (Faragher & Howe, 1988, p. 169). Furthermore, women’s increased access to education failed to produce a beneficial outcome, primarily because hegemonic stereotypes overshadowed the quality of the education experience.

In the 1950s, capable women showed no signs of wanting to be anything more than “suburban housewives and mothers” (Friedan, 1963, p. 228). Many of the women who were provided access to higher education sought husbands in the process, subordinating the value of an education to domesticity. For other women, work provided new challenges and opportunities, and by the mid-70s, many hit barriers as they tried to progress into leadership roles.

Scientific management and bureaucratization prevented women from entering administrative roles because of the societal belief in male dominance and the public perception that men should lead and women should follow (Shakeshaft, 1987). In her profound book The Second Sex, DeBeauvoir (1952) summarized the gender hierarchy: “this world, always belonging to men, still retains the form they have given it” (p. 680). Because it was still the norm for women to care for a family and a home, they were dependent on their husband’s economic activity. The husband served as provider and hence secured the primary role in the family. Even when a woman worked outside the home for wages, her work retained a “secondary character” (Cott, 1977, p. 21).
In the 1950s and the early 1960s, gender policy issues were in the forefront, but societal concern focused on creating positions for men in order to provide role models for boys and employ them after World War II (Marshall, 2000). Greater numbers of women entered the workforce during World War II, and, during the 1950s and 1960s, many were ready to progress into leadership roles. It was at this time that research and policy issues began to identify the reasons so few women moved up and whether or not they made competent leaders.

In 1985, Weaver suggested that it was during the 1960s that “male psychologists studied boys and girls and discovered profound differences between them; sociologists of the family, like Talcott Parsons, described masculine behavior as that suited to the role of the breadwinner. Men . . . were naturally aggressive, rational, objective, and commanding, whereas women were passive, emotional, subjective, and obedient” (pp. 39-40). It was believed that men were cut out for the workplace, women for the home. Women were considered to lack motivation and to be inexperienced in public relations, finance, and politics. The goal of research and policy, if women were to enter the workforce, was to create programs to “fix” women’s deficiencies (Marshall, 2000).

Zinsser (1993) asserted that it was not until the 1960s that women’s history was considered significant enough to warrant textbooks and university courses dedicated to its study. “Simply, women were not viewed as an integral part of the historical record. The vast majority remained silent and invisible, their history subsumed under general description of men’s lives” (Zinsser, 1993, p. 3).

Despite initiatives to research leadership and promote women’s advancement as early as the 1960s and 1970s (Hartman, 1999), women in leadership roles remained
scarce. According to Hartman, women’s pursuit of formal leadership positions had failed to keep pace with advances in civil rights, suffrage, access to education, improved health care, and legislation to protect women from sexual violence.

With the 1970s evolved the women’s movement, feminism, and an uprising against traditional patriarchy (Douglas, 1994). The news media of the decade played a central role in “turning feminism into a dirty word, and stereotyping the feminist as a hairy-legged, karate-chopping commando with a chip on her shoulder the size of China, really bad clothes, and a complete inability to smile” (Douglas, 1994, p. 165). Helen Reddy’s “I Am Woman” hit number one on the billboard charts.

The “profound cultural schizophrenia about women’s place in society that had been building since the 1940s and 1950s” (Douglas, 1994, p. 165) gave way to the women’s liberation movement, resulting in national media attention, demonstrations in the street, and bra-burning ceremonies. It was the beginning of a societal shift, evolving stereotypes, and changing expectations for women. According to Eisenmann (2006),

The turn to social analysis and collective action that marked the post-1960s feminist movement and colored later views of female activism was largely absent in the thinking of early postwar women. In their minds, feminism was an identification to be avoided. Three decades removed from the suffrage movement, the term feminism connotes the unseemly activities of a previous suffragist generation; in a post milieu focused on women’s domesticity, such activism was distasteful. In addition, many prominent women, including educators, had succeeded by following mainstream expectations, and they were disinclined to advise younger colleagues to do otherwise. Moreover, by the 1950s
feminism was often linked to communism in the same way that homosexuality and civil rights activism had been tainted.” (p. 2)

During the 1970s, a cohort of behind-the-scenes women established themselves in leadership roles in higher education despite patriarchal influences and societal expectations. The overwhelming majority of women who were college presidents were also nuns. “Of 1,500 persons who were presidents of four-year colleges, 95 were women and of these 84 were nuns and 2 were ex-nuns” (Chamberlain, 1988, p. 317). During that time, 60 men were presidents of women’s colleges, but not a single woman headed a men’s college.

Affirmative action programs and societal attitude shifts provided opportunities for women in education leadership, but it took efforts by the women themselves to benefit from these new opportunities (Chamberlain, 1988). It was during the 1970s that a number of programs were launched to promote interest and progression for women in leadership roles.

Founded in 1972, the Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) originated as the project of a small group of academic women under the leadership of Sheila Tobias (associate provost of Wesleyan University)—it called itself the Committee for the Concerns of Women in New England Colleges and Universities (Tobias, 1998). The high level administrators who made up the membership nominated women for positions as institutions aligned hiring with federal affirmative action regulations. HERS expanded services and offered seminars and training.

From the mid-1970s, many companies recruited women leaders but didn’t promote necessary cultural changes to provide a supportive place for women to thrive,
resulting in disproportionate turnover for women compared to men (Mattis, 2001). Employers began to review practices and culture in an attempt to enhance recruitment, retention, and professional development of women leaders.

Self-help books for women aspiring to leadership roles encouraged women to adopt male rules and game-playing in order to succeed in a male-dominated environment. Hennig and Jardim (1976), the authors of The Managerial Woman, encouraged professional women to study sports and master strategy in order to gain an understanding of success from a male perspective. They suggested that women “lack men”s focus on the all important question, „What”s in it for me?”” (p. 39). Harragan (1977) promoted indoctrination into the military mindset in order to mitigate female deficiencies such as emotionalism and empathy.

Founded in 1977 as a means to advance women in higher education, the National Identification Program was established by the American Council on Education (ACE). Its purpose was to identify female candidates for leadership, increase visibility of the candidates, and create and promote networks of both women and men who were committed to the promotion of female leaders in higher education (Chamberlain, 1988). By the mid-1980s, development and advancement of women in leadership was no longer about “fixing women” but, instead, about “educating employers that their expanding ranks of female managers and professionals were a business resource” (Mattis, 2001, p. 372).

In her ground-breaking book The Female Advantage: Women’s Ways of Knowing, Helgesen (1990) celebrated distinctly female traits as applied to the leadership arena. Through diary studies, she identified aspects of the way women led, challenging public
perceptions about being a leader and suggesting that female characteristics enhanced leadership abilities. These characteristics included concern for people, focus on both ends and means, planning and communication, and existential mindset. Helgesen (1990) described one of the reasons the participants in her study appeared to be better managers, their “active involvement in the domestic sphere” (p. 31). She asserted, “motherhood is being recognized as an excellent school for managers, demanding many of the same skills: organization, pacing, the balancing of conflicting claims, teaching, guiding, leading, monitoring, handling disturbances, imparting information” (Helgesen, 1990, pp. 31-32).

The 1990s showed increased numbers of women leaders, especially in the field of education, where the industry was considered to be a good fit for female leadership traits. Nevertheless, women remained disadvantaged despite 20 years of workplace and academic growth (Kloot, 2004). By 2002, women occupied 28% of the presidencies at community colleges (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006), as conceptualizations of college presidents’ approach to leadership changed from the “take charge” “great man” approach to approaches emphasizing participatory and shared decision making—approaches that are more often associated with women leaders (Chliwniak, 1997; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). When asked to describe a defining trait of women leaders, specifically as it related to selecting a job and staying with it, Barsh and Cranston stated “women consistently cite the meaningful elements of the work” (2009, p. 22) as a means to higher commitment levels.

In summary, women have progressed from moral leaders for their families (Frankfort, 1977) and servants to their communities (Ginzberg, 1990) to leaders in the
workplace. Higher education, once considered a means to women’s moral development, provided critical academic and career training for women in the workplace (Hassenger, 1967). As new leaders, women faced a number of challenges to acceptance, such as the societal belief that men should lead and women should follow (Shakeshaft, 1987). During the 70s, self-help books encouraged women to adopt male rules and game playing in order to succeed in a male-dominated environment (Harragan, 1977; Hennig & Jardim, 1976). In the late 80s, Helegesen (1990) changed the way society viewed women leaders. She celebrated female traits as they applied to the leadership arena and the ways women lead. Helegesen recognized motherhood as an excellent school for managers. By 2002, women occupied 28% of the presidencies at community colleges. The following section will examine women leaders in academia.

**Women and Higher Education Leadership**

Historically, higher education has responded to social needs and evolved over decades to meet societal demands. In the early American years, clergymen served as moral leaders, educators, and fund-raisers. After the Civil War, research universities were developed, and faculty gained authority. During World War II, academic presidents served political roles, building coalition and support (Bornstein, 2003), and “by the dawn of the twenty-first century, the academic presidency was more complex than ever before” (Bornstein, 2003, p. 3).

As the complexity increased, the duration of the employment of college leaders shortened. Legitimacy became a significant problem. According to Bornstein (2003):

In the decade of the 1990s, higher education was vigorously attacked by academics, journalists, and legislators on the basis of some well-publicized abuses
and misconduct, including rule violations in big-time athletics, misuse of government-sponsored university research dollars, and high levels of student loan defaults. Added to these issues was the widespread perception that political correctness was permeating the academy, tuition was being increased faster than the rate of inflation, there was an overemphasis on research at the expense of teaching, undergraduate education was being neglected, most scholarly research was useless, and presidents had little influence in their institutions or in the public arena. (p. 4)

Exceptional challenges have continued to plague higher education institutions, and there remains a need for better leadership (Madsen, 2008) and an expanded pool of leadership candidates. Integrity, transparency, and commitment to academic values are core requirements (Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009). “Women remain underrepresented in academic leadership and must exercise personal agency for fostering their own advancement and challenging inequities” (Ummersen, 2009). According to Eddy (2008), “a projected rapid turnover in administrative positions may present opportunities for more women to break through the glass ceiling and ascend to positions of authority at 2-year colleges” (p. 8).

In 2009, Jackson and O’Callaghan analyzed 66 documents in an effort to “advance theoretical and practical knowledge regarding glass ceiling effects in higher education” (p. 460). They viewed the glass ceiling concept as “a set of impediments and/or barriers to career advancement for women and people of color” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009, p. 460), and they noted that women and people of color who achieved senior level positions in higher education “are disproportionately located in
two-year colleges and less prestigious four-year institutions” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009, p. 461). They concluded that “glass ceiling effects operate throughout a woman’s career, and may get worse as her career grows” (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009, p. 469) and that the women they studied experienced more personal obstacles and less institutional support than their male peers (Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009).

In 2008, Eddy asserted “statistics indicate that women hold fewer presidencies and obtain them later in life” (p. 19). In the early twenty-first century, women gained ground, and as the number of women presidents increases, society will be exposed to other methods of leadership (Eddy, 2008).

In their study of nine women educational leaders, Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper (1998) identified marginalization as a means to “redraw cultural, geographic, and institutional boundaries” (p. 142), discovered that a collective voice produces greater effect than an individual voice, and concluded that strong educational leaders embrace their responsibilities as a means of overcoming gender discrimination. In her study of 10 female university presidents, Madsen (2008) identified four key ingredients to their leadership in higher education: (a) self-assessment and willingness to change, (b) self-reflection and contemplation, (c) learning from failures, and (d) passion for personal and professional development. Through identification of successful leadership techniques, women can learn from other women leaders and self-assess leadership efficacy.

In summary, women in academic leadership have been disproportionally located in two-year colleges (Jackson & Callaghan, 2009) despite a need for improved leadership throughout higher education institutions (Madsen, 2008). Anticipated turnover in administrative positions should provide increased opportunities for women to move into
key administrative roles (Eddy, 2008), if they can break through the glass ceiling (Jackson & Callaghan, 2009). In the following section, Catholic higher education, patriarchal hierarchy, and the role of women leaders is explored.

**Catholic Higher Education**

In the late nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century, religious Sisterhoods began to found women’s colleges at a time when access to higher education for women was contested (Schier & Russett, 2002). According to Curran (1990), “the Catholic purposes and goals of higher education, together with the neoscholastic philosophy that Pope Leo XIII endorsed in 1879 as the Catholic philosophy, developed an ideology and corresponding curriculum for Catholic higher education that clashed strongly with the educational philosophy of the mainstream of American higher education” (p. 29).

While the Catholic Church embraced the concept of single-sex institutions of higher education, members of the middle class society continued to struggle with the impact of higher education on women’s traditional family roles. “The conception of the emerging university as an institution directly involved in the political, economic, and industrial development of the nation was essentially new replacing the antebellum belief that colleges should primarily produce theological leaders and upstanding local citizens” (Nemec, 2006, p. 23).

Evident on all levels of the Catholic educational system was the authoritarian temper that permeated the governing bodies of the Church (McCluskey & Hesburgh, 1970). According to McCluskey and Hesburgh, “. . . almost every aspect of the lives of Catholics—doctrinal, moral, educational, etc.—was determined on high. Deviations
from the accepted pattern of belief and behavior were viewed at best as eccentricities, so
completely and unquestioningly did the lower clergy and the laity accept the ruling of
their major religious superiors” (p. 228).

Church leaders taught constituents that women’s destiny was in the home, where
a collegiate level of education was unnecessary. However, it was not only the Catholic
Church that propelled prejudice against higher education for women. Despite public
condemnation, diligent and committed first generation women proved worthy of a college
education and capable of rigors previously only afforded to men (Schier & Russett,
2002). As a result, societal prejudice waned. But the Catholic culture remained firm in
its conservative expectations for women and aligned with patriarchal European ideals,
encouraging women to stay home where they belonged (Schier & Russett, 2002).

As a result, many of the colleges founded by Catholic Sisters addressed the
pragmatic needs of women, and professional training focused on education and nursing.
Most of the students were the first in their families to attend college, and graduates were
unlikely to attain positions of prominence (Schier & Russett, 2002). This is likely one
reason these Catholic institutions were less visible to the public than traditional colleges
and universities catering to a male population. In addition:

…the lives of these women religious were lived out under strictures imposed by a
male church hierarchy that deemed them most virtuous when most hidden. The
richness of the lives of Roman Catholic nuns who, throughout two millennia, have
been teachers, scholars, artists, mystics, and writers has accordingly not been well
documented. Nor has attention been paid to the influence of their teaching,
scholarship, artistic output, mystical experience, and writing. Even within
Catholic circles, the story of Catholic higher education for women and of the women who made it happen remains a closed book. (Schier & Russett, 2002, p. 3)

In the meantime, as part of a changing culture in Catholic higher education, laypersons have assumed the majority of leadership roles in Catholic institutions, leaving the legacy of the religious men and women who preceded them unrecorded (Morey & Piderit, 2006). Prior to the influx of lay leadership, Catholic school leaders have been faced with the challenge of transmitting Catholic cultures and beliefs to future generations of young people in an effort to instill commitment to social justice.

According to Coburn and Smith (1999), three factors contributed to the creation of Catholic women’s colleges: (a) Catholic laywomen were already attending college in state or secular institutions, which was considered a threat to their faith; (b) nuns who were increasingly required to obtain college coursework and degrees to meet professional state accreditation in education were also attending secular institutions; and (c) no existing Catholic college or university admitted women. Sullivan (2001) asserted “a Catholic university’s accountability to the church in respect of the philosophy should be that of showing not only that the university has made provision for the performance of philosophy’s integrative tasks, but that it had done so in accordance with the prescriptions of and in the spirit of the encyclical Faith and Reason” (p. 11).

In her book, Through the Windows: A History of the Work of Higher Education Among the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sister Mary Jeremy Daigler (2001) wrote, One of the curiosities of the written history of education in the United States is that the stories of the many colleges founded by communities of Catholic Sisters are routinely omitted from the books written by even those authors who are
dedicated to the exposition of women’s history. There is little mention of the more than 190 colleges (30% of those established for women in the country) founded by communities of Catholic Sisters in response to women’s need for higher learning, which would otherwise be inaccessible to them. Women in general, and Catholic Sisters to an even more detrimental degree, have been unable to take center stage and to spend time and energy to make their accomplishments known. (p. 2)

Daigler described the cultural influence of the spiritual virtue of humility as a primary deterrent to publication of accomplishments. She also asserted that sisters in higher education found their time better served in pragmatic purposes, applying academic disciplines to tenure and promotion in preparation better to serve their students, immersing themselves in teaching and the study of administration.

Schier and Russett (2002), in their book about Catholic women’s colleges, addressed the invisibility of Catholic women’s institutions, while providing a comprehensive history of these institutions:

How to explain the neglect of these institutions by scholars? It certainly cannot be explained in terms of the numbers of young women who have passed through their doors, for these colleges have educated many more women than the renown Seven Sisters (Wellesley, Vassar, Smith, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, Barnard, and Mount Holyoke). It has been estimated that slightly more than half of all the colleges for women in the United States were founded by religious sisterhoods. (Schier & Russett, 2002, p. 1)
Four years later, in 2006, Morey and Piderit published their findings from a national study of Catholic higher education that focused on 124 senior administrators from 33 Catholic colleges and universities as they shared their “own convictions about the enterprise of Catholic higher education” (p. 4). This project focused on the Catholic tradition and the features that make Catholic education unique, such as a vibrant religious culture, an ability to educate the whole person, and a noble mission to inspire and develop faith, reason, and personal values.

More recently there are conflicting perspectives about the future of denominational higher education. One viewpoint suggested a secularization of Christian colleges, not necessarily including Catholic colleges and universities, based on a decreasing pool of students, restriction of Christian perspective in requirements for grants and federal funds, competitive curricular additions, and marketing strategies and career emphasis (Lawrence, 2007). Opposing this view was the belief that colleges with a distinct religious identity have been flourishing. According to Miller (2006), “new Catholic colleges are being established, while enrollments at Christian colleges and universities increased by two-thirds in the decade between 1992 and 2002” (p. 6).

While commitments to social justice and environmental stewardship align well with a Catholic college identity, some more conservative critics expressed concern with the conflict between “academic freedom and doctrinal assent” (Miller, 2006, p. 6). As a result, Catholic institutions must be prepared to handle a clash between academic pursuits and commitment to diversity, and “required statements of faith” (Miller, 2006 p. 6). Leaders in Catholic higher education must be prepared to take a stance on issues such as women’s and gay rights.
In summary, religious Sisterhoods founded women’s colleges at a time when access to higher education for women was contested (Schier & Russett, 2002). Church leaders perpetuated gender discrimination and oppression of women; however, women proved worthy of a college education and capable of the rigors previously only afforded to men (Schier & Russett, 2002). As Catholic higher education expanded, conflict underscored expansion initiatives, academic freedom, and doctrines of the Church. The next section examines the complexities of gender, religious identity, and leadership as they relate to the women who led higher education institutions.

**Gender, Religious Identity, and Leadership**

Understanding the ways that “women have negotiated their roles within the gendered power dynamics of …religious traditions provides the keys to understanding and analyzing women’s contributions in the church and in larger society” (Coburn & Smith, 1999, p. 6). According to Coburn and Smith (1999), American Catholic sisterhoods had four unique characteristics: (a) ethnic and class diversity, (b) lifelong education and work, (c) perpetual vows, and (d) a distinctive environment and tradition. These qualities “created an unprecedented female power base that enabled independent activity, limited patriarchal interference and control, and significantly shaped American Catholic culture and public life” (Coburn & Smith, 1999, p. 8).

Coburn and Smith (1999) asserted that “The Sisters’ vow of ‘holy obedience’ to their female superior provided a buffer to patriarchal authority, permitting them to resist pressure from male clerics, who utilized gender and hierarchal privileges to manipulate the Sisters” (p. 9). Fialka (2003) pointed out that “vowing to live a life of celibacy, agreeing to obey male superiors, and living on a few dollars a month might seem
hopelessly anachronistic to many modern women—to some, downright un-American. But the three vows created strong, disciplined, selfless organizations that adapted very well to the rigors of America” (p.3). The convent provided an alternative to marriage and motherhood. The sisterhood also provided an avenue to a career well before laywomen were invited into that arena. Many Sisters defied gender stereotypes, revealing drive, ambition, and an entrepreneurial spirit. According to Fialka (2003), Sisters were the greatest risk-takers of the Catholic Church, “taking out big mortgages to build schools and hospitals, gambling on a future that would rise above the shanties and mean streets where they worked” (p. 8).

In the 1950s and 60s, stereotypes weren’t limited to gender expectations. Hollywood portrayed Catholic sisters as magical beings who prayed, sang to the heavens, and even flew. In the late 1960s, Sally Fields starred in *The Flying Nun*, a popular show about a sister whose habit allowed her literally to fly to the rescue. Coburn and Smith (1999) described nuns as otherworldly creatures, naïve and sheltered from secular influences. They suggested that the public image of nuns reinforced gender ideology, supporting domesticity and submission. Cartoons created a different archetype, with drawings of “stern, old, ruler-wielding women itching to whack unruly youngsters” (Fialka, 2003, p. 13). It was believed that most of the Sisters employed punitive consequences as a means of teaching important lessons:

For the most part, nuns were typically young women fired with faith and idealism but often saddled with classes of sixty or more pupils as the Catholic school system exploded. Educators are still probing what they managed to accomplish. There is the mysterious “Catholic School Effect,” which causes some students,
particularly those from poor economic backgrounds, to regularly outperform their peers in public schools. The source of this magic, academics are finding, is not the ruler. It is love. (Fialka, 2003, pp. 14-15)

During that time, society drew on the compassion, the intellect, and the talent of Catholic Sisters. According to Schier and Russett (2002), “when the need for and desirability of Catholic colleges for women became increasingly evident (some Catholic young women were so bold as to attend secular colleges!), religious sisters were the obvious people to undertake the creation” (p. 4). The sisters were highly organized and had a long tradition of relative independence and initiative (Schier & Russett, 2002).

Catholic Sisters waged a battle against public perceptions and science that dated from the Middle Ages in the name of social justice. According to Ruether and McLaughlin (2002), “Catholic nuns, though they belonged to an extremely patriarchal church whose male hierarchy defined female roles according to medieval notions that women were irresponsible, soft-brained and incapable of logical thought, were in some ways the most liberated women in nineteenth-century America” (as cited in Schier & Russett, 2002, p. 4). Schier and Russett (2002) asserted that the sisters’ religious vocation allowed them to transcend gender roles considered normative. “Through the ages they had created intellectual and educational spaces in times and places where women were discouraged from intellectual pursuits and purposely excluded from higher education” (Schier & Russett, 2002, p. 5).

The earliest women leaders in higher education were the Catholic Sisters who founded women’s colleges. They set out to educate women to become leaders, and in this way, they expanded the opportunities for laywomen. With the exception of religious
sisters, “Catholic women as a whole have not been conspicuously identified with the assertive advancement of women’s issues” (Lindley as cited in Daigler, 2001, p. 3). Their voices have remained silent despite great accomplishments. Daigler (2001) suggested that part of fostering an environment that is supportive to the development of women is dispelling the myths that undermine public understanding of the accomplishments of Catholic sisters. Too often the patriarchal hierarchy of the Church assumed the credit for the accomplishments of Catholic Sisters. According to Daigler (2001):

Primary among the myths about women religious is that of a dependent relationship on the Catholic Church hierarchy: that local bishops mandated the funding of the colleges and controlled their early years, and that therefore the women deserve no credit. Another strong myth is that bishops and popes provide ongoing financial subsidy for the colleges and can therefore expect unthinking loyalty from the women. Finally, some argue that the Sisters are unfair competitors against the laity for employment, tenure, and promotion because those mythical subsidies allow them to work for low salaries, and that therefore their professional work is evaluated by different standards than the laity’s.” (p. 4)

Women religious were expected to accept their fate within the constructs of the Catholic Church, humbly to defer credit for their accomplishments, and to maintain a stance of obedience to the Church and its patriarchal hierarchy. As a result, “those engaged in the struggle for the equality of the sexes have often seen the Catholic Church as an enemy . . . . Catholic teaching has prolonged a traditional view of woman which at the same time idealizes and humiliates her” (Daly, 1968, p. 53).
For Catholic Sisters, the convent provided an alternative to domestic life (Fialka, 2003). As leaders, Sisters were held to societal standards influenced by Hollywood and the media (Coburn & Smith, 1999). These expectations for the ways Sisters were expected to behave impacted their abilities to perform in their roles. As a result, Sisters who wished to be leaders had to learn to navigate the Church’s patriarchal hierarchy and societal paradigms. The following section explores the Catholic tradition and the history of women religious.

**Catholicism: History of Women Religious**

In 1985, Weaver said, “female invisibility in history is not accidental. The landscape of history, as of every other discipline, has been defined by men so as to exclude women” (pp. 1-2). Catholic Sisters who founded schools and hospitals are missing from history books. Their stories, rich in cultural traditions and grounded in the patriarchy of the Church, have yet to be told. Their voices have yet to be heard. According to McDannell (2011),

In the past ten years, what has stood out in the American Catholic Church has been the sex abuse scandals. Priests preying on boys and young men along with the reluctance of bishops to end this behavior have rightfully grabbed the attention of both Catholics and non-Catholics. This attention, however, plays into an enduring misunderstanding of Catholicism: that the Catholic Church is energized, defined, and determined by the actions of men. Most of the written Catholic history has resolved around men because it is the story of priests, theologians, and popes. Too often women drop out of this history. (p. 12)
During Medieval times, women were considered inferior to men, incapable of Christian ministry. Men even debated whether or not women had souls (Tucker & Liefeld, 1987). Women could not accept communion with their bare hands, nor could they partake in Holy Communion and the Eucharist during their menstrual cycle because they were considered to be unclean (Tucker & Liefeld, 1987).

During the Middle Ages (1066-1485) women were seen as inferior to men, and as a result, they were often victims of sexual harassment, forced to endure both verbal and physical abuse. Women who entered convents did so with “lofty ideas and standards” (Tucker & Lieeld, 1987, p. 134), only to be disappointed by the strict rules and patriarchal structure. During the Catholic Reformation (16th century), women sought a life of service as an alternative to domesticity, but their work for oppressed populations met opposition from the Church when the papal order of the time wanted them to remain cloistered (Tucker & Liefeld, 1987).

The history of Catholicism encompassed distinct periods of transition and structures in the Church. For 300 years, and well into the nineteenth century, the Council of Trent (1545-1563), designed as a response to the Protestant Reformation, defined religious life (McDannell, 2011). The Council, held in Trent, Italy, had been called “to clarify Catholic doctrine, strengthen the boundaries between Protestant and Catholic thought, and address abuses that were damaging the Church from within” (McDannell, 2011, p. 22). As a result of the Council meeting, the Vatican published the Missale Romanum, “laying out the proper structure and prayers of the Mass. This text remained unchanged for the next four hundred years” (McDannell, 2011, p. 22).
For the first time Catholics had written doctrines to follow, which was a significant development since the Middle Ages (Redmont, 1992). Many of these ideas have stayed intact in modern Catholicism. Medieval thinking encompassed a belief in a supernatural order that superseded the natural order. This tradition viewed reason and faith as compatible (Redmont, 1992). However, the subsequent Enlightenment challenged the supernatural and stressed the “innate strength of human reason over divine revelation” (McDannell, 2011, p. 23).

According to McDannell (2011), “Catholic leaders had watched as political and philosophical revolutionaries in France, Italy, and Germany had taken property away from monastic orders, killed and humiliated priests, ordered religious instruction out of schools, denied the existence of miracles, and turned Christ into a philosophical teacher rather than a supernatural savior” (p. 22). Vatican I responded to the Enlightenment and changing political situation of Europe. As a result, in 1870 the Council Fathers approved Dei Filius, which was a “dogmatic constitution” that proclaimed God’s authority and power over the human mind and staked claim over interpretation of the Scriptures (McDannell, 2011).

