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## Women CIOs in Higher Education Pursuing Work-Life Balance/ Integration, Self-Care, and the Influence of COVID-19

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Women CIOs in Higher Education Pursuing Work-Life Balance/Integration, Self-Care, and the  
Influence of COVID-19

by

Candice J Veilleux-Mesa

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Leadership,  
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This dissertation titled Women CIOs in Higher Education Pursuing Work-Life Balance/Integration, Self-Care, and the Influence of COVID-19

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## **Dedication**

*This work is dedicated to all women aspiring to find meaning and balance among the passions in their life as they grow into who they are meant to be.*

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## Abstract

There is a gender gap within higher education (HE) administration, and specifically the Chief Information Officer (CIO) position. This is a problem because men and women administrators provide diverse perceptions and advantages to HE institutions. The CIO perspective is important because they perform a critical role in the IT management and organization of HE institutions. Additionally, women in leadership positions often face additional pressures and barriers as compared to their men counterparts when seeking to integrate their work, family, and personal self-care. Thus, to further understand and take action to improve representation of women HE CIOs, the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perspectives of women HE CIOs and their ability to find and maintain work-life balance/integration with their roles as a worker, family member, and self-care and the significant impact of the novel COVID-19 pandemic in the pursuit of this goal. In this study, I used qualitative case study methodology and liberal feminist lens to explore the work-life balance/integration journeys, views, and practices of three women working as CIOs in HE institutions. The work-life journeys these women CIOs experienced were complex and inspiring. They hold the demanding and intricate responsibilities of the technology management and development within their respective institutions. They work long hours, endure the stress and pressure associated with this position, and adjust to enormous strain when necessary, such as momentous impact of COVID-19. They spend much of their energy toward the obligations and enrichment of their careers and their passion for this work is evident. They also acknowledge the impact work has on their home and personal lives. They organize their roles and responsibilities according to priority and recognize the importance of their own wellbeing and practices of self-care as major factors in the success of their other roles.

Ultimately, the pursuit and maintenance of work-life balance is an ever-evolving yet crucial aspect of these women HE CIOs lives.

*Keywords:* Chief Information Officer, COVID-19, higher education, self-care, women, work-life balance, work-life integration

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation explores the perceptions and experiences of women higher education (HE) Chief Information Officers (CIOs) regarding their ability to find and maintain work-life balance/integration with their roles as a worker, family member, and self-care and the significant impact of the novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic (COVID-19) in the pursuit of this goal. This study emerged from a distinct lack of scholarly research on women HE CIOs pursuing work-life balance/integration, and the influence of COVID-19. In this study, I used qualitative case study methodology and liberal feminist lens to explore the work-life balance/integration journeys, views, and practices of three women working as CIOs in HE institutions.

In the United States (U.S.), although women account for more than 50% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), they are underrepresented as administrative leaders in highly influential establishments including political offices, business organizations, and HE institutions (Agars, 2004; American Council on Education, 2017; Dolan, 2010; Eagly, 2007; Rhode, 2017; Snyder et al., 2016). This gender gap extends to top administrator positions within HE institutions and is a prevalent concern as men and women contribute diverse advantages to administrative positions based on their unique perceptions and experiences (Young, 2004). Additionally, to provide a representation of one group's perceptions, numerous representatives of said group are required to be physically present to voice the concerns and topics of interest the group holds (Campbell, Childs, & Lovenduski, 2010). Further, women in leadership contend with additional pressures and barriers than their men counterparts when pursuing equilibrium in their roles as a worker, family member, and personal life (Guthrie et al., 2005; Padulo, 2001; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010).

## **Background and Related Literature**

Gender stereotypes can strongly influence people's perceptions (i.e., beliefs) regarding how one should act, what they should wear, and what occupation they should hold (Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Lips, 2017). Researchers have found gender stereotypes and gender discrimination impact women's ability to pursue and achieve leadership roles (Lips, 2017; Vongalis-Macrow, 2016) which contributes to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Probert, 2005). HE organizations are men-dominated organizations (Acker, 1990; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010). They hold to the expectations of the ideal worker norm (Bailyn, 2011; King-White & Rogers, 2018; Williams, 2001). This creates complex challenges for women HE administrators compared to their men colleagues. For example, as women CIOs make up less than a quarter of all CIOs in HE institutions, they may experience additional demands in comparison to their men counterparts (Frye & Fulton, 2020). CIOs are important administrators to consider because, as our society increasingly depends on technology, the necessity for HE CIOs has become crucial to the success and sustainment of HE institutions. Further, it is common for people to have trouble juggling their work, family, and personal responsibilities (i.e., work-life balance/integration) (Lester, 2013), and researchers have specified a need for reshaping and redesigning higher education work culture to create an environment which fosters the ability for women to balance/integrate their work life, home life, and personal goals (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010). To fulfill the worker and family role to the best of one's ability, personal health (i.e., wellbeing and self-care) must be prioritized. Wellbeing is the balance of one's mental, physical, emotional, and social dimensions. One example which contributes to state of wellbeing is the act of self-care. Self-care is conducted through behaviors

which promote, strengthen, and maintain wellbeing (Bryan & Blackman, 2018). For example, some people exhibit self-care through engaging in activities like yoga, reading for pleasure, or writing in a journal. Also, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, HE administrators have been forced to adapt to a new norm (e.g., working remotely, conducting meetings via teleconference) which continues to reshape their professional, family, and personal responsibilities (Diep, 2021; Kaiser Health News, 2021).

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For clarification, key terms used in this study have been defined. These definitions are supported by the literature and provide a common basis for the language used in this study. The following terms are:

#### ***Chief Information Officer***

The “(s)enior executive responsible for establishing corporate information policy, standards, and management control over all corporate information resources” (Synnott & Gruber, 1981, p. 66).

#### ***Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19 or COVID)***

An infectious disease caused by a novel coronavirus.

#### ***Feminist Theory***

Theory which focuses on questions and dilemmas related to sex and gender.

#### ***Gender Stereotypes***

“A set of beliefs about what it means to be female or male” (Golombok & Fivush, 1994, p. 17).

#### ***Self-Care***

The act of conducting behaviors which promote, strengthen, and maintain wellbeing (Bryan & Blackman, 2018).

### ***Senior Leadership***

Senior leaders include top-level executives such as “presidents, chancellors, vice presidents, provosts, deans or their equivalent” (Twombly & Rosser, 2002, p. 459).

### ***Stereotypes***

A collection of beliefs regarding the attributes ascribed to a group of people (Greenwald et al., 2002).

### ***Wellbeing***

For the purposes of this study, wellbeing is the balance of one’s mental, physical, emotional, and social dimensions.

### ***Work-Life Balance***

For the purposes of this study, work-life balance is the compartmentalized approach to viewing the roles of work, family, and personal self-care as separate from each other.

### ***Work-Life Integration***

For the purposes of this study, work-life integration is the holistic approach to viewing and combining these roles as all part of one person's experiences in life which are intertwined with one another and not separate from one or another

### **Problem Statement**

There is a prevalent gender gap issue within HE administration, and specifically the CIO seat, as women compared to men are consistently tackling additional stressors in men-centric HE institutions because they are forced to contend with pressures to conform to archaic gender

stereotypes (i.e., men work outside the home while women perform domestic responsibilities) while simultaneously seeking to harmoniously integrate their work, family, and personal self-care. Thus, it is imperative to investigate women leader's perspectives, activities, and behaviors to further understand and take action to improve representation of women HE CIOs. Further, there is a gap in research solely on the perspectives and experiences of women HE CIOs pursuing work-life balance/integration, and there is no research on this topic in reference to COVID-19.

### **Purpose Statement**

The guiding purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of work-life balance/integration, and self-care as a component of such, for women HE administrators working in HE institutions as CIOs and the influence of COVID-19.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the perceptions of women HE CIOs regarding their ability to find and maintain work-life balance/integration?
- What do women HE CIOs experience in their pursuit of work-life balance/integration, specifically self-care?
- How has the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic influenced women HE CIOs seeking work-life balance/integration?

### **Overview of Theoretical Framework**

One way to investigate the prevalent gender gap in HE administration is through the lens and use of feminism and feminist theory. Feminism uncovers and eliminates injustices which have developed throughout history and remain prevalent in our society (Ropers-Huilman &

Winters, 2011). Feminism is pronounced when one supports and promotes women's rights in the pursuit of equality between women and men (Payne & Payne, 2004; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2011) argue that feminism has a three-part definition; first, women's contributions are valuable to our world; second, due to the oppression women encounter as a group, they have been unable to reach their full potential or experience the rewards of full participation in society; and third, feminists believe women's situation in society and our world needs to change in both public and private domains through multiple means, such as education, policy-making, activism, and individual efforts. Importantly, by investigating the perspectives of women, feminist researchers bring the personal into a public domain and promote women-centered work which is based on collective cooperation instead of detached individual advancement (Acker, 1987; Blackmore, 1989). Often, this focus leads feminist researchers to ask questions such as "Whose truth is heard and validated? Whose perspectives are trusted and valued? Whose manner of communication is reinforced and whose is ignored?" (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011, p. 671).

In general, theories consist of the perspectives of those pursuing answers to questions or dilemmas relating to a specific topic; for example, feminist theory focuses on questions and dilemmas related to sex and gender, and has been utilized in educational literature for decades, discussing general topics ranging from the way in which women have been educated as compared to men, to the scant presence of women in educational entities compared to men (Acker, 1987; Blackmore, 1989; Ferguson, 2017). Feminist theorists have critiqued educational leadership by exposing the struggle and unjustness of women's ascent in educational administration as they are judged based on a men-centric leadership model (Dunn et al., 2014).

Using a feminist lens is beneficial because the “consciousness which underlies [feminism] enables feminists to interpret social reality in ways which may be radically different from other interpretations...The same events, behaviors, states, beliefs, and so on come to *mean* something different from what they previously meant” (Stanley & Wise, 1991, p. 277). Thus, the feminist theory perspective (i.e., feminist lens) offers a unique view of events and situations in a men-centric work environment such as higher education.

As Ropers-Huilman and Winters’ (2011) definition of feminism explains, there are multiple means of changing women’s situation in society (e.g., activism, policy-making, education) and through these means, multiple types of feminism have emerged. Some examples include, radical feminism which focuses on reshaping society in its entirety as they argue our society is inherently patriarchal; intersectional feminism which focuses on the intersection of various parts of one’s identity (i.e., race, class, gender) in oppression; and liberal feminism which focuses on the premise that women and men are fundamentally equal but social conditions in our society (e.g., traditional gender norms) create a disparity between them (Baehr, 2021; Brewer & Dundes, 2018; Willis, 1984).

Liberal feminism also holds that freedom is based on personal autonomy (i.e., one should live the life they choose), and in our gendered society which has been established through a traditionally patriarchal culture, personal autonomy is not fully available to women as “social and institutional arrangements often fail to respect women’s personal autonomy and other elements of women’s flourishing” (Baehr, 2021, para. 8). Thus, liberal feminism aims to investigate and remedy the lack of personal autonomy women experience in this gendered society. Liberal feminism extends to the topic of this study as the goal was to investigate the

unique experiences women CIOs working in HE encounter, the novel perception they provide, and the influence of additional stressors they face when attempting to integrate the responsibilities of their work, family life, and personal self-care while simultaneously enduring pressures to conform to gendered societal stereotypes.

### **Overview of Methodology**

In this study, I used a qualitative case study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and liberal feminist lens to examine the work-life balance/integration perceptions and experiences of HE non-faculty administrative track women CIOs working in public HE institutions. I chose to investigate women CIOs because they are underrepresented in HE institutions as compared to men. For example, women constitute only 23% of HE CIOs compared to 77% of men HE CIOs (Frye & Fulton, 2020, p. 10). These leaders play a key role in their organizations as they serve as the top information systems administrator and ensure the availability of Information Technology (IT), establish technology planning and innovation, and help create and shape technology transformation within the organization (Jones, et al., 2020). Further, with the demand and advancement of technology in society, HE institutions are increasingly pressured to adapt; thus, HE CIOs have become crucial to the growth and sustainment of HE institutions.

To determine the best candidates for this case study, I used purposeful sampling to recruit three women CIOs who have had ideally three years of experience working at two- or four-year public HE institutions in the U.S. First, I sent an introductory email (see Appendix A) to determine whether each participant meets the specified criteria. Then, I sent an invitation email (see Appendix B) with a copy of the oral informed consent script (see Appendix C) if they agreed to participate and met the criteria in the introductory email. Then, I conducted recorded

semi-structured interviews (see Appendix D for interview questions) via Zoom video conferencing. Next, I coded and sorted the data into a list of related categories, major themes, and subthemes. To ensure credibility and dependability, all participants were invited to review and confirm findings drawn in the study through member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish transferability, I included rich in-depth information and descriptions so the reader can identify any similarities between their own experiences and the information included in the study. To establish confirmability in my research findings, I used an audit trail (i.e., a written trail of the entire research process) which helped to systemize, relate, cross-reference, and attach priorities to the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Significance of the Research**

Most researchers who have explored work-life (i.e., balance, integration, etc.) and gender focus much of their attention on the perspectives of faculty or the combined perspectives of faculty and staff and their experiences with juggling work and family (Bell et al., 2012; Bryan & Blackman, 2018; Currie & Eveline, 2011; Fontinha et al., 2019; King-White & Rogers, 2018; Lester, 2013; Lester 2015; Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018; Paduraru, 2014; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Szelényi & Denson, 2019; Young et al. 2017). However, there is a gap in research solely on the work-life perspectives of non-faculty HE women administrators working as CIOs and their experience pursuing work-life balance/integration during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The perspectives of CIOs are important as CIOs perform a critical role in the IT management and organization of HE institutions. Per Haddon et al. (2009) and Haddon and Hede (2010), it is useful and important for researchers to investigate the multiple perspectives of individuals which reflect our changing society, the complex workplace, intricate family and home life, as well as

each individual person. Further, it is crucial for work-life researchers to understand work-life balance differs per individual based on factors influenced by social representation (e.g., gender philosophies, experiences, socio-cultural ethos) (Kirby, 2017). Therefore, novel literature should be consistently gathered to bolster the existing work-life literature. This research study is significant in that it contributes to the existing literature with a focus on the perspectives of women CIOs working in HE institutions, incorporates the importance of self-care as a component of work-life balance/integration, and importantly, considers the influence of the global COVID-19 pandemic on women's pursuit toward work-life balance/integration.

### **Organization of the Study**

Utilizing a liberal feminist lens, I first examined the existing literature to discover the influence of gender stereotypes and gender discrimination on women's lives, the types of leadership contributions women make, the experiences and impact of women leaders in HE administration and the role HE institutions play, the barriers and experiences women encounter in their pursuit of work-life balance/integration, how they manage multiple roles (e.g., worker, family member, and personal self-care), and the limited available research discussing the societal impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Next, using case study methodology, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with women CIOs working in HE institutions to investigate their perceptions and experiences in their pursuit of work-life balance/integration and the impact of COVID-19 on this endeavor. Lastly, continuing with the use of the liberal feminist lens, I

analyzed and synthesized the data collected with the goal of enriching the current work-life literature.

### **Chapter Summary**

In part, our historically gendered society contributes to the underrepresentation of women in top HE administration, which continues to be a detriment to the United States HE institutions and society as women contribute diverse advantages to administrative positions (Young, 2004). As a scholarly contribution to remedy this issue, I used a liberal feminist lens, which focuses on questions and dilemmas related to sex and gender and aims to advance women's right to choose how they live, and case study methodology to investigate the work-life perceptions and experiences of non-faculty women CIOs working in public HE institutions in the United States. This research is significant because most work-life researchers have focused their attention on faculty and staff experiences and perceptions and there is no research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work-life experiences of non-faculty women CIOs working in HE institutions.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Although women represent more than 50% of all bachelor's and master's degrees awarded since 1981 and doctoral degrees granted in the last decade (Johnson, 2016, p. 5), they are consistently underrepresented leaders in administrative positions in prominent organizations such as businesses, legislative offices, and institutions of HE (Agars, 2004; American Council on Education, 2017; Dolan, 2010; Eagly, 2007; Rhode, 2017; Snyder et al., 2016). Further, although women have proven they have the necessary competence and knowledge to excel in leadership positions, the gender gap between men and women in institutions of HE remains. This issue is also puzzling because there is extensive research speaking to the importance and benefit of women's leadership presence in organizations because women and men offer different insights and benefits to administrative positions (Dugan 2006; Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Warner, 2014; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010; Young, 2004). For example, as Warner (2014) argues,

Over the past two decades, a considerable body of research has emerged to lend incontrovertible proof to the idea that when women thrive, organizations thrive—and nations thrive too. From that research, there is now a consensual view that women's leadership is not just a matter of fairness, but also has the potential to move companies, governments, and societies in new and better directions. (para. 10)

In other words, it is to the benefit of all in our society to advocate for the equal representation of women and men in administrative leadership positions in HE institutions.

Further, in addition to the gender gap in HE administration, women in leadership positions often face additional pressures and barriers as compared to their men counterparts. For

example, they often experience challenges when pursuing symmetry in their roles as a worker, family member, and their personal life (Guthrie et al., 2005; Padulo, 2001; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010). Stereotyping may influence the gender gap issue and challenges women face when pursuing equilibrium in their multiple roles as HE institutions are historically and currently men-dominated organizations (Baehr, 2021; Dunn et al., 2014). The impact of stereotyping is discussed further in the next section.

### **Stereotyping**

Stereotypes are a collection of beliefs regarding the attributes ascribed to a group of people (Greenwald et al., 2002). For example, if someone believes all Americans are obese, all elderly people have difficulty using technology, all women are bad drivers, and men never ask for directions, they are assigning stereotypes based on their ideas about these groups of individuals. Vongalis-Macrow (2016) has established stereotyping is one overarching barrier hindering women in leadership in higher education. People learn how to act and what to be like through interactions with their parents, peers, and other outlets (e.g., organizations, institutions, etc.) in their environment (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Stereotypes format the way people perceive others, including what people expect others should be like, and how people believe others should behave (Greenwald et al., 2002; Heilman, 2001). As Sandberg (2015) argues, “All of us – men and women alike – have to understand and acknowledge how stereotypes ... cloud our beliefs and perpetuate the status quo” (p. 159).

Stereotypes have two fundamental parts; they can be descriptive, which pertains to the definite characteristics of a group, as well as prescriptive, which pertains to the characteristics people believe should be about a group (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Vinkenburg et

al., 2011). Importantly, prescriptive beliefs about a group or singular individuals often perpetuate inequality as they pressure people into conforming to the stereotypes regardless of if they view themselves as fitting the stereotype (Lips, 2017). For example, society's pressures for women and men to conform to gender stereotypes leads to gender inequality (Lips, 2017). Additionally, if the stereotypes associated with a specific group do not match with group members being qualified, they may jeopardize the career opportunities, for example in HE administration, for members of those groups. For instance, if the stereotypes associated with leaders do not match the stereotypes associated with women, then the career opportunities for women pursuing leadership positions may be jeopardized. Additionally, per Probert (2005), the current extensive imbalance in academe creates and increases unequal outcomes for women compared to men in academic careers. Further, an imbalance between the stereotypes associated with a group and the stereotypes ascribed to the social roles a person undertakes can result in prejudice and discrimination (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

### ***Gender Stereotypes***

All groups have associated stereotypes; therefore, there are stereotypes about gender as well as occupations (e.g., administrative positions at HE institutions). Gender stereotypes are "a set of beliefs about what it means to be female or male" (Golombok & Fivush, 1994, p. 17). Further, when an individual has been classified by others as man or woman, "that person is judged by standards thought to be appropriate for that gender group" (Lips, 2017, p. 24). For example, prescriptive stereotypes of men (i.e., masculine) include descriptions such as logical, competitive, independent, and aggressive, whereas prescriptive stereotypes of women (i.e., feminine) include descriptions such as emotional, submissive, cooperative, and sympathetic

(Eagly & Karau, 2002). As these prescriptive gender stereotypes are only characteristics which are believed to be associated with each group (i.e., women or men) and are not definitive characteristics of each group, they contribute to gender inequality (Lips, 2017). However, specific traits are not the only signifiers of stereotyping, other components often apply; namely, occupation, appearance, behaviors, and personality traits can be influenced by stereotyping. Gender stereotyping can impact occupation if, for example, a department posts a job description in which they state they are looking to hire someone who is ambitious and self-confident, and the hiring manager believes a gender stereotype that men are more associated with ambition and self-confidence than women. In short, although the hiring manager may regard a woman applicant as an option, they may be less likely to hire her because they believe a man applicant is more ambitious and self-confident than a woman applicant.

Further, some stereotypes can be categorized into groups, such as agency, which exhibits people as independent individuals, and communion, which exhibits people as individuals who participate with the larger society in which they live (Bakan, 1966). Agentic and communal traits can be attributed to all groups and individuals. People with agentic traits are focused on attaining a sense of autonomy and personal gain, as agentic traits contain achievement-oriented components (Diehl et al., 2004; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly et al., 2000). People with communal traits are focused on helping others, belonging to a community, and being involved with others, as communal traits contain interpersonally oriented components (Diehl et al., 2004; Eagly et al., 2000).

Researchers have found men are associated with agentic traits and women with communal traits (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly et al., 2000; Heilman & Eagly, 2008). For

instance, Eagly and Karau, (2002) found women are viewed as having feminine stereotypic qualities such as affectionate, sympathetic, and helpful and are also associated with communal traits, and men are viewed as possessing masculine stereotypic qualities such as independence, drive, and assertiveness which are also associated with agentic traits. Further, in their book *The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender*, Eagly and Steffen (1989) compiled findings from their experiments completed in 1984, 1986, and 1988 in which they gathered judgements of communal and agentic attributes from participants by providing information about an individual who was either man or woman, and was either a homemaker, worked full time, or their occupations were not described. Interestingly, they found participants judged those in an occupational role as more agentic and less communal than those in a domestic role, regardless of sex. However, the researchers also found “average women and men whose occupations were not mentioned were perceived stereotypically: Women were seen as higher in communion and lower in agency compared with men” (p. 127). Thus, the association between women and communal traits and men and agentic traits may contribute to gender discrimination.

### ***Gender Discrimination***

Per Eagly and Karau (2002), if stereotypes ascribed to a group differ from those attributed to a person’s actions and social roles, the person may experience prejudice and discrimination. For example, because gender stereotypes lead people to make assumptions about how women and men should be, what behaviors they should exhibit, and which occupations they should pursue, if a person does not conform to their ascribed gender assigned behaviors or occupation, they often experience gender discrimination or bias. Further, as previously mentioned, women are associated with communal traits, thus when they veer from this social

expectation and express agentic traits which are associated with men, they may experience various forms of discrimination. Gender discrimination (i.e., bias) can be described as explicit (i.e., identifiable, blatant) or implicit (i.e., often unidentified, automatic) (Daumeyer et al., 2019; Lips, 2017). Thus, people who exhibit explicit discrimination are often aware of their preferences, beliefs, and attitudes and can identify and communicate them to others (Daumeyer et al., 2019; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). However, people who exhibit implicit discrimination react to automatic associations of which they are often unaware (Daumeyer et al., 2019; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Further, although people are often aware of the influence their explicit discrimination can have, many are unaware of the impact of their implicit discrimination. For example, implicit gender discrimination is exhibited in ways such as undervaluing work done by women compared to men (Lips, 2017), the wage gap between salaries earned by women and men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), and the motherhood penalty (i.e., women workers who are mothers are an inconvenience to companies as compared to men because they need to be accommodated) (Correll et al., 2007).