From 1959-1965 Pope John XXIII and his successor, Paul VI, announced the second Vatican Council, which did not define new dogmas, but instead spoke to the world at large “about the character of the Church itself, its inner life, and its mission in the world” (Redmont, 1992, p. 38). As part of the proposed Constitution, two American bishops submitted some remarks about women: “the Church has been slow in denouncing the degradation of women in slavery and in claiming for them the right of suffrage and economic equality” (Yzermans, 1967, p. 202). Their proposals included
recommendations for liturgical functions of women, including administration of sacraments, increased lay apostolate, women religious participation and representation in matters of concern, and increased opportunities for women, both religious and laity, to serve the Church (Tavard, 1973). According to Redmont (1992),

One of the changes Catholic women most wanted to see in the Church was the opportunity for women to bring this wisdom [based on distinctive experience] into the public forum, whether the pulpit, the seminary classroom, or the policy-making bodies of the Church community. Many women longed for the powerful symbol of female leadership in the sacramental life of the Church, but even more of them wanted, quite simply, a public voice in the Church’s corporate life. (p. 32)

Prior to Vatican II, women religious served in administrative roles in grammar schools, high schools, and colleges, and in hospitals. Few laywomen enjoyed this responsibility and prestige at the time. However, after Vatican II laywomen were encouraged to participate in more prominent roles (Wallace, 1992). According to Wallace, “the new Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983, made some provisions for the expansion of women’s roles in the Church” (p. 10).

Still denied ordination, women were invited to entertain other positions in their diocese, including pastoral administration in priestless parishes (Wallace, 1992). This was one way to solve the shortage of priests without extending full equality to women.

**Summation and Chapter Conclusion**

Historians and researchers have offered limited insight into the lives of the Catholic Sisters who have shaped Catholic culture, provided leadership in a higher
education setting, and educated women to become future leaders. Many questions have been left unanswered as these leaders remained invisible.

In 2008, Susan R. Madsen published her study of women university presidents, a qualitative analysis of the influences and opinions of 10 women serving as college presidents or chancellors. However, her study failed to include the “invisible” religious sector and the Catholic leaders who might offer a unique perspective about the role of college president. Knowledge and understanding of these leadership concepts can offer insight that future leaders can apply to their own leadership endeavors. Catholic Sisters served as educational leaders long before women began serving in secular educational leadership roles.

Missing from the literature have been the voices of the women leaders who founded Catholic colleges and those who served as college presidents in a time when women leaders were a rarity. According to Chamberlain (1988), “recent scholarship on Catholic women’s higher education is nearly non-existent. This is unfortunate because these institutions constitute over half of all the women’s colleges in the United States” (p. 112). An exploration of Catholic women’s contributions to the role of women leaders in higher education will fill a void in the body of knowledge about education leadership.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

—Women hold up half of the sky”
Chinese Proverb

—For the sky to be complete, both halves must work together; nothing can be truly human
that excludes one half of humanity”
Sally Helgesen, 1990

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the lived experiences of Catholic Sisters who have served as college president; to gain an understanding of their perceptions and perspectives as they relate to leadership and leadership efficacy; to identify the role, if any, that gender and religion play (or have played) in institutional and societal acceptance of their leadership in higher education; to explore the impact of gender and religion on the culture of the institution they serve; and to provide the participants with a voice in order to add to the current body of knowledge about leadership and higher education. To further understanding about this distinct group of leaders, I selected a phenomenological qualitative inquiry as the methodology of choice. Gaining knowledge about this specific cohort of women leaders can better inform future women leaders—and leaders in general—as they pursue administrative and executive level positions in higher education.

A review of recent and historical literature about women and higher education leadership revealed a gap in the area of Catholic higher education and the Catholic Sisters who have led many of the institutions of Catholic heritage. The present study was designed to examine the experiences of these women through face-to-face interview
sessions. Using naturalistic inquiry, qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 11 Catholic Sisters who had served or were serving as college presidents.

In order to explore the “meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon” (Patton, 2002, p. 104), the participants’ voices—both literally and metaphorically to represent their perspectives and understanding—were captured through thick rich description. This research attempted to discover “the nature and meaning of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 17) and to interpret themes and patterns across participants.

**Research Questions**

This study was designed to answer the following central research question:

How do Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents perceive their leadership?

The following sub-questions were developed to examine key dimensions of the central research question:

1. How do Catholic Sisters who have served in the role of college president define their success?

2. How do Catholic Sisters perceive their acceptance in society as leaders, and what factors contribute to those perceptions?

3. How did these Catholic Sisters exhibit qualities that challenged gender stereotypes?

4. How do Catholic Sisters who have served in the role of college president define gender and religion as they pertain to leadership and the culture of the institution?

**Conceptual Framework**

Based on the postmodern epistemological presumption that knowledge is socially constructed and dependent on the viewpoint and values of the investigator (Kvale &
Brickmann, 2009), a qualitative interview is the production site of knowledge, and “constructionism replaces the individual with the relationship as the locus of knowledge” (Gergen, 1994, p. x). The nature of this research warranted a qualitative interview study for the following reasons: (a) the study was field-focused naturalistic inquiry; (b) the researcher, a connoisseur of higher education leadership, served as an instrument, or a tool, in the research process; (c) data collection and analysis were interpretive; (d) data represented the voices of participants through expressive language; (e) research sought out and addressed the particulars including the unique perspectives and perceptions of each participant; and (f) the success of the research was judged by the coherence, insight, and instrumental utility of the study (Eisner, 1998). The research sought to evoke constructed realities through a holistic approach and to elicit subjective interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

As a critical, feminist researcher, I utilized a data collection method adapted from a post-positivist approach (Hatch, 2002) with an analysis undertaken within particular frames of reference: feminism, constructed self, and Catholicism (see Figure 1). Using interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002), which “fits most comfortably within the assumptions of the constructivist paradigm” (p. 189), interpretations were described as specific explanations for things that were happening in the lives of the Catholic leaders who participated in the study. Explanations were constructed within the a priori frames with the understanding that other interpretations were possible (Hatch, 2002). These conceptual frames were selected based on the literature about women and leadership and women and Catholicism. As a feminist and female leader in higher education, I wanted
to gain an understanding of the role of gender and the underpinnings of social justice as they relate to the leadership construct of Catholic Sisters who serve as college presidents.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the research study, including 3 elements: feminism, Catholicism, and the constructed self.

People construct a view of the world based on experiences and perceptions (Krauss, 2005). Thus, an understanding of the participants’ perceptions of effective leadership constructs and personal leadership efficacy offers valuable insight into the lived experiences of this unique cohort of leaders. While the term constructed self for purposes of this research exposed elements associated with constructivist learning theory, the definition used here related to the constructed self, a process by which people learn by reflecting on lived experiences and constructing personal knowledge and understanding of self and the world.
The framework of Catholicism was selected because I wanted to understand the impact of the Catholic faith and the Catholic Church on these leaders’ abilities to perform in their roles. These conceptual frames (see Figure 1) were considered in the development of the research questions and in the design for the semi-structured interview format.

**Research Methodology**

The University of North Florida Institutional Review Board approved the proposal for this research study on June 6, 2011 (see Institutional Review Board approval letter in Appendix A). Participants were identified in June of 2011 using a purposive sample from a list of Catholic colleges and universities provided in the appendix of Schier and Russett’s 2002 book *Catholic Women’s Colleges in America* and through the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities website and the identification of Catholic Sisters who have served in the role of college president. I located Tracy Schier, one of the authors of *Catholic Women’s Colleges in America*, and she provided referrals and access to some of the participants for my study. Eligible participants exhibited predetermined characteristics and shared a common experience (Patton, 2002), meeting the following criteria: (a) Catholic Sister and (b) must have served in the role of college president.

Participants were contacted via telephone and/or email, using a telephone script (see telephone script in Appendix B). An informed consent document was provided via email or U.S. mail prior to data collection. Because participants received a copy of the informed consent document weeks before the scheduled interviews, they had ample time to make a decision regarding whether or not to participate. Each participant signed the
informed consent document prior to her interview, with the option of a verbal consent for purposes of confidentiality (see Informed Consent document in Appendix C). This option was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Only one participant opted to provide consent verbally. Data were collected in June, July, and August of 2011. My husband and I traveled together during a three-week road trip, spanning 13 states and visiting colleges in six of the 13 states. For the research methodology, face-to-face semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Patton, 2002) were conducted with 11 Catholic institutional leaders. Eight of the interviews were conducted in participants’ offices on their respective campuses, and three of the interviews were conducted using Skype software. Focusing on context (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), the use of a semi-structured, in-depth interview format (Patton, 2002) with open-ended interview questions and probing allowed for some flexibility in the research (Merriam, 2009). The research attempted to elicit, inductively and holistically, the leadership experiences and expression of participant self-efficacy in the setting of each college campus (Patton, 2002) viewed through feminist, constructivist, and religious lenses.

Prior to conducting the face-to-face interviews at the locations selected by each participant, I introduced my husband to her and informed her that he would be transcribing the data. I explained that I included him as a transcriptionist in my Institutional Review Board application, and that he had been approved to assist. All of the participants were very gracious and kind. They did not seem hindered by the knowledge that my husband would have access to what they would be sharing with me during our interviews. A semi-structured format was used during the interviews, specifying questions as prompts for further discussion and allowing the participants’ voices to guide
the interviews (see Interview Questions in Appendix D). Only one participant requested that I send the questions prior to the scheduled interview session. For this participant, the questions were emailed two weeks before the face-to-face interview.

All of the interviews were digitally recorded using two devices and transcribed in their entirety. Interviews lasted between 1 hour and 3 hours in length. Digital files were stored on the University of North Florida secure server. Once uploaded, digital files were deleted from the recording devices and laptop used for the study. Supplemental notes were taken throughout the interview process and during reflection between interviews.

My husband transcribed eight of the interviews, and I transcribed three of them. I read each of the eight transcripts I did not transcribe while listening to the recordings to ensure accuracy of the transcription. My husband became intimate with the data and served as a sounding board for my initial impressions and interpretations.

Upon completion of transcriptions and cross-checking, copies of the transcripts were emailed or mailed to the participants for review, and input was solicited regarding the accuracy of statements and representation of intent. Responses were solicited by email and U.S. mail. Three of the participants declined transcript review.

For those participants who returned edited transcripts, changes ranged from minor editing to the removing of entire sections of dialogue. Most of the changes were sent to me via email, but two participants opted to send hard copies with marked edits. Upon receipt of the edited transcripts, I followed up with several of the participants to discuss the changes and verify understanding of content and intent. Recommended changes were edited accordingly. Coded transcripts were retained for interpretation and analysis.
Researcher as Tool

My interest in the research topic stems from my Catholic upbringing, my personal participation in Catholic higher education, and my experience as a woman leader in higher education for the past 15 years. I was raised in a blue-collar German Catholic family. The middle of three girls, I was expected to graduate from high school, find a husband, marry, and raise a large Catholic family. My dad told me, “Girls don’t need an education.” I was the first in my family to earn a college degree.

I earned my Master of Arts degree at Rivier College, an institution founded by the Blessed Anne Marie Rivier of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. Rivier’s mission was to teach and serve the poor. Committed to social justice and service, Sister Anne Marie’s goal was to educate the daughters of working class families to become leaders.

I began my career in higher education as an assistant director of admissions at Rivier College. Over the past 15 years, I have worked for several higher education institutions, both traditional and for-profit. I served in a variety of roles, including Director of Admissions, Director of Education, Campus Director, President, Executive Director, and Regional Vice President of Operations.

Throughout my career as a woman leader, I faced limitations and barriers because of my gender. I worked in environments where the vast majority of the leaders were men who valued the leadership of other men. I quickly discovered that society had certain expectations about the ways women were supposed to behave. Even as I learned to navigate the patriarchal environments in which I worked, I continued to face inequities. At one point I discovered that a male colleague working in a comparable position with
less experience was earning a salary 60% higher than mine. These experiences contributed to my feminist stance and advocacy for women leaders.

As a connoisseur of higher education leadership (Eisner, 1998) with significant experiences impacted by gender, my life experiences allowed me to serve as a tool in my research (Eisner, 1998). As Moustakas (1994) pointed out, “the data of experience, my own thinking, intuiting, reflecting, and judging are regarded as the primary evidences of scientific investigation” (p. 59). I systematically sought out and acknowledged my own subjectivity in order to maintain a level of awareness of the ways that subjectivity shaped my understanding of the data (Peshkin, 1988). Through qualitative interviews, and from a feminist perspective, I explored the experiences of a sample of Catholic Sisters who served in the role of college president.

**Participants**

Of the 48 prospective participants identified through the process described earlier, contact was attempted with all 48. Responses to letters inviting participation in the study were received from 17 of the 48 potential participants. Six declined participation in the research study, with 11 eligible candidates agreeing to participate. The 11 participants represented colleges in six states of the U. S. Table 3 depicts the distribution of years served among the participants in the study.
Table 3

*Participant Tenure in Presidential Roles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Number of Participants in Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 to 5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 35</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Settings for the Research Study**

Of the 11 campuses where interviews were conducted, six were located in urban communities and five were situated in the suburbs. Eight of the 11 interviews were conducted on the college campuses of the participants. Two of the participants provided lodging and dining on campus and offered an inside perspective of campus life. Each campus had its own unique style and culture. Campus structures exhibited Victorian architecture, brick construction, or the clean lines of the mid-20th century. The inside of some of the buildings resembled monasteries, with cold corridors and stark meeting areas. Cement halls emitted damp musty odors like those in northern basements after a rainstorm. In other campuses, administrative buildings displayed ornate chandeliers, marble staircases, and cherry hand rails. Some of the offices of the participants were small and modest, and others were furnished with antiques from the 18th and 19th centuries.

At the time of data collection during the summer months, few students wandered the campus grounds. However, some of the institutions had invited students to attend summer athletic camps. This hustle and bustle charged otherwise subdued environments,
and cafeterias percolated with laughter and emitted smells of maple syrup and sausages. Other campuses, accented with stained glass and steeples, evoked a reflective solitude. Eager grounds crews tended to the fine details of campus landscaping. They pruned and mowed as subtle chimes sounded from the chapels.

Despite the disparities, all of the campuses shared a common feature. Pride was evident in the black and white photographs of past presidents, founding Sisters, and the many graduates of each institution, that were displayed in galleries near administrative offices. Photographs of recently graduated nurses wearing crisp uniforms with winged hats and capes and of new teachers clutching diplomas as they smiled for the camera lined passageways in and out of administrative areas.

The rich description and the details of campus environments were presented in a vague format to protect the identity of the participants. However, the settings in which the participants lived is important in order to appreciate the rich culture, historical legacy, and unique identity of each college campus. There is an expression used for new high school graduates when they visit prospective colleges. In order to make the right decision about their futures, they are told: “Visit the campus. When you step foot on the „right” campus, you’ll know it. You’ll feel it.”

Through leadership, Catholic Sisters impacted the culture of their institutions and contributed to the feel of their campus communities. For interviews conducted on campus, the setting influenced initial impressions of participants as leaders in their environment. In the next section, the analytical process is described.
Data Analysis Methodology

The qualitative data were analyzed using typological analysis (Hatch, 2002), interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002), and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). Bloomberg and Volpe’s (2008) recommendations for analysis were incorporated into the coding process, beginning with color-coding to identify prevailing themes within typologies, then applying explicit codes to subcategories (Boyatzis, 1998; Hatch, 2002). Thematic analysis provided a means of interpreting, organizing, and presenting the data.

Early stages of informal analysis occurred through reflection and journaling at the time of data collection. This process allowed me to capture initial impressions and reactions (Hatch, 2002) throughout the data collection process. These impressions, juxtaposed with the research questions and objectives, then contributed to the *a priori* typologies used for analysis. I categorized the data based on these predetermined typologies (see Table 4).

This approach—typological analysis—made sense because this study relied on interviews as the primary data collection tool with the goal of capturing participant perspectives around previously identified topics as stated in the research questions (Hatch, 2002). Interviews incorporated a “fairly focused purpose, a fairly narrow set of research questions, and a fairly well-structured data set in terms of its organization around a set of fairly consistent guiding questions” (Hatch, 2002, p. 152). In this way, data from the interviews offered perceptions of lived experiences relating to the topics of interest, and these topics were logical places to start analysis (Hatch, 2002).

The typologies included *definition of success, leadership efficacy as perceived by participants, factors contributing to leadership acceptance, and impact of gender and*
religion, if any, on leadership and culture of the institution. Data were read through with these typologies in mind, and areas where these typologies were evident were marked on the transcripts. Summaries of participant excerpts were recorded on a data chart organized by research question.

As part of the interpretive process, I read the data several times to gain a sense of the whole (Hatch, 2002), and I recorded notes in the margins. By rereading the transcripts several times and contemplating the data as they related to the conceptual framework, I was able to identify patterns and themes within the typologies. Each pattern or theme was highlighted in different colors (see Table 4), and subcategories within the highlighted colors were assigned codes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Boyatzis, 1998; Hatch, 2002). For example, the category of social justice was identified as a common theme, and within this category, feminism and gay rights (SJF-Social Justice Feminism), moral values (SJM—Social Justice Morals), and philanthropy and helping the poor/oppessed (SJP—Social Justice Poor) were coded.

In order to adopt this method, I reliably and consistently had to recognize codable moments, develop appropriate codes, and interpret the information and themes in the context of a theory or conceptual framework (Boyatzis, 1998) of feminism, Catholicism, and constructed self. From a hermeneutical viewpoint, “the interpretation of the meaning is the central theme” (Kvale & Brickmann, 2009, p. 50). Through my own connoisseurship, I identified patterns or themes within the a priori typologies as listed in Table 4.
Table 4
Themes Identified Within Typologies and Viewed Through Lens of Conceptual Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Color Code</th>
<th>Identified Pattern or Theme</th>
<th>Conceptual Lens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Social Justice, Service, &quot;Head to Heart to Hands&quot;</td>
<td>Feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aqua</td>
<td>Relationship Between Religion and Higher Education; Catholic Identity</td>
<td>Constructed Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, 4</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Viewpoint About Gender and Impact of Gender on Role of Leadership</td>
<td>Feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coral</td>
<td>Family Support, or Lack of Support; Overcoming Adversity</td>
<td>Feminism; Constructed Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 4</td>
<td>Plum</td>
<td>Stories; Legacy; Legends</td>
<td>Constructed Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 3</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Motivation for Decision to Become a Sister; Lifestyle; Options and Choices</td>
<td>Feminism; Constructed Self; Catholicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>Religious Authority and the Influence of the Church</td>
<td>Catholicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Self-identity--Separate from the Congregation and Separate from the Church</td>
<td>Feminism; Constructed Self; Catholicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 4</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Preparation for the Role of President, or Lack There-of, Obedience to Superiors</td>
<td>Feminism; Constructed Self; Catholicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 4</td>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Leadership Characteristics and Efficacy, Perception of Truth</td>
<td>Feminism; Constructed Self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Transcripts were color-coded to identify themes across participants. First-level themes included social justice (green), the relationship between religion and higher education (aqua), viewpoint and impact of gender and feminist perspective (orange), level and impact of family support (coral), stories, legends and legacy (plum), reasons for the life and decision to enter the convent (yellow), sectarian authority and impact of the Church on personal and professional life (pink), self-identify and individual
characteristics (blue), preparation for role of president (red), and leadership characteristics and efficacy (purple). Color-coded transcripts were further coded to include second-level identifiers. In this way, data were organized by subcategories and compiled into key findings. Findings were interpreted and analyzed across participants and synthesized with the literature to draw some conclusions about the leadership construct of these Catholic Sisters who had served as college presidents and the impact of gender and religion on their leadership efficacy. Non-examples were sought and identified to gain a holistic perspective.

The goal of this research was to create knowledge and promote learning. Implications of the study for leadership practice were assessed based on Donmoyer’s (1990) language of schema theory. He employed “the notions of assimilation, accommodation, integration, and differentiation from the schema theory of Piaget (1971)” (p. 190) to characterize the type of generalization and transferability that occurs through experiential learning. Through experiences, our cognitive structures become more integrated, as terminology and events have greater meaning, and become more differentiated based on each subsequent experience and schema shift. According to Donmoyer (1990), when generalization is thought of in this way, diversity of settings “becomes an asset rather than a liability” (p. 191). He continued,

When diversity is dramatic, the knower is confronted by all sorts of novelty, which stimulates accommodation; consequently, the knower’s cognitive structures become more integrated and differentiated; after novelty is confronted and accommodated, he or she can perceive more richly and, one hopes, act more intelligently. (p. 191)
Readers of this study will experience vicariously the lives of the participants. They will have the opportunity to understand leadership from the perspective of these Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents. Using the schema theory view of generalizability (Donmoyer, 1990), “the purpose of the research is simply to expand the range of interpretations available to the research consumer” (p. 194) by employing primary sources and “the researcher’s personal, idiosyncratic perspective” (p. 195). Subsequently, readers can construct new meaning through the application of their own personal experiences and reflection.

In addition to studying and interpreting the interview transcripts, I examined respective college websites and school catalogs to gain a sense of the culture of each institution. I read mission statements and core values, student testimonials, and letters from the presidents.

In an effort to convey personal characteristics and maintain a human factor, participants were assigned pseudonyms. These names were selected alphabetically, much like names selected to identify storms or hurricanes (refer to Table 5) and assigned to participants arbitrarily.
Table 5

Pseudonyms Assigned to Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYMS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sister Amelia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Betty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Catherine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Diane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Evelyn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Francine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Gabrielle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Harriet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Irene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Janine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Kelly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Issues**

In order to protect the participants in this study, an understanding of the “concrete powers and vulnerabilities that are in play in particular situations” were attended to through phronesis, the “intellectual virtue of recognizing and responding to what is most important in a situation” (Kvale & Brickmann, 2009, p. 61). This ethical guideline for moral conduct addressed practical skills during the interview process, including probing to understand, empathy, and confidentiality. I was careful to pay attention to body language and to format my questions in a manner that conveyed my concern and respect. According to Kvale and Brickmann (2009), “the personal consequences of the interview
interaction for the subjects need to be taken into account, such as stress during the interview and changes in self-understanding” (p. 63). Participants were encouraged to share their stories in a comfortable setting and to allow their own voices to guide the interview process. I was sensitive to delicate issues and cautious in approach.

Interview questions were developed based on my own desire to learn about aspects of participant experiences that I could relate to as a leader in higher education. I reflected upon the subcategory of research questions and the different contributing components.

The promise of confidentiality promoted candid responses to interview questions. To safeguard the confidentiality of the participants, identifying characteristics were concealed, including their geographic location and the population of the campuses where they worked.

Limitations of the Study

To facilitate interviews with the purposive sample, domestic travel was required. Travel expenses limited access to all participants. Skype software was used as an alternative means for the interviews for three of the participants; however, this software limited my ability to gain a sense of the leader’s presence on campus. This method also affected rapport as subtle nuances were more difficult to detect and body language was more difficult to perceive. The computer served as a barrier to the personal connection I experienced in the face-to-face meetings. These interviews were shorter than the face-to-face interviews, averaging an hour as opposed to the two-hour average for face-to-face interviews.
In addition, of the more than 150 colleges founded by nuns in the United States, many have closed their doors permanently. The women who served these institutions were not represented in this research. Further, only the presidents of 48 colleges were invited to participate in the study and, of them, only 11 participants agreed to participate and were interviewed. Although the research questions were intended to elicit knowledge about Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents, the data and analysis of the data represent the perceptions of only the 11 participants in this study.

Selected participants offered a perspective based on a level of success that enabled them to take on presidential roles. Some participants offered starkly varied perspectives, suggesting that the 11 participants in the study did not represent a collective voice. Furthermore, participants who declined participation in the study may have detailed very different perspectives.

Conclusion

This study examined the lived experiences of 11 Catholic Sisters who had served as college presidents. This heuristic research sought an understanding of their perspectives on the construct of the leadership of these Catholic Sisters through dialogue and self-reflection. Typological analysis (Hatch, 2002), interpretive analysis (Hatch, 2002), and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) were used to analyze the data within the conceptual framework of feminism, constructivism, and Catholicism. The researcher served as a tool in the analytical process, drawing on connoisseurship in higher education leadership and feminist perspectives.

The interpretation and analysis for this research study are presented in Chapter 4, supported with excerpts from the participants. Chapter 5 provides a summary of this
research study, discussion of the results, and implications for women leaders in higher education.
Chapter Four: Interpretation and Analysis

―We know and identify ourselves as women in solidarity with other women. We experience this solidarity as we acknowledge the painful realization that all women in church and in society are colonized, that all women are patronized, that all women are viewed as objects, that all women are conditioned and expected to be complementary.‖

Mercy Sister Theresa Kane, 2004 Outstanding Leadership Award recipient from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious

In 2009, the Vatican conducted two extensive investigations, the more significant one, the Apostolic Visitation, was designed to evaluate the lifestyles of American nuns and to determine whether or not they were living in fidelity to their congregation’s expectations and to the Church’s guidelines for a holy life. The impetus for the investigation was the declining number of Catholic Sisters entering the convent since 1965, a phenomenon attributed to reforms as a result of Vatican II (Cardman, 2010; Gary, 2010; Goodstein, 2009; Wooden, 2011).

Many parishioners believed that the Vatican was trying to shift the nuns back to the culture of former times: living in convents, wearing habits, ordering schedules of daily prayer, and working in Roman Catholic institutions (Gary, 2010; Goodstein, 2009; Wooden, 2011). Another explanation was that the Vatican was trying to rein in the Sisters, in an effort to prevent them from promoting gender equality and gay rights, both of which are contrary to Rome’s teachings and the Church’s patriarchy (Gary, 2010; Machelor, 2009).

Vatican II described the Church as People of God and therefore challenged the patriarchal and hierarchal model of the church (Cardman, 2010; Fox, 2009; Gary, 2010)
by raising up the laity as holy. This paradigm shift may have contributed to subsequent events that spurred the investigation. Perhaps the impetus for the investigation was financial reasons. Declining numbers of women religious and the aging population of those who remained in Catholic orders created a strain on financial resources for the Church (Cardman, 2010). A Sister’s vow of poverty means that her wages are returned to the Catholic orders. Without human resources, those wages are nonexistent.

The Vatican investigation contributed to the perceptions of the participants in this present study regarding leadership, campus culture, and their respective congregations. An understanding of this event seemed important to understanding participant perspectives as they described their lived experiences as higher education leaders.

According to Coburn and Smith (1999), women have been servants to domesticity, to the Church, and to a patriarchal hierarchy for centuries, regardless of their choices in life. Catholic Sisters have used “creativity, persistence, and patience” (Cardman, 2010, p. 15) to seek ways of life that allowed them to manifest their love for God within a structured Church. Committed to social justice, the Catholic Sisters who participated in this present research study led educational venues in order to provide women and men with access to higher education and to encourage equal rights, despite gender or sexual orientation. Their leadership was instrumental in driving social and spiritual change.

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to examine the lived experiences of Catholic Sisters and to explore their perceptions of leadership, perceived societal response to their leadership, and the perceived impact of gender and religion on the culture of their institutions. Using naturalistic inquiry, qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 11 Catholic Sisters who had served or were serving as
college presidents. Using typological analysis (Hatch, 2002), interpretive analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Hatch, 2002), and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), data were interpreted and analyzed through the lenses of three conceptual frameworks: feminism, the constructed self, and Catholicism. This study was designed to answer the following central research question:

How do Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents perceive their leadership, and how do they describe the personal experiences that have contributed to that perception?

The following sub-questions were developed to examine key dimensions of the central research question:

1. How did Catholic Sisters who have served in the role of college president define their success?

2. How did Catholic Sisters perceive their acceptance in society as leaders and what factors contribute to those perceptions?

3. How did these Catholic Sisters exhibit qualities that challenged gender stereotypes?

4. How did Catholic Sisters who have served in the role of college president define gender and religion as they pertain to leadership and the culture of the institution?

This chapter provides an analysis of data in order to describe how a specific group of Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents negotiated their commitment to the Church, their dedication to the mission of their institutions and their constituents, and their responsibility to their own consciences as they led their institutions. Data were interpreted using the framework elements of feminism, Catholicism, and the constructed self. A feminist lens permitted examination of participant perceptions of gender equality, gender stereotypes, and societal expectations for women. The lens of Catholicism permitted examination of the impact of religion and chosen faith on
perceived leadership and societal acceptance of that leadership. The concept of *constructed self* permitted exploration of the evolution of the woman, the Sister, and the leader through lived experiences, reflection, and societal influences. The results of the interpretation and analysis thus reflect the influence of *a priori* typologies established by the research questions. This format was selected in order to present interpretations of responses to the interview questions and offer answers to the questions driving this research study. The organization of this research analysis is depicted in Table 6 below.