One type of implicit discrimination influencing women in the workforce is the belief that “the quality of women’s work tends to be undervalued” (Lips, 2017, p. 295). For example, researchers investigating participant evaluations of pieces of work (e.g., research article or painting) done by women compared to men found that participants evaluated work less favorably when it was done by a woman compared to when it was done by a man (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012). Also, women often receive incorrect and negative assessments of their competence which undervalue their work. For example, their accomplishments are sometimes “devalued by being explained as luck” (Lips, 2017, p. 295) and not attributed to their diligence, intelligence, or skill.

Importantly, undervaluing women's work and competence leads to consequences such as women receiving less credit and less pay for their labor.

Additionally, although women make up 50.8% of the population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019) and represent 51.7% of all management- and professional-level positions (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), they are underrepresented in leadership positions and underpaid as compared to men (Warner, Ellmann, & Boesch, 2018). For instance, in 2012, the average weekly salary of women working full time in management, business, and financial operations jobs in the United States was about 71% compared to their men counterparts, and women who worked in professional occupations earned about 73% compared to their men colleagues (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Unfortunately, almost a decade later, the wage gap has not minimized much. In the United States in 2020, women's average weekly salary working full time in management, business, financial, and professional jobs was about 73% compared to their men colleagues (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Therefore, the gender pay gap prevails.

Another form of gender discrimination against women in the workplace is the idea that women workers who are pregnant or have children are more expensive and more of a burden for companies than men because companies must make accommodations for them (Correll et al., 2007; Crosby et al., 2004; Lips, 2017). Unfortunately, due to the historically disproportionate role women play in child rearing, they often encounter additional barriers and challenges in the workplace than their men colleagues. Some researchers call this form of discrimination the "motherhood penalty" (Correll et al., 2007) or the "maternal wall" (Crosby et al., 2004). Additionally, per Sallee (2013), although more men faculty have reported being married with

dependent children than women faculty, women consistently encounter greater demands when attempting to juggle their professional and personal responsibilities.

Role congruity theory may also explain the additional barriers and challenges women face. Per Eagly & Diekmann (2005), role congruity theory suggests that when a group's characteristics align with their typical social roles (e.g., women constrained to child rearing role), they will be viewed more positively. However, when a group (e.g., women) veer from the assigned typical social roles (e.g., working outside the home but still have children), prejudice and discrimination toward the group may arise. Thus, regardless of their expertise or accomplishments, women who have veered from the traditional caretaker role often encounter implicit discrimination through challenges and judgements in the way they are viewed, how much they are paid, and whether they should be home with their children as compared to their men counterparts.

### **Leadership and Higher Education**

Leaders take responsibility for and guide others in an organization or group toward specific goals (Goleman, 2004). Leadership in higher education administration is conducted by leading a team within a college or university to accomplish the goals which were a result of the mission, purpose, and vision created for the various programs and activities in said institution (Dunn et al., 2014). A singular leader can often have a great effect on collective groups such as teams and organizations (Contractor et al., 2012). However, when members of a group enact leadership behaviors and become leaders themselves by working collectively to achieve a goal, it can create an environment of collective action which is spread through the organization's community.

Many higher education institutions view themselves as possessing and encouraging distributed leadership (Gosling et al., 2009; Gronn, 2009). This form of leadership holds a collective perspective as organizations who utilize distributed leadership support the concept that leadership responsibilities are communicated and shared throughout the entire team (Contractor et al., 2012; Gosling et al., 2009). However, Bolden (2008) found many institutions maintain a constant struggle between hierarchical (e.g., managerial, centralized, or top-down leadership approach) and lateral (e.g., collegial, distributed, or bottom-up leadership approach) forms of leadership. This dispute is more prominent in colleges and departments with access to more money, as colleges and departments who control the largest share of the budget hold greater power and influence than the others in the institution (Bolden, 2008).

Other higher education institutions prefer a “blend” of hierarchical and lateral leadership (Gronn, 2009). They find the most influential examples of leaders are the traditional position holders demonstrating top-down leadership combined with multiple colleagues utilizing interpersonal leadership. However, Bolden (2008) found people also want singular inspirational or visionary individuals to serve as leaders within their institutions. These individuals are desired particularly when an institution is experiencing a transition of leadership or during significant times of change. Therefore, those who hold to the idea of distribution leadership as the best leadership type for higher education institutions, need to consider how to incorporate the impact of specific influential individuals.

### ***Higher Education***

Cultural stereotypes (i.e. component influencing individuals via the macrosystem) are the attitudes and ideologies held within a community or social group (Hampson, 2018). For example,

many industries and organizations hold cultural stereotypes about the use of family leave policies. In their investigation of company cultures in Sweden, Hass and Hwang (1995) found men are less likely to use family leave policies because, although available, their organizational culture does not permit it in earnest. Another example includes the ideal worker norm, which is a cultural stereotype that also permeates industries and organizations (Bailyn, 2006; Bailyn, 2011). The ideal worker norm is the social expectation of an employee to be constantly available and attentive to their employer above all other responsibilities in their life (Bailyn, 2011; King-White & Rogers, 2018; Williams, 2001). More specifically, per Drago (2007), it is an expectation in which serious career professionals dedicate their lives to their work “24 hours a day, seven days a week, for periods of years and even decades at a stretch” (p. 8). One such organizational community which might reward an agentic style but discriminate against a communal style and consistently holds to this cultural stereotype is higher education, and it has a direct impact on their employees.

It is important to consider the working conditions of faculty, staff, and administrators working in higher education institutions because researchers have found faculty, staff, and administrators are crucial to shaping and altering campus cultures, including the influence and perspectives regarding work-life balance/integration within an institution (Hart, 2008; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Sallee, 2013). Previously, higher education was viewed as a less stressful place to work compared to corporate or government organizations (Gillespie et al., 2001), however, in the last few decades as more higher education institutions have begun to adopt the “business model” culture, faculty and staff responsibilities have grown exponentially and they are often expected to be available and working at all times, consistent with the ideal worker norm of always being

available to the employer and having no responsibilities outside those of work (Bailyn, 2011; King-White & Rogers, 2018; Williams, 2001). Further, whereas the typical work hours were often conducted in the workplace from 9-5pm and parenting ideas in which the father works the “big job,” and the mother takes care of domestic responsibilities were prevalent, in the last decade, technology has allowed individuals the flexibility to work anywhere at any time of day or night and families have shifted toward equal parenting (Bailyn, 2011). Additionally, researchers have found faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education specify work-associated responsibilities as a major source of stress (Gillespie et al., 2001; King-White & Rogers, 2018). Further, researchers have found the life needs of employees and the requirements and socialization needs of higher education institutions do not often match (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010). Although HE institutions are attempting to adopt policies which allow for flexible hours and accommodations, their efforts are sluggish compared to demands and requirements of their faculty, staff, and administrators (Lester, 2013). Thus, there remains a mismatch between today’s workplace (i.e., HE institutions) and today’s workers (i.e., faculty, staff, and administrators) (Williams et al., 2016).

### ***Women Leaders in Higher Education Administration***

There are different levels of positions in higher education administration, namely low (e.g. entry-level), mid, and high (i.e. senior) levels. Entry-level positions are viewed as gender neutral because the tasks required at this level require both traditionally feminine (i.e., cooperative, emotional, sympathetic) and masculine (i.e., independent, competitive, logical) traits. Mid-level positions are viewed as feminine because the tasks and leadership style required by administrators in these positions are traditionally feminine. For example, per Yakaboski and

Donahoo (2010), “The significant presence of women on campus is recognizable most among midlevel administrators who comprise the largest administrative group within higher education organizations” (p. 271). Interestingly, although Yakaboski and Donahoo (2010) argue senior-level positions (i.e., presidents, chancellors, vice presidents, provosts, deans or their equivalent) are viewed as masculine because the tasks and leadership style required by administrators in these positions have been traditionally masculine, Dale (2007) argues the opposite. In their qualitative dissertation geared toward understanding the experiences of success for women administrators in senior leadership positions, Dale (2007) found women in these positions learned to advance and succeed based on key components which more closely match the traditionally feminine (i.e., cooperative, emotional, sympathetic) traits. These components included building and maintaining collaborative relationships, working in an environment in which their individual values matched with the values of the office culture, acknowledging prevailing gender issues in their work environment, engaging in self-reflection, and utilizing constructive knowing. These conflicting findings may be due to changes in the ideas of leadership and the climate and culture of HE institutions.

Other researchers have found women leaders often use different leadership styles compared men (Christman & McClellan, 2008). For example, women administrators are more likely to sustain their administrative roles by using both feminine and masculine types of leadership as compared to their men colleagues (Christman & McClellan, 2008). However, specific leadership actions (e.g., persistence, dependability, cooperation), which are preferred by women, can be evident in both men and women leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Vongalis-Macrow, 2016). Additional components for effective leaders, such as general intelligence and

extraversion, are also exemplified by both women and men leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007). However, there are some perceived differences in leadership effectiveness of men versus women leaders. For example, Dugan (2006) found women score themselves significantly higher than men on constructs of consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, common purpose, citizenship, and change. Additionally, women are perceived as more likely than men to manage team members and financial resources fairly and effectively, engage in research, community, and professional endeavors, enhance the quality of education in their institutions, and promote and support institutional diversity within their institutions (Rosser, 2003). Strong and clear women-style leadership qualities are consistently demonstrated by both men and women leaders; however, men-style leadership qualities are demonstrated by both men and women leaders only sometimes (Young, 2004). In short, men exhibit women-style leadership qualities consistently, whereas women do not exhibit men-style leadership qualities consistently. The researchers suggest these differences may be due to shifts in ideas of leadership and leadership styles over time (Young, 2004).

Unfortunately, the culture of HE institutions was not built to accommodate women leaders and has not reached a point of equality between the women and men in their employ. For example, Zemsky (2001) argues,

Higher education's challenge is to develop a culture that yields to women the same recognition and rewards that it has always yielded to men – and to do so in such a way that the result is a wide variety of roles, responsibilities, and models of leadership reflective of the gender diversity that has come to characterize the academy. (p. 2)

Thus, although men and women leadership styles may shift over time, HE institutions have not shifted from its historically men-dominated culture (Baehr, 2021; Dunn et al., 2014) and the gender gap in HE institutions prevails despite extensive research (Dugan 2006; Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Warner, 2014; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010; Young, 2004) speaking to the importance and benefits of women's leadership presence.

**Chief Information Officer.** One important example of the gender gap in HE institutions is the lack of women Chief Information Officers (CIOs). Per Synnott and Gruber (1981), a CIO is the "(s)enior executive responsible for establishing corporate information policy, standards, and management control over all corporate information resources" (p. 66). The role and responsibilities of a HE CIO has expanded exponentially in the last decade as they were traditionally titled director of information and communication technology (ICT) which was a mid-level administrative role. The ICT director was responsible for a university or college's basic business functions and processes (e.g., finance/budgets, student information/inventory) and were expected to either develop or purchase systems to assist them in their duties (Harris & Skinner, n.d.). However, with the expanded use and necessity for technology at universities and colleges, the CTI director position has grown from a mid-level position to an executive CIO position. These leaders play a key role in their organizations as they serve as the top information systems executive and ensure the availability of Information Technology (IT), establish technology planning and innovation, and help create and shape technology transformation within the institution (Jones, et al., 2020). CIOs also play a critical role in the IT management and organization of HE institutions. Thus, as our society, and specifically the HE community,

continue to grow in dependence on technology (e.g., online learning, remote teaching, electronic academic systems), the necessity for HE CIOs have and will continue to become increasingly crucial to the success and sustainment of HE institutions. Unfortunately, there are more men than women CIOs serving universities and gender stereotypes are one important factor which contributes to this disproportion. For example, per Frye and Fulton (2020), the general HE IT workforce is predominantly male, and women constitute only 23% of HE CIOs compared to 77% of men HE CIOs (p. 10). In their study investigating the differences between women and men HE CIOs, Clark (2013) found the masculine culture of HE IT contributes to the disparity between women and men CIOs and perpetuates stereotypes and biases against women CIOs. For instance, they found that HE IT hiring managers perpetuate unconscious gender discrimination by using prescribed stereotypes when deciding who should be in technical leadership positions (Clark, 2013). As it is to the benefit of all in our society to advocate for the equal representation of women and men in HE administrative leadership, HE institutions need to work to reshape their culture and recognize the crucial advantages women leaders supply to the organization. Also, as more women enter positions in HE administration and advance to higher levels of leadership, their needs must be assessed so organizations can support and retain them. Further, the need to explore and learn from women's experiences becomes more urgent as they are often primarily responsible for maintaining work and family duties and enduring the countless pressures associated with assuming these roles.

### ***Gender Discrimination in Higher Education***

Gender discrimination plays a large part in the added pressures women administrators are forced to contend with in the HE workplace. Unfortunately, traditional gender norms influence

all of society's institutions, including businesses, organizations, and HE institutions (Acker, 1990). According to traditional gender norms, men serve as breadwinners and women are responsible for all caregiving duties (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Sallee, 2013; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). As expressed by Eagly and Karau (2002), if there is an imbalance between the stereotypes associated with a group and those associated to social roles which an individual exhibits, it may lead to prejudice and discrimination. For example, because women are associated more with communal traits and leadership is associated with agentic traits, when women assume leadership roles (which are perceived as agentic roles), the views toward these women as opposed to men (who are associated more with agentic traits) in leadership are more negative and can result in sex discrimination (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Greenwald et al., 2002). Higher education organizations are not gender neutral; they are historically men-dominated organizations (Acker, 1990; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010). Some say that gender discrimination no longer exists in higher education, however, the truth is it prevails in less obvious ways than in the past. Two decades ago, scholars argued about the presence of gender discrimination in higher education, as Rhode (1999) stated:

Americans' most common response to gender inequity is to deny its dimensions. A widespread perception is that once upon a time, women suffered serious discrimination, but those days are over. Barriers have been coming down, women have been moving up, and full equality is just around the corner. (p. 3)

Gender discrimination can be expressed as explicit (i.e., blatant) or implicit (i.e., automatic) (Daumeyer et al., 2019; Lips, 2017), and although people working in HE administration do not

often exhibit explicit gender discrimination, implicit gender discrimination prevails (Ballenger, 2010; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

A reason for the gender discrimination in senior leadership positions in HE institutions could be the institutions attitudinal and organizational biases against women which exclude women from promotion or hiring opportunities (Ballenger, 2010). Other factors may include unintentional biases, outmoded institutional structures, lack of role models for future women leaders, and style of leadership (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Importantly, biases, promotion, hiring, and perception constraints restrict opportunities for women's participation and success in HE administrative office.

### ***Barriers for Women Leaders***

Many women face barriers which influence their prospects for obtaining top level positions in an organization. For example, the situation such as the glass ceiling and/or labyrinth contribute to the underrepresentation by women in senior leadership roles. Researchers describe the glass ceiling as “invisible barriers” which prevent many women from moving upward in an organization to fill aspired senior level positions (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Lips, 2017). Importantly, the glass ceiling is detrimental to progress in equality as it “prohibits both women and organizations from reaching their full potential and denies us all of the maximal benefits of gender diversity in leadership” (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017, p. 312). Other researchers believe the glass ceiling concept is overly simplified, and instead, believe women currently face a labyrinth of multiple barriers (e.g., implicit and/or explicit discrimination) on their way to pursuing senior level leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Keohane, 2014). For example, as Keohane (2014) states, “finding a way through the maze to the central prize of top leadership

is a challenging task for men as well as women; however, ...women encounter additional cul-de-sacs and dead ends that men generally do not face” (p. 43). In other words, whether described as a glass ceiling or labyrinth, the additional obstacles women often face when trying to carve a path toward leadership are not experienced by their men counterparts. Unfortunately, this winding path women face toward leadership does not look like it will become easier to navigate any time soon. For example, after evaluating the current rates of change in her work *The difference “difference” makes: Women and leadership*, Rhode (2003) estimated that it would take three centuries before women and men would equally “become top managers in major corporations or achieve equal representation in the U.S. Congress” (p. 7).

Further, gender discrimination continues to be prevalent, as even now, most women must work much harder than their men counterparts to “fit in” when pursuing or continuing in most, if not all, careers which are men-dominated (Lips, 2017). This poses a particular barrier as women are not judged and often not compensated fairly based on merit, skill, and accomplishments. For example, in the United States, patterns of unequal pay and lack of promotion for women in upper-level positions in higher education institutions are prevalent (Agars, 2004; American Council on Education, 2017). Researchers have identified women administrators working in HE institutions are paid less than their men colleagues (Hatch, 2017; Graf et al., 2019; Muller, 2019; Seltzer, 2017; & Tarr, 2018). Specifically, per Berger & McCafferty (2019, p. 3), women HE administrators are paid approximately 20% less than men. This is concerning, because women’s careers are intricate and multi-dimensional based on the distinct barriers they face as opposed to men; however, workplaces remain in a single dimension, namely the men-representative organizational dimension (Bilimoria et al., 2008). Additionally, women who do progress to

upper-level leadership positions must contend with a double-edged sword because even as they advance, they receive less mobility, compensation, and authority than their men colleagues and often receive advancement in less than favorable circumstances (Bilimoria et al., 2008).

Therefore, although men are overrepresented in senior leadership positions in HE, women's leadership contribution has proven positive and influential which merits further exploration into how they navigate through their working responsibilities in a men-dominated field, time with their family and time spent cultivating their personal goals. It is with that picture in mind that I will review what the literature has to say about the pursuit and navigation of one's work-life balance and work-life integration.

### **Work-Life Balance/Integration: A Women's Issue**

It is common for people to have trouble juggling their work, family, and personal responsibilities as they often desire equilibrium amongst them (Lester, 2013). This goal toward equilibrium is often termed work-life balance or work-life integration, however, specific components within the definition of each may differ per individual (Berheide et al., 2020; Lester, 2015; Mitra & McAlpine, 2017). Some researchers describe work-life balance as part of one's identity that is defined based on social and cultural norms (Lester, 2015; Mitra & McAlpine, 2017). For example, in their qualitative study which focused on gender and work-life balance for early career researchers, Mitra and McAlpine (2017) state that it is a "negotiation between the dual demands of work and broader life, undertaken by individuals, within the context of their overall work environment, as well as prevailing societal norms" (p. 6). Importantly, gender stereotypes are also linked with prevailing societal norms because within each society and culture, people have certain expectations and beliefs about how women and men should act and

the pressures to act in a certain way may influence one's identity and ability to navigate work-life balance. Others characterize work-life balance as promoting growth and compatibility among work, family and personal obligations including emotional, behavioral, and time demands (Bell et al., 2012; Fontinha et al., 2019; Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018). For example, in their qualitative study which focused on faculty wellbeing in academia, Young et al., (2017) linked work-life balance with wellbeing which they described as "a lifestyle centered on health, well-being, and balance among the spirit, body, and mind" (p. 336). Interestingly, some work-life balance researchers have noted further research should be conducted to explore a more integrated approach to the blurred boundaries between work and other aspects of personal life (Lester, 2015; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012).

Work-life integration has been defined as a unified experience linking work and life roles. For example, in their quantitative study, Berheide et al. (2020) investigated whether institution type (i.e., research university versus teaching-intensive college) and/or gender play a role in faculty members' ability to achieve work-life integration. The researchers defined work-life integration as "...encompass[ing] diverse professional and personal lives, including people with or without partners and/or children. A non-directional and holistic approach, it does not imply an even division of time or energy between work and home" (Berheide et al., 2020, p. 3). Further, integrating multiple roles is often beneficial as it alleviates one from the pressure to "choose" a role and instead offers flexibility and equilibrium to one's life (Marshall et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2016). Many work-life researchers have also found work-life integration is important for the health and wellbeing of families and individuals and is related to greater life

satisfaction and reduced stress (Allen et al., 2000; Eby et al., 2005; Frone et al., 1992; Parkes & Langford, 2008; Pocock, 2003).

Work-life integration and work-life balance can have different meanings for multiple individuals depending on their interpretation and personal experiences. For the purposes of this study, work-life balance is the compartmentalized approach to viewing the roles of work, family, and personal self-care as separate from each other; whereas work-life integration is the holistic approach to viewing and combining these roles as all part of one person's experiences in life which are intertwined with one another and not separate from one or another.

### ***Work-Life Balance/Integration for Leaders in Higher Education***

The pursuit to integrate/balance one's roles in work, family, and personal self-care is not stagnant, it is a task which requires much energy and must be examined on a frequent basis, and in most cases daily. There can be many challenges to managing separated roles, as it can be frustrating and disappointing when one's personal, home, or career goals impede one another. Challenges are particularly prevalent for women as they pursue careers in men-dominated organizations (e.g., HE institutions) which hold the ideal worker norm that requires employees to always remain available (King-White & Rogers, 2018; Williams, 2001; Bailyn, 2011), while simultaneously combating the gendered societal stereotypes which emphasize the belief that women should conform to a domestic role (Dunn et al., 2014; Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018). For example, per Williams et al. (2016), "All women face a clash of social ideals: The ideal worker is always available to the employer, and the ideal woman is always available to her family" (p. 529). Thus, women in HE leadership roles face the added pressure of society's view of the ideal woman which conflicts with the ideal worker norm.

Researchers have specified a need for reshaping and redesigning higher education work culture to create an environment which fosters the ability for women to integrate their lives into the workplace rather than having to separate their work on campus from their time at home or time spent on their personal wellbeing (e.g., self-care) (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010). Further, reshaping higher education work culture to promote work-life balance/integration is important as there are often consequences and challenges for women attempting to balance/integrate their work life, home life, and personal goals (Guthrie et al., 2005; Padulo, 2001; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010). Importantly, women pursuing leadership roles in the workplace may experience additional stress due to barriers in their attempt to balance/integrate their roles. For example, significant barriers for women pursuing work-life balance/integration include insufficient maternity leave, childcare support or elderly parent care, and inflexible work options (Ballenger, 2010; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Johns, 2013). Further, holding a leadership career in the HE work culture, which maintains the ideal worker norm (i.e., requiring employees to always be available), can be particularly challenging and create undue stress for senior administrators, including CIOs, as it puts a consistently disproportionate amount of time and energy into the goals and needs of the institution above those for self-care and home. For example, per Jones and Komives (2001),

While a “balanced life” continues to be an elusive goal for many women professionals, women in senior-level . . . positions must reconcile the great demands of their work and with other interests and responsibilities. The irony in this situation is that successful women leaders often suggest that part of their success is due to the well-rounded lives they lead, which includes time for relaxation and renewal, family, and interests outside

the workplace. However, the realities of senior leadership positions do not always support the matching of espoused values with such activities. (p. 242)

In other words, because the demands of higher education work culture (i.e., ideal worker norm) differ acutely from the realities in the life of an employee (i.e., devoting time to responsibilities in home, and to oneself as well as work), many senior administrators in HE, such as CIOs, experience additional stress which often leads them to make tough decisions as to where they spend their time. For example, faculty, staff, and administrators employed at HE institutions often hold off on expanding family or pursuing additional personal goals outside academia (Bryan & Blackman, 2018; Levtov, 2001; Mason et al., 2013; Young et al., 2017). These factors highlight the importance of seeking work-life balance/integration for women working in HE administration.