Table 6

*Organization of Data Interpretation and Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Conceptual Framework</th>
<th>Feminism</th>
<th>The Constructed Self</th>
<th>Catholicism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1: Definitions of Success</td>
<td>Success and the Social Justice Tradition</td>
<td>Success and Leadership Efficacy</td>
<td>Success and Christianity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2: Societal Acceptance of Leadership</td>
<td>Leadership and the Search for Equity</td>
<td>The Road to Leadership</td>
<td>Leadership Within a Patriarchal Hierarchy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3: Challenging Gender Stereotypes</td>
<td>Rejecting Domesticity</td>
<td>Gender Stereotypes and Women Religious</td>
<td>Changing Times and Shifting Stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4: Gender, Religion, Leadership, and the Culture of the Institution</td>
<td>Gender and Leadership, A Cultural Phenomenon</td>
<td>Gender, Religion, and Higher Education as Building Blocks</td>
<td>Historic Patriarchy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional literature about relevant research and background information is introduced in this chapter in order to support or clarify interpretation and analysis of data. Participant excerpts provided the evidence to support the analytical claims described in the following sections. To address the central research interpretation and analysis of
participant perceptions of leadership are presented at the end of this chapter, prior to the chapter’s summary and conclusions.

**Research Question #1: Definitions of Success**

The first research question sought to discover ways that the participant Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents defined their success. In an effort to understand the perceived characteristics of success, each participant was asked to describe the relevant components of success from her own point of view. Participant responses were examined using the lenses of feminism, Catholicism, and the constructed self.

Within the feminist component of the conceptual framework, the theme of social justice was identified. Participants discussed institutional mission and the fight for women’s and gay rights as a general social movement to which they subscribed. Responses viewed through a lens of Catholicism reflected lives committed to faith and service. These leaders discussed the holistic development of their students as their greatest success. The third element of the framework, the constructed self, was used to examine participant perceptions about their own contributions to successful outcomes. Participants described effective leadership practices as a means to positive outcomes. Participants who perceived weaknesses in their leadership seemed to base their perceptions on interactions within their campus communities as opposed to tangible factors such as financial stability or growth of their institutions. They perceived a lack of acceptance and a lack of support from their constituents. The following sections present some of the responses and interpretations within the three elements of the conceptual framework: feminism, Catholicism, and constructed self.
Feminism: Success and the Social Justice Tradition

Participants described education as a catalyst for social justice by expanding women’s career choices, promoting freedom from patriarchy, facilitating community service in education and medicine, and developing future leaders for perpetual growth. For example, Sister Evelyn said, “I look at my opportunity to be engaged in higher education as to be able to free the gifts of other people, particularly young people.” Sister Amelia described “a kind of education that will help our students and our graduates live responsibly in a diverse and independent world.” She said, “the entire emphasis on education is about relationship and the common good . . . and related to the very rich tradition in the Catholic Church of social justice.”

These Catholic Sisters described ways they were liberated from traditional expectations and exposed to new opportunities through increased access to education. According to Sister Betty, “Most Catholic Sisters were either teachers or nurses. . . . A lot of the impact of Catholicism in the last hundred years came through the presence of teachers in the classroom.” Embedded in the mission of the Catholic colleges represented in this study is the commitment to social justice and the legacy of service. This commitment to service is evident in the institutions’ academic disciplines, such as medicine and education, and in the college mission statements.

Most of the participants voiced a sincere commitment to fulfill the mission of their founding Sisters and to dedicate their lives to serving oppressed populations. This was reflected in participant definitions of success:

I really define success in terms of achieving and moving—in a very clear and consistent fashion—the mission of the institution, which is about providing the
education that enables our graduates to be leaders in the service of others. . . . I think we’re successful when they’re successful. (Sister Amelia)

Participants defined success in terms of social justice. This notion encompassed civil rights, access to higher education, and equitable treatment for women in the workplace and in society. Women’s colleges, many of which were founded by Catholic Sisters, provided a venue for personal and professional development and exposure to unprecedented leadership training. For example, Sister Janine wanted to work “for and with the people,” and she saw religious women as leaders. She said, “religious [nuns] came here, established schools—first elementary, then secondary schools—and they established the first colleges.”

Committed to social justice and gender equality, participants said that they were not willing to accept the status quo that women’s place was in the home. Sister Amelia said, “Nuns were the best feminists in the world because in many ways we made our way in a secular world, . . . encouraged not to be subservient, but to go as far as we can.”

“I am a product of the bold vision of Women Religious in America,” said Sister Francine. “I believe that the efforts of the many and varied congregations of Women Religious to establish and promote and maintain institutions of higher education in this country in response to the educational needs of young women, in particular, is of inestimable and enduring value.” Participants described the ways in which their work guided the female students and future leaders they served as they explored their options. According to Coburn and Smith (1999), “women have historically struggled to find a place in religious traditions that have elevated men to “divine” status as definers and gatekeepers of religious rituals, symbols, and authority. Women have fought for
autonomy and meaning against sacrosanct prescriptions that have attempted to control female behavior in both private and public settings” (p. 70). These Sisters did not ask for permission. They saw a job that needed to be done and they stepped up to do it. Sister Kelly said, “women saw the plight of other women who were [pause] desperately poor and needed education . . .and all kinds of things related to the health of their families, and so, these women banded together and formed communities to do this work.”

In their choice to pursue faith-driven lives, these Catholic Sisters faced limitations as women. Regardless of personal choices to pursue a religious life or a traditional life of domesticity, women have faced oppression. They have been expected to defer to a patriarchal hierarchy. Sister Catherine studied the Vatican documents as she contemplated a career committed to higher education and service. She said, “the way that that document described Catholic colleges and universities differed from my experience as a woman.” The document descriptions seemed prescriptive and broad. They lacked the personal component she had experienced. Sister Catherine’s work was personal. For her, higher education had to be about value systems. Women could fight oppression by reaching out to others. She claimed that the strength of the colleges founded by women was in the culture and added, “They had developed a culture of compassion.”

As the Catholic Sisters in this study recognized the marginalization, subordination, and oppression of women, they identified higher education as a means of societal change. In this way, participants presented themselves as feminists. “Feminists have long recognized as imperative the task of seeking out, defining, and criticizing the complex reality that governs the ways we think, the values we hold and the relationships we share, especially with regard to gender” (Dietz, 1987, p. 1). According to the
participants, their predecessors founded women’s colleges because they recognized a need to educate women. Education became not only a means of breaking free from patriarchal control but an opportunity to help an oppressed population. Education became a means to change.

For her book *Generous Lives: American Catholic Women Today*, Jane Redmont (1992) used material gathered through interviews with over 100 Catholic women in an effort to gain an understanding of the characteristics necessary to be a Catholic woman in the 1990s. Many of her participants suggested that “girls” and women’s schools run by religious orders of women helped them develop leadership skills, independence, and athletic talent . . . . A women’s college is really a reinforcing element for a young woman because there, the women do everything and you’re not in competition with men who are dominating the classroom” (p. 65). In this way, Catholic women’s colleges promoted confidence and unprecedented opportunities. Participants in this study described success based on the impact of their institutions on women’s gains in academics and in the workforce. For example, Sister Kelly said,

Success is defined within the context of social justice. Social justice looks at inequities. It says, wait a minute! This is not the world as God imagined it . . . because there is this oppression of one class by another. And when you look at it in the United States, I think about the waves of [pause] liberation. When I was growing up, . . . there were still Colored and White bathrooms and water fountains. So the first wave that I experienced was racial justice. The second wave that I experienced was the women’s movement, . . . and I think it absolutely is a question of justice. You know, parity of salary, opportunity, all of that. I
think the third wave that we are in right now—and it is really interesting to me to watch, and it’s one that, you know, the Church is having trouble with—but it’s the notion of justice for people who are gay, whether it be marriage, or civil unions, but at least equity of rights.

As part of the Catholic tradition, these leaders committed their lives to the Church’s social justice tradition by embracing missionary work and service to others. This moral obligation to pursue justice and fight for equity became a key component of the higher education curriculum at their institutions and, as a result, the spiritual development of their students. Sister Kelly asked, “Is this the mission of social justice, this commitment to social justice, that drives feminism?” Another participant noted,

For the women, we wanted them to become competent and caring, empowered and empowering, faith-tested and true, inspiring, aware of their giftedness by God: to become kind, thoughtful, generous, and also courageous in the face of obstacles. (Sister Francine)

Some of the participants suggested that their approach to social justice incorporated feminine nurturing and encouragement, interdisciplinary academic practices, and application of the teachings of the Church. They stated that, as a result of Vatican II, women religious reached out to lay persons as they had not done previously, and defined success by their impact on the lives of others and their ability to involve more people in their mission. According to Sister Francine:

It was following the second Vatican Council that [our college], like so many other colleges led by women religious in America, most originating as all women’s institutions of higher education, integrated the church’s social justice tradition
into the college curriculum, encouraging students to participate in efforts to make a difference, such as participating in home missions and mission experiences abroad, in urban plunges, and local volunteer projects and such. In other words, the colleges and universities founded by religious orders of women have graduated young women and men who have a great concern for the poor and those most in need in our society and in the world-at-large.

Participants talked about respecting all who came to their institutions and working toward “a notion of thought, feeling, and action” (Sister Kelly). Sister Kelly described the expression “from head to heart to hands” as understanding “both with our reason, but also with the notion of transcendence and the notion of faith.” She said, “It touches our heart in some way, with regard to our understanding of the human community, and then we do something about it.”

Participants also described success in terms of acceptance in a man’s world. These Catholic Sisters said that they had access to components of the male world before their lay sisters enjoyed such privileges. Several of the participants described women religious as the first women on committees, boards, and business organizations. In essence, they were “the first women in the room.” I coined this phrase to convey the phenomenon that participants described. According to Sister Catherine, “older sisters tell about when they first started off in higher education, and they’d go to either an accreditation meeting or a meeting of presidents of independent colleges or something, and it was all men. And it was smoky and there they were, two or three of them in habits [pause], and they were all accepted. And there were no laywomen. The only women presidents were Sisters.”
Sister Irene said, “We had really strong women leaders in those earlier days of religious life who were able to do lots of things with men in powerful positions that perhaps laywomen could not do.” She said that women religious were able to break into the Catholic university structure and make significant gains for women as a whole.

Participants seemed to agree that social justice addressed inequities, and Catholicism addressed faith and service. Sister Francine said, “If you don’t really get that broad-based understanding, all of our efforts become reduced to the notion of having a job with all the bullet points on the checklist of things to do.” Participants said that they approached their roles as missions toward social justice, not as jobs. They talked about success in terms of social change, legacy, and perpetuation of the mission of their founding Sisters. Sister Catherine asked, “Will people remember the Sisters when the last one dies? I think so, because I think there are a lot of people who will continue that charism . . . because I think people have been attracted to it. That’s why they came to these institutions. That’s why they stay at these institutions. It’s more than a job.”

It might be argued that these Catholic Sisters capitalized on their roles as Sisters and leaders to impact social justice initiatives. Participants described ways that the social justice tradition was incorporated into all aspects of their lives. The next section examines the participant perceptions of success and work toward social justice through the lens of Catholicism.

**Catholicism: Success and Christianity**

As service leaders, many of the participants described curriculum development geared toward community service and sacrifice for the good of others. They described a rich Catholic tradition of social justice. They used expressions like “from head to heart to
hands” (Sister Francine and Sister Kelly) that illustrated the progression of student learning to caring to doing. By developing future leaders, these Catholic Sisters described ways that they have promoted change and worked toward social justice.

Participants defined success by the lives they have touched through service and the students they encouraged to pass on this legacy. According to Sister Irene, women religious placed value in service, not material things. She provided an example of this value measurement:

I think, if you look across the country and you look at the colleges and universities that were founded by women religious, I think you’d find that wonderful solid base of caring and compassion about [pause] the most in need, about spending lives in service to others rather than making sure that you are going to get a job that would give you the highest salary or the best perks for yourself.

Most of the Catholic Sisters who participated in this research study conveyed a deep devotion to the institutional mission of their fore-Sisters and a great love for their chosen faith. They said that they dedicated not only their careers to the institutional mission and Catholicism, but also their lives. “I mean, that’s who you are, that’s what you care about. That’s why you came to religion, and it’s why you are in this ministry,” Sister Irene explained; then she added, “It is because you care about the religious dimension and formation of young people, and the ethical development and spiritual formation and development, and you can help provide for them because of the position you are in and because of the kind of institution you are leading.” Sister Evelyn said,
“Religion is at the core of my life. More faith than religion, . . . but I see it as sort of a seed from which everything else springs in my life.”

Participants described a foundation of Christian teachings about service to others and social justice, and they discussed the ways they drew on their own experiences and awareness of emotional pain to reach out to others who were too weak to help themselves. Some of the emotional pain they described involved limitations to their choices in life and submission to a patriarchal hierarchy. They said that they found strength through solidarity within their congregation. For example, Sister Kelly said, “I come here not just as myself, but I come here with the sponsorship of the Sisters [of congregation].”

All of the participants alluded to the changes since Vatican II and the empowerment of the laity. They described the connection between the rituals of prayer and worship and their commitment to sharing and applying and working toward a better world. For these participants, religious life also provided an alternative to a life of domesticity. They said that they chose to touch more lives than they could serve as a wife and mother. Sister Catherine explained that women “gravitated to religious life because there was an opportunity to be more than just a housewife, a mother, . . . to have other opportunities that the religious life afforded them in terms of education and leadership.” But for some, it seemed that, unexpectedly, their students became their children; the Church, their spouse. These Catholic Sisters said that they had access to education and opportunities for careers in medicine and education long before laywomen enjoyed such privileges; however, they remained subordinate to a patriarchal hierarchy.
It seemed that Vatican II prompted a level of expectations within the congregations of women religious that it has not successfully fulfilled. Three key areas remain unresolved. The first involves women’s reproductive rights, including birth control and abortion. Sister Kelly said, “The Church is going through a period of being frightened of the secular world . . . particularly in regards to women’s issues that the Church is very, very conservative about these days. . . . The abortion issue is the absolute cutting edge issue.” According to Sister Evelyn, women’s issues have contributed to declining numbers of Catholic Sisters. She said, “there are lots of reasons that all sort of came about at the same time: changes in the church, changes in society, the evolution of birth control, [pause] the opportunity for women to go into other fields—when I say birth control, the experience that girls have now at a much younger age [pause] to mature sexually.”

The second issue involves women’s and gay rights. Many of the sisters described conflict between their commitment to their vows and the reality of their conscience and compassion for women’s rights and gay rights. Sister Kelly said, “The church is having trouble with the notion of justice for people who are gay.” Sister Betty described gender inequities within her campus community. She said, “. . . they’ve got a whole bunch of men on their faculty that make a heck of a lot more money than the women, and until they kind of retire, you can’t do much about it, because you can’t fire them!” Sister Francine expressed frustration with failed efforts to implement the mission of the Vatican II council. She said, “We cannot be sure of the continuity of Vatican II. In fact, sometimes I do feel that we are definitely going backwards instead of forward!”
Participants talked about ordination and their concern with the Church’s failure to recognize women as worthy for this role. This is the third issue impacting the expectations of women religious after Vatican II. For example, Sister Francine said, “There are sisters in my religious order who have left both the congregation and the Church because they felt they had a call to the priesthood.” She added, “We are coming at this question from the perspective of service, gender equality, and wanting to work together as teams to accomplish the good.” Sister Diane said, “I have some differences with some of the practices of the Church. You know [pause], I don’t want to be a priest, but, again, I know a number of women that I believe are called to priesthood. So, [pause] I would have a challenge if I were in conversation with some priests, probably, very likely, or some Catholics.” Sister Francine said,

We do have many, many priestly women, but we don’t want to belong to a system that is attached to a vision of Church that is a pyramidal hierarchy; but, rather, a circle that has a strong inner core of leadership with circles of service that include both women and men working together, ordained and non-ordained.

It seems as though the relationship between the Sisters and the patriarchal hierarchy remains somewhat unchanged, with women removed from decision-making within the Church (Ruether, 1991). As a result, most of the women religious in this study claimed responsibility for work toward social justice and societal change. “We’re here at the crossroads,” said Sister Francine. “We should be forging ahead with the vision of the Council, but we are going backwards in so many ways.” Like many American nuns, they “consciously adopted the goals of the feminist movement and declared themselves in solidarity with it” (Ruether, 1991, p. 264).
Sister Irene described her desire to emulate the former leaders of her institution and her sense of awe when she thought of their accomplishments. In turn, she considered it her responsibility to impact the next generation of young people and to guide them in their journey toward responsible citizenship and community servitude. She said, “I still find myself praying to them [predecessors], asking for their wisdom. . . . There is that opportunity and responsibility to encourage the younger generation and to inspire them.” In this way, the founding Sisters perceived their role as passing on their legacy traditions and impacting future generations. According to participants, they initially committed themselves to education and health care, careers in which they were able to impact large populations in a positive manner. Through education, these Catholic Sisters reached out to the laity to instill the moral values of their predecessors and to perpetuate the spirit of caring.

Participants suggested that a holistic educational process better prepared their students for responsible citizenship, environmental stewardship, and a commitment to community service. Through a curriculum designed to enhance personal development and civic responsibility, these Catholic Sisters were able to advance the mission of their founding Sisters and past presidents.

Participants described their frustrations with the Church. They suggested that the Catholic patriarchy has shifted attention to political agendas such as abortion, gay marriage, the pedophilia scandal, embryonic stem cell research, and the Apostolic Visitation. Sister Kelly described Rome’s investigation as “outrageous.” She lamented the Church’s focus on issues such as lifestyle and abortion despite the recent pedophilia scandal. She recalled waves of social justice that included first racial justice, then the
women’s movement, followed by parity of salary, and most recently, gay rights. “The Church is having trouble with [pause] this notion of justice for people who are gay” Sister Kelly explained, “whether it be marriage, or civil unions, but at least equality [pause] of rights.” Sister Gabrielle also expressed concern with this shifting focus within the Catholic community. She said,

So, I was talking about a sort of cultural devastation, an extreme cultural vulnerability. . . . It could also be argued, especially if one agrees with the notion that our current culture—which makes so little space for the genuinely religious attitude—is consuming that attitude at an alarming rate; that such cultural devastation accounts, in large part, for the trauma about mission and identity that Catholic colleges experience today.

Sister Francine detailed ways political groups might undermine Vatican II initiatives. She said,

Due to the backlash created by groups like Opus-Dei, Legionnaires of Christ, and others, now we cannot be sure of the continuity from Vatican II. . . . I believe that, in view of what’s going on today, there is every reason for us, as women in the Church, to be as forward-looking as we ever have been, especially in regards to gender equity and the place of women in the Church. It will take much courage, given the current reality.

Participants described a need to maintain focus on core issues such as human suffering, poverty, and social justice, including women’s and gay rights (Townsend, 2007) despite contemporary issues within the Church. Sister Kelly said, “I do think this
notion of social justice is part and parcel of the whole Catholic tradition and something that we believe in [pause] greatly here as part of our university.”

Participants described the ways they served as promoters of human choices and human rights and exhibited empathy and compassion regardless of leadership approach. Sister Amelia said, “This notion of social justice, which is part and parcel of the whole Catholic tradition and something that we believe in greatly at our university, is something to advocate for.” Sister Evelyn reiterated the role of women in the perpetuation of moral values. She said, “You see all these national scandals, and we’ve got enough in our own state [pause]. . . . . There’s certainly evidence that there’s this expectations that the woman is the keeper of the moral values. She’s the one that’s supposed to keep it all in line, and make sure that, [pause] she’s holding people accountable in her family to do the right thing.”

It might be argued that, through lived experiences, these Catholic Sisters have learned successfully to navigate their roles within Catholicism and higher education to attain their positions of influence and authority. The next section is a discussion of how the participants’ perceptions of leadership efficacy and success relate to the constructed self and the influence of lived experiences and societal expectations.

The Constructed Self: Success and Leadership Efficacy

Participants defined success in terms of leadership efficacy. Sister Gabrielle said, “The wonderful things about our group [congregation] is that we are hard working. You give us a job, and we will get it done in spades.” In addition, participants suggested that effective leadership equated to positively impacting lives, whether through community service and ministry, work toward social justice, a top-notch education, preparation of
graduates for successful careers, or development of the whole person through a values-laden education. Sister Harriett said, “We’ve had women who have gone on to leadership positions. More than one of them!” Sister Irene said, “As a leader, it’s really easy to see how you can help bring people and the resources of the institution forward to bring about that change and to move to the next place.” At the core of participant perceptions, as expressed in the interviews, were the lived experiences that impacted their point of view over their lifetimes: factors influencing the initial decision to become a nun; individual traits and characteristics shaped by upbringing, culture, and social norms; examples set by prior leaders; and circumstances leading to administrative roles. These aspects of lived experiences and their influence on participant perceptions of leadership efficacy are explored in the following paragraphs.

Participants described various motivations for choosing the convent life, each providing insight to individual personalities and perspectives. Sister Gabrielle said, “I didn’t become a Sister in order to serve the Church. I became a Sister because I wanted a life of silence, solitude, and openness to ultimate reality or God.” Sister Gabrielle struggled in her role as president of a Catholic institution, and she felt she impacted more people through her role as an instructor. She suggested that as an instructor she could have better contributed to the holistic education of her students and enjoyed greater success than she had as a president. She described the conflict between her own perceptions of self-efficacy with the criticism of her peers. She expressed regret and disappointment with the Sisters in her congregation and their lack of support:

There was a huge amount of jealousy. But, you know God writes straight with crooked lines. I’m so convinced of that after this time because I am happy with
what I did as a president. But I”m glad I didn”t have more time in the position, even under the best circumstances. Having more time could have been dangerous, in the sense that you can lose your identity in your role . . . and nobody is immune. That didn”t happen to me, but I think it”s only because I wasn”t there for many years…just because you can do something doesn”t mean that you should . . . . I think it was a blessing in disguise that I didn”t do it for a long time. Probably for the campus, too, for all we know! (Sister Gabrielle)

Saddled with institutional financial debt upon her appointment as college president, Sister Catherine defined success by a balanced budget, innovation and critical thinking, and the ability to make tough decisions. She said that her college”s efforts to serve an oppressed international population left them vulnerable to closure. She said, “My effectiveness has been bringing good fiscal management to this institution,” albeit with challenges related to interpersonal relations on campus. She described leadership efficacy in terms of “stabilizing the finances and turning the college around, and in promoting and raising our reputation and visibility of the college” (Sister Catherine).

As a tool for feedback, Sister Catherine sent out assessment surveys to her staff and faculty in order to invite them to evaluate her leadership efficacy. She reported that the results of the surveys suggested a breakdown in communication among administration, staff, and faculty. Sister Catherine said that she struggled with “the interpersonal, which I would have thought was my strongest suit . . . you know, the interacting with the people.” She also suggested that interpersonal skills and other participant leadership characteristics contributed to her attainment of personal and professional goals, and as a result, contributed to her success. She admitted that
perception is truth when it comes to campus culture and that she had some work to do to
develop interpersonal relationships within the campus community.

Sister Gabrielle noted that a perceived failure to succeed in her role as president created limitations on her ability to impact others in a positive manner. She indicated that her greatest successes were in the classroom where she could teach and mentor her students through more intimate, direct interaction. It was there that she had developed the confidence to impact the lives of her students and to lead them to act.

Sister Catherine said that she focused her efforts on tasks, albeit important tasks, but this focus limited her ability to interact with her campus community. She said that her work in financial management saved her college from closing its doors—but this was work that she had to do alone. As a result, Sister Catherine said that she learned through campus surveys that her campus community craved her attention. She had been perceived as distant from her constituents, and, as a result, her behaviors created doubt about her leadership efficacy. She perceived that some of her constituents struggled with her leadership approach, and this perception seemed to undermine her confidence. As a result, Sister Catherine withdrew from departmental meetings and avoided confrontation with academic leaders. She told her team, “If you want me to come back, invite me, and I will. But [pause] this is my last president’s report” (Sister Catherine). Although she stood strong in her conviction that the tasks she attended to were necessary, Sister Catherine expressed concern with her level of acceptance in her campus community. She described herself as an effective leader and stood strong in her convictions that she handled the most important campus issues appropriately. These areas included financial
stability for the campus, increased visibility, and improved reputation, as described earlier.

Possibly contributing to Sister Catherine’s sense of rejection were the stereotypical assumptions that women should be more collaborative and relational and men more task-oriented and autocratic (Eagley & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagley et al., 2000). Not only did this participant face societal expectations for her leadership as a Catholic Sister, she faced societal expectations for her leadership as a woman.

Some of the participants expressed a belief that their leadership style exhibited stereotypically feminine characteristics, such as nurturing, compassion, and empathy. Participants who described a collaborative leadership style reported greater perceptions of success in their institutions than their counterparts who described a more autocratic style of leadership. There are several reasons that a more collaborative leadership style may have been more acceptable in the Catholic higher education environment. It seems that leadership is expected to reflect the culture of the congregation, humility seems to be a core value of the congregation, and collaboration seems to be valued within each congregation.

Although these aspects related to the patriarchal hierarchy in the Church and the expectations for women religious, there also seemed to be clear societal expectations for the ways women were supposed to behave. Traditionally, women have been expected to be submissive, compassionate, nurturing, and collaborative. Women with more authoritarian styles of leadership have met challenges to acceptance (Barburto et. al., 2007; Cellar et al., 2001).
You’re always working with a sense of building a collective we. It’s not so much about being an individual star. The whole benefits significantly when there’s an ownership of what the direction, goals, and strategies are. It’s not about any one person; it’s about how you can liberate the energy for the sake of the whole. It doesn’t matter who gets the credit; it’s the outcome you’re looking for. (Sister Amelia)

As part of the collaborative spirit, these participants expressed an expectation that campus leaders take responsibilities for their areas, interact with each other, confront each other, and communicate with each other. Sister Kelly said,

I think leadership has got to be collegial. It’s got to create a community that’s . . . not a hierarchal model . . . that we sort of got saddled with when Christianity took on a kind of Roman way of thinking about things, where the man is the head, the King is the head . . . . I don’t think it’s really what Jesus imagined when he was on this earth. I think there is a collegial notion that you as the leader are there to bring out the best in everyone who works with you and that it’s much more of a notion of a circle. Now, I do think you can’t give away your power. You have to, in some ways, be the inspirational leader, the person who loves the mission and inspires other people to work as hard as they can for it. But you also have to be the listener because there is so much wisdom from each of these people. There is so much more wisdom there [pause] that it becomes this collegial or more circular leadership that requires people to be strong and confident in their own right.
Two participants described their collaborative methods based on the notion of a circle. Like the round tables of King Arthur, this idea creates an image of shared leadership—no one person more important than another. According to Sister Francine, We Sisters, in religious orders today, define ourselves . . . as a circle, [chuckle] and you know, we’re just a group of circles or rings, and in the center is a kind of hub—our essential missions, along with our central administration—that sort of facilitates the activity. The energy of the atom generates rings of energy emanating from the core, and each ring represents an area of the world where we bring that energy to service.

Along with collaboration, employee responsibility and accountability were also deemed important. Participants set high expectations and placed trust in their employees.

I’m not a micromanager, definitely not! I mean, you have your job and you do it. I’ll take you to task. But it’s your job; I want you to do it. I trust that you can. I want you to come back with a report that shows to me that my trust was well placed. (Sister Diane)

Others created a formula to identify future leaders on their staffs, to capitalize on strengths, and to encourage professional development. They served as role models for future leaders, while serving the mission of their predecessors. This process seemed to perpetuate the commitment to social justice and the mission of the institution as leaders passed on traditions and leader legacies.