### ***Navigating Multiple Roles***

Some researchers identify two roles a person assumes when balancing or integrating their life responsibilities, namely “work” and “family/personal” (i.e., indicating family and personal responsibilities as one role) (Bell et al., 2012; Berheide et al., 2020; Fontinha et al., 2019; Lester, 2013; Lester, 2015; Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018; Mitra & McAlpine, 2017; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Young et al., 2017). Others specify their interpretation of the second “family/personal” role by labeling it simply “personal” (Lester, 2013; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Young et al., 2017), “nonwork” (Fontinha et al., 2019), “broader life” (Mitra & McAlpine, 2017), or “leisure” (Currie & Eveline, 2011). However, some researchers identify three roles used to balance or integrate life responsibilities, namely work, family, and personal (Denson et al., 2018; Szelényi

& Denson, 2019). For the purposes of this study, three roles will be investigated, namely worker, family member, and personal self-care.

One's work life can often take precedence over other aspects of life as those who work have the responsibilities within the workplace as well as those outside the workplace. The worker role may also signify the breadwinning role as they are contributing financially to the household. Further, as many organizations hold their employees to the "ideal worker norm", the time spent in the worker role often outweighs the time spend with one's family or on themselves (Bailyn, 2011).

One's role and responsibilities as a family member can also be overwhelming and demand much of one's time as people can serve in separate roles within the family role context. For example, within one's family unit, they can simultaneously serve in the role of partner, parent, and caretaker of elderly parents. If applicable, women usually assume each of these roles within the family role. In other words, if the family role includes the care of children or elderly parents, women are often expected to assume these responsibilities regardless if they also fill the worker role (Ballenger, 2010; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Johns, 2013).

Additionally, to fulfill the worker and family role to the best of one's ability, personal health (i.e., wellbeing and self-care) must be prioritized. Wellbeing is the balance of one's mental, physical, emotional, and social dimensions. One example which contributes to state of wellbeing is the act of self-care. Through knowledge of the self, self-care is conducted through behaviors which promote, strengthen, and maintain wellbeing (Bryan & Blackman, 2018). Self-care as a component of work-life balance/integration is crucial because it offers one a time to reflect on and exert energy toward strengthening one's physical, mental, social, and emotional

wellbeing, so they can have the capacity to fulfill their home, career, and any other goals to the best of their ability. Per Irvine (2009), “How can we hope to care for others if we, ourselves, are crippled by ill health, burnout, or resentment?” (p. 127). Best practices for promoting self-care in the HE workplace include selecting a healthy support system, giving oneself permission to make mistakes and learning from them, prioritizing items and undertaking one at a time, and learning to say no and let go of things that are out of one’s control (Anitha & Sritharan, 2014; Gillespie et al., 2001; King-White & Rogers, 2018). Further, Bryan and Blackman (2018) emphasize four categories of self-care practices which may influence those working in HE institutions (i.e., administrators, faculty, staff), namely, mental, emotional, physical, and social self-care. Mental self-care activities are important for coping with burnout and stress which can be experienced by those working in the HE environment. It can be exhibited through activities such as meditation, mindfulness, generosity, and purposeful decision making. Emotional self-care helps strengthen and maintain a healthy emotional state. It can be exhibited through activities such as reflection, spiritual practices, emotional regulation, and self-empathy. Physical self-care practices offer support and benefits to strengthening one’s physical body. It can be exhibited through activities such as exercise, sleep, medical checkups, and sensible nutrition. Lastly, researchers have found obtaining social supports and social engagement can impact one’s experience in a HE setting (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005); and because the HE work environment can be time-consuming, demanding and may leave little room for social interaction within or outside of work, social self-care is important to practice. It can be exhibited through practices such as networking or spending time with friends.

Although researchers differ in their definitions of work-life balance and work-life integration, to truly understand the experiences of women HE CIOs, it is important to consider how they navigate their worker, family member, and self-care roles whether viewed as separate components or in unison. It is also imperative to consider outside factors which could influence their experience pursuing work-life balance/integration. With this in mind, we begin to turn our lens to one such factor of interest, namely the influence of COVID-19.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

Since its first appearance in Wuhan, China in December 2019, the coronavirus outbreak has disrupted lives all over the globe. In early February 2020, the World Health Organization announced the outbreak would be termed Coronavirus Disease 2019 or COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a novel coronavirus. People who contract the virus could have anywhere from no symptoms to severe illness, and even death. In the U.S., as the virus spread and the death toll rose, most businesses and organizations were forced to close their doors, shut down completely, or move to function remotely. People were encouraged to stay home as much as possible and reduce contact with others. A mask was required to be worn over the nose and mouth whenever outside the home in a public domain (e.g., grocery store) and people were advised to stay at least six feet from each other to prevent the spread of the disease. HE institutions were no exception to the impact of COVID-19 as they were forced to rapidly close face-to-face student and employee interactions and move functionality to online platforms (e.g., Canvas, Zoom, Microsoft TEAMS). Administrators, faculty, staff, and students had to abandon their offices, classrooms, dorms, and campus to the safety of their homes and adapt to working and functioning away from the brick-

and-mortar campus. In December 2020, one year after the disease began to spread, the first COVID-19 vaccine was administered in the U.S. (Otterman, 2020). By April 2021, total COVID-19 cases in the U.S. exceeded 31 million, total COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. exceeded 559 thousand, and total COVID-19 vaccines administered was approximately 190 million (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). As the COVID-19 vaccines continue to be administered throughout the U.S., many businesses and organizations have reopened their doors (USA Today, 2021) and people have begun to venture out and attempt to readapt to life outside the home. HE institutions have also begun to move toward the stages of reopening (Elias et al., 2021; Kaiser Health News, 2021; Nietzel, 2021; Whitford, 2021). However, as COVID-19 has altered all aspects of HE, administrators, faculty, staff, and students have had to adjust to a new norm which will continue to be reshaped and reformed in the future (Diep, 2021; Kaiser Health News, 2021). For example, institutions who did not offer online learning (e.g., Canvas) were forced to transition and use it as their main form of teaching when their student body had to leave the campus. Administrators, faculty, and staff were also advised to leave campus and, if possible, transition all their professional responsibilities to online platforms (e.g., Zoom, Outlook, Microsoft TEAMS). Further, as fully online transitions became standard for institutions throughout the United States, the tasks within university IT departments multiplied exponentially. Thus, as their prominent role encompassed university IT related responsibilities, CIOs became crucial for the success and sustainment of institutions during COVID-19. The social, emotional, mental, and physical influence of COVID-19 on HE institutions or its community (i.e., administrators, faculty, staff, students) has not yet been explored because universities and colleges are continuously adjusting as the virus is still circulating throughout the

globe. However, we know the implications are powerful and endless and everyone's current and future lives as they knew it have changed in some way; thus, it is imperative that we begin investigating now.

### **Chapter Summary**

It is to the benefit of all in our society to advocate for the equal representation of women and men in senior administrative leadership positions in HE institutions because women and men contribute diverse advantages to administrative positions (Young, 2004). It is critical to understand the influence that gender stereotypes and gender discrimination have on women's ability to pursue and achieve leadership roles as their influence contributes to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Probert, 2005). Learning about leadership is important as HE CIOs act as senior leaders in their organizations. As HE organizations are not gender neutral (Acker, 1990; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010) and hold the ideal worker norm (King-White & Rogers, 2018; Williams, 2001; Bailyn, 2011), it is also essential to understand women's experiences working in a men-dominated organization to better grasp the complex challenges women HE CIOs often face compared to their men colleagues. Additionally, as it is common for people to have trouble juggling their work, family, and personal responsibilities (Lester, 2013), and researchers have specified a need for reshaping and redesigning HE work culture to create an environment which fosters the ability for women to balance/integrate their work life, home life, and personal goals (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010), it is necessary to discover the experiences and perceptions women HE CIOs encounter in their pursuit of work-life balance/integration. Self-care as a component of work-life integration/balance is particularly crucial because for one to accomplish goals and responsibilities to the best of one's ability, one

must be attuned and tend to one's personal health and wellbeing (e.g., mental, physical, emotional state). Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the world as we knew it, and as HE administrators have had to adapt to a new norm which continues to reshape their professional responsibilities (Diep, 2021; Kaiser Health News, 2021), their family life and personal goals are also impacted, thus leading to uncharted challenges and barriers in their pursuit of work-life balance/integration.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The gender gap between men and women in HE top leadership positions is a problem because men and women administrators provide diverse perceptions and advantages to HE institutions (Young, 2004). Further, women in leadership encounter added burdens and hurdles compared to men in leadership when pursuing equilibrium in their life (Guthrie et al., 2005; Padulo, 2001; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010). Additionally, it is crucial for work-life researchers to understand work-life balance/integration differs per individual based on factors influenced by social representation (Kirby, 2017). Therefore, in this study, I contributed to the existing work-life literature by focusing on the perspectives and experiences of women pursuing work-life balance/integration as CIOs working in HE institutions and considered the influence of the global COVID-19 pandemic on women's pursuit toward this goal.

#### **Research Questions**

- What are the perceptions of women HE CIOs regarding their ability to find and maintain work-life balance/integration?
- What do women HE CIOs experience in their pursuit of work-life balance/integration, specifically the self-care component?
- How has the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic influenced women HE CIOs seeking work-life balance/integration?

#### **Study Design**

Researchers have used multiple avenues of analysis to investigate work-life balance and integration for faculty, staff, and administrators at HE institutions. Some researchers use quantitative analyses (e.g., distributing multiple surveys) (Bell et al., 2012; Berheide et al., 2020;

Denson et al., 2018; Fontinha et al., 2019; Szelényi & Denson, 2019) to measure the experiences and perceptions of people pursuing work-life balance as faculty, staff, and administrators. For example, Berheide et al. (2020) used a survey to measure work-family conflict, work-life balance, work-supportive family, and family-friendly department. Whereas Bell et al. (2012) used a self-reported questionnaire to evaluate job stress, wellbeing, work-life balance, and work-life conflict.

However, other researchers utilize qualitative analyses (Currie & Eveline, 2011; Lester, 2013; Lester, 2015; Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018; Mitra & McAlpine, 2017; Perrakis & Martinez, 2012; Young et al., 2017) to investigate work-life balance for faculty, staff, and administrators; although they often use different approaches (e.g., phenomenology, case studies, narratives). For example, Perrakis and Martinez (2012) used a phenomenological approach (i.e., investigating the essence of one's lived experiences) to examine the experiences women department chair faculty with young children have with balancing their work and personal responsibilities. Whereas Currie and Eveline (2011) used a case study approach to investigate the influence of e-technology on faculty work-life balance.

For the purposes of this study, a qualitative case study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and liberal feminist lens was used to examine the work-life balance/integration perceptions and experiences of HE women CIOs working in public HE institutions. Qualitative research is geared toward “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). Researchers conducting qualitative case studies search for meaning and understanding regarding a specific “case” (i.e., the unit of analysis) through observations, reviewing artifacts, and/or

interviewing people. In this study, I used interviews in my search for the meaning and understanding of each participant as they navigate the demands of work, family, and personal self-care. Employing the liberal feminist lens was useful because feminist theory focuses on questions and dilemmas related to sex and gender. Further, qualitative feminist research investigates situations which influence women, focuses on the relationship between diverse women's lives and positive social change, and acknowledges the influence the researcher has on the participants (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011).

### **Participant Selection**

Special attention was given to identifying participants who could contribute to this study. To determine the best candidates for this case study, I used purposeful sampling, or in other words, criterion-based sampling (Lecompte & Schensul, 2010). I recruited three women HE administrators from two- or four-year public HE institutions in the U.S. I recruited participants who have had ideally three years of experience working as a top HE administrator on a non-faculty administrative track, namely a Chief Information Officer (CIO) position, within their institution. I chose to investigate women CIOs because they are underrepresented in HE institutions as compared to men. For example, women constitute only 23% of HE CIOs compared to 77% of men HE CIOs (Frye & Fulton, 2020, p. 10). CIOs play a key role in their organizations as they serve as the top information systems administrator and ensure the availability of Information Technology (IT), establish technology planning and innovation, and help create and shape technology transformation within the institution (Jones, et al., 2020). Further, with the demand and advancement of technology in society, HE institutions are increasingly pressured to adapt; thus, HE CIOs have become crucial to the growth and

sustainment of technology in HE institutions. First, I searched through the websites of 157 U.S. two- or four-year public HE institutions for their respective CIO or Chief Technology Officer (CTO) contact information. Of the 157 institutions investigated, only 27 listed women CIOs or CTOs. I sent all 27 potential participants an initial introductory email (see Appendix A) which explained the purpose and criteria of the study and requested a response if they met the criteria and wished to participate. Importantly, I assumed the gender of the CIO/CTO listed on each website through a combination of factors, including name, pronouns, and photo (if available). I understood that my own assumptions and categorization of gender assignment may not match that of the potential participant, therefore, to mitigate any misinterpretations I made sure to include my intention to recruit only women CIOs/CTOs in the introductory email sent to each of the 27 potential participants. Of the 27 potential participants who were sent the introductory email, four CIOs and no CTOs responded. Of the four responses, one was unable to participate due to time constraints, but the other three agreed to participate. All three participants were CIOs from four-year public institutions. Also, although my intention was to recruit CIOs who have ideally three years of CIO experience, unfortunately this was unobtainable possibly in part because there are so few women HE CIOs. Thus, the participants in this study have approximately two or more years of CIO experience. Following the three email responses, I sent each participant an invitation email (see Appendix B) with a copy of the oral informed consent script (see Appendix C).

### **Data Collection**

Following the invitation email, I collected data through two semi-structured interviews. For clarity, the interviews were labeled “Interview 1” and “Interview 2: Expansion.” Interviews

are a useful form of data collection as they allow researchers to discover what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 2015, p. 426). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state, “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (p.108). In other words, interviews allow the researcher to discover information regarding situations and circumstances that the participant’s encounter from the participant’s perspective. Semi-structured interviews include questions which are flexibly worded allowing the participant the freedom to expand on the initial topic or veer the initial topic in a direction relevant to their personal experience or situation. Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to introduce questions or new ideas in any order which fits best with the organic flow of the conversation.

The interviews were recorded and conducted via Zoom video conferencing because of time and distance constraints due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Online interviews are beneficial because they allow both researcher and participants the geographical freedom to conduct the interview anywhere with internet connection. Further, conducting online interviews provides the ability to easily record each interview, thus granting the opportunity to carefully analyze non-verbal cues once each interview was concluded. However, online interviews can also pose challenges; for example, internet service malfunctions or access issues could arise, or the participants could be unfamiliar with the use of the video call platform, thus making it difficult to conduct the interview in a smooth and timely manner. Importantly, two online malfunctions occurred during the data collection process for this study. The first malfunction occurred during Interview 1 with Tara, in which the sound cut out for a few seconds. No information was lost, and the participant was unaware of the malfunction. The second

malfunction occurred during Interview 2: Expansion with Brigid, in which my home internet shut off and auto rebooted in the middle of the interview. The interview was temporarily interrupted as Zoom signed us both out and we had to rejoin the meeting and begin recording again. Thankfully, the initial recording downloaded automatically to my computer when we were cut off; thus, no information was lost. The interruption lasted approximately three minutes. When we signed back in, I reiterated the question I asked before we were cut off and the interview continued uninterrupted.

During Interview 1, I asked open-ended work-life balance/integration interview questions (see Appendix D), which were developed using the research literature. Open-ended questions are useful as they encourage participants to elaborate on what topics they view as relevant and important (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). The interview questions contained inquiries geared toward gaining a holistic impression of the participants' experience with work-life balance/integration and self-care as a woman CIO and how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their pursuit of work-life balance/integration.

During Interview 2: Expansion, first I conducted a member check with each participant to clarify and confirm the information which was discussed in Interview 1. If the results did not reflect accurately the participants' perceptions, I discussed the information until agreements were reached. During the remainder of the interview, the participants were encouraged to introduce or expand on topics which they found influenced to their experience pursuing work-life balance/integration as a woman HE CIO during COVID-19.

As I utilized the liberal feminist lens throughout this research study, I adhered to general principles feminist researchers often use to guide their relationships with participants. For

example, it is important to offer participants the opportunity to be partners in the research endeavor, to be reflexive in the research relationships, and to recognize “research relationships are empowering, encouraging, or enable participants to take action to improve their situations” (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2011, p. 681).

Further, to ensure clarity and effectiveness of the data collection process, I adhered to the guide provided by Bogdan and Biklen (2011) and I began to analyze the data during the data collection phase of the study. For example, I forced myself to make decisions that narrowed the study as I knew it was unrealistic to pursue everything (e.g., I realized it was not feasible to explore every topic mentioned in the interviews if they were unrelated to focus of the study even if I thought they were personally interesting), I wrote memos to myself regarding key information for later investigation or reflection (e.g., I wrote on sticky notes and a note pad with comments/thoughts, printed the interview questions and wrote ideas as they emerged during the interview and immediately after, and added notes on my phone when I went for walks to think and reflect), and I continued to explore the literature throughout the entire study as themes and topics arose which I was less familiar with (e.g., mentorship/role models, CIO pathways, coping strategies).

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes. First, I recorded the interviews through Zoom. Then, I transcribed each interview within a few days of the original recording. Through this process I was able to review the interviews multiple times, thus affording a more in-depth opportunity to listen closely to the participants answers and reflect on their tone, mood, and phrasing. After recording and transcribing the data from each interview, I

sorted the data into a list of multiple related categories. In other words, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), I coded the data by assigning signifiers to various aspects of the data so I could easily retrieve specific information. Example code signifiers included colors, phrases, words, letters, numbers, or combinations of them. For this data, I used colors to organize and denote information for each participant (e.g., Tara was blue, Diana was yellow, and Brigid was green). Also, several sample categories I uncovered included “stories,” “definitions,” “activities,” and “challenges.” Then, to eliminate redundancy, I narrowed the categories down to three major themes, namely (1) Understanding the Work and Family Life of a Higher Education CIO, (2) Life During COVID-19, and (3) The Power of Self-Care. All the major themes contained subthemes.

Further, confidentiality of the participants was always closely guarded. All names which might expose the identities of the participants were replaced with the pseudonyms Tara, Diana, and Brigid, to maintain their confidentiality. Moreover, the code list, interview recordings, research data, and other sensitive materials were handled carefully and kept under lock and key at my home. Once the project was completed, all raw data was destroyed or erased immediately.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Importantly, throughout the entire research process, I was aware of and acknowledged my positionality (i.e., biases) as I recognized my own beliefs and life experiences could project onto the data. For example, as a woman working in a HE administrative office, I have experienced situations which have both aided and challenged my personal goal to pursue work-life balance/integration, particularly, as I have had to adapt to working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. I sometimes struggle to make time for myself when the responsibilities of

work and family life seem to take precedence. Therefore, I consistently recognized and reported any instances or possibilities of such that my positionality may have had on the data.

### **Trustworthiness**

A crucial goal of conducting research is to establish trustworthiness with the participants, readers, and scholarly community by producing ethically valid and reliable knowledge.

Researchers determine trustworthiness through credibility and dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility and dependability indicate whether the research findings are credible and dependable, transferability indicates whether the researcher has provided sufficient descriptive data, and confirmability indicates whether the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations are coherent and supported by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To ensure credibility and dependability, all participants were invited to review and confirm findings drawn in the study through member checks (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, I transcribed Interview 1 before conducting Interview 2: Expansion to organize and review topics discussed. Then, during Interview 2: Expansion I conducted a member check and clarified, confirmed, and expanded on ideas/topics/results which were discussed in Interview 1. This provided multiple benefits to confirming credible and dependable research findings. For example, it offered an opportunity to assess intentionality (i.e., confirm what the participant intended through sharing specific information), correct errors or misunderstandings in interpretations or facts, and summarize findings; it also opened an opportunity for the participant to share more information and confirm the overall accuracy of the findings in addition to specific points of information. In addition to member checks and to

establish transferability, I included rich in-depth information and descriptions so the reader can identify any similarities between their own experiences and the information included in the study. Evidence in the form of quotations from the interviews has been included as a means of conveying participant understanding (Gibbs, 2007).

To establish confirmability in my research findings, I used an audit trail (i.e., a written trail of the entire research process) which helped to systemize, relate, cross-reference, and attach priorities to the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, as I collected data, I created and maintained an audit trail by keeping a log of organized notes of the entire process. For instance, I logged all thoughts, reflections, ideas, and speculations which arose organically as I filtered through the data. To further organize this information, I used an audit trail categorizing system suggested by Halpern (1983) and divided my audit trail into multiple categories and subcategories as they arose. This was a useful endeavor as it prevented pertinent information from becoming lost or misinterpreted. As the goal of data analysis is to make sense out of the data, a carefully organized audit trail permitted additional opportunities to contemplate and more easily locate any underlying themes or topics which were present. It also provided the freedom to filter through and easily locate specific relevant information within the data set.

### **Chapter Summary**

Unfortunately, there is a gender gap between men and women representatives in top leadership positions in HE institutions, which is an issue because men and women contribute diverse advantages to administrative positions (Young, 2004). Further, previous research indicates that women in leadership contend with additional pressures and barriers than their men

counterparts when pursuing equilibrium in their roles as a worker, family member, and personal life (Guthrie et al., 2005; Padulo, 2001; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010). Therefore, in this qualitative case study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with three women CIOs working in HE institutions and asked questions regarding their perspectives and experiences pursuing work-life balance/integration and the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on their pursuit toward this goal.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from semi-structured interviews with three women CIOs at HE institutions within the United States. The guiding purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of work-life balance/integration, and self-care as a component of such, for women HE administrators working in HE institutions as CIOs and the influence of COVID-19. Demographic descriptions of the participants follow. Because of the relatively low number of women CIOs in higher education, the descriptions are ambiguous in places to maintain the participant's confidentiality.

### **Participants**

Tara is a 60-year-old white woman who is CIO in a large four-year public research university located in the Midwest region of the United States. She has spent 37 years working in HE and 11 of them have been spent in a CIO position. She has been the CIO at her current institution for two to five years. There are 600 people on her staff and 1500 people in the IT community at her university. She has a master's degree and is married with one son who is grown and no longer lives at home. She is a grandmother.

Diana is a 43-year-old white woman who is CIO in a large four-year public research university located in the West Coast region of the United States. She worked in the private sector for 10 years before entering HE. She has worked in HE for 10.5 years. She has been the CIO at her current institution for two to five years. There are approximately 200 people on her staff and approximately 275 people in the IT community at her university. She has a master's degree and is married with no children.

Brigid is a 54-year-old white woman who is CIO in a large four-year public research university located in the West Coast region of the United States. She has spent 35 years working in HE. She has been the CIO at her current institution for two to five years. There are 350 people on her staff and 850 people in the IT community at her university. She has a master's degree and is married with two daughters who are grown and no longer live at home.

### **Data and Analysis**

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with these women and the interview transcripts were coded and analyzed for major themes and subthemes as they related to the guiding purpose of this study. Three major themes emerged in the data namely, (1) Understanding the Work and Family Life of a Higher Education CIO, (2) Life During COVID-19, and (3) The Power of Self-Care. Four subthemes emerged within the major theme (1) Understanding the Work and Family Life of a Higher Education CIO namely, (a) Career Path to CIO Position, (b) Family Life, (c) Perceptions of Gender Discrimination in Higher Education, and (d) What it Means to be in Senior Leadership. Three subthemes emerged within the major theme (2) Life During COVID-19 namely, (a) University Response to COVID, (b) Significant COVID Challenges with some Positive Outlook and (c) Future Expectations for Higher Education. Finally, two subthemes emerged within the major theme (3) The Power of Self-Care namely, (a) What Does Self-Care Mean?, (b) What Does It Look Like and How does it feel?. Findings for each theme and subtheme are further discussed in turn.