I think really good leaders have the gift to identify leadership in others and to enable those to develop. I’m a very inclusive, participative style of a leader, and I
also emphasize as much creative thinking as possible, but coming to group
ownership for direction. (Sister Amelia)

Contributing to the leadership style of participants was the level of preparation for
the role of college president. For example, Sister Harriet felt ill-prepared for the role, so
she focused on hiring the best people to work with her. She said, “. . . because they all
knew their jobs better than I did, I let them do it.” Lack of preparation contributed to her
collaborative leadership approach. Sister Gabrielle described advanced preparation for
the role of president. As a result, she confidently made decisions without necessarily
consulting her team members. She said, “. . . college presidents can have upwards of 9 or
10 constituencies, and you can’t please them all, all of the time.” Geared toward personal
accomplishment, Sister Gabrielle also said, “I’m less geared to the collaborative mode,
because I’ve always been pretty much a solo flight in my life, in the things I’ve done.”
Sister Francine’s commitment to social justice became the catalyst to a leadership role.
Her passion and team focus became the foundation of her leadership. She said,

Well, sometimes I define this [leadership efficacy] by the impressions and
feedback offered to me by others. Some I do recognize in myself. I do know that
many people have said, “you’re a charismatic leader,” or “you’re a proactive
leader,” or “you have the courage to make difficult decisions,” or “you’re a
collaborative leader.” I do know that I work best with a team. (Sister Francine)

Sister Diane described her love for interacting with her campus community. “I
just love to walk around and say, ‘Hello,’” and say, ‘Thank you,’” and say, ‘How’s your
wife? How are the kids?’ . . . . It doesn’t take long; I can do it while I’m going to the
car. I can do it while I’m going to the mailbox.” For example, she said to the grounds
man, “You guys are really, really busy out here, and I really appreciate what you are doing. You know, on days like this you’d rather be home sunning yourself or something.” She explained, “Now this guy’s flying high. It doesn’t take much, and we don’t pay him enough. Maybe that’s why I feel like I have to compensate for that, for all the things they do for us at our institution. To me, it’s part of being a woman. It’s part of being a Christian. That’s how I saw my role.”

Most of the participants described the interactions with their staff and students as a foundation to their leadership. They promoted open door policies and committed to an approachable style.

The faculty and staff feel very free to come to me, especially if they have a personal issue, and they need a little help or understanding or time or money. I don’t know that you’d usually do that with another president. They feel free, partly because I’m a Catholic nun and probably because I am who I am and they know me. [pause] And I will say to new people coming here, you know, if you have a hard time in your own life, this is a community and you can ask for help . . . . . I run it like a family. (Sister Evelyn)

The work environment seemed to affect the leaders’ health and happiness. They seemed to construct self-expectations based on societal influences, responses from the campus community, elements of their upbringing, and interaction with staff members day-to-day. Through reflection and self-assessment, they tried to perform effectively in the role. For some, this process seemed debilitating, undermined their confidence levels, and created insecurity. Others said they tried to emulate the successful leaders before them. According to Sister Diane, she often tried to mirror the Sisters who served in
leadership roles before them. “And just as I looked to the women in my own congregation, in particular, who were both in the positions I’ve held over my lifetime with a sense of awe and a desire to emulate them, [pause] and I still find myself praying to them, asking for their wisdom as to what would they do in my circumstance.” (Sister Irene). Sister Diane described the ways her predecessors modeled their work as responsibilities, not jobs. Carrying on their legacy, she said, “I don’t think I ever came to work [using quotation marks in the air to emphasize the word work] believing it was work. Even when I had problems, challenges, I knew that I had support here with me and that people worked with me rather than for me. And it always made the job a pleasant one.”

Many of the participants incorporated regular leadership team retreats into their annual schedules to allow for collaboration, team building, and strategic planning. This process was perceived to encourage higher levels of interaction and feedback for continual improvement. For example, retreats facilitated the level of collaboration Sister Kelly deemed necessary for effective performance. She described her early leadership experiences with her new team. She thought, “these people are all good at what they do, but they don’t get along with each other.” Her campus leaders faced challenges and conflict in weekly meetings, so she scheduled an extended off-campus meeting to deal with the big issues. Proud of her team’s success, Sister Kelly beamed, “People were very collegial, but the thing that I loved about it [pause] is that people were owning issues.”

Sister Harriet described female collaboration as valuable and effective. She said, “I think women in leadership are different than men. A man is . . . on a white horse. He
is the boss.” She added, “I mean, he is the run of the show. Women are different. They are more collaborative.”

A self-proclaimed visionary leader, Sister Irene said that she promoted a collegial environment in most situations; however, at times she opted for a more directive approach. She described the need for situational leadership and flexibility.

Collegial environments are wonderful, and I am a full supporter of them; I’ve lived my life that way, and I believe in them fully—but bringing the consensus and the agreement of everybody to the table just is a very time-consuming process, and you can’t always be successful at that. So the opposite part of that, I think, is that when people don’t feel they may have been as much a part of the decision as they had wished, they’ve built up enough confidence in the leadership and in the people who have been privy to the decision to help them make it happen. What you don’t want is the “we-they” mentality of administration going in one direction and the rest of the institution going in another. That’s not leadership. (Sister Irene)

Regardless of leadership styles, all of the participants described ways their personal choices contributed to campus culture and their perception of their own success. These Sisters said that they perpetuated a commitment to service and to the holistic education of their students in an effort to develop future leaders. Their own experiences on the path to leadership seemed to contribute to their leadership styles and perceived leadership efficacy.

Although leadership efficacy was perceived as a component of overall success, participants disagreed on the factors driving perceptions of efficacy, e.g., commitment to
a healthy balance sheet versus visibility and accessibility for the campus community. All of the participants seemed to agree that their ultimate success was defined by the impact of their leadership on the holistic development of their students.

Participants defined success in terms of social justice, institutional mission, and perceived leadership efficacy. College presidents perceived themselves as successful if they developed future leaders, touched lives of oppressed populations through service, and promoted the growth of their institutions. The next section examines the participants’ perception of societal acceptance of their leadership and their understanding of the factors contributing to that level of acceptance.

**Research Question #2: Societal Acceptance of Leadership**

The previous section considered the participants’ definitions of success. Leadership efficacy was perceived to be an important factor driving successful student outcomes, service to oppressed populations, and growth of respective institutions. Topics within their descriptions included perceptions of societal acceptance of their leadership and the factors contributing to those perceptions. The participants who boasted high levels of success and perceived efficacy as leaders tended toward collaborative styles. They described accessibility and visibility as components of their leadership styles.

This section takes a closer look at the factors contributing to participant perceptions of societal acceptance of their leadership. Participants were asked to consider the impact of religious authority on perceived societal acceptance, both from the perspective of their own authority as Catholic Sisters and from the perspective of perceived extensions of a patriarchal Catholic Church.
In order to gain an understanding of participant perceptions of acceptance within their higher education communities and society as a whole, participants were asked to describe their initiation into the higher-education leadership process. Viewed through the lens of the constructed self, these lived experiences contributed to the participants’ perceptions about their leadership and acceptance within their respective communities. Subsequently, participant feedback was viewed through the lens of Catholicism. Within this element of the conceptual framework is the examination of participants’ responses regarding the potential impact of the Church and religious authority on societal acceptance of their leadership. Finally, participant leadership styles were explored using a feminist lens. Influences of gender stereotypes and societal expectations for the ways women are supposed to behave were considered. Participants were asked to provide insight into the range of factors contributing to leadership acceptance.

The Constructed Self: The Road to Leadership

Participants were asked to describe the way they first became involved in higher-education leadership. Most of the participants were appointed to their roles as president. Some said they did not want it. According to Sister Irene, “We had supervisors who came around, in our congregation at least, and I think it was true in many, and those women were charged with identifying people who had potential, perhaps, to move to other levels.” She became involved in higher education after being asked to teach. She climbed up the ladder and served as a department chair, then as an academic dean before applying for the role of president. She added, “I was selected to then become president at the end of [that] process, which was a tremendous surprise to me, but a happy surprise.”
According to participants, the Provincial—the Catholic Sister acting under the superior general of the religious order—made the decisions for the congregation, for the institutions, and for the Sisters. Despite the fact that these Catholic Sisters claimed to have challenged gender stereotypes and to have broken ground in support of future women leaders, they also committed to uphold the faith and values of a patriarchal Church. They described ways in which they held to the rules of the Church and expected to fall in line with the patriarchal hierarchy.

According to participants, Sisters demonstrating leadership traits, such as high intelligence level, charismatic interpersonal relationship skills, and ambition, were placed on an academic track designed to prepare them for future leadership roles. For Sister Kelly, her initiation started when the head of her order said, “We’ve got a need . . . and we’d like you to consider it.” In this way, religious superiors contributed to participants’ understanding of themselves as leaders. Four of the participants took on presidential roles when they held only a Master’s degree; they pursued the doctorate later.

Sister Harriet said, “They [the members of the board of trustees] interviewed people on campus and selected two Sisters that had been named by people. And I was one of them.” She went on to say, “I never applied for the position. Nor did I desire it.” Sister Harriet expressed her belief that the decision was the work of the Holy Spirit. She said, “I figured I had nothing to lose. If I did a good job, I’d stay. If I didn’t, I didn’t ask for it. If they said, ,It’s not really your gift,” then I would accept that without being humbled or humiliated.” Sister Harriet entered the role with a Master’s degree and absolutely no prior leadership experience.
Sister Gabrielle was also chosen for the position of president. She said, “I didn’t think about it, nor did I look for it, nor did I want it . . . . I wanted to be a scholar teacher. That was my aim in life for my work.”

Through leadership by appointment, participants did not necessarily have a choice about their trajectory within higher education and within the Church. They said that they deferred to decisions that they believed to be God’s plan for them, and they looked to their faith to guide them. For some, this path of obedience to a higher power promoted a sense of security; for others, lack of preparation seemed to undermine their confidence.

Sister Evelyn said, “The president resigned, and they asked me consider being president . . . . I taught very little, but I did get tenure. And I was about 35 when I became president!” She said, “When they asked me to apply, I did, knowing absolutely nothing about the presidency. Very, very little about administration. And I got into it, and I loved it, so I’m still here.”

Sister Francine said, “I sometimes wonder why the Congregation chose me for the presidency, especially when I was hoping to go to Brazil to minister in those favelas and teach in the seminaries there. My heart was set on that!” She described the day that two members of the Provincial Team visited her campus and identified her as the next leader. “My life was definitely redirected at this point,” she said. “You have to just go back to . . . what were my vows about? What does it mean to follow God’s design for me?”

Some participants said that ambition and pursuit of advanced degrees laid the foundation for consideration for leadership positions. Sister Catherine said, “I loved the variety of things that you are exposed to in administration, . . . and there were strong women leaders at the time in my religious community who were reflecting back to me
that I had leadership potential.” Conversations with members of her congregation led Sister Catherine to believe that she was on track for a presidency. Once appointed, she felt prepared for the role. “I had the educational credential and the experience, so I was able to say, early in my presidency, that I felt well prepared for the role.”

Once identified as leaders, participant presidents found themselves held to certain expectations because of their faith. The next section looks at participants’ perceptions of leadership by using the lens of Catholicism.

**Catholicism: Leadership Within a Patriarchal Hierarchy**

Most of the participants in the study described a progression within the Catholic Church that empowered them to take on greater roles in society at large. They stated that religious authority allowed them to lead during a time when women were not yet accepted as leaders. Some participants stated that the impact of religious authority on societal acceptance of women religious as leaders was more evident and prevalent prior to Vatican II. They attributed the differences to the lifestyle of women religious at the time. According to Sister Irene,

There was a time in our society, and there’s still some of this left over, a residual, but less so, I think, in part, because of our lifestyle. It was so mysterious when I entered. For example, we did not mix with lay people, we did not go out socially, we could not even eat in front of our families. It was a very monastic, somewhat cloistered life, and so people saw us as almost like a third entity, if you would—something not like any other group. So there was both a great respect and deference toward us—a deep lack of understanding of us as ordinary people, trying to do good things. So they had us on a pedestal, . . . and there was a little
intimidation factor, perhaps because we had these big habits and no one knew too much about us. They just knew that we were very powerful women, and it gave us freedom that we enjoyed as well . . . . We had a certain authority about us that opened doors that were not open to other women, or to lay people in general—but certainly not to laywomen.

According to Sister Evelyn, religious authority promoted acceptance of Catholic Sisters as women leaders only in some disciplines and career choices. “There was a certain respect that women religious earned for the rest of us . . . . I think people accept, certainly, nuns in positions of authority in education and in health care. Not so much probably in other fields.”

“I remember when I hired a vice president for finance, and he had come from the retail world,” said Sister Diane, “and somebody said to him, ‘you’re going to work for a woman?’ And he said, ‘Oh, don’t worry. I’m working for a Sister.’”

According to Sister Betty, there has been a tangible shift in the power of religious authority as it relates to societal acceptance of leaders. She said, “I think probably in the past when I was president, it was very important, because people always looked up to the Bishops and the Cardinals and all the rest of what they saw as Church. Right now, I don’t know that the Church has as much influence—it might almost be a negative, as well as a positive [influence].”

Other participants contradicted the rest with their opinion that religious authority helped but was not enough to promote societal acceptance. They suggested that their leadership abilities and the support of the congregation were the primary catalysts to societal acceptance.
That can’t be all I bring, and I think that Sisters can’t assume that they will be listened to just because they are Sisters. It’s got to be whole [pause] . . . . You have to bring the professional expertise that you have. You have to be able to match the faculty academically. You’ve got to have all of that. (Sister Kelly) She further argued that the solidarity of her congregation contributed to perceptions of strength and leadership.

It’s not the gender, and it’s not the patriarchy; it’s the fact that we came from a communal base . . . a religious congregation, a community of women that was [pause] committed to education . . . . It came from our communal, our congregational charism and spirit and mission . . . . There was such respect for the Sisters as teachers and educators that we had credibility. I don’t think it [our leadership] had anything like we were an extension of a patriarchal arm of the Church at all. It was in our own right . . . . It’s due to the efficacy and the impact of education on women religious in this country . . . . It was out of our own identity, our own integrity, our own passion, our own sacrifice. (Sister Amelia)

Another participant refuted societal acceptance of authority based on religion and stated that Catholic Sisters and laity have equal footing in the leadership arena. She said, “I think it probably was based on the person . . . . I think it has to do with [pause] not being a power grabber. I don’t know if I am using the right term there, but I think when a person comes in, whether they are lay, or it doesn’t matter, if they come in and say, “I’m the President, and I make the decisions,” . . . . I think that probably would cause more problems” (Sister Harriet).
Sister Betty said, “In the past, as I read the past, the Church generally had the attitude: We know what you need to do and we are going to tell you what you need to do.” However, things seem to have changed. The colleges and universities represented in this study were under the leadership and authority of the participants and their boards of governors, not the Church, and as a result, free from the patriarchal hierarchy—to a degree.

In some ways, the convent helped to prepare Sisters for their leadership roles and for the partnerships with their boards of governors. Participants said that each Sister in the congregation was expected to participate in a certain level of training, and each was to become educated.

The Sisters who founded, led, and taught in Catholic colleges received the general training common to all sisters in Postulancy and Novitiate programs. Religious formation was intense and tailored to serve both spiritual and apostolic goals of young Sisters. It combined a congregationally infused, broad-based Roman Catholic spirituality with a pragmatic, rather than intellectually inspired, professional education.” (Morey & Piderit, 2006, p. 247)

All of these participants said that they welcomed the opportunity to become educated and to adopt a lifestyle that challenged the status quo, specifically related to domesticity.

Once these Catholic Sisters committed to their vows, it seemed that they accepted the life chosen for them by their religious superiors. They said that they depended on God and their faith to guide them. Salaries were returned to the congregation, and the provincial made the decision as to the ways their income should be spent. If a Sister needed medical or dental care, she merely asked the provincial for approval to see a
doctor. She was otherwise provided an allowance for her personal needs. Sister Catherine said, “My salary goes directly to the order. Now, the order, in turn, gives me money on a monthly basis because I’ve already done a personal and professional budget. Contractually, I’ve worked it out with the board that they—as part of my compensation—give me money that helps me to do my job or to take a vacation, and [pause], so it’s down in the contract.”

Participants applied the tools developed through education and personal experiences to their professional roles. These Catholic Sisters said that they negotiated their roles within their campus communities, within their congregations, and within the Church. They expressed high levels of respect for the Church’s expectations, and many of them developed a working relationship with the local Bishop in order to maintain adherence to the Church’s rules and beliefs. They carefully selected guest speakers for graduation, performers for student events, and lecturers by first reviewing historical perspectives and ensuring that opinions and beliefs were not contradictory to those of the Church. For example, if a potential speaker had previously expressed a pro-choice agenda, she or he would not be invited to campus. The Church provided structure, guidance, and black and white expectations.

Sister Kelly said, “We still bump into that patriarchy in the Church that is really, really difficult . . . because the Church is going through a period, I think, of being frightened of the secular world.” When talking about a potential guest speaker at her graduation, she described her encounter with the Bishop. “The abortion issue is the absolute cutting-edge issue. It’s the one that you cannot be outside the Church on. There is a great controversy about Notre Dame giving Obama an honorary degree. I got a letter
from the Bishop . . . saying ,“I hope that you will respect the Church’s teaching in terms of the people you honor, both Catholic and non-Catholic. If they are opposed—if their stance is against the Church’s views on this issue, you can’t honor them.”” Most of the participants described their understanding, albeit sometimes frustrating, of the Church’s rigid expectations.

Participants said that they balanced compliance with personal finesse. Each described the ways her own personality traits contributed to her abilities to perform in her role. Sister Irene told the story of a Sister who approached the president of Fordham University to request that he open a summer school for Catholic Sisters. She said, “Well, of course, he wasn’t going to do that. But while the Sister was in his office, she noticed a very nice box of Cuban cigars on his desk. Well, she went home, and she simply sent him a box of those cigars with a thank-you note, and she told him what day the Sisters would arrive for summer school.” As the story goes, the president felt he had no recourse, and he did, in fact, open his college for summer school for the Sisters. It was a story about the early days of women breaking into the Catholic university structure, otherwise reserved for men. Sister Irene added, “No laywoman could have done that!” She described women religious holding a level of authority that rivaled that of laymen. The story also illustrates a complex approach that capitalizes on religious authority and feminine grace.

Each of these participants demonstrated an ability to negotiate within the Catholic patriarchy to rise to the position of college president. As a leader in such an important role, each participant suggested that she counted on campus acceptance in order to perform.
As these Catholic Sisters navigated their roles in the religious community, they had to deal with crises and scandals, such as the “disorienting condition of the Roman Catholic Church itself, plagued not only by the apparent inability of its many factions on the left and the right to find common ground, but shaken also by a global, scandalous sexual abuse crisis!” (Sister Gabrielle). While most participants admitted that religious authority played a role in societal acceptance, most attributed their personal leadership traits as the main reason they were accepted as leaders in their religious communities and on their campuses.

Participants described a variety of leadership characteristics that they believed contributed to their abilities to lead their campuses. Many discussed their charisms or special gifts, and their ability to inspire their campus community, not only through modeled behaviors, but through the spoken word. They expressed a responsibility for the moral development of their students.

Participants described ways that their responsibility to their students stemmed out of their innate commitment to social justice initiatives. These Catholic Sisters served as early feminists by promoting access and equity for laywomen and encouraging them to seek education and leadership opportunities. These values contributed to their leadership vision on their respective campuses. According to Morey and Piderit (2006), “As a group, sisters no longer considered themselves primarily as exemplars of holiness and commitment to the Church or as models of obedience as they undertook common tasks with good outcomes far beyond what could be achieved with each acting individually. Rather, the sisters were promoters of justice who spoke and acted on behalf of the poor and marginalized. Each sister in her own sphere of influence and the sisters collectively
were to witness to the truth by speaking boldly, like the prophets of old” (Morey & Piderit, 2006, p. 260). Although social justice initiatives provided the foundation for a gender revolution through increased access and equity, participants encouraged the development of characteristics they considered to be inherently feminine traits: compassion, empathy, and respect. Participants promoted civic responsibility, acceptance of diversity, and leadership.

According to Sister Francine, Sisters “were welcomed with open arms by the people because the Sisters have always served with and among the people. In general, people have had great trust in the Sisters.” Sister Kelly suggested, “That we were Sisters allowed them to accept us . . . . If I hadn”t been a nun, I probably wouldn”t have been in that world at all.”

Some of the participants felt that the Church was not always supportive of women religious leaders. They described the attempts of Vatican II to “level the playing field” by inviting laity to join the ranks of the holy. According to Sister Kelly:

There was a sense of respect for Sisters, . . . almost a notion of Sisters being on a higher plane somehow. Vatican II tried to do something about that, talking about all of the faithful being called to holiness, and it’s not a matter of Sisters and priests being higher . . . . But I was still used to that notion of, you know, a Sister is someone you look up to.

In some cases, life as part of a congregation created unexpected challenges. Sister Gabrielle said “Sometimes being in a religious community of women makes it difficult for you to be a president . . . . Who needs evidence when accusations will suffice? There were those who were supposed to be supportive of me—or so I thought—who gave me
more trouble than anybody else did.” Sister Gabrielle alluded to the notion that holy
Sisters were expected to behave in ways that reflected positive human interaction,
courtesy, and consideration. She further noted, “We are still culturally conditioned to
say, „Your success diminishes me. Down you go, chump; up I rise.” It’s not pretty. Now
that’s a cultural feature of our predominant ethnic group [in our congregation]. It’s
magnified in a community because the community is a microcosm of the ethnic
macrocsm.”

According to Sister Harriet, the role of Catholic Sister did not contribute to
societal acceptance. “I think it probably was the person,” she said, suggesting that a
women leader should not be compelled to hold tightly to the position, but focus, instead,
on the requirements of the role and the resources available to accomplish the tasks at
hand. According to Sister Janine,

The leader has to make it on her own. I don’t think any of these outside
influences can really substitute for approval as a result of your decision-making
and your leadership. Just because you are a nun, it doesn’t mean that people are
going to accept you. You have to have the leadership. You have to have good
inter-personal relations with people. You have to be intelligent enough for good
decision-making.

Sister Kelly described the need for personal strength during a time of transition.
She said that she drew on a proven track record of things she did well, while stepping out
of her comfort zone:

I had to establish myself as a friend, as a colleague, apart from, you know, all the
trappings of being a Sister. And that was a good thing. [pause] And it was at this
time, too, that we were getting rid of the habit. I was always pretty humbled because I was always trying to do something that felt like was too big for me. I didn’t have great self-esteem about the whole thing, but I kept doing it [taking on leadership responsibilities] . . . . But the thing that I’ve said often is that I was just so glad I was brave enough to do it [accept the challenge of the presidency].

For Sister Irene, there was no substitute for hard work, commitment to the mission of the institution, and professional development. She did not look to her title of Catholic Sister to carry her.

I still feel, even here, that to move ahead you have to really do your homework, do your analysis, look at the opportunities presented to you that match the ability and talents and mission of your institution. And then, as a leader, . . . you can help bring people and the resources of the institution forward to bring about that change and to move to the next place. It’s a little bit like climbing a ladder.

Participants’ perception of the influence of the Church on their leadership varied. Some saw themselves as separate entities, leading in a silo with shared values. Others said that they experienced a clear overlap of a patriarchal Church and campus leadership. Most of the participants described their leadership as autonomous and separate from the Church. Two participants portrayed partnerships with their Bishops and explained that they and the Bishops participated in regular campus meetings with faculty, staff, and students and had a palpable influence on the campus culture. In this case, the campus community might have perceived the Bishop as the true leader and the Catholic Sisters serving as college presidents as messengers—merely workers on behalf of the Church.
Furthermore, this type of relationship was not described as collaborative, but rather top-down.

Sister Catherine stressed the importance of a cohesive relationship with the Bishop, a key player in the success of her campus. He scheduled time to meet her faculty and her students and, hence, played a key role at her institution. She was one of the participants who focused the majority of her time on task-oriented activities, including financial management and debt assessment. This dynamic might have presented a greater challenge if the campus community had perceived the Bishop to be the vocal leader. Sister Catherine explained, “My Bishop wants to . . . meet with the faculty. So the faculty are always, [pause] suspicious, „why is the Bishop coming?” . . . . He has representation on the board . . . he comes every year for the opening Mass. . . . But people need to know that he is not dictating what the curriculum is or any employment actions I take.” In order to be accepted as leaders, these Catholic Sisters had to establish their authority within the patriarchal structure of the Church and somehow hold a clear position within college administration. The participants who balanced this relationship seemed comfortable with the arrangement, not threatened. They seemed to embrace the Bishop’s presence and enjoy the shared responsibility of guiding their students as part of a holistic education.

As stewards for the Church, the participants who have served as college presidents expressed a clear responsibility to promote the Church’s teachings and the mission of their founding Sisters. For the more progressive leaders and contemporary educators, this sometimes challenged personal ideology about what it means to be educated. One participant struggled to lead open-minded, diverse, and critical thinkers in
an environment that continued to embrace stagnant beliefs and expectations, especially relating to women. Sister Betty said, “I think eventually—though I’ll be long dead and you’ll be long dead before it happens—the pressures of our contemporary society, which is moving very fast, will push us toward important and inevitable changes.” The next section considers participant perceptions as they relate to feminism and the Church.

**Feminism: Leadership and the Search for Equity**

Participants described internal conflict between advocacy for women’s and gay rights and the laws of the Church. Most said they were compelled to follow their conscience. “The issue here is not just about ordination; it’s about gender-equality and full inclusivity. And it’s not about power either. It’s about service” (Sister Francine).

Daly (1968) described the Church’s impact on women religious this way: “The Catholic Church appears to many as the last stronghold of anachronism and prejudice, refusing to adapt its structures to the condition of modern women, still preaching to them the passive virtues of obedience, submission, and meekness, while seeming to refuse or ignore the profound aspirations of half of the human race to liberty and full personhood” (p. 54). One need only look to the 2009 Vatican investigation to appreciate the limited changes since this 1968 statement. According to Daly (1968), many Catholic Sisters were so optimistic about the proposed changes in the Vatican II documents that they overlooked the inherent “symbol system of Christianity itself and that a primary function of the Christianity in Western culture has been to legitimize sexism” (p. 17).

Some of the participants expressed concern that the Church had failed to change with the times and, as a result, had traditionally contradicted the goals of education and
the notion of expanding perspectives and tolerance of multiple points of view. The two major issues included gender equity and gay rights. For example, Sister Betty said,

I don’t think that overly conservative people who cannot open their minds to look at differing points of view are able to clearly see what is happening. And you have to be able to do that with everything if you are going to be an educated person.

Participants described their personal battles as they worked in support of gender equity in the Church and gay rights. They suggested that increased conflict created pressures seen in the 2009 Vatican investigation, which challenged the lifestyles and beliefs of Catholic Sisters and threatened their ability to serve in the same capacity as leaders. The descriptions of some participants in failing to adhere to all of the teachings of the Church could be seen as a “cafeteria Catholicism” that allows diners to pick and choose only what they like to eat from an array of abundant, but tasteless, options” (McDannell, 2011, p. 231). One participant alluded to changing religions. All of the participants were proponents of change, some embracing the concept of birth control, female ordination, and the incorporation of a feminine voice in local, regional, and national decision-making in the Church.

Participants who served in the role of president for 10 years or longer perceived an evolution in their leadership traits to fit the needs of the institution and to maintain a place within the religious realm. Participants described their niche in modern society as a combination of religious and secular cultures. According to several participants, societal expectations have contributed to perceived acceptance of Catholic Sisters as leaders in higher education. Sister Catherine explained, “I’ve never worn a habit . . . . I’ve never
worn a veil . . . . I entered the convent when I was only 23 years old. It was after Vatican II, and people had modernized. But there’s still that pull-back—you know, what Hollywood and Broadway expect—this kind of caricature of religious women, from *Sister Act* and *Nunsense* and all that kind of stuff—it’s just one of those things that I can get really incensed about at times. But the reality is, nobody writes me off because I’m a woman religious.”

Perceived images of the way Catholic Sisters are supposed to look and behave likely have been constructed based on a combination of social norms, the media, and reality. One example might be the perception of a Catholic school upbringing with religious instructors wielding rulers at unruly children. In addition, societal expectations for the ways women are supposed to behave have impacted the participants” perceptions of their leadership. Sister Catherine described her struggles with campus expectations that she should be a maternal, nurturing leader. She described emails and phone calls from students with “terribly sad situations.” Contrary to cultural expectations for a feminine response, Sister Catherine said, “sometimes I just have to pass it off to the CFO and say, you handle this because I can’t hear one more sad story from a student.”

These Catholic Sisters said that they have found themselves navigating the landscape, both current and historical, balancing public perceptions and expectations with the reality of day-to-day life. According to Sister Evelyn, Catholic Sisters who serve as college presidents have not taken their power lightly. She described one of her predecessors: “She was a very authoritative, distinguished nun. She used to go to New York City and have meetings . . . and she could raise money just like that! [The participant snapped her fingers.] And she could get men to do anything she wanted them
to do.” Sister Evelyn suggested that her predecessors exercised their power for the good of others, especially oppressed populations.

As proclaimed feminists, these Catholic Sisters were change agents, leading the way politically, socially, and culturally. They said that they took a stand against inherent patriarchy and fought for women’s rights. “Unfortunately our Church hierarchy has often interpreted our desire for gender equality and full participation in the Church as a seeking of power. I don’t quite understand where that comes from when we are so hard-pressed to adequately provide for the spiritual needs of our people!” (Sister Francine). Sister Betty said,

I’ve read some of the things I wrote—I started looking through my folders from the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, at my speeches and other things that I said. Well, it was interesting to watch the progression in my understanding of what the issues relative to women were. In the early times, in the 60s, even my language was “man, he.” I had apparently not yet become alerted to how language impacts how you think. . . . I would never write something like that now. I would talk about humankind, not mankind—my whole vocabulary has changed.

Events in the social sector, “raising critical issues of justice and individual rights in the public arena” (Morey & Piderit, 2006, p.258), impacted religious congregations as women religious began to view the patriarchal structure of the Church through the lens of secular civil rights movements (Morey & Piderit, 2006).

Many religious women, as well as men, it must be said, looked at the Roman Catholic Church and saw an organization with a history of entrenched patriarchy, oppression of women, and discrimination against people of color and
homosexuals. Horrified by what they saw as behavior contrary to the gospel message of love within their own Church and congregations—behavior they had themselves participated in—religious women set about trying to reform the injustice they saw in their own house. (Morey & Piderit, 2006, p. 258)

Sister Betty said, “And in the past, as I read the past, the Church generally had the attitude: we know what you need to do and we are going to tell you what you need to do.”

According to Sister Francine,

Following World War II, a significant number of Catholic colleges and universities were founded by religious orders of women were established in countless cities across this country. The proliferation of Catholic colleges and universities founded by religious orders of women came as a natural progression for the Sisters in teaching communities and fulfilled a great need at the time. . . . Their important goal at the outset was to give Catholic women an opportunity to achieve this level of education and, years later, in many cases, to open these institutions to men. . . . Many of these religious congregations of women who responded to the educational needs of young women, in particular, were able to maintain them as women’s colleges to this day.

Despite feminist initiatives in both secular and religious society, participants described prescribed boundaries that they found insurmountable. Sister Betty described “a great deal of resistance by the large numbers of very conservative people who seem to be able to get power and hold onto it” within Catholic higher education and the Catholic patriarchal hierarchy. She said, “That makes me very sad because I don’t think that”s
good education.” Participants suggested that their leadership has been limited by the constructs of the patriarchal Church.

Sister Evelyn said that she has had to synthesize the components of her life in order to meet the needs of her students. These compartments included the elements of her faith, her commitment to social justice, and her dedication to the holistic education of her students. She said that she created a safe haven of trust and a place where people felt comfortable reaching out for help. It seemed that she created a community. “Partly because I’m a Catholic nun and probably because I am who I am and they know me, but I say to new people coming here: „You know, if you have a hard time in your own life, this is a community, and you can ask for help.‟” Her story portrayed a delicate balance between her own natural tendencies as a leader and the limitations placed upon her by the Catholic Church.

Despite a patriarchal hierarchy in the Church, some of the participants believe change is coming to the Church, albeit not likely in their lifetime. There was a clear dichotomy between those participants who expressed belief that the Church is evolving and those who expressed a belief that the Church has failed to change with the times. Most of the participants expressed feelings of disheartenment with the Church and its inability to recognize women as equals to men. Sister Francine said, “You know, I would have things to say to the leaders of the Church [chuckle]. At one time I was even tempted to seek ordination . . . . I look at my life and I say, „This was your calling,‟ and I think part of what I am really proud of is the opportunity to empower others to not lose hope and to work toward a fully inclusive Church.” In her book They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Woman, Ruth Wallace (1992) said, “Given the patriarchal
structure of the Catholic church, and the conservative stance of the current members of the Roman Curia regarding women in the church, one would not expect to see women appointed to significant leadership positions” (p. 1). Sister Diane said, “I know I represent the Church in higher education and here at [name of college], or did. [pause] But I don’t know that I represent the Catholic Church in the male dominated sphere. . . . I have some differences with some of the practices of the Church.” Sister Francine spoke about the need for change within the Catholic tradition. She explained, “the Holy Spirit is not stagnant! Actually, I see the Holy Trinity as a dynamic movement. This means that the Church must be dynamic, not static.”

Some participants discussed changes in the Church as a result of Vatican II. They expressed hope for a future that included women in greater leadership roles. Participants shared stories about their history and its impact on their current situations. Sister Gabrielle compared the shifting culture of Catholic Sisters and Catholicism to the cultural devastation of the Crow Indians. She said, “this is a metaphor now, the whole thing, the experience of the Crow Indians and their last great chief, Plenty Coup, who died in 1932. . . . Plenty Coup recognized that although people who lived by the name Crow lived on, what it meant to be Crow no longer made sense in the way it once had.”

In the 1970s, the women’s movement in secular society impacted women and their roles in the Church. “Many American Catholic women experienced a heightening of their critical consciousness as they worked for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. These experiences helped some Catholic women to reflect on their countless hours of parish service and their exclusion from the most important functions in
the ministry” (Wallace, 1992, p. 11). Some participants expressed an interest in the priesthood for themselves or a woman they knew. Sister Francine said,

I am qualified to be ordained tomorrow—today, actually—but obviously, that’s not available . . . . There are Sisters in my religious order who have left both the congregation and the Church because they felt they had a call to priesthood. Yet, the two in question had to join the United Church of Christ because their dream could not be fulfilled in the Roman Catholic Church.

Sister Catherine described the study of theology, once reserved for seminary men, as a catalyst to change. She said, “Women are very creative in kind of circumventing the obstacles because they have the determination. . . . I believe some of it comes from [pause] . . . the will of God. So we’ll overcome these obstacles to make it happen.”

Sister Francine said, “We do have many, many priestly women, but we don’t want to belong to a system that is attached to a vision of Church that is a pyramidal hierarchy, but rather a circle that has a strong inner core of leadership with circles of service that include both women and men working together, ordained and non-ordained.” When asked if women will be ordained in the future, Sister Evelyn replied, “No time soon.” She described the conflict of immigrant Anglican Priests who can be married. She said, “I think that’s going to cause a lot of problems with current Priests who can’t marry and with some women religious . . . . And [pause] things take hundreds of years, especially in the Church, it seems. So, I wouldn’t say that women will never be ordained, but I probably won’t see it.”

Two participants stated that they have explored other religions as a means to leadership roles within a church community. Sister Gabrielle said, “Buddhism looks
good on a lot of days. . . . I am very fond of the way they look at reality.” In his book *Sisters: Catholic Nuns and the Making of America*, Fialka (2003) asserted,

Polls show that only a minority of women aspire to priesthood, though a larger group probably thinks that the barrier against women is an anachronism that should be removed . . . . Orders of religious women have been the Church’s largest reservoir of managerial talent and beneficial contacts with the outside world. If the Church intends to survive as a healthy community, the men who run it need to clarify the status of sisters and give them the opportunity for roles and responsibilities that use their full range of skills. (p. 334)

One participant commented on the challenge of listening to boring Sunday homilies, knowing she could do a better job. Another described a calling to the priesthood and love for the Eucharist. Many of the participants expressed some level of resentment to be denied equitable treatment in the Church because they are women. This stance, consistent among most of the participants, reflected the feminist perspectives of the participants. Their commitment to social justice and civil rights seemed to extend beyond the secular arena. Although these participants demonstrated their ability to navigate the historically patriarchal world of the Church as evidenced in their positions within their religious and academic communities and in serving as college presidents, some described the contradiction between a university as a marketplace of ideas and a highly conservative Church (Sister Francine and Sister Betty).

In summary, most of the participants described ways initiation into leadership offered early lessons about the power of religious authority. As they learned to navigate their leadership within a patriarchal hierarchy, participants said that they took on greater
responsibilities. Grounded in a foundation of faith and commitment to social justice, these leaders made a clear commitment to the holistic education of their students. They expressed the belief that societal acceptance has been based not only on their religious authority, but on the unique leadership characteristics they brought to their positions. In order to best serve their students and oppressed populations, it seems that these Sisters have learned to follow the rules of the Church and partner with a patriarchal hierarchy, and still maintain a high level of integrity based on their own personal convictions.

The next analytic category will examine stereotypically feminine characteristics as they apply to leadership efficacy and societal acceptance. In addition, the impact of counter-stereotypical approaches to leadership will be discussed.

**Research Question #3: Challenging Gender Stereotypes**

The purpose of research question #1 was to elicit participant perspectives about success. Most of the participants defined success in terms of social justice, perpetuation of their institutional missions, and the holistic development of their students. They described leadership efficacy as a measure of success. The leaders who perceived themselves to be successful generally embraced a collaborative approach and encouraged staff and faculty members to take ownership for their own performance outcomes.

Research question #2 examined participant understanding of societal acceptance of their leadership. Participants described the factors they perceived as instrumental to that acceptance. These included religious authority and personal leadership characteristics. These leaders learned to navigate the patriarchal hierarchy of the Catholic Church to obtain their leadership positions; however, most of the participants
described the conflict of following the rules of the Church while following their conscience in regard to women’s and gay rights.

This section of the study, designed to address research question #3, explored the participants’ perceptions about gender stereotypes. Participants described themselves as entrepreneurial, ambitious, and visionary. They claimed to be bold critical thinkers and problem-solvers who have defied convention in lifestyle choices and societal influence. They described themselves as committed to service and self-sacrifice, and they were humbled by the successes of their students. Even in their decision to pursue the life of Catholic Sisters, participants disregarded societal norms and expectations. Participants offered a variety of reasons for choosing the life of a Catholic Sister.

In an effort to explore the ways participants have challenged gender stereotypes, each was asked to discuss the factors that contributed to her decision to become a Catholic Sister and her personal experience pursuing advanced degrees. These experiences and societal expectations contributed to the constructed self and their perceptions of leadership.

Each participant was also asked to provide examples of perceived gender stereotypes and to describe the ways in which she felt she challenged those stereotypes. These aspects were examined through a feminist lens.

Finally, in order to understand the changing roles of Catholic Sisters in society today, participants were asked to describe the reasons for declining numbers of Catholic Sisters. Their responses were considered within the conceptual framework element of Catholicism.
The Constructed Self: Gender Stereotypes and Women Religious

Participants described the ways that, throughout their lives, they generated knowledge and meaning through the complex interaction of their experiences and their reflection and contemplation of those experiences. Through reflection and contemplation, these leaders made decisions and exhibited behaviors resulting from a synthesis of multidimensional personal and societal factors: upbringing, congregational vows, perceived societal expectations, mission of the institution of higher education, and learning based on experiences.

In general, responses in the interviews suggested that family values, societal culture, social norms, and intrinsic tendencies contributed to the participants’ perceptions of gender, sexual orientation, and lifestyle choices. Leadership constructs were shaped as a result of background, culture, professional interactions and experiences, role models, faith values, and personal mission and vision (Bodner, 1986; Fosnot, 1996).

All of the participants expressed the belief that they exhibited qualities that challenged gender stereotypes and defied convention; however, all of the participants also stated that gender stereotypes had not impacted them in their role as college presidents. Sister Gabrielle described personal traits that defy conventional female stereotypes, stating, “I’m a person of determination, tenacity, and perseverance . . . . I don’t respond well to being micro-managed. I like to take charge . . . . I’m very results-oriented . . . . I’m rather compulsive. I have high standards. I’m a perfectionist.”

As was discussed previously, Catholic Sisters defied conventional expectations. Committed to social justice, they described ways they challenged themselves to educate the daughters of working-class families to become leaders through access to higher
education. “If you go back and look at the history of religious congregations, they really
served people,” said Sister Janine. Sister Irene said, “It was women religious who were
principals in schools and maybe opened doors to other laywomen over time . . . . We
were the pioneers of a lot of things for women.” These Sisters approached their work
with conviction and dedication to service and social justice. They said that they believed
that their sacrifices set the expectations for their successors.

This college was built originally out of the sacrifice of the Sisters. The lives of
the Sisters became the living collateral in the very early days. You know, when
the people who came to certify the university said, “Well, now what is your
collateral?” We are the collateral. That was the passion that created it [the
institution]. (Sister Amelia)

Sister Catherine described a time when the only female college presidents were
Sisters. She said, “They were just as shrewd and had just as much insight and ability as
the men, but I think, over and over, people underestimated us [them].” According to
Sister Amelia,

You pulled out all the stops to give it your fullest talent, your fullest passion.
Because that’s what you believed was your form of service, tied to the spirit of
your particular congregation . . . . I think we’ve always broken down walls . . . .
That was breaking stereotypes . . . . We were the reason that schools were opened
to women.

Some participants described a desire to be more than a wife and a mother. Others
said they wanted to be available to travel, to experience a life free from domesticity.
Sister Francine described women religious as forward-thinking, responsible, and relentless:

I think our Sisters felt that women could succeed and exceed as well as men. They believed that women, as well as men, deserved opportunities beyond the elementary and secondary levels, and that we didn’t necessarily see the women of [our regional area] as having to be mill workers as their only option. The Sisters believed that these young women had potential far beyond that. They also could foresee that the mills were not going to last forever. This has proven to be the case… It was in the midst of these post WWII revitalization efforts and in the midst of a new generation of children that religious congregations were compelled to respond. There was a certain conviction—a boldness—almost to say, we can do this! We can and we must provide educational opportunities for the new generations to come . . . . [pause] And there were those first orders that took the risk and led the way in founding institutions of higher education, especially for women.

For Sister Evelyn, it was about stepping outside her comfort zone and becoming involved in places that only men had stepped before her. “I’ve taken an active part in some leadership positions which people were not comfortable with,” she said. “I’ve often been the first woman or the only woman on a board.” Eventually she saw increased opportunities due to corporate quotas for diversity. “All the banks were looking for one woman, and it was interesting because they also wanted a woman who had some position. So, there were only a few of us, [pause] so we were all getting two or three calls. And they didn’t want our expertise; they really wanted a woman who had a position.”
Sister Irene did not think in terms of gender. She said that she managed to avoid the implications of gender stereotypes:

I would have to be honest and say, I don’t know of too many occasions when I really felt put upon by gender stereotypes. I think I’ve had good relationships with leadership in the Church, for the most part, and I think the Bishops with which I work, for the most part—not in every single case—respected us in our roles and I always felt respected in my role as a leader . . . . I don’t think that I ever felt, as a general category, that gender stereotype was a difficult barrier for me to overcome.

Although many of the participants denied an impact of gender stereotypes in their roles as leaders, the accomplishments of these women leaders provided evidence of ways they challenged gender stereotypes. As a result, they seemed to encourage future women leaders to take up the challenge.

There’s been an enormous contribution made to higher education through the leadership of women religious. Over half of the Catholic colleges and universities in this country were founded by Sisters. They stepped up to the plate, and in most cases, hit the ball right out of the park . . . . It was not about getting the credit or the renown. It was just [about] doing it. And there have been thousands and thousands of graduates from all of these institutions who have made a significant impact on the world because of the quality of the education they got. (Sister Amelia)

To gain an understanding of the circumstances leading up to participant leadership roles, each was asked to describe the factors that contributed to her decision to
become a Catholic Sister. These descriptions provided perceptions of the constructed self through lived experiences and self-reflection. Participants offered a variety of reasons for pursuing a religious life, including a desire to serve God, a pursuit of happiness, a commitment to service, and a desire for a safe, secure lifestyle. Sister Kelly said, “I wanted to do something generous for God, and I wanted to live a life of service—kind of a faith and service,” while Sister Janine said, “I wanted to work for and with the people . . . and at that time, religious women were leaders and educators, and I think it was then that I had the inclination and entered.”

For Sister Harriet, the decision involved a perceived lifestyle. “I found the Sisters very joyful and committed . . . . It attracted me—the way they acted and behaved. There were a large number at that time, and they were always very joyful. And I wanted to teach.”

According to Sister Evelyn, “It was very appealing to young women, mainly because of the faith element and the service element, but also because it was seen as a choice other than marriage.” A religious life offered an option to the traditional female lifestyle: wife and mother.

I had grown up thinking, just as my parents had, that I would date, get married, and have children. But, you know, that’s the beauty of the call . . . . I thought it would always haunt me if I did not find out if I was really called to religious life.

(Sister Catherine)

Most of the participants said that they dated in high school and college but quickly realized that marriage and motherhood did not represent a lifestyle they wanted to pursue. As another aspect of this option to domesticity, the order provided an
opportunity to travel. Whether through experimentation and exploration, as one participant described it, or a true calling to the religious life, participants said that they recognized the opportunity to apply their charism, or spiritual gifts, in a career choice that might positively impact the lives of others.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the Catholic Church “confined and defined women by their reproductive role” (Reuther, 1991, p. 263) and forbade contraception. As a result, the Church significantly limited female contributions to society. In the book *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*, Rosemary Radford Ruether explained that “Catholicism traditionally split women into two categories, celibate women under vows and married women, with the former seen as superior to the latter” (p. 263). The limitation of women’s choices in life likely forced participants to choose between domesticity and a religious order.

For some, the journey was precarious. They said that, ultimately, their doubt about their lifestyle choice could only be alleviated through years of service to others and through the bonds of solidarity. Sister Kelly said, “. . . you hit a rough patch, or a moment of „Oh my God, what did I do?” and [pause] for me, it was in the 60s when everything was exploding in terms of renewal, reform; the whole culture was turned upside down.”

Perhaps the things they did not find in the Church, they found in each other. Sister Kelly described her connection with her fellow Sisters when she said, “. . . the other thing that made it possible, [pause] this little bit of an intangible; I come here not just as myself, but I come here with the sponsorship of the Sisters [congregation] behind me.” Sister Francine said, “a strong bond of unity exists among all the Sisters.” When Sister
Betty described her personal journey within her order, she said, “You are always free to leave anytime. But I never really wanted to leave. I’ve really enjoyed my life and I have wonderful friends and the students that I have taught are really strong friends and I hear from them all the time and we see each other periodically.” Some said that they discovered a road on which they might pursue a career, become highly educated, travel, and do many of the things that marriage and motherhood could never have allowed. According to Sister Amelia, “I was in religious life at the time in the Sisters [pause] movement, when there was a great emphasis placed on getting us the best education possible with the intent that it would certainly enrich our ministries.” Sister Kelly described the notion of availability and the freedom to “do what I am told and go where I am sent.” Several participants traveled both domestically and internationally for ministry and service to oppressed populations. The specific locations and opportunities are intentionally left out to protect the identities of the participants.

Despite the benefits of the life described above, it might also be argued that Catholic Sisters sacrificed much to pursue a religious profession. Participants suggested that “the calling” was powerful enough to draw them in. For some, religious life provided the only alternative to marriage and motherhood. Perhaps this defines the apprehension many conveyed in their initial decision to become a Catholic Sister. It was at one time unacceptable to be a single woman who avoided family life. Sister Francine described her parents” initial disappointment in her decision to pursue religious life, expecting her to settle into the traditional roles of wife and mother. Just before she headed into her final vows, her parents called her into the living room. She described the moment: “It remains precious to me that the day I was to profess my final vows, before
leaving for the ceremony to be held in our home parish, my dad and mom called me into
the living room and said, „Come sit between us.” I thought, oh my gosh, what is this
going to be about? And you know what? They said to me, and I cry when I think about it,
„If you change your mind this minute, it would be okay with us.“

Daly (1968) suggested: “Made to feel guilty or „unnatural” if they rebel, many
[Catholic Sisters] have been condemned to a restricted or mutilated existence in the name
of religion” (p. 58). For an independent, career-driven woman, or a homosexual woman,
the order provided the only lifestyle option. When Sister Francine”s parents gave her
permission to change her mind, “they were assuring that my decision was a free choice.
They freed me up completely” (Sister Francine).

When participants chose to enter the convent, they chose lives of poverty,
chastity, and humility. Although it might be assumed that each was called to the faith by
a higher power, in some cases another explanation might be more accurate. In his book
for convent life also offered some substantial side benefits. It was often the only way to a
decent education for a woman . . . . Ambitious women who had the skills and the stamina
to build and run large institutions found the convent to be the first and, for a long time,
the only outlet for their talents” (p. 2).

Many of the participants identified a need for personal growth. They
contemplated life choices in which female characteristics that challenged stereotypes
might be accepted. They said that they considered options to domesticity that still
allowed them some level of security. For example, Sister Kelly said, “I was always
trying to do something that felt like it was too big for me,” and “I just held my nose and
jumped.” She also said that a major reason for her decision to become a nun was because she wanted to be available. Sister Kelly said, “You can pull up roots” and described “this notion of availability and the freedom.” She described safety and security in the order. Sister Diane said she never had to worry about a roof over her head, food on her plate, or access to medical care.

For some of the participants, an introspective personality, an affinity for ritual, and a desire for higher education became motivating factors to join an order. Sister Kelly said, “I think my motivation was a kind of idealism. I wanted to do something generous for God, and I wanted a life of service.” This thinking has a rich history in the Victorian era. According to McDannell (1986), “the charismatic nature of the early Christian community and the later development of a monastic ideal worked against the spiritualization of the family and home life. To have family commitments meant being bound to this world and not preparing for the Kingdom of God” (p. 2). Life in the convent equated to a spiritual life and a closer existence to God than life in a traditional family could provide.

Others said they found themselves searching for something more. Some saw Catholic Sisters as joyful, and they wanted to discover that happiness that comes from selflessness and service. Sister Diane was drawn to the life because she saw “primarily the happiness in the Sisters who taught me. I felt that there must be something in that life that is worthwhile.” She asked, “What qualifications would you need in order to have a life that would be so happy, so enriched?” She realized that there must be more opportunities for happiness in life than the acquisition of material things.
Another participant recognized the Sisters’ bravery and wanted the chance to be courageous, too. “They had enormous conviction, courage and resiliency, even in the midst of their tremendous sense of grief and loss,” said Sister Francine, describing the heroism of sisters who saved students from a schoolhouse fire.

When faced with limited choices in life, Sister Evelyn chose the convent. “It was very appealing to young women, certainly because of the faith element and the service element, but also because it was seen as a choice other than marriage—because people who are married tend to be devoted to their families and not too many of them also had a career or were involved in full-time service. So, I thought I would try it.”

In general it might be argued that the Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents chose the life of the convent in order to adopt certain privileges and freedoms. They embraced an opportunity to live a life of servitude to God instead of servitude to a husband and children. However, this decision subordinated them to the patriarchal hierarchy of the Church, and, as a result, shifted their potential obedience to a husband to obedience to patriarchal religious leaders. Subordination to a patriarchal hierarchy and the plight for equity are explored in the next section.

**Feminism: Rejecting Domesticity**

If gender is a social construct, traits and characteristics of Catholic Sisters who have served as college president were likely developed during their childhood as a result of family influences, societal norms, and environmental culture (Claes, 2006). Factors contributing to the constructed self were examined in the previous section. According to the participants, as these traits and characteristics evolved through maturation and life choices, they were influenced by the social norms of the congregation, as opposed to the
norms of secular society. At Catholic women’s colleges, women were expected to do everything. There were no men to whom to turn for help with facilities, maintenance, or community relations. According to Sister Diane, “I’ve never had anybody who challenged that I, because I was a woman religious, couldn’t do something.” They took responsibility for the work at hand. According to Sister Janine:

I don’t think religious women look at themselves like: oh, I am a woman; I can’t do it. It was: I need to do it. Do I have to be a farmer? Do I have to be a teacher? Do I have to do this? Do I have to do that? After Vatican II, many religious went into different work, becoming doctors and lawyers and all. Why? Because they knew that in the future they had to support other religious women who were in retirement, couldn’t work . . . . Being a women has never inhibited me.

Sister Evelyn discussed her work in preparing future women leaders. She said, “I think they have a lot of role models here . . . . The students see a lot of women who are leaders and who are capable, very capable.” The Sisters talked about educating the whole person, which encompassed intellectual stimulation, moral development, and commitment to service. This concept of a whole-person education applied both to women and to men.

According to Sister Catherine, “The strength of these colleges founded by women was in the culture. They had developed a culture of compassion, and it flowed out through their charisms, compassion and mercy.”

Sister Kelly said, “The feminine stereotype is sort of soft and passive. In a leadership position, you can’t be that way. You have to make hard decisions about things. You have to take some strong stands, and you can’t be just a listener. [pause]
You have to be a speaker, too . . . . I think those stereotypes are changing, but at least, based on the old ones, I guess I have defied them.”

Participants suggested that campus staff and faculty members expected certain types of behavior from their campus leader. The participants who said they demonstrated authoritarian leadership characteristics and a task-focused approach perceived challenges to acceptance, while the participants who said they practiced collaborative leadership with an emphasis on communication perceived support and acceptance from their employees and students. It might be argued that the acceptable behaviors reflected societal expectations based on stereotypes for women and for women religious.

Sister Betty asserted, “Gender stereotypes just are ridiculous!” She described an awakening later in her career to the gender issues she had not realized existed in the world. “I felt that women are able to do anything that men are able to do, if men would just get out of the way and let us do them!”

Sister Kelly and Sister Amelia refused to submit to gender stereotypes and suggested that gender is constructed based on societal influences.

I resist the sort of false dichotomy or a spirit that men are from Mars and women are from Venus. I don’t know that there is a hard-wired feminine way of looking at things or a hard-wired masculine way. I know we have been enculturated, you know, differently, . . . but I would prefer to think about it as [pause] a kind of basic Christian notion. (Sister Kelly)

According to Sister Amelia,

I have never felt limited as a woman . . . . I don’t buy into stereotypes. I think it’s far beyond that now, in terms of the opportunities that both our male and female
graduates have and how they learn side by side. It’s developed dramatically from what it was in the ’60s or ’70s or ’80s.

Participants suggested that family life contributed to attitudes about gender. Most of the participants described families who encouraged higher education, despite societal norms and other families gearing daughters toward lives of domesticity. The challenge presented itself, however, when participants announced to family members their decision to pursue religious lives.

For most of the participants, their families supported them once they became accustomed to the idea of their entering religious life. Initial disappointment was evident as they mourned the loss of unborn grandchildren and as they adjusted to the realization that their daughters would not pay them back for the education they sacrificed to provide for them. Sister Gabrielle described her family’s response: “I think they would have preferred if I had gotten married . . . . So after we got over the few tears and the ‘oh, I’ll never have any grandchildren’ . . . it was fine.”

Sister Irene said, “I think most Catholic families are happy when they hear that people are going into religious life, but not so happy when they learn that their family member is going. At that time, religious life really separated you from your family.”

Sister Catherine offered a contrary perspective. She said, “I don’t want to shed bad light on my mother, but she was kind of like, ‘Oh, what a waste of money!’ [In time she] came around to kind of liking the status of having a nun in the family.”

Family culture and societal expectations contributed to constructed realities about each participant’s place in the world, and these factors likely impacted decisions to lead and to serve. Participants said that they refused to allow societal expectations and gender
stereotypes to prevent them from living a worthy life, committed to their faith. The following section examines the impact of societal change on the future of women religious and Catholicism.