### **Understanding the Work and Family Life of a Higher Education CIO**

Working in HE offers numerous rewards and challenges. All the participants expressed opinions regarding their work and contributions to their respective institutions, teams, and the

greater community. For example, Tara was enthusiastic about topics related to her work as a CIO and Brigid mentioned she cares about and invests deeply in her work. Diana specifically mentioned that she enjoys the mission-driven work environment which working in HE affords, as she commented, "...it became apparent to me pretty quickly into my tenure that there were two things that I discovered there. One is how much I love the mission driven environment...For me, being in a mission driven organization, that's what it's all about." To further understand their experiences and perceptions working as a CIO, it is beneficial to start at the beginning by discovering how these women arrived in their HE CIO seats, what their family life is like, the influence of gender discrimination in their life at work, how they interpret their role and others in senior leadership and importantly, how these topics influence their pursuit of work-life balance/integration.

### ***Career Path to CIO Position***

When asked about their career path and how they came to be a CIO at their institutions, two participants shared that they began their careers in HE and remained, whereas one participant shared that she began her career in the private sector but moved into the HE arena later on. Both participants who began in HE have worked in the arena for decades and recall their experience living through the expansion of the internet and computer technology as it emerged and transformed from a novel subject to the influential entity that it is today. Also, two of the three participants experienced "career jumps" which were "completely opportunistic."

**Tara's Path.** While working at her first HE institution, Tara started in an entry level position in computing and moved "through the ranks" to the position of director of IT. The move into IT was not intentional, as she commented,

I'd been doing a lot of computing because it was all around, and I just ended up working in a technology job doing IT support and just learning on the fly, on the job, and stepped into management and started over time moving up the management ranks.

Interestingly, her movement “through the ranks” prior to a CIO position were “completely opportunistic.” For instance, she stated,

In every career jump along the way, except the last two where I actually applied for a job, all of it was because an opening happened...The tap for management, the tap to work on educational computing, all of it was just opportunistic because it was happening around me.

The time working at her first institution was memorable because she was there for “over 25 years” and was present through the development and mainstream use of computers and internet technology. As she put it,

I was at [a high technology and innovation university] when computing started. And ended up working in computing there but it was this time of everything was new...Computers were new, and then networks were new, and then the internet was new. So, every couple of years I'd take on a new thing, add something to the portfolio, launch something new, and then that would get established. Then, because we're in such a high paced high innovation environment, there would be something else that would pop up to work on. So, all of a sudden, I've worked across educational, library computing, research computing, administrative, all of it added up over the years.

Because obtaining the CIO position was not opportunistic like her previous roles, she applied for a position as a CIO and moved to a different institution where she worked as a CIO for many years. Lastly, she moved to her current institution and assumed the CIO position.

**Brigid's Path.** Brigid also started her career in HE and began working in the library at her first institution. After earning her master's degree, she moved through library management which ultimately led her into an IT management position. She remained at her first institution for 23 years.

It is important to note one key experience Brigid mentioned when discussing her pathway to the CIO position. This was the influence of a specific previous supervisor. This supervisor assisted her in several ways, but one fundamental influence was his support when she had given birth to her second child and had to breastfeed while at work. Unfortunately, at the time, "there was no such thing as lactation rooms," her office afforded no privacy, and there were very few women's restrooms in the building where she worked. So, her supervisor gave her his office to use. She explained,

My boss gave me his office twice a day for nine months to pump my milk because there was no other really good place to do it in that library. I was able to go into his office and put a sign up and lock the door. That was really incredibly supportive in terms of supporting a working mom and for putting somebody in the right way. I just wanted to share that story when you talk about the winding path.

The lack of lactation rooms and few women's restrooms created a significant issue which Brigid was forced to contend with. Thankfully, her supervisor allowed her to use his office.

Brigid's time working at her first institution was also notable because she was present through the development and evolution of computer technology and the internet. She stated,

Basically, this was at a time when there were no web browsers. There was a World Wide Web, but there were no web browsers. We were doing everything by command line, and we were using modems to dial up into major databases...Believe it or not, libraries were actually a place where technology was being used at first, and I just happen to have a knack for it.

Then, she moved to a second institution and worked as a director of academic technology for a "while" but did not "feel the right fit" with the institutions culture. Finally, through networking with a "friend colleague," she moved to her current institution where she initially worked in academic technology for six years. During her time in that role, she realized the CIO position was a goal she wished to pursue. She shared,

I grew the organization and negotiated with the CIO to move the research IT into my organization...That's when began to recognize that I probably wanted to be a CIO myself...

After she realized the CIO role was of great interest to her, she accepted the position at her current institution.

**Diana's Path.** Diana's career path differed from the other participants in that she started her career in the private sector working for a large web services company. However, like the other participants, she worked around technology and then moved into a position in IT. For instance, she stated,

My first leadership position, I was 21, and it was at a company that I had worked for in college and I had a great opportunity to come back and start my post. I've always worked in a technology environment, although I was not in an IT department specifically until much later. I spent about 10 years in the private sector and progressively responsible leadership roles that moved me from the customer service space into the tech support space...

When she began at her first HE institution, she worked as a director in the IT department. Over time, she recognized the CIO position as a goal she wished to pursue. As she put it, "I always knew I wanted to be an executive leader, but the CIO seat turned out to be where I wanted to be." At the time, she also reported to a woman CIO who encouraged and supported her to pursue a CIO seat. Thus, she was "prepared" and "ready" when she eventually moved into her current position.

### ***Family Life***

The role of family is often an integral part of one's life and one's ability to find and maintain work-life balance/integration. This was true for each of these women. All three participants are married and each of them remarked on the support they receive from their spouses. For instance, one noted, "My husband is amazing and a great supporter of me." Another commented, "I am fortunate that I have a fantastic partner." Importantly, none of the participants have had children in their home during their time as CIOs. Diana has no children, and mentioned, "I don't have kids, but my husband and I are people who really value our time together and our time doing things that are for us." Both Tara and Brigid have children, but they are older and no longer live at home. Tara shared, "...my CIO jobs that I took happened after my

nest was empty... my nest has been completely empty for 15 years now.” Tara is a grandmother and Brigid’s daughters are both expecting, as she happily exclaimed, “I’m going to be a new grandma, and I’m super excited because they’re going to be cousins.”

Tara and Brigid also shared experiences in their family role. They made it clear that although their children no longer live at home, they still experience family challenges and stressors. For example, Brigid expressed “I don’t have small children at home. My kids are out of the house and that’s a huge thing...,” but some family challenges still arise, and it is important to make the time to address them. For example, she shared a story in which she recently took out time to help her daughter who was struggling with finding time to make lunch in her busy day. She explained,

My youngest...was teaching fourth graders who had been out of school for almost two years [due to COVID] and she’s like ‘They’re acting like kindergarteners. They don’t remember any classroom behavior...I’m so tired and I’m not making or eating lunch.’ So, I went shopping over the weekend and packed her five days’ worth of lunches and took them down to her because I wanted to make sure that she was eating. So, we still do have challenges, even though I say my kids are out of the house. I don’t know many other moms [of adult children] who make five days of lunches over the weekend...I could have been doing work and I made a list of lunches instead.

In other words, even though her daughter no longer lives with her, because she understands the pressures of juggling a career with other life roles, Brigid found it was important to take time and effort away from her own work to make sure her daughter ate well for a week.

Tara also acknowledged the importance of navigating multiple roles and has found that “family stressors are more difficult when something is not going well with the child or concern about aging parents or other family concerns.” For instance, she mentioned a time when her son fell and broke his arm. She was in the middle of teaching a technology course and dismissed her students immediately so she could attend to her son. Simply put, the concerns of her family are paramount because, “...even though we care a lot about the people at work, business is business, but family is the heart.” She also explained, “There was never a single time in my career that I put my work ahead of my child, and my career was just fine.” The way she tackles family challenges is by taking the time to find all the information she can about the problem at hand and then work from there to find a solution. Her view is,

A lot of times our fears in life come from fears of not knowing or our mind can go to places of speculation, and the more that we arm ourselves with solid information about the situation we're in, the more we can feel like we're in control. We can navigate it rather than being tossed along with the tide. I think that's a really important part of my navigating.

In other words, by understanding as much information as possible about an issue, she can discover the best way to overcome it. This is important because she uses this process to cope with the family stressors she encounters, thus freeing her from the fears of the unknown and allowing her to feel like she has more control of the situation.

Brigid also mentioned the importance of control and noted issues which can arise regarding prioritization in balancing one's roles (i.e., work, family, self). She believes it is crucial for one to assess priorities and adjust one's actions according to which role requires the

most attention at any given time. To her, this means she did not always put family first. She stated,

I'll be really blunt, maybe I'm a little more old school, but I had to make a lot of different choices about prioritizations. I'm not going to tell you that my family was always the top number one priority, because it wasn't. I made choices based on who else could carry that load. I'm very lucky, I've been married for 30 years and I had a husband who was willing to trade off the load when needed.

She also expressed her gratitude toward her mother who “although she's a faculty member, she helped out as much as she could too.” In her experience, it is important to “create a network around you,” and believe “that it's sometimes okay to say, ‘I'm stepping back and making some decisions about what my priorities are.’” She explained that sometimes her children were a priority and sometimes they were not. She also expressed, “I actually wish more people could figure out how to say that and figure out the juggling” and provided an example story in which she had to choose between attending her daughter’s “middle-school promotion” (i.e., middle-school graduation) (i.e., family role) or attending a prestigious and intensive two-week program which would benefit her career (i.e., work role). The conflict arose because the two events were scheduled at the same time. When she chose to attend the program instead of her daughter’s promotion, she experienced comments from others such as, “Oh my god, how could you miss that?.” Regardless, she made her choice and took her daughter aside to explain her decision. She said,

I explained to her ‘You finished middle school and that's super fantastic and dad’s going to take some pictures and he's going to send them to me. But I'm not going to be there,

and this is why. It's because my career is important to me and I've been nominated for this thing and I got in and it just so happens that the dates don't align...but I'll be thinking of you.' Honestly, that's how I wanted to be a role model. Maybe it's a different way and I know that.

In this scenario, Brigid had to make a difficult decision choosing between her family (i.e., family role) and something which would benefit her career (i.e., work role). Although she received some comments from others about missing her daughters' event, she was clear in her intention to set an example for her family by identifying her top priority at the time and explaining her reasoning. With this in mind, we begin to turn our lens to look closer at the participants experiences and perceptions of gender discrimination and whether it has further influenced their work, family, and/or personal roles.

### ***Perceptions of Gender Discrimination in Higher Education***

Researchers have found the men-dominated culture of HE institutions was not built to accommodate women leaders and has not reached equality between the women and men who work in the HE arena (Baehr, 2021; Dunn et al., 2014; Zemsky, 2001). The participant's shared their experiences and perceptions regarding the men-dominated culture of HE. For example, Tara explained her perception as,

I've been asked by other women CIOs, 'What's it like to be a woman CIO?' and the answer is, I don't know because I don't have anything to compare it to. But it's a male dominated industry in IT and a male dominated industry in the academy.

Further, Brigid specified experiences witnessing particular sacrifices women have made while working for HE institutions. She expressed a concern for women in senior leadership positions

and women faculty as she believes “many women in senior leadership roles have sacrificed themselves” for the institution as they are often the ones who are “tapped on” to tackle difficult or unsurmountable projects. She thinks, “they do it because, not always, but often women are a little more willing to play along. By play along, I don’t mean just solve hard problems, but also serve the institution.” For example, she described three women in senior leadership roles who worked at her institution for many years and were asked to manage separate but similarly arduous projects. The first woman was asked to lead a student information system project which was a “ridiculously political, very difficult, multimillion dollar project. The politics was thick, and it was awful.” By the end, the woman was “burnt out” and “she ended up retiring right as the project was over. She was just done.” The second woman was asked to lead a section of the same project which she “worked really hard” on, but was ultimately required to reorganize, so many people lost their jobs. Brigid noted, “she did really awful yucky work for the institution. Then, she was like, ‘You know what? I’m done. I’m retiring.’” The third woman was asked to lead a shared services organization. Brigid described it as a “nightmare,” because although the woman was “selfless” and “an amazing leader,” the project was a “political hot-bed” and it ended up being “blown-up” leaving the woman without a job.