**Catholicism: Changing Times and Shifting Stereotypes**

Sworn to vows of poverty, chastity, and humility, participants said that they accepted their responsibilities to their congregation, to their institutions, and to their students. “Faith, for Catholic women, is something bodily, appealing to the heart and senses as much as the mind” (Redmont, 1992, p. 230). For those who chose religious life as an alternative to domesticity, their primary commitment to Christianity and to the Church was critical.

Participants expressed their belief that changing times have contributed to declining numbers of Catholic Sisters. These changes included access to education that was once limited to those in the order, opportunities to balance family and career, and greater choices for lifestyles other than the domesticity of marriage and motherhood. In addition, many Catholic Sisters no longer wear habits or live cloistered lifestyles. Instead, they blend with laity. Sister Diane suggested,

I think it”s [declining numbers of Catholic Sisters] because the opportunities for education and to serve are there without having to commit oneself to it [the congregation vows]. I think the opportunities to see those happy people are limited. They don”t see a Sister any more. They don”t have a Sister teaching them. They don”t have Sister nursing them. I think our mannerisms—our behaviors—are such that people do not recognize us. I think you need a model in order to want to be that person.
According to Sister Kelly, the decline in the Catholic sense of community has impacted potential inductees to the order and the faith. “When I entered the convent there was still the community. There was the convent connected with the school, and we all worked in the school, and we did it all together. What happened in the mid-sixties was [that] we went to much more of a system of individual choice, . . . but what happened with that—those communities sort of broke up. And that notion of this band of people doing this work together was no longer operative. What is the cohesion of the community? What pulls it together?”

According to some participants, leadership roles for women were once reserved for women religious. These women religious had to make a choice between domesticity and a life of faith. Despite the decision to reject domesticity, these women still made a commitment—to the Church as opposed to a spouse. The commitment was critical to taking vows. Participants suggested that recent generations are less likely to make the profound commitment required for a religious life.

In the 1700s and 1800s, it was women religious who were able to take on leadership, and there were few opportunities for women. Women at that time got married and had families. The emphasis was on the women staying in the home. Over the years, there’s been development and more opportunities for women. Women work for and with the Church as parents and single women. And so, you know, there’s also this difficulty in our society about making commitments. When you come to a religious community you make a commitment. After a while, it’s a commitment for life. Some people just can’t make that commitment for life. (Sister Janine)
Declining numbers of Catholic Sisters spurred the 2009 Vatican investigation, the Apostolic Visitation. Although investigators implied that a shift from cloistered, structured living served as impetus to this decline, participants offered a number of other possible reasons for women’s decisions to pursue alternate lifestyles, such as increased access to education, wider acceptance of single living, and expanded opportunities in the Church for laity. The next section will explore the impact of gender and religion as they pertain to participant leadership and the culture of their respective institutions.

**Research Question #4: Gender, Religion, Leadership, and Institutional Culture**

This question provided an opportunity to learn about several aspects of participant perceptions of leadership and the impact of gender, religion, and leadership on the culture of the institution. As a result, this question served several purposes: to ascertain the participants’ perception of the relationship between religion and higher education, to identify the role of gender and religion as they pertain to leadership and the culture of the participant institutions, and to project the effects on the institution of laity taking on presidential roles in the future. It was during this last line of questioning that participants expressed their concerns with the Church to which they have sworn allegiance.

Most of the participants described a campus culture in which religion and higher education were intrinsically linked, each serving a role in the personal and academic development of students.

Leaders in Catholic colleges have been most dedicated to making sure that the mission of the founding Sisters is being carried out and that they are faithful to that . . . . They take very seriously their obligation and responsibilities to be the
spokesperson for that value system and that legacy that has been passed onto them. (Sister Irene)

The marriage of gender and religion was significant in that women religious founded women’s colleges to meet a societal need, to provide women with access to higher education, and to promote a holistic education for social justice. “It’s certainly evident that education has been, and still is, a major commitment for women religious today” (Sister Francine). Participants said that gender, religion, and education formed a triad, with each component essential to the whole. These Sisters enhanced their students’ spiritual development through curriculum development. Sister Francine said, “... having just completed my own master’s degree in religious education from [institution], I was asked to develop an actual department of religious studies . . . . To this day we express our missions as education of the whole person. It is viewed as a formation for life.”

One of the things that distinguished Catholic colleges founded by women from those founded by priests or brothers was their sharp focus on personal spiritual development of students. Women religious saw the spiritual formation of their students as critical to their education, and, therefore, nuns took this responsibility seriously and continued to improve their own preparation and formation in this regard. (Morey & Piderit, 2006, p. 252)

Serving as role models, participants offered examples of the ways they have represented social justice and service, intent in their resolve to develop future leaders. They saw their roles as facilitating the educational process and “allowing an individual to explore each
dimension of their human development” (Sister Catherine). This commitment to social injustice and service served as a component of whole student development.

As part of the mission of Catholic higher education, participants expressed a firm belief in the relationship among religion, spirituality, femininity, and educational leadership. According to Sister Francine,

It is very important that people are spiritually whole, psychologically whole, and that they can also stand up with confidence, having acquired the credentials that can help them to be successful in the world. It’s a vision of whole-person education, and seeing to the health of the body, mind, heart, and soul. To me, that’s the kind of education with which we have equipped our women—and men.

Sister Irene compared the call to religious life to the call to education and described the many parallels in a mixture of contemplation, reflection, and ministry. In the following sections, participant perceptions of leadership and the impact of gender, religion, and leadership on the culture of the institution are examined through the lenses of the constructed self, religion, and feminism.

The Constructed Self: Gender, Religion, and Higher Education as Building Blocks

If societal expectations for the Catholic college president were based on the media representation of the mysterious cloistered women in “flying nun” attire, those expectations would be challenged when the Catholic leader relinquished her habit and interacted with the campus community on a more personal level. According to Sister Irene, “Because we became more like—and mixed with—lay people, they got to know we were really made of the same flesh and blood as they were . . . . Our lifestyles became more transparent, perhaps in shifting from the habit to dressing like a lay person.
Our abilities had to stand more on their own merit.” The traditional paradigm shifted, and the Catholic Sister who served as college president was approachable and interactive. Her words set the tone, and her actions set the expectations for her students, her staff, and her faculty. For example, Sister Evelyn described the ways she modeled service interaction:

I’m very devoted to service and helping, especially the poor. So, given our neighborhood and our circumstances, it’s been easy. You know, the poor are all around here . . . . Students who can’t afford to come here but have a lot of talent, we [pause] always sort of reach out . . . . I see it as [founding Sister’s] legacy—reaching out to the people that nobody else cares about. The underserved. We started one of the first veteran offices.”

However, societal expectations were not based solely on images from the media. These Catholic Sisters, upon entrance into the convent, committed to vows of poverty, chastity, and humility. For participants who adopted a self-promoting or overly confident demeanor, perceived consequences were harsh. Sister Gabrielle said, “We want everybody around us to be humble. But if somebody is achieving very high, and I’ve always been a very high achiever, and that’s not everybody’s trajectory, you run into problems.” One explanation might be that the problems were not based on the high level of performance, but rather on the perception that the participant was “rather cold, and had a superiority complex” (Sister Gabrielle). This participant said she was competitive during her earlier school years, and she said she was used to negative reactions to her high achievements. She entered the role of president with the subconscious expectations that she would be scrutinized and criticized by her peers in the congregation. Further, the
fact that she “took every opportunity to publicly speak” might have been perceived as self-promoting. She also said, “I like a little recognition,” which opposed the vow of humility.

There may have been another explanation for a perceived lack of acceptance for this particular leader. Perhaps her high performance levels, and, in turn, her high expectations for her staff and faculty, created a challenging work environment. For example, Sister Gabrielle said, “People can sometimes see my high standards and just feel they’re almost impossible to meet. That can discourage people if you are working with them.”

Participants who served in the role of college president for many years described a perceived evolution of leadership characteristics modified and constructed as a result of experience. Long-term leaders described a perceived transition or transformation from autocratic styles to more collaborative techniques, based on the trust they developed with and for their team members. They discussed a shift from a need-to-know-everything approach to a not-needing-to-know-everything stance. They suggested that the shift was based on a foundation of trust. The participants who described more authoritarian leadership styles also described processes of self-assessing for ongoing improvement. Several participants described appropriate leadership styles depending on the situation at hand. For example, Sister Janine said, “I was pretty directive at the beginning.” She explained that an authoritarian style was required when she first took office. “Somebody had to take the reins, and [pause] provide some direction.” She said that after she hired and trained her staff, she was able to shift to a more collaborative approach, however she continues to require information from her team members.
Two of the participants had served in the role of college president for over 30 years. Both described ways in which their perceived leadership seemed to evolve over time through trial and error, self-assessment and reflection, and learning from the mistakes of the past. In this way, their perceived leadership evolved to meet the needs of the campus. These participants also described perseverance in the face of failure. They admitted their weaknesses and accepted criticism. They said that they were humbled by their failures and willing to learn from their mistakes. Sister Francine said she had the “simplicity to ask for advice.” Sister Janine described communication and organization as the catalysts to leadership progression: “As the years went on, we developed a strategic plan, incorporated a representative from all of the areas in the college at that time, and we just kind of moved along and developed. I think my leadership approach developed in the same way.”

Participants conveyed the belief that religion and higher education are intrinsically linked and that, in order truly to educate their students, both must play key roles in the student development process. Most of the participants stated that religion and education are hand in hand in the development of the whole person. They discussed the marriage of religion and education as an opportunity for contemplation and reflection. Sister Irene eloquently described the significant relationship between religion and higher education and presented profound parallels and interconnections.

The earliest universities grew out of the monasteries and out of religious life itself. I think the call to education is very parallel to the call to religious life, if you think about it, because it is that mixture of contemplation and reflection and study, and then sharing that with others. It is the same as the call to religious life,
isn’t it?—that we study and pray and learn, and then we are called to be active and to share that message with others. So in the context of a person who is in religion doing that, it seems to me to be a natural companionship, or a natural vocation, to blend those two together. St. Thomas used to say that it was the best vocation in the Church to be a teacher, because when we are studying and praying and preparing, we are contemplative, and when we are teaching and sharing our knowledge with others, we are in active ministry; so it’s the beautiful balance between the two that is a very full realization, I think, of religious life.

(Sister Irene)

Sister Gabrielle discussed a dialogue between faith and reason as the birth of humility and the core of development. She described ways that dialogue and development help students to understand that they are small in the world, and yet they can impact many. Sister Gabrielle suggested that with great humility comes an openness to the ideas of others and ultimate transformation.

Religion is about a person’s search for meaning . . . for what we call God and ultimate meaning in life. That meaning also includes the search for one’s true sense of self. You know, not an inflated and unrealistic sense of self, but a real sense of self—which is to say, a humble sense of self. And I think that’s what religion is ultimately about. Education, higher education, to use platonic terms, is really about the search for truth and goodness and beauty. The Platonic Triad. In a sense, higher education is devoted to the human function of reasoning. And religion is devoted to that capacity for openness to the unknown and to mystery, which is what we call faith. So, I think the relationship between religion and
higher education, specifically Catholic higher education, is a dialogue between faith and reason. (Sister Gabrielle)

For others, the marriage of religion and education defined them. Together they represented a commitment to social justice, equity, and access to education. It was the reason they chose to enter their congregation in the first place.

It’s certainly evident that education has been, and still is, a major commitment for women religious today! Sisters [of my congregation] and countless other congregations have poured out their lifeblood, in a sense, in the effort to provide quality higher education to all who’ve aspired to it . . . . The interior motivation for entering a religious congregation was the conviction that was calling you to live a life of complete dedication to God and to the Gospel of Jesus. One also enters a religious congregation to do something. The doing of the good of these women’s orders was, first and above all, the mission of education, in an effort to raise up the people, especially among the many immigrants to our country . . . . Religious orders of women were on the front lines of this movement to make the opportunity for higher education available to all who qualified. (Sister Francine)

Sister Betty offered a view different from the other participants. With a mantra, “change your mind when your mind changes,” she said, “if you are going to be a good teacher, you have to be constantly aware of the changes going on in society and in the minds of the people that are sitting in front of you.” She saw a disconnect between religion and education because “we don’t think of religion as something that changes.”

Most of the participants described the ways in which Catholic higher education provided a value-added dimension to holistic student development. According to Sister
Kelly, “We also value a kind of universal notion of humanity that takes us into valuing the global—the things that are outside our little culture . . . . I think the notion of service is going to be extremely important . . . from head to heart to hands.” Sister Irene said, “Today there are so many types of institutions . . . . So you have to have great value to able to compete with the very good public institutions that charge much less . . . something of value added that makes it worth the sacrifice.” According to Sister Catherine, “The strength of these colleges founded by women was the culture. I look at the physical manifestations of a Catholic identity and the structural value systems.” Sister Francine said, “Our students, faculty, and staff were involved in service projects that made a difference in the lives of the neediest of our citizens.” She described the education at her institution as a “stepping stone” to a meaningful and gainful career.

In summary, women religious dedicated their lives to service and social justice, and those values were evident in the ways they led their campuses. Their feminine identities, faithful initiatives, and service components impacted the culture of their institutions. The following section examines the impact of Catholicism on participant leadership and the culture of their institutions.

**Catholicism: Historic Patriarchy**

Participants expressed concerns with the inability of the Catholic Church to modernize, to impart fair practices in terms of social justice, and to adopt new policies relating to women’s and gay rights. When provided an opportunity to discuss concerns about the Catholic Church, most of the participants embraced it, eager to express the reasons they felt disheartened and disappointed. They said that they struggled to
understand the ways an institution that affects so many is so unwilling to meet the needs of an evolving world.

There are times when I think we are on a collision course with the Church . . . because the Church is [pause] going through a period of being frightened of the secular world. I think it was Pope Benedict who talked about being smaller and purer. With regards to women’s issues, the Church is very conservative these days. . . . In the past—it’s probably been going on for three years at least—Rome began an investigation of American Sisters . . . [pause] and people were looking at the pedophilia scandal and saying, wait a minute, you are after the nuns? How does this make sense? (Sister Kelly)

Some participants served as spokeswomen for colleagues with aspirations for higher roles within the Church. Others merely pointed out that the pedophilia sex scandal had turned the Church into a glass house that has no place judging women and gays and the choices that they make in life. Sister Gabrielle said, “Let’s look at the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church. It’s hard to be a well-educated nun and keep going to church because you could often do a better sermon, for one thing. I’m not fond of the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church. But I’m still a Catholic, and I don’t see myself not being a Catholic because I don’t know of anything better.” According to Sister Francine,

The issue here is not just about ordination; it’s about gender equality and full inclusivity. And it’s not about power, either; it’s about service. Unfortunately, our church hierarchy has often interpreted our desire for gender equality and full participation in the Church as a seeking of power.
Others discussed the dichotomy of being Catholic and religious but unable to align with the rigid views of the Church. Sister Betty said, “I think that whether or not the person is in sync with Catholicism doesn’t mean they’re in sync with the Church. For instance, I think I am really in sync with Catholicism, but I am not always in sync with the Church hierarchy. There’s a difference there.” She spoke in broad terms about social justice. She added, “My stance is not on a particular issue, like women priests—although I think women ought to be priests; there’s no reason why they can’t be. The issue is the rigidity and over-conservatism of the Roman hierarchy.”

Sister Janine disagreed with the other participants in her view of the Catholic Church. She said,

The Church will go on. It will never disappear . . . . There’s always been somebody there to work for the people and to be involved in ministry. A girl just graduated from our university, Mary, and her parents came up to me and said,

“Sister, we are so happy because our daughter is going to take a Master’s in Canon law.” Well, did you ever hear of that before? Before, the only ones that took Canon law years ago were the priests. And then the nuns got into it. And now, here’s a young girl taking a Master’s in Canon law. And I said, “That’s wonderful.”

According to Sister Catherine, “Women religious have figured out how to navigate the Church and still be authentic Catholics.” She further stated, “I am very careful not to do anything that would jeopardize that relationship and embarrass him [the bishop] and embarrass the Church.” Participants claimed to have an understanding of unwritten rules that applied to certain aspects of their lifestyles and their institutions.
They said that they developed a delicate balance between leadership and respect for the expectations of the Church and the congregation. For example, Sister Francine said,

I think that church authorities who were more accustomed to colleges administered by religious orders of men . . . did have an adjustment to make when religious orders of women began founding Catholic institutions of higher education. They were likely intimidated by the idea of women in higher education, in general, simply because it was so nontraditional. After all, the prior prevailing thought was that a woman’s place was in the home! Fortunately, we women were undaunted and forged ahead, providing the opportunity for a college education to women of the middle class . . . . With respect to the patriarchal structure of the Church, I have to say that I built a positive relationship with each of the three different Bishops in office during my tenure. I do know that they greatly appreciated the role of the Sisters and our educative mission with our diocese. I have to say, however, that relating with members of the Church’s hierarchy was sometimes challenging. Our college was quite progressive, theologically. We had embraced Vatican II and were enthusiastic about advancing the vision of Vatican II. There were times when we knew we were under scrutiny for taking a more liberal stance on issues. At times, maintaining that positive relationship required a bit of finessing and nuancing. On occasion, we needed to reassure the Bishop that we were authentically Catholic.

That reassurance was not an easy feat for these women religious leaders who recognized that being Catholic meant submission to the Catholic hierarchy. According to Sister Kelly, they “still bump into the patriarchy in the Church, and it is really, really
difficult . . . particularly in regards to women’s issues . . . . The Church is very, very conservative these days.” She described her university as the marketplace of ideas and the pursuit of truth and admitted her challenges with the Bishop’s expectations. Sister Betty echoed her concerns.

In the past, the Church generally had the attitude: We know what you need to do, and we are going to tell you what you need to do. But for many, many centuries . . . what they were proposing to us came as a result not of deep prayer, but out of all kinds of arguments, the participants sometimes coming to physical blows. In the era when I was president, all of this was beginning to become clearer and more openly discussed. I could feel it in the air, but I never really had a great deal of difficulty because I didn’t have a Bishop who told me I couldn’t do this or I couldn’t do that . . . . It really does propose a question about Catholic higher education at the present moment. I think its relationship with the Church could be pretty difficult in the future . . . . I’m just glad I am not president now.

Sister Evelyn did not consider her institution to be an extension of a patriarchal church. She said, “People are always teasing about things that happened with the Pope or something. As far as my experience over all of these years, the bishop is friendly and warm and kind, and we get together sometimes socially. That’s it. They just leave us alone.”

These Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents said that they relied on their Catholic Christian identity in very profound ways; however, they also said that they made a conscious effort to embrace all students, whether they were Catholic or not. Sister Irene described her position for all of her students, regardless of religious
affiliation. She said, “Because you care about the religious dimension and formation of young people, and the ethical development and spiritual formation and development, you can help provide for them because of the position you are in and because of the kind of institution you are leading.” These participants, in their roles as college presidents, had to balance their commitment to their faith and their responsibility to embrace all students and make them feel welcome and part of their campus communities. Sister Kelly said, “I think we are here to respect all who come. Some are Catholic and some are not... [pause], but to expose them to what I am talking about in terms of a world view that is universal, that reveres the human, and that works toward a notion of not only thought, but feeling and action.”

In summary, the participants in this study offered their own perspectives on religious reform and described common frustrations and the failure of the Church to modernize or to recognize their contributions and abilities. They described ways they negotiated their roles within a patriarchal hierarchy to promote the well-rounded development of their students. In some ways they depended on their Catholic Christian identity as they reached out to students of all religious denominations to embrace diversity and enhance the campus communities. The next section examines the culture of participants’ institutions through a feminist lens. The impact of gender on perceived leadership is explored.

**Feminism: Gender and Leadership, a Cultural Phenomenon**

Most of the participants in this study expressed a belief that gender and religion have played key roles in their leadership and in the culture of their institutions. They described their commitment to the legacy of their institutions and to the vision and
mission set forth by their predecessors. Many described a holistic education, incorporating a head-to-heart-to-hands motto for the preparation of their graduates for responsible citizenship and lives of service. “In the Catholic faith tradition, [pause] there’s a sense of the importance of developing God-given gifts for the sake of the common good. And I think that’s foundational to the educational mission and also higher education” (Sister Amelia). Participants described gender and religion as influential, omnipresent, and directly related to one’s sense of self. For example, Sister Amelia said, “Your gender and your religion are part of who you are as a leader. They don’t define you, but they’re an aspect of who you are.”

Participants applied aspects of their Christian identity in the formation of curriculum and in the development of campus cultures. For many, the purpose of their role has been based on feminist goals, promoting equal access to a superb education, fairness in career opportunities and pay scales, and gay rights.

We are getting ready for our centennial [celebration]. Our institution was founded because there was absolutely no education for women. We were a pioneer entity, and we became the oldest and the largest Catholic college for women in our state. (Sister Amelia)

Despite efforts toward equal access, participants described Catholic women’s colleges as specific to the career needs of women. Academic programs at their campuses seemed to cater to societal expectations for feminine characteristics, such as nurturing. Participants said that women’s colleges were assessed for quality within their own sector or category. There were “good women’s colleges,” but they weren’t necessarily held to the standards of traditionally male colleges and universities. For example, Sister Evelyn explained,
“The [Catholic women’s] colleges were looked at differently because they were women’s colleges. So they were always sort of considered second rate. It’s the best women’s college, but it’s not the best college. [pause] You get a great education for women, but you won’t get a great education.” Women’s education was considered to be “less than,” but women were lucky to have access to higher education in the first place (Cott, 1977).

Sister Betty presented an argument for the value of women’s colleges. She described her graduates as very strong feminists “out in the real world speaking very loudly and . . . doing it well because they learned how to do it [at her institution].” She described her students much like a mother might describe her children. Participants, in general, conveyed high levels of responsibility and concern for their students’ education and wellbeing, much like mothers for their children. Two of the participants described running their universities “like a family.” These maternal instincts, considered to be feminine attributes by participants, were perceived as contributing to leadership characteristics and the overall culture of participant institutions.

Part of the responsibility of the mother figure is to accept and care for all of the students, regardless of gender or religion, just as a mother does. This scenario serves as a metaphor for inclusion within a family. For example, Catholic students might be compared to biological children, while secular students might be considered or compared to an “adopted” child. The mother or leader maintains the family traditions and expectations within the family culture and includes all of those within her family, regardless of DNA. Although the adopted child cannot be expected to become biologically linked to the mother and father, that child can be expected to conform to the family norms. Participants described Catholic colleges and universities designed to
embrace all students, regardless of religion or spiritual beliefs; however, all are expected to follow the founding mission. “My view is that I would like to keep the best of the Catholic identity,” said Sister Kelly, “while being inclusive and respecting of the whole secular world.”

After Vatican II, Catholic Sisters were compelled to empower the laity and raise them up. According to Sister Francine, they specifically targeted laywomen. “We wanted to see them in positions of leadership,” she said.

We never felt threatened. There were a few members in our religious orders who experienced some resentment there . . . . However, the vast majority were eager to educate women into leadership roles that would prepare them to be teachers and principals in our schools. The most important goal was to guarantee the provision of a Catholic education for the coming generations. (Sister Francine)

In an effort to expand career options for women, these Catholic Sisters said that they expanded curricula beyond education and medicine. In addition, just as women were fighting for equal access to traditionally male institutions, these Catholic Sisters recognized the opportunity to create a rich learning environment by expanding their programs to men. This change meant inviting a unique perspective—the male perspective—into the classroom. According to Sister Irene, “I think the challenge for all of us is to find the niche that will help us rebuild a solid foundation that we had at one time and to provide a kind of education, the kind of programs, that is very attractive to young people. You have to meet the needs of the students as they are today and be able to compete with lots of other kinds of institutions.” In order to do this, these leaders have had continually to examine market demands, assess student interest, and compete with
many types of institutions in order to survive. In many cases, this includes the expansion of program offerings to entice male students.

The first four sections of this chapter presented interpretations of participant responses and excerpts from semi-structured, in-depth interviews in response to the sub-category research questions driving this study. The first section addressed participant perceptions of success and the factors contributing to those perceptions. Participants defined success in terms of social justice, institutional mission, and perceived leadership efficacy as a means of perpetuating the legacy of their founding Sisters. Participants expressed passionate dedication to student outcomes and the holistic development of responsible graduates with leadership aspirations and capabilities.

In the second section of this chapter, participants discussed the factors contributing to perceived societal acceptance of their leadership. Participants suggested that religious authority allowed them to lead before women leaders were accepted in presidential roles. Participants also expressed firm beliefs that their personal traits and characteristics influenced constituents’ responses to their leadership and their own perceptions of leadership efficacy.

The third section of this chapter explored participant perceptions of gender stereotypes. Participants described personal traits and characteristics that defied traditional female stereotypes; however, participants also suggested that they were not impacted by gender stereotypes and expectations. Contrary to this point of view, participants also described leadership challenges related to societal expectations for the ways women should behave.
The fourth section of this chapter considered the impact of gender, religion, and leadership style of participants as they related to the culture of their institutions. Participants suggested that gender and religion were part of their identities as leaders and that these components contributed to societal expectations for the ways these leaders were expected to behave—as women and as Sisters. Participants also expressed concern about the inequities within the Catholic Church and the misperception that desires for equality were somehow linked with need for power.

The fifth and final section of this chapter explores participants’ perceptions of their leadership from a macro perspective. Participants’ understanding of leadership efficacy and factors contributing to those perceptions are also examined.

Central Research Question: Perceptions of Leadership

The primary objective of this research study was to understand participants’ perceptions of their leadership. This section provides an interpretation of participants’ responses as they relate to their understanding of leadership efficacy and the factors contributing to those perceptions. The two major factors addressed in participant responses were leadership style and the impact of accessibility and visibility on campus.

As a foundation, participants described ways in which the levels of preparation for their role impacted their abilities to perform. Participants also discussed the need for visibility and accessibility as essential elements of good leadership. Each participant was asked to describe her leadership characteristics as they related to the culture of the institutions and to detail the impact of their perceptions of leadership on future leaders within their institutions.
Leadership Style

Participants offered diverse examples of their perceived leadership styles. For the most part, the participants who served in the role of president for over 15 years described a progression in their styles as they learned, through trial and error, which approach worked best. The two participants who seemed best prepared for their role as president in terms of academic credentials and progressive leadership experience leading up to the role described perceptions of constituents’ lack of confidence in their abilities. These participants seemed confused by the lack of acceptance within their campus communities. These participants pursued doctoral studies in higher education administration and served many years in progressive leadership roles within academia. They stated that they knew the answers and were capable of making decisions without help or buy-in from their team members. They alluded to time constraints and limitations of a collaborative approach. Sister Gabrielle said, “I’m less geared to the collaborative mode, because I’ve always been pretty much a solo flight in my life.” Sister Irene said, “Collegial environments are wonderful, and I am a full supporter of them. I’ve lived my life that way . . . but bringing the consensus and the agreement of everybody to the table just is a very time-consuming process and you can’t always be successful at that.” These participants also voiced concerns that their team members felt neglected, underutilized, and undervalued. Further, they stated that team members lacked commitment to the solutions and failed to deliver in critical moments.

Lack of trust in the abilities of team members led to micromanagement and mutual resentment. Sister Catherine said, “You talk about empowering these vice presidents . . . but some of the stuff that should happen doesn’t always happen. And then
you shift into this micromanagement thing.” Without trust, their teams were destined to
dysfunction (Lencioni, 2002). As a result, they seemed to lack a collaborative spirit, a
professional camaraderie. In addition, these leaders expressed feelings of isolation,
loneliness, lack of support. Sister Catherine said, “as college president, you have no
peers on campus.” She further stated,

I just went through my [assessment survey] . . . . The two things I learned from
that is that there are people who want my personal attention. My attention has
been focused on turning this college around financially, so perhaps I have not
been attentive to individuals who just want my time and attention . . . . Also
there’s a sense that people are not given enough opportunities to participate in
helping us make that difference.

Attending to Sister Catherine, her fiscal responsibility as a leader was certainly a
significant component of her role; however, balancing personal interaction with task-
orientated duties seemed to be expected within her work environment. Sister Catherine
also faced the challenge of handling sensitive work and highly confidential financial
management that her constituents weren’t necessarily privileged to. She described times
when she had to maintain high levels of confidentiality in order to maintain harmony and
composure within the institution. If constituents were not exposed to the delicate balance
of leadership at the time of Sister Catherine’s tenure, they may not have understood the
significance of her work, and therefore, they may have formed unwarranted opinions.

Sister Gabrielle said, “One of the great lines I remember is „institutions make
lousy lovers.” You are going to remember this now, because when you are a president, it
doesn’t mean everybody adores and loves you . . . . Just remember, don’t look for love
there. Look to serve.” She expressed disheartenment with much of her tenure as president and described the stress levels she experienced. She was ultimately diagnosed with cancer and left the post primarily due to health reasons. She said, “When you’re a president, you literally don’t have anybody on campus that you can share everything that you want to share. I was fortunate. I had a good friend who lived out of state, and I would call. I would say, „excuse my language, but you won’t believe this crap,“ and she would say, „oh yeah? Try me!“”

When Sister Gabrielle described her relationship with the members in her congregation, she said, “We don’t support one another.” Sister Catherine and Sister Gabrielle said that they were proud of their accomplishments and they desired credit and recognition for their successes. It is possible that their personal traits and characteristics contradicted the paradigm for women and for Catholic Sisters. Perhaps they defied the vow of humility and, more importantly, the campus community’s expectations for behaviors considered to be appropriate for a Catholic Sister. Furthermore, their desire for recognition defied societal expectations for the way women should behave. Many participants described a progression and an evolution in their leadership and the formation of highly effective teams over time.

Sister Gabrielle described her low need for affection as the impetus to perceptions, “that could create, and for some people I think it did, this perception that I was rather cold and had a superiority complex.” Sister Gabrielle suggested that her self-image seemed to contradict the vows of her congregation. She said that the Sisters in her congregation expected everyone around them to be humble, including her, but “If
somebody is achieving very high, and I’ve always been a very high achiever, and that’s not everybody’s trajectory, you run into problems.”

Sister Gabrielle and Sister Catherine avoided conflict because conflict under the circumstances they described was difficult, even ugly. According to these participants, the employees who did not feel supported or valued lashed out at them, challenging their point of view and forcing an alternative agenda. Instead of respectful communication, interaction was hostile at times, destroying any chance of collaboration. Sister Catherine explained that she no longer attended the Academic Senate meetings at her institution. Disheartened by the way her academic leaders and faculty members treated her after she presented one of her President’s reports, she told them they would have to ask her back—which they never did. She said she felt “bullied.”

Sister Gabrielle opted for compromise instead of collaboration, avoidance instead of discussion. She said, “I find that conflict is really disagreeable . . . . I will be accommodating, or I will be compromising, or I will just avoid it.” When describing interaction with her constituents, Sister Gabrielle said, “I will lose energy—and this is so true—if I”m subjected to hostility, unfriendliness, or constant criticism. And I think, after a short honeymoon, most presidents are [subjected to these things]. This is particularly difficult for most women; unless they decide they are going to be honorary men.”

The participants who rejected conflict said that they also avoided attempts at collaboration. Sister Gabrielle said, “I have a low preference for collaboration, where you have to, [pause] it’s like playing chess, which I never learned to do; and I was very impatient with it.” She didn’t perceive conflict as a healthy aspect of human interaction.
Instead, she described conflict in terms of hostility and destruction. “All of this conflict tends to make me feel unfulfilled and frustrated” (Sister Gabrielle).

These experiences, as conveyed by these participants, represented perspectives from leaders who had high expectations for themselves, and, therefore, seemed highly critical in self-assessment. Each seemed to practice reflection and contemplation in order continually to improve her leadership.

Contrary to these scenarios in which participants were well-prepared, many of the participants were ill-prepared for the role of college president, some lacking adequate credentials and others without sufficient experience. As a result, they said that they were forced to depend on their vice presidents for consultation, problem solving, and decision-making. Participants described vice presidents who they perceived felt needed and stepped up as key players on the leadership team.

Participants who led under these circumstances seemed to embrace the camaraderie, the team spirit, and the collaborative successes. They described feelings of humility and insecurity and dependence on their employees to guide them and share in their decision-making. In turn, they expressed feelings of support from their campus environment. In addition, these leaders empowered their team members to communicate and to hold each other accountable. They said that they drew on the professional expertise of each leader and capitalized on the skills through professional interaction and communication. The president served as a team member, not the “go to” person. Departmental leaders were expected to do their jobs, and the president set expectations based on trust.
Sister Kelly described her lack of preparation for the role of president, at first refusing to accept the position when approached by the search committee. She said, “You know, usually you’ve been in higher education, then you’ve been a department chair, then you’ve been a Dean, then you’ve been a Provost, and [pause] I said, ‘I don’t have the right pedigree. I’m not doing it!’” Her manner in articulating her position seemed to convey the humility expected from a Catholic Sister. After further thought and some soul-searching, Sister Kelly agreed to apply for the position. Fearful, but faithful, she described the experience: “I can still feel what I felt when I pushed ‘send,’” because I knew the skids were greased at that point.”

Under these circumstances, the subsequent hiring processes of these presidents became even more critical. It was imperative that these leaders selected the best candidates for the jobs. According to Sister Irene, “it has a lot to do with the people with whom you surround yourself and your ability to hire good people. I think that’s a great skill of a leader—to hire good people and then to mentor the people you have hired to give them that sense that they need to become leaders as well.” Sister Harriet said, “If I gave any advice to a president, it would be, get the best people you need to do the work.” Proud of their accomplishments, she elaborated about each of her vice presidents and added, “They all knew their jobs better than I did. I just let them do it!”

The collaborative leaders in this study conveyed the importance of setting high expectations for their team members, believing in them, and establishing a foundation of trust. They said that they were not afraid to make a change in the event that they believed they had the wrong person in the position. They conducted regular face-to-face meetings, encouraged professional debates about pressing issues, and expected weekly and monthly
reports on departmental progress and accomplishments. The next section examines the impact of leader accessibility and visibility on perceived leadership efficacy.

**Accessibility and Visibility as a Leadership Approach**

Participants’ leadership style was perceived as instrumental to societal acceptance of their leadership. A parallel factor, according to participants, was the chosen approach in terms of accessibility and visibility on campus. Achieving community and campus acceptance might be the result of the participant’s interaction with her faith community, her faculty and staff, and most of all, her students. The evidence in the study suggested that participants who made a point of interacting with their students on a personal level enjoyed greater acceptance and respect levels than their counterparts who neglected to interact at this level.

Sister Kelly said, “I was worrying about all of these VPs this morning. I have sort of personal friendships with [them]. I care about their families. I care about them. We talk together.” Upon reflection, she added,

Somebody told me one time as a college president you have to be a little bit of a priest too. You’ve got to be the person who is inspirational at times in terms of the talks you give . . . but you also have to be the person that shows up at funerals and the person who’s there at times of hardship and sorrow. So I try really hard to connect with a lot of people on campus. I go to the cafeteria for lunch and just sit with, you know, whoever I see. And I love the people on this campus. The grounds crew! They are incredible! (Sister Kelly)

This leader adopted a down-to-earth approach to campus visibility and, as a result, presented a congenial image. Her accessibility invited feedback from students, staff, and
faculty, and she was able professionally to consider the feedback for ongoing improvement. Her campus community became part of the positive change under her tenure.

Sister Evelyn described her love for her students. Her student-centered approach kept her focused on issues that were important to her in her role as president:

I came from a background of teaching and loving students. So I’ve always tried to be student-centered—because they are my love. I mean, that is the whole purpose of the college. And you can get lost in the details and the budgets and things like that. The location of my office has helped, too. I see students a lot. And I am very accessible to them. I go to their functions and their games. It keeps me grounded.

Sister Diane said, “I walk around, and I just try to encourage people.” She explained that the relationships with her students have driven her functions as a president. She added, “How many students are going to relate to the president? Very few. But they are going to relate to you, and that’s what’s important to carry on your mission.”

Sister Irene said that she learned from her mistakes over many years of service. Humble enough to invite criticism and committed to self-assessment, she said, “Dealing with people is probably the most complex part of the work that we do. And there’s no single way to do that. I think it is a skill set you learn over time. Obviously some people are better at it than others, but I think we can all learn it if we listen and we get feedback from people, and try to analyze how you would do things differently.” The participants who invited individual interaction and attended to student needs on a personal level expressed overall campus support in their positions as campus leaders.
Opting for an alternative to the grounded interactions and personal approach the previous participants described, Sister Gabrielle considered public speaking to be a means of visibility. She said, “I think some people thought I was too visible. I took every opportunity to public speak. . . . I love to stand in front of a group of people, but never without a script,” and the script allowed her to stay on task and avoid interaction and conflict.

Sister Catherine’s focus on budgeting and financial management, as described earlier in this chapter, limited visibility with her team and her students. She saw the impact of her decisions in her critical assessment—360° survey, an instrument designed to measure all aspects of performance. She requested that her staff complete the surveys in order for her to gain an understanding of their perceptions of her leadership efficacy. She was not prepared for their responses. After reading their evaluations, she said that she became defensive, taking a stance of opposition instead of collaboration.

It might be argued that the presidents who attended to personal relationships, those who placed trust in their vice presidents (or made changes should the wrong people be serving in the roles), and those who maintained a down-to-earth visibility on campus experienced greater perceived support and increased perceptions of acceptance. The presidents who reserved their time for task-oriented activities and micromanagement expressed feelings of isolation and lack of support. It seems that those who portrayed stereotypically female leadership styles, collaborative and communicative, were more accepted than those who adopted traits traditionally considered to be masculine, task-oriented, and autocratic.
Three of the participants described a more top-down approach to leadership on their campuses. They also described feelings of isolation and loneliness not mentioned by participants with a more collaborative approach. These participants described extensive preparation for their roles as college presidents and a tendency to make more decisions on their own, without the input of staff members. According to Sister Catherine:

“it’s a very isolating job as much as you interact—and you need to interact with people all the time—it’s very lonely . . . . It can be very, very stressful, depending on the circumstances of the college at the time that you’re in leadership and, [pause] so you rely on people. But I have to remind myself: They’re not my friends. I have friends and, if push comes to shove, I may have to say something very difficult to them that I wouldn’t, you know, want to have to say.

For some of the participants, their leadership approach evolved over time. Sister Janine began her career with one approach and gradually evolved in her current leadership style. She said:

“I think it was pretty directive from the beginning [pause] . . . . And I’m pretty much hands on . . . . I would say that I’m a person that really wants to be informed because when I do attend the board meetings, the board has the expectation that the president would report on all areas, or at least be aware.

Sister Gabrielle described her own unique perspective. She explained, “I work well with people, but I don’t enjoy collaboration. Especially long-term collaboration. Collaboration can become the mantra of the status-quo crowd, but unless you dive into it at every opportunity, it can affect how you’re accepted as a leader.” She opted for
compromise when faced with conflict, conveying that, at times, collaboration just takes too long:

I find that conflict is really disagreeable. Even when it’s not really disagreeable externally [I think] oh, God, we don’t all see it the same way . . . so I will tend to do one of three things. I will be accommodating, or I will be compromising, or I will just avoid it. So, accommodating means that in a conflict situation I tend to be somewhat unassertive and cooperative rather than competitive. I might neglect my own concerns to satisfy those of others. I will be yielding—that’s one way that I deal with conflict. Another way is to compromise. I will try to find expedient, neutrally acceptable solutions. The problem there is expedient, because solutions can’t always be found quickly. Ah, I’ll exchange concessions. You know, you give me this, I’ll give you that . . . . I’ll seek a quick middle ground position. These are not collaborative moves. This is a way of avoiding conflict. This is compromising, which is not collaboration. Avoiding it all together, which is, I think, my preferred mode . . . . Oh, you don’t see it my way? I don’t see it your way. I don’t want to do what you’re suggesting. You don’t want to do what I’m suggesting. Why don’t we just forget about it, you know?” (Sister Gabrielle)

One participant offered words of wisdom for authoritative personnel, based on her experiences with past presidents:

Once you are in a position of leadership, and it’s a pretty powerful position, that can change a person . . . and we’ve had some people that have had difficult times, simply because they saw their position more as power. And whether you’re a
person religious or layperson, if that comes out too strong, people resent it. (Sister Harriet)

Sister Catherine admitted a tendency to be guarded in order to avoid being hurt by others. “You have to have thick skin,” she said, following with, “I’ve only had one blow up at a meeting,” and “Sometimes I think I come off kind of snippy.” She discussed her reflection on past behaviors and her efforts to rebuild relationships.

All of the participants spoke about their responsibilities to their employees and to their students, some feeling the weight of it on their shoulders. “I never lost one night’s sleep over the fact that I had cancer,” said Sister Gabrielle, “but I did lose a lot of nights” sleep over personnel issues.”

In summary, participants described a variety of leadership styles and approaches, ranging from autocratic and task-oriented to collaborative and maternal. The participants who embraced more collaborate styles of leadership seemed to perceive higher levels of leadership efficacy. Furthermore, the participants who practiced highly accessible and visible approaches to leadership expressed high levels of acceptance within their campus communities. They suggested that accessibility increased opportunities for critical feedback, which, in turn, contributed to evolving leadership techniques. These leaders described feelings of support and acceptance. Following is a summary of this chapter.

Summary of Chapter Four

In the first research question category for this study, participants defined their success by institutional commitment to social justice, advancement of the mission of their fore-Sisters, growth of the organization as the impetus to increased numbers of future leaders, and establishing a collective “we” or collaborative partnership of responsible and
accountable team members. In essence, success was defined by success of the institution’s graduates.

According to the participants, there has been a shift in the factors contributing to societal acceptance of Catholic Sisters as leaders in higher education. In answer to the second research question, participants expressed the belief that the influence of sectarian authority has fallen off in light of progressive societal acceptance of female leaders. Participants also conveyed the belief that individual traits and leadership characteristics directly impacted leadership efficacy and perceived success. They described their leadership construct in terms of intrinsic characteristics and the limitations of the patriarchal structure.

Regarding the third research question, all of the participants exhibited qualities that challenged gender stereotypes. In an all-women environment, women did everything. There wasn’t anyone there to tell them they couldn’t do something. As a result, all of the participants denied that gender stereotypes inhibited them in any way. The participants also expressed that gender stereotypes did not represent a reality about women. They suggested that each person is an individual, regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation. They further implied that their leadership was impacted by societal expectations of acceptable characteristics for a Catholic Sister and for a woman.

For the fourth research question, participants described religion and education as a partnership, and gender as a component of the leader’s identity. They described religion, education, and gender as a triad that impacted the culture of the institution and the expectations for a holistic educational experience. Participants described a learning
process in the development of effective leadership based on the *intrinsic* influences of gender and the *limitations* of the Catholic patriarchal hierarchy.

Participants practiced different styles of leadership, and evidence showed that these styles impacted their perceptions of the ways their leadership was received in their campus communities. Professional interaction with personnel, healthy financial balance sheets, and growth of respective institutions seemed to impact participant confidence levels and perceived leadership efficacy.

Participants who adopted a more collaborative leadership style described feelings of acceptance, camaraderie, and team spirit. These participants also described a more accessible and visible approach to leadership, making it a point to interact with all stakeholders within their respective campuses. Furthermore, these leaders seemed to exhibit styles that were highly compatible with societal expectations for women and for religious Sisters based on the vows of their religious orders.

Chapter Five examines conclusions and the implications for leadership practice from this research study. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are also discussed.
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

―Christian ideology has contributed no little to the oppression of women.‖
Simone de Beauvoir

For over a century, Catholic Sisters have significantly impacted Catholic higher education for women. They founded Catholic colleges and universities when women’s access to higher education was limited. As conduits of a historical Catholic culture (Morey & Piderit, 2006), these nuns had to develop skills to compete in a male-dominated sector. Catholic Sisters built a network of women leaders during a time when society believed that women belonged in the home (Fialka, 2003).

Contemporary and historical literature offers insight into leadership theories, women’s issues, and Catholic traditions. However, studies on the leadership of Catholic Sisters are missing from library shelves. This information is especially relevant in light of shifting societal culture and greater acceptance of women leaders in the workplace. Despite gains in the workplace and increased attention to female leadership characteristics (Lupi & Martin, 2005), women are expected to take on disproportionate responsibilities in the home (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007) while accepting lower salaries than their male counterparts in the workplace.

As early feminists, Catholic Sisters challenged Catholic traditions and historical societal norms and fought for women’s right to access and equity in education and in the workplace. Their religious vocation allowed them to transcend gender roles (Schier & Russett, 2002) and advance women’s opportunities (Daigler, 2001).
The purpose of this research study was to examine the contributions of Catholic Sisters to the role of women leaders in higher education, specifically college and university presidents, and to fill a void in the body of knowledge about education leadership. Knowledge and understanding of their leadership constructs can offer insight for future leaders in higher education.

This research study sought to understand the ways 11 Catholic Sisters who served as college president perceived their leadership. The study explored their definitions of success, their perceptions of societal acceptance of their leadership, their beliefs about gender stereotypes, and their understanding of the role of gender and religion as they pertained to Catholic higher education and the culture of their institutions. This qualitative, phenomenological research study utilized semi-structured face-to-face interviews to elicit participant perceptions of their leadership.

The 11 participants in this research study were selected from a list of 48 potential Catholic Sisters who were serving, or had served, as president of Catholic colleges or universities. Participation was voluntary, and none of the participants was further screened from the criterion of Catholic Sisters serving as or having served as college or university presidents. Participants represented institutions in six different states, and length of service ranged from less than 5 years to over 30 years.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted using 12 questions designed to elicit the participants’ perceptions. Using typological analysis (Hatch, 2002), interpretive analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Hatch, 2002), and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), data were interpreted and analyzed through the lenses of the three
components of the conceptual framework: feminism, constructed self, and Catholicism.

This study was designed to answer the following central research question:

How do Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents perceive their leadership, and how do they describe the personal experiences that have contributed to their perceptions?

The following sub-questions were developed to examine key dimensions of the central research question. These questions also guided the data collection process and analysis:

1. How do Catholic Sisters who have served in the role of college president define their success?

2. How do Catholic Sisters perceive their acceptance in society as leaders, and what factors contribute to those perceptions?

3. How did these Catholic Sisters exhibit qualities that challenged gender stereotypes?

4. How do Catholic Sisters who have served in the role of college president define gender and religion as they pertain to leadership and the culture of the institution?

Participants connected their definition of success with the notion of service and commitment to the mission of the institution, sometimes even quantifying their impact by noting the number of lives they had touched and improved. This perspective was identified by many of the participants as they discussed their commitment to social justice and dedication to the mission of their institutions. Included in the excerpts presented in Chapter Four were the contrasting perspectives of three of the participants who defined success in different terms.

The participants also expressed their beliefs that religious authority and their roles as Catholic Sisters allowed them to lead when women were not yet accepted as leaders. In addition, participants stated that individual identity and personal leadership
characteristics contributed to societal acceptance of their leadership and impacted leadership efficacy.

Most of the participants described their adoption of a collaborative leadership style with trust as a foundation and compassion and interpersonal relationships as building blocks. Three of the participants adopted differing leadership styles, incorporating techniques that were authoritative, compromising, or deflective.

Participants expressed the belief that they exhibited qualities that challenged gender stereotypes and defied conventional ideas of women’s roles. However, all 11 participants also stated that gender stereotypes had not impacted them in their role as college presidents, especially in all-women campuses.

Participants in the study stated that they had learned to navigate their role as leaders in a historically patriarchal world of higher education and the Church. In the discussion, many of the participants said that they had learned to balance playing by the rules with attending to social justice issues, such as women’s and gay rights, while some of the participants did not experience a need to navigate their roles within the hierarchy. Only one participant did not consider her institution an extension of a patriarchal Church.

Participants conveyed a belief that religion and higher education are intrinsically linked, and that, in order truly to educate their students, both must play key roles in the student development process. One participant expressed a different perspective, suggesting that education is evolving while the Church remains stagnant and rigid.

Most of the participants expressed concerns with the inability of the Catholic Church to modernize, to impart fair practices in terms of social justice, and to adopt new policies relating to women’s and gay rights. One participant in the study presented a
contrary point of view and suggested that the Church will continue to thrive as a patriarchal hierarchy, and that things are, in fact, changing within the hierarchy. One other participant refrained from speaking about her viewpoints about the Church.

The purpose of this chapter is to expand the analysis of the study and to consider its conclusions in terms of generalization and transferability. Research considered within a quantitative paradigm of scientific method suggests that, in order to generalize findings, a large random sample is intended to represent the larger population, and hence, results from the sample are assumed representative of the population (Donmoyer, 1990; Eisner, 1998). For the present study, a small purposive sample was selected. The sample included a specific group of people whose profiles do not match those of many others in higher education leadership. Yet, it might be argued that this small group has the ability, through the perceptions and perspectives of its members, to inform others who are not like them.

Through experience, human beings are able to learn from one situation and apply those lessons to subsequent and different situations. In this way, transferability resembles generalization in that a lesson learned may be applied to future, different, non-identical situations (Eisner, 1998).

Donmoyer (1990) used the language of Piaget’s schema theory and the notions of assimilation, accommodation, integration, and differentiation as tools to explain the way human beings utilize “visceral, affect-laden knowledge” (p. 190) to filter experiences through a cognitive structure, to reshape cognitive structures in order to apply to a unique situation, to incorporate other lessons in order to increase understanding, and to pick and choose the appropriate aspects of an experience and lessons learned in order to apply to a
situation. Donmoyer (1990) further explained that for this type of generalization to occur, diversity in settings and situations “becomes an asset rather than a liability” (p. 191) because diversity stimulates accommodation; and, as a result, “the knower’s cognitive structures become more integrated and differentiated . . . . He or she can perceive more richly and, one hopes, act more intelligently” (p. 191).

Readers of this study have the opportunity to experience vicariously the perspective of the 11 Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents. These vicarious experiences might then be assimilated to the readers’ individual environments and encounters. The adaptation or accommodation of vicarious experiences to new settings and situations become examples of transferability. In essence, the knowledge is in the particulars, and transferability involves application of skills, images, and ideas across situations (Eisner, 1998).

The interpretation and analysis in Chapter Four provided answers to the central research question and four sub-questions. This chapter will provide a deeper analysis of participant perceptions of leadership. Other sections in the chapter include implications and limitations of this research study and recommendations for future research.

Leadership Theories within Conceptual Framework

This section will revisit the conceptual framework for the study and consider leadership characteristics and applications within these constructs. The first component will assess intrinsic qualities of the participants within a feminist perspective and explore the ways they relate to perceptions of leadership. The next section will consider Catholicism and the limitations within this patriarchal structure. For the third and final component of this section, participant experiences will be examined as they relate to the
constructed self and evolving leadership characteristics. Figure 5.1 illustrates the three leadership concepts derived from the conceptual framework.

Figure 2. Leadership concepts within the 3 components of the conceptual framework.

**Feminism and Intrinsic Leadership**

Participants claimed that gender stereotypes did not impact them. They described campus life in all-women’s institutions where women were expected to do everything on campus. Participants expressed a belief that gender stereotypes were “silly” and that they were not willing to buy into them. However, participants also described expectations within their campus communities for the way they should act.

Sister Kelly described femininity as soft and passive and stated that good leaders cannot exhibit these qualities. Sister Harriet and Sister Diane suggested that women who opt for a more direct approach might be perceived as aggressive or bitchy. Sister Gabrielle stated that she had been described as cold. She described the campus
perception that she had a superiority complex and she related this factor to some of the challenges she faced with her vice presidents.

Sister Francine described opportunities gained through a feminine approach. Other participants described feminine “wiles” that opened doors for them. Sister Irene told the story of a Sister who used feminine nuance and finesse to open a summer school for her female students. These contradictions offer evidence of paradoxical views in terms of gender stereotypes.

The Catholic Sisters who participated in this research study described ways in which their roles as women, Sisters, and leaders contributed to their perceptions of leadership. Each of the participants described experiences and responsibilities that revealed multiple facets of identity. This notion might be compared to Du Bois’s (1897, 2007) intense preoccupation with his position as a Black American in an elite society. DuBois grappled with his identity as an African American in a non-African American social milieu. He articulated the conflict between two different aspects of his identity. Much like participant descriptions of the woman, Sister, and leader facets of their identities, Dubois reflected on the conflict within the facets of his own identity:

This American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world; it is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings: two
warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1897, 2007, p. 144)

Participants performed in the roles of woman, of Sister, and of leader; and each looked at herself through the eyes of her family members, her fellow Sisters, her constituents, and the patriarchal hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Although these unique aspects of identity often complemented each other, at times they created internal and external conflict. Intrinsic behaviors did not always match societal expectations for the ways these leaders were expected to behave.

Participants who embraced stereotypically feminine qualities and approached leadership through collaboration and personal interaction described greater perceived acceptance within their communities. Participants’ *intrinsic leadership* characteristics matched expected leadership norms. Based on assumptions that “wielding power is a man’s job and women do their part through caring, supporting, mothering, and providing services” (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p. 70), a maternal approach to leadership fit the complex role of woman, leader, Sister. These participants expressed maternal desires to nurture their campus communities. They said that they ran their campuses like families.

Sister Francine and Sister Kelly described their leadership teams in terms of a circle. Their descriptions connect to Helgesen’s (1990) description of female web-like leadership in which the woman is at the center of her team of colleagues. She suggested that the skills and attitudes that women developed were based on their experiences, combined with natural feminine tendencies. These *intrinsic* tendencies contributed to participant perspectives and perceptions of leadership.
Literature on women’s leadership suggests more sharing of power and participation through collaboration and communication (Chliwniak, 1997; Eddy, 2009; Townsend & Twombly, 1998). However, Eddy (2009) found that despite campus communities describing presidential leadership in gendered terms, perceiving men as more authoritative and women as more generative, “the actual leadership behaviors were not stereotypically gendered” (p. 12). Furthermore, Sagaria and Johnsrud (1988) discovered that presidential perceptions and faculty perceptions did not necessarily align. They explored the leadership perceptions of college presidents who proclaimed to be collaborative leaders only to discover that their faculty members did not agree with the perceptions held by their leaders.

According to Kellerman and Rhode (2007), more than 100 studies confirmed that women were rated less favorably as leaders when they adopted an authoritative, seemingly masculine style of leadership. Rosser (2003) found that women leaders were evaluated more negatively than men when exhibiting autocratic leadership behaviors, and Helegesen (1990) said that motherhood was an excellent school for managers because each employs similar skills. Women have traditionally been associated with leadership behaviors like nurturing and collaboration (Cummings, 1979), and these behaviors have come to be expected. Furthermore, Spurling (1997) suggested that female colleagues have undermined successful outcomes due to competition and paradigm shifts. This was evident in several of the participants’ comments as they discussed support levels from members of their congregations.

In this study, participants suggested that a collaborative, collegial approach to leadership was expected. Those who described maternal instincts as a driving factor in
their leadership characteristics appeared to enjoy greater support from their campus communities. As role models, they nurtured their campus communities as mothers might nurture their children. This approach included candid communication, high expectations, financial support, and tough love.

Aligned with this leadership style and direction, most of the leaders interviewed for this study offered campus programs in education and health care—both providing to students venues for service and nurturing. Participants described their work to help women gain access to higher education, but they also suggested that women’s colleges remained “less “ than traditional men’s colleges. They described limitations in their efforts toward social justice. Sister Janine explained that there were good Catholic women’s colleges, but they were rarely compared to male institutions or considered worthy for that comparison. According to Wood (2009),

Barriers to women’s advancement in faith-based institutions emanate from theological foundations and denominational belief systems concerning women’s role in the church and society. In the faith-based institutions that have kept strong ties with their affiliated denominations, these cultural norms become a part of institutional culture and lead to policies and practices that limit women’s professional growth and contributions. (pp. 78-79)

Leaders of faith-based colleges and universities must recognize the importance of advancing gender equity within their campus communities. Many of the participants’ institutions have adopted co-education, and these leaders detailed efforts for advancing women in academic leadership. However, despite efforts at the campus level, the majority of the participants did not anticipate seeing the changes they hoped for with
regard to gender equality within the Church. They had not been successful in shattering “the stained-glass ceiling” (Wood, 2009, p. 92). While they successfully navigated their way to their presidential positions, the majority of the participants expressed concern with the limitations placed upon them as women in those positions. They suggested that the patriarchal structure of the Church imposed physical and virtual barriers on them, limiting their ability fully to promote gender equality and shift historical paradigms. The next section examines the limitations of the Catholic Church and the implications for participant leadership.

**Catholicism and Limited Leadership**

Almost all of the participants described limitations placed on them by the Catholic Church—even those who claimed to be autonomous in their leadership. As leaders, these participants expressed a responsibility for the holistic development of their students and for setting them on the right track toward a social justice agenda. Most of the participants discussed their commitment to women’s and gay rights. While they proclaimed freedom from gender stereotypes, especially in all-women environments, participants denied equitable treatment within the Church. As they reflected on their faith and their role in leading others, they discovered “ever more clearly the structure of masculine dominance” (Halkes, 1989, p. 1).

The Catholic Sisters who participated in this study offered insight into their reasons for choosing a life of faith and the ways, along that path, they had been directed to the role of academic leader. As nuns, participants became submissive to their congregation and to their Church despite the desire of many to avoid submission to domesticity. Their salaries were returned to the congregation to be appropriated as
determined by the Provincial. They sacrificed control of many aspects of their lives.

Most of the participants described a deep trust in their congregational leadership. They committed to their faith and accepted the destiny chosen for them.

In return, most of the participants enjoyed a level of security and solidarity within their religious communities. The Sisters of their congregations provided support and camaraderie. Sister Harriet portrayed the Sisters in her congregation as her new family. She trusted them implicitly, and she knew she could count on them.

For most of the participants in this study, the pathway to the presidency was determined for them. Many did not want it. Many did not feel qualified. Sister Harriet did not apply for the position or want the position, but she decided that she had nothing to lose. Sister Gabrielle was adamantly opposed to taking a leadership role. Her passion was teaching. Sister Evelyn was young and naïve. She was not prepared for the level of responsibility, but she opened her heart and her mind and stated that her faith carried her through.

Participants described their deep love and commitment for their faith. Sister Francine reminded herself of the purpose and extent of her vows. She embraced a life that she believed to be God’s plan for her. Sister Kelly chronicled her journey and the influence of charisms, or spiritual gifts from God. But, for these participants, life in the convent was not without conflict. Many described opposition between commitment to conscience and duty to congregation and the Church’s teachings. Sister Kelly described her frustration with the Church’s rigid expectations and failure to change even as she remained loyal to her faith and to her congregation. Sister Gabrielle discussed the impact
of the pedophilia scandal within the greater religious community and her delicate mission to promote faith within her own campus environment.

Women have traditionally been expected to develop moral values within their families. This was the primary purpose of Catholic education for decades (Ginzberg, 1990). Participants, committed to the holistic development of their students, fostered spiritual development. They described the importance of ministry during difficult times. When the imperfect patriarchal hierarchy failed so many in the Catholic Church during the priest sex scandals, these Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents had to find ways to hold onto their Catholic identity and maintain their mission of social justice and service.

In addition, each of the participants contributed to the culture of her institution through her leadership approach. The personality and interpersonal skills of each one set a tone for campus life. Participants described community perceptions and expectations of the ways they were expected to behave as women and as Sisters. These expectations included commitment to service, a collaborative approach to their work, and evident humility. For Sisters who failed to satisfy these cultural norms, their congregations applied pressure to shift behaviors. Sister Gabrielle met with challenges within her congregation. She described a level of competitiveness and animosity. She did not feel she could trust the Sisters in her congregation to support her in her role as college leader. Sister Janine stressed the importance of decision-making capabilities and interpersonal relationship building as key factors of societal acceptance of women and Sisters in leadership roles.
Most of the participants expressed the belief that religious authority impacted societal acceptance of their leadership. Sister Amelia described the level of societal respect for her communal congregation and its commitment to education and mission. Sister Irene expressed her belief that society had Sisters on pedestals. They were considered to be powerful women with great responsibility. Sister Kelly described Sisters as feminists committed to social justice and gender equality. Sister Irene suggested that Sisters had powers that laywomen did not have. Despite the perceived impact of religious authority, participants cataloged complex challenges as women, as Sisters, and as leaders. They functioned within paradigms and barriers placed on them by their congregations, their constituents, and by the Church. They were expected to promote the teachings of the Church and to serve oppressed populations; however, the Church limited women’s and gays’ rights. These Sisters managed religious opposition and personal conscience in the name of service. They avoided guests on campus who contradicted the views of the Church, but they supported those on campus who chose unconventional lifestyles. As leaders, these participants served as role models. They were scrutinized by members of their congregation, by their constituents, and by the patriarchal hierarchy within the Church.

Sister Francine expressed frustration that women have not been allowed to be ordained. Sister Kelly challenged the Church’s position on women’s and gay rights. Sister Betty described conflict between education and the Church, specifically related to openness to new perspectives and change. She said that she was disheartened by a stagnant patriarchal hierarchy that was embodied in the Catholic Church.
The Catholic Church as an institution is the personification of a hierarchical system based on patriarchy, where men who are considered superior hold all the positions of power. A belief in patriarchy guarantees a dominant position for males because the primacy of their authority is unquestioned. (Wallace, 1992, p. 153)

But each of these participants maintained a commitment to the faith to which she had sworn vows. They identified the challenges set before them and recognized the constraints within which they worked. Within this limited leadership, participants struggled for the power to advance change. In the following section, the evolution of participant leadership is examined through the lens of the constructed self.

**Constructed Self and Evolving Leadership**

The perception most prevalent among the participants serving in their roles for 10 years or more was the perceived ability to advance effective leadership skills and characteristics through trial and error. Sister Janine described an initial authoritarian approach which, at the time, she felt was needed to facilitate urgent change. As she hired and developed her management team, she and her team members established the necessary trust to allow her to shift into a more collaborative empowering leader.

Most of the participants were appointed to their roles as college leaders despite personal aspirations that, in many cases, encompassed very different plans. A surprising shift in career trajectory left some participants disoriented. As a result, they were unprepared for leadership roles and dependent upon established leadership teams within their respective campuses. Most of these Sisters said that they embraced a collaborative approach to leadership. They employed a team approach to problem solving, and they
empowered their vice presidents to perform in their duties. They described the importance of hiring the right people and embracing transparency and communication. The participants who said that they practiced this approach perceived that they experienced high levels of leadership efficacy. This phenomenon is supported by the literature presented in Chapter Two. Madsen’s (2008) interview study of 10 female college presidents explored the leadership principles that they described as guiding them in their adult lives. The primary themes she identified included “hiring right,” employee empowerment, transparency, employee support and development, collaboration and teamwork, and creating a vision. These themes corresponded with participant perceptions about personal leadership characteristics and perceived efficacy.

Participants suggested that as women they lead differently than men do. They suggested that they inadvertently aligned their approach with societal expectations when they practiced collaboration and teambuilding, nurturing, and support. They based this phenomenon on the social construction of the characteristics of a woman in society, the traits of a Sister, and the components of a woman-leader. Participants were provided access to experiences as girls, as women, and as Sisters that boys and men were not provided; as a result, it made sense that their approach to leadership and to power differed from that of a man (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Furthermore, their approach was expected to differ from that of a man.

Participants described a progression within their leadership roles—an evolution of behaviors as a result of experiences, reflection, and self-assessment. To garner societal acceptance, these leaders had to reconcile differing expectations for their roles as women, as Sisters, and as leaders. Sister Gabrielle and Sister Catherine showed that behaviors
that might help a man in a leadership role might harm a woman in the same position (Schichor, 2009). These behaviors might include task orientation, a focus on financial management, and a directive approach. Social realities impacted leadership success despite leadership competencies (Rodler, Kirchler, & Holzl, 2002).

These leaders practiced reflection and self-assessment as tools for ongoing improvement. Sister Irene described a progression in her leadership as she embraced feedback from her constituents. Sister Catherine also invited feedback through a survey process and was addressing faculty comments at the time of my visit to her campus. As these participants recognized shortcomings, they seemed to develop skills to overcome them. In this way, their constructed self shifted. Their perception of leadership efficacy improved.

The notion of a multi-faceted identity and the concept of self-construction through experiences suggest that leaders have the opportunity continually to grow and improve. Readers of this research study might be encouraged by these implications. The following section examines more closely the implications from this study.

**Implications of this Research Study for Future Leaders**

The Catholic Sisters who participated in this research study provided insight to the multiple facets of personal identity, the complexities of merging these facets, and the impact of identity on one’s ability to lead. As participants shared their experiences and perspectives about leadership, I was able to reflect and apply ideas to my own situation as a leader in higher education.

This research revealed some common experiences among participants despite different social constructs and geographic locations. Most of the participants trusted in
their faith to guide them and accepted their fate to lead even if they felt ill prepared for their positions. Most of the participants were singled out and recommended for leadership roles. Each of them defined success in her own terms, with the majority of the participants emphasizing commitment to service and the holistic development of students.

Participants who perceived themselves to be effective leaders tended toward a more collaborative approach. They were both accessible and visible on campus, and they adopted student-focused practices. They also established trust with their staffs and faculty members and, as a result, garnered high levels of support from them. These participants emphasized listening as a means of building trust in their relationships. This process reflects Helgesen’s (1990) notion that women function within a metaphor of hearing while the voices of others provide the prominent role. In this way, participants invited input from staff and faculty members and placed credence in their feedback and opinions. In the spirit of collaboration, constituents were provided voices. Participants, as leaders, listened to the things they had to say and valued diverse perspectives.

Several of the participants described themselves as maternal. They treated their campus communities as families and provided intellectual, emotional, and even financial support for their members. These participants stressed the importance of effective interpersonal relationships and communication.

Many of the participants described experiences as “the first woman in the room.” Despite being one of many women on their college campuses, they had become accustomed to being the only woman on external boards and committees. They were chosen to participate on external boards and committees because they were women—
perhaps to serve as tokens—but once selected, participants suggested that they provided a fresh perspective and a voice of reason. They may have been selected as a quiet female representative, but once appointed, they offered a voice and a different perspective.

They described themselves as feminists, fighting for equity and social justice. They perceived themselves as leaders on campus and in society. Although some admitted to being under scrutiny, the majority of participants considered their leadership independent from the Catholic Church. They also stated, however, that they respected the teachings of the Church and ensured that their actions did not embarrass the Bishops overseeing their congregations. Despite this respect, participants voiced frustration with the Church’s failure to change.

All of the participants expressed a belief that their leadership impacted the culture of their institutions. Some stated that they were compelled to behave a certain way in order gain acceptance in their campus communities. Others described challenges based on the fact that their leadership failed to conform to the expectation of their campus communities and their congregation. It seemed that gender impacted these expectations in ways the participants might not have even realized.

Through the lessons of these participants, leaders might learn to step back and assess the factors impacting their roles. Through reflection and self-assessment, leaders might consider the significance of gender, ethnicity, culture, and societal norms as they relate to expectations for acceptable behaviors and for performance in their roles. By understanding the factors contributing to perceived acceptance, leaders might navigate their environments more effectively.
This study presents an argument for collaborative leadership, high levels of communication and respect, and commitment to student outcomes. The participants who were forced to depend on their vice presidents said that they quickly learned the importance of hiring well and building trust. They expressed feelings of support and camaraderie. They perceived that their employees felt valued and significant to the team. Leaders who interacted with their staff and their students were well received by their campus communities and enjoyed longevity in their positions. These leaders also maintained a humble demeanor, crediting their team members for successes and equating the success of the campus with the success of its graduates.

This study presents an argument for holistic education, such as Catholic higher education. Graduates learn about civic responsibility, stewardship, and philanthropy in a faith-based atmosphere. While these Catholic institutions embrace students of all denominations, the inherent value systems reflect Christian perspectives. These institutions offer a “value-added” component to a traditional curriculum and encourage students to explore spirituality and to ask questions. Students develop a respect for diversity and a responsibility to help the poor and oppressed.

Participants were confident that as laywomen and men accept leadership roles in Catholic higher education, they will provide visionary leadership in support of the founding mission. Participants expect that future leaders, regardless of faith, will learn the history of the institutions and promote the mission to all constituents. Further, many of the participants suggested that lay leaders will more easily promote the success of the founding Sisters because they will not be challenged by the obstacle of the vow of humility that current Sisters face.
By sharing perceptions of their lived experiences, participants provided a glimpse into the role of Catholic college president and Sister. As observers, we are able to view the challenges and successes through their eyes and voices. We are able to contemplate their reasoning and check it against our own. We are able to learn the lessons they teach and apply them to our own leadership experiences (Eisner, 1997). Our schema are altered as we gain a new perspective of the world (Donmoyer, 1990). We are able to understand the meaning of success from the perspective of Catholic Sisters who served as college presidents. We are able to examine their perceived leadership in order to construct our own reality about ways we should lead. We are able to identify the many facets of our own identities and consider the balance and conflict as they relate to performance in leadership roles.

This study provides a number of primary implications for leadership practice. The first implication for practice promotes a collaborative approach that involves campus constituents and capitalizes on the strength of many—the notion that two heads are better than one, ten heads better than two. This practice encourages brainstorming, sharing of ideas, personal interaction, and inclusion.

The second critical implication relates to leader accessibility and approachability. Leaders who were accessible and approachable invited more frequent feedback, input to decision-making, and a broader understanding of the campus community and its expectations. These leaders also perceived themselves as grounded, connected.

This study’s third implication for leadership practice involves leader reflection and self-assessment. These tools help to identify individual strengths, areas of
opportunity, and personal roles in campus successes and failures. Through reflection and self-assessment, leaders might target weaknesses and learn from their mistakes.

The fourth implication for leadership practice is communication as a tool for feedback and an opportunity for team members to consult, counsel, and advise. Effective communication promotes the sharing of ideas, the opportunity to test concepts, and the ability to provide critical information.

The fifth and final implication for leadership practice is the value of developing solid support systems in both internal and external environments. It might be argued that earlier implications, collaborative leadership and communication skills contribute to the leader’s success in developing these significant relationships and establishing the needed support to be successful.

**Limitations of this Research Study**

The participants in this research study provided rich perspectives of Catholic Sisters serving as college presidents; however, this study did present some limitations. Of the 48 colleges identified, only 11 presidents agreed to participate. Their voices may not be representative of the total group of Sisters serving as Catholic college presidents; the details of their personal experiences serve to inform readers of this study only about their perspectives. The voices of the other Catholic Sisters who declined participation or did not respond may have opted for those choices for a number of reasons. Regardless of the reason, their stories are omitted here.

For the interviews conducted using Skype software, it seemed more difficult to develop rapport, to gain a sense of the leader’s presence on campus, and to make the
same level of interpersonal connection. These interviews were also shorter than the face-to-face interviews.

Interpretation and analysis were based on participant perceptions of reality and means of communication. Participants attested that their stories were accurate; however, this study represents only their perspectives. In addition, analyses of participant responses were based on one point in time—the time period of the interviews. Many factors may have contributed to participant perspectives and perceptions on the specific days that interviews were conducted.

Furthermore, confidentiality was very important to these participants. It is impossible to determine whether these women described the full extent of their experiences. Most expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have a voice. The selected participants represented a group of people who have successfully navigated the patriarchal hierarchy to obtain positions as leaders.

Finally, participants filtered the data as they determined events and perceptions they were willing to share with me. As a connoisseur of higher education, I further filtered the data as I selected information I considered to be relevant to the study during the analytic process. The next section will present recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this research study offer insight for women leaders pursuing college presidencies and for women leaders in general. However, its limitations suggest that further research is needed to inform future leaders in higher education. This study examined participants’ perceptions of individual leadership. To gain a holistic understanding of leadership efficacy, individual case studies could provide an
opportunity to enrich participant perspectives through the involvement of staff members, faculty, and students, who could add their perceptions regarding presidential leadership. Data collected from multiple sources might then be triangulated to provide a more comprehensive perspective.

Many Catholic colleges and universities in the United States have a rich history of Catholic Sisters leading them. A study of lay successors could address the impact of Catholicism and gender on the culture of the institution and its leadership. The ability of a lay leader to carry on the rich traditions and legacy of the founding Sisters should also be examined.

The number of Catholic Sisters who serve as college presidents is declining. Soon, their knowledge will be lost to the world. Because this study offered limited exposure to the lived experiences of Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents, it is imperative that further research be conducted in order to learn from their leadership, their challenges, and their successes. Specific areas of exploration could include (a) the impact of collaborative initiatives between presidents and constituents as they relate to campus goals and growth of the institution, (b) balance among personal, professional, and spiritual aspects of their lives, (c) effective means of professional development for Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents, and (d) exploration of regrets of Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents.

In addition, the literature suggests a need for further research on women leaders and higher education, an exploration into gendered leadership constructs, and shifting societal expectations relating to women leaders. Research on the impact of gender and religious identity on leadership is recommended, as well as an exploration of the impact
of the 2009 Vatican investigation on Catholic Sisters and leaders in Catholic higher education.

**Conclusion**

Catholic Sisters have assumed leadership roles in higher education since the late 19th century. They have impacted the lives of future leaders and empowered women to explore options to domesticity. Despite this cohort’s profound contribution to the history of higher education leadership, their stories are missing from textbooks and library shelves.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to examine the lived experiences of Catholic Sisters who served as college or university presidents and to gain an understanding of their perceptions of leadership. Of the 48 participants identified for the study, 11 agreed to participate. They responded to 12 interview questions and provided feedback and stories relating to their experiences as leaders. In order to sharpen the focus of the study, a set of lenses was selected to frame the analysis. These included feminism, constructed self, and Catholicism.

Participants described their roles in terms of preparing future leaders, especially women leaders. They passionately described expanding opportunities for women and men in an effort to open doors and increase choices that they didn’t enjoy as young women. As leaders in higher education, participants embraced their religious and authentic authority as a means of affecting change. Proponents of social justice, these leaders were expected to weave together the components of their identities to meet the expectations of their constituents. As women, these participants were expected to be gentle empathetic nurturers. As Sisters, participants were expected to devote themselves
humbly and respectfully to their ministry. As leaders, participants were expected to merge the facets of their identities and present themselves as effective team-builders. At times these expectations presented conflicts, especially when participants challenged the status quo. These leaders had to make choices. They could work to earn the trust of their constituents in order to shift the expectation paradigms, or they could modify their ways of doing things to conform to societal norms.

Participants suggested that their leadership behaviors were influenced by personal interactions throughout their lives. Some described the impact of family members, congregations, campus constituents, and the patriarchal hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Participants learned valuable lessons through lived experiences, reflection, and self-assessment. These Catholic Sisters who have served as college and university presidents have paved the way for future leaders.

Participants integrated the facets of their identity to be effective leaders. The elements of the conceptual framework were used to describe facets of participant leadership. Embedded in the notion of intrinsic leadership was the element of maternal instinct. Some participants described the ways in which they ran their campuses like families. They used words like nurture, dependability, support, and trust. As Catholic Sisters, participants conveyed frustration with the limitations of the Catholic Church and its inability to change. They described ways they practiced limited leadership, negotiating the rules of the Church and attention to personal conscience. Participants also provided insight into the evolution of their leadership through trial and error, constructive feedback from campus constituents, and self-assessment through reflection. This
evolving leadership was evident particularly in those leaders with years of tenure in their positions.

Participants perceived that gender and religion played key roles in their leadership constructs. They also stated that religious authority impacted perceived societal acceptance of their leadership; however, they suggested that individual characteristics contributed equally to that acceptance. Participants described the role of stereotypes as they pertained to societal expectations for leadership characteristics of women and for Catholic Sisters. Participants defined leadership efficacy in terms of successfully moving the institution toward the mission of their founding Sisters. Their groundbreaking leadership opened doors for future women leaders through training, commitment to high standards, and ministry.
MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 7, 2011

TO: Ms. Karen Scolforo

VIA: Dr. Marcia Lamkin
      Education

FROM: Dr. Katherine Kasten, Chairperson
      On behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board

RE: Review by the UNF Institutional Review Board IRB#11-041:
    “The leadership of Catholic Sisters who have served as college
    presidents: The impact of gender and religion on leadership efficacy”

This is to advise you that your project, “The leadership of Catholic Sisters who have
served as college presidents: The impact of gender and religion on leadership
efficacy,” has undergone “expedited, categories #6 & 7” review on behalf of the UNF
Institutional Review Board and was approved.

This approval applies to your project in the form and content as submitted to the
IRB for review. Any variations or modifications to the approved protocol and/or
informed consent forms as they relate to dealing with human subjects must be
reviewed with the IRB prior to implementing such changes. Any unanticipated
problems involving risk and any occurrence of serious harm to subjects and others
shall be reported promptly to the IRB within 3 business days.

Your study has been approved for a period of 12 months. If your project
continues for more than one year, you are required to provide a Continuing Status
Report to the UNF IRB prior to 5/07/2012 if your study will be continuing past the
1-year anniversary of the approval date. We suggest you submit your status report 11
months from the date of your approval date as noted above to allow time for review and processing.

As you may know, CITI Course Completion Reports are valid for 3 years. Your completion report is valid through 12/01/2013 and Dr. Lamkin's completion report is valid through 9/16/2012. If your completion report expires within the next 60 days or has expired, please take CITI's refresher course and contact us to let us know you have completed that training. If you have not yet completed your CITI training or if you need to complete the refresher course, please do so by following this link: [http://www.citiprogram.org/](http://www.citiprogram.org/). Based on your research interests we ask that you complete either the “Group 1 Biomedical Research Investigators and Key Personnel” CITI training or the “Group 2 Social Behavioral Researcher Investigators and Key Personnel” CITI training.

Should you have questions regarding your project or any other IRB issues, please contact Kayla Champaigne
Appendix B

**Phone Script (modified)/ Email:**

Hello, Sister XXXXX,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Florida, and I am seeking participants for my dissertation research study: *The leadership of Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents: The impact of gender and religion on leadership efficacy*. I am in the process of identifying participants for my study.

The goals of this research is to promote a fuller understanding of women leaders in higher education and the contribution of the Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents, to explore the mission of Catholic Sisters as educators and feminists, and to present an argument for further research on this topic. This qualitative study will examine the leadership construct of Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents through semi-structured interviews, providing a voice to the participants, and contributing to the body of knowledge on women leaders in higher education.

Would you consider participating? Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. Furthermore, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. While participants will be invited to waive anonymity in order to better convey individual experiences holistically, participants will otherwise remain confidential. In this case, identifying characteristics will be concealed, with the exception of the qualifying criteria: 1.) Catholic Sister, and 2.) having served as college president.

The study will be conducted using a semi-structured interview process, promoting discussion around each topic, and will be held in your office, or in a location of your preference. The interview process is expected to last approximately 90 minutes, and will be recorded using two digital devices. Interview recordings will be transcribed and transcriptions will be stored on the UNF secure server. You will be provided with copies of the transcripts for feedback and verification of content accuracy. Upon receipt of your feedback, edits will be made.

Data will then be analyzed using a thematic coding process and the results will be compiled to create an aggregate profile of Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents. Your feedback and concerns can be addressed at any time in the production of this research.

Because there is a dearth of literature about Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents, the greatest benefit of this research project will be the addition to the body of knowledge about this specific group of women leaders in higher education. The Catholic Sisters chosen to participate in this study will have an opportunity to share lived experiences related to leadership, social activism, and social justice. Your voice will guide the research in this study.
No foreseeable physical, psychological, social, legal, or other risks will be incurred by you as an interview participant. No type of compensation or inducement will be offered to you for your participation.

Would you be willing to participate in this study?
Appendix C

Informed Consent

University of North Florida

The Leadership of Catholic Sisters: The Impact of Gender and Religion on Leadership Efficacy

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. Interview participants must be 18 years of age or older. By signing this consent form and completing this interview you are giving your consent to be involved in this research. If at any point you decide that you do not want to complete the interview, please inform the administrator. Your refusal to participate will not result in any penalty or loss of benefit.

You are being asked to participate in this interview to help researchers better understand the impact of gender and religion on leadership and self-efficacy of Catholic Sisters who have served as college presidents. Please be as honest as possible and answer all questions to the best of your knowledge. The interview will be audio-recorded and should take no longer than 90 minutes. If you do not wish your interview to be recorded, please communicate your request to the researcher before your interview begins. You have the right to terminate the interview at any time for any reason with no consequences imposed to you.

Your interview will be transcribed and the transcript will be forwarded to you for your feedback and verification of the accuracy of the content. Your feedback is crucial in validating the accuracy of the transcription.

Confidentiality is paramount to the integrity of the research. All of the participants’ interviews will be analyzed using a thematic coding process and the results will be compiled to create an aggregate profile of Catholic Sisters who have
served as college presidents. Your feedback and concerns can be addressed at any
time in the production of this research.

No foreseeable physical, psychological, social, legal, or other risks will be
incurred by you as an interview participant. No type of compensation or
inducement will be offered to you for your participation. The potential benefit of
the study is to obtain a better understanding of the construct of leadership and the
impact of gender and religion as they pertain to leadership of Catholic Sisters who
have served as college presidents.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have of the person who is
conducting this interview. Feel free to fully express or explain any of your answers.
Your insights are the focus of this study so please do not restrain your answers.

Once the study is completed, the results will be synthesized and submitted as
part of the requirements of the doctoral criteria at the University of North Florida.
In addition, the results will be submitted for publication, then stored and locked.

Thank you for your cooperation and time. If you should have concerns about
this interview or your participation in the study, please call or email:

Karen M. Scolforo

____________________________________________                   _________________________________________
Your Signature                                                Today’s Date

____________________________________________                      _______________________________________
Principal Investigator’s Signature                           Today’s Date
Appendix D

Interview Questions

The Leadership of Catholic Sisters: The Impact of Gender and Religion on Leadership Efficacy

1. What factors contributed to your decision to become a Catholic Sister?
2. How would you describe the relationship between religion and higher education?
3. Describe your personal experience pursuing advanced degrees.
4. How did you become involved with higher education leadership?
5. How would you define your leadership characteristics?
6. How would you describe your leadership efficacy?
7. In what ways do you feel sectarian authority and the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church have contributed to societal acceptance of your role as a leader in higher education?
8. In what ways have you challenged gender stereotypes?
9. How would you define gender and religion as they pertain to leadership and the culture of your institution?
10. In what ways do you feel you have impacted future women leaders?
11. Why do you think we are seeing declining numbers of Catholic Sisters?
12. How do you feel Catholic Colleges will change as a result of lay persons taking on presidential roles?
References


Vita
Karen M. Scolforo

EDUCATION

Doctor of Education, Candidate
University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida
Degree Conferred April 2012
Educational Leadership; Cognate: Higher Education Administration and Finance

Master of Art Degree
Rivier College, Nashua, New Hampshire
Writing and Literature, 2002

Bachelor of Science Degree
Franklin Pierce University, Rindge, New Hampshire
General Studies, 1998
Summa Cum Laude
Education Conversion Program for Alternative Teacher Certification, 1999

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Education Affiliates/Fortis Institute, Jacksonville, FL
2009-Present
Budget development, profit and loss control and analysis, monthly operations meetings with executive committee/board of directors, collaborative leadership, and staff and faculty development, implemented new programs to meet community need

REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS/PRESIDENT
Keiser Schools/BAR Education, Inc; Jacksonville, FL; Charlotte, NC; Columbia, SC; Charleston, SC, Nashville, TN
2005-2009
As Regional Vice President of Operations, responsible for total student population of 1700, 190 employees, $30M operating budget
As President, responsible for overall operations, 67% growth of division and 559% growth of campus. Awarded Campus of Distinction 2006, 2007, 2008 for low attrition, high attendance, high completion, high student survey/satisfaction scores.

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/DIRECTOR
Premier Education Group: Sanford, ME; Manchester, NH; Tewksbury, MA
2002-2005
Total student population of 1450, 165 employees, $25M operating budget. Overall operations for three campuses in three states, overachieving budget goals by average of 40%. Served as Director of Education, Director of Admissions, Director.

EDUCATOR
Mont Vernon Village Schools /Weare Middle School, Mont Vernon and Weare, NH 1999-2002