Ultimately, Brigid believes women are primarily targeted to manage these types of projects because she has come across this kind of scenario many times. For instance, she said, I’ve seen it enough now where I think it’s a pattern. I really would never have said that before. Am I going to be a part of that pattern? I don’t know...I think they’re really good at looking for people who are probably willing to do really hard work and I think often it’s women and then those women end up, honestly, retiring or without a job.

However, she also noted gender may not be the only factor influencing this issue as age “with people in her generation” may also be to blame. She thinks, in her generation, they “did sacrifice a little more as women...” and because of this, they may be more willing to “take on really hard challenges.”

**Gender Gap.** In addition to women making sacrifices for their HE institution, when asked how their role as a woman working in HE influences their work-life balance/integration, they each indicated they do not think the fact they are women negatively impacted their career, but they acknowledge the clear disparity between the number of women and men in HE, specifically the gender gap in the CIO position. One participant described it as “This is an interesting role. It is one where women are relatively rare, as are persons of color.” They experienced times when they realized that although they were in a room full of executives, they were the only woman. This disparity remained even when they were in a room full of CIOs. For example, Diana recognized this gender gap when she was at events as she described, “...when I go and travel across the country, there will be a room full of us at an event that has 50 CIOs, I'll notice only 6 or 7 of us are female.” Tara also described a time, early in her CIO career at her previous institution, when the four biggest universities in the region, including her own, all had women working as CIOs. She explained the reaction to the experience as,

...a publication did this article about us. Everyone was like, ‘Wow all these women! What’s going on out in the northwest?’ and I was like, “When will it stop being a novelty that I can both have two X chromosomes and lead an IT organization?,” and the other women were like, ‘Shut up, it's just awesome that we're all women.’

It was “so novel to have that many women” working as CIOs simultaneously that an article spotlighted the information. Additionally, Tara mentioned the gender gap is maintained by a pipeline issue which influences hiring trends. She explained, “There are hiring trends where people hire people like themselves, so people of color, people from underrepresented groups, and women were not getting leadership positions....”

Although these issues are prevalent in HE, the participants believe they are progressively improving as institutions have become more intentional regarding diversity initiatives. As Tara argued, “as we see more women and people of color in the leadership positions, it is boards that are more attuned to the fact that diversity matters, and it creates a better higher performing company,” and she has “slowly started to see these changes overtime.”

Diana mentioned although “most of our senior administrators are men, like there are in other institutions...I think we’re working on that...,” because she believes “it’s getting a little bit more gender diverse.” For instance, she recounted a recent experience at a CIO gathering for EDUCAUSE in which 20% of the CIOs were women whereas she noticed previously only 10% of the group were women. She believes it was “a little better” because many R1 institutions “had roles that changed.” She also mentioned she has seen a change in her HE institution over the last four years as they have worked to spend greater attention to “belonging and inclusion and diversity of all sorts.” This included a deliberate focus on anti-racism and gender diversity. Tara also mentioned this change in her institution as she and her staff and others have been “digging deep” to navigate through diversity efforts.

Although the participants identified the gender gap and implicit gender discrimination in HE, none of them mentioned personally experiencing explicit gender discrimination while in

their CIO seat. Interestingly, they all attributed this to their senior leadership position. Brigid shared that she has noticed when she's the only woman in a room, but she has no difficulty speaking up, and she attributes this to her title and not necessarily because she is a woman. Similarly, Diana has no problems speaking up due to her CIO role as she explains her experience as,

I am fortunate in that my position and authority tend to make it so that I don't feel like I have to fight to [be heard, because] a) I'm outgoing and I'm pretty comfortable and extroverted in a room and b) I don't generally feel I [lack] the confidence to speak up. So, I don't generally feel it is [difficult] for me, but I notice though. It's getting better in our institution. There are more women at senior leadership table than there were before, but the top layer of the institution is still undeniably male.

When asked, "What is it that you notice?," she explained that bias (i.e., discrimination) is just "something that you notice" and recalled a time when she reported to someone who was "outright sexist," but has not experienced this from anyone at her current institution.

Tara also found her position has played a role in aiding against gender bias. She explained that "back in the day" she experienced such things as, "you would get the jokes, you would get the snide remarks, you get the assumption that you couldn't take on a task because you might have to do childcare or those kinds of things." She believes two things contribute to the decrease in this gender discrimination, namely her position and her age. First, she indicated the influence of her position, "I'm in an executive position, people are more careful about what they say to me. There's more difference, because quite often when I'm in the room pretty much everybody there works for me." Then, she indicated the influence of her age, "I'm not a young

woman anymore. I can hand out a good stink eye at this point, but there's more of a presence there and I think young women are just picked on more than older women.” Thus, Brigid and Tara viewed their senior leadership position as a barrier against observed gender discrimination. This leads into the next section in which the impact of senior leadership is discussed in more detail.

### ***What it Means to be in Senior Leadership***

Those in leadership positions generally have many responsibilities, tasks, and goals. For example, leaders consider details beyond the recurring daily issues or agenda and constantly consider enduring effects and long-standing efforts (Fullan, 2013; Mulec, 2006). Leaders are also responsible for a specific group as well as linking the group to external sources; they also acknowledge their impact exceeds to boundaries outside of their own area of authority (Fullan, 2013; Mulec, 2006). Those in the senior leadership position of HE CIO are no exception.

**The Position of CIO.** The CIO is an integral part of the HE university system because as the demand for technological advancements increase, HE institutions must keep up the pace and the CIO helps with the organization, development, and maintenance of technology within these institutions. Therefore, because CIOs continue to become increasingly crucial to the success and sustainment of HE institutions, it is important to understand their role. All three participants were enthusiastic when speaking about their senior leadership role and shared key aspects of the position which have influenced their life. They also all viewed the position as high demand and time consuming. For example, they included the different types and functions of CIOs, the people-oriented and advocacy aspects of the position, and the usefulness of collaborating with others in the CIO national community.

Importantly, the intricacies of the CIO position can look different depending on the institution. For example, Brigid described her experience as the “campus CIO” at her institution. She shared that at many large institutions, like her own, they have multiple department CIOs, but only one campus CIO. She also expressed the importance of being open to “working across the aisle” because “oftentimes in technology, there are many aisles.” In essence, collaboration with others is a key component of being a CIO. Additionally, because her responsibilities as a CIO are extensive (e.g., oversee networking, the data center, email, all big central services, all administrative services, HR, payroll, and student information systems), she finds it is important to delegate tasks to one’s team and to advocate for those in technology and the investment of technology for the institution. For instance, she stated,

If you ask what a CIOs real job is, I think it's to be an advocate for the use of technology in the mission driven work on the campus...Now, what you will learn is that at big, large institutions, there's technology everywhere and the CIO is not the god or the goddess of IT. There are many people doing amazing things across the campus. The campus CIO, my job, is to advocate for all people that have IT titles...They may not all report to me and I can't tell them all what to do, but it's important for me to understand what they're doing, what they need, and to advocate for them.

In other words, although these CIOs may have many tasks and responsibilities within the IT department, they also serve as advocates for the continued advancement of technological services at the institution.

Diana also expressed the CIO position as one with immense responsibility and pressure. Her experience as a CIO was different from Brigid in that she experienced it as a singular

position at her institution. She did not mention additional CIOs at her institution, and in fact, described her role as one-of-a-kind. When she moved into the CIO position, she experienced a lot of added stress and pressure and had to intentionally adjust. For instance, she stated it was a time of,

Adjusting to that realization and the subsequent pressure change that comes with knowing it is you. It is ultimately you who's the only person with whom accountability stops. You are the person that the President will call, or the Provost will call, success or failure, and feeling a tremendous obligation to make sure things go well.

This added pressure and stress did not diminish her enthusiasm for her work. When she described her responsibilities, her passion was apparent. For example, she explains,

The networks need to be up 24 hours a day. The services need to be working. There's always something that we're working toward that is going to either inhibit if it doesn't go well or enable the next great progress for the university, which is so cool. That's one of my favorite things about my job and what tells me to continue to do it and why I get great satisfaction out of it, but it also comes with that stress.

Further, in addition to the substantial stress which can accompany the CIO position, the demand on one's time is also a consideration. All three participants mentioned the time demands which CIOs must contend with. As Diana expressed above, the networks run 24 hours a day, which means CIO responsibilities can extend past the average business hours of 9am-5pm Monday-Friday and can extend into the evenings and weekends.

Tara also explained the time and travel required for the position, as she stated, "They can involve travel ...we may have long nights, and in IT sometimes you can have emergencies which

require you to drop what you're doing and go deal with something bad.” She also specified the importance of having a “home structure that's really helpful is part of the ability to thrive in these jobs, and it's not just as a CIO, but I think any job where you're so visible and in so much demand.” This is important to note because she indicated the “helpful” influence the family role can have on one’s worker role.

Additionally, all the participants indicated that the CIO position is particularly “people oriented” and requires a lot of collaboration with other teams at the university and in the community. For example, as stated previously, Brigid sees the CIO role as an advocate for others, therefore she spends much of her time communicating and collaborating with different departments and teams on campus. As another example, Tara spends much of her time “engaging with other people and doing people work... Whether [on Zoom] or face to face, still, most of my day is spent with other people brainstorming, executing, checking, and following up, preparing to present, all of those things.” All three participants also expressed their appreciation for the CIO national community, particularly their women CIO colleagues. For example, Diana stated,

The CIO role is one that is so unusual in that I can talk about being a woman in leadership with a number of other administrators at the university but being in leadership in tech, there isn't anyone else at the level of pressure and responsibility of the CIO seat. That is something that I think we have a really good community, nationally, of women. And [a good community of] just colleagues in general, it doesn't have to be women. I feel on equal footing, I feel respected, I think we have a really good environment there.

Simply put, because encountering women leaders is more common than encountering women CIOs, continued collaboration, support, and comradery provided by the national community of

women CIOs, and CIOs in general, is crucial. These leaders work together to share ideas and support each other to cultivate a community that furthers the technological advancements in their respective institutions.

**Mindful and Supportive Leadership.** As leaders, CIOs serve as critical examples for their team, and they may also turn to their supervisors and others in senior leadership to serve as examples for themselves. All three participants provided insight regarding their experiences and perceptions of what good leadership entails. For instance, Tara described it as, “Part of it is being a role model to others and making sure you're demonstrating what you want other people to do. To make sure that they are being mindful of their own abilities and mindset.” As another example, Tara mentioned the “hard lessons” she has learned over the years as a CIO and the implications of her actions on her team. She emphasized the importance of being “mindful” when addressing her team and the amplification of her voice as it was more influential once she became a CIO. She said,

If I give somebody a positive comment, it shines a little brighter, if I'm making negative comments about a person or project, it hits harder. If I say, ‘Hey I'm unhappy with something.,’ that has ripple effects because of the job I'm in. If I'm joking, I have to be really careful. There have been a lot of hard lessons I've learned along the way.

She shared a story about a time when she was riding in an elevator with a new manager who had just been moved to report to her. She recalled a project that specific team had been working on, and wanted to engage in small talk and make a connection with the manager, so she asked, “How's the project going? I'd love to hear about it.” She explained the repercussions of this instance as,

Again, I was just making small talk. But I got a call from their manager later saying, ‘Why are you redirecting this person's work? They’re really upset because they hadn’t made progress, but it’s because I told them to work on something else.’ I was like, ‘Seriously? It was just small talk!.’ I mean seriously! But because I asked, it was perceived as a priority.

She realized her voice was stronger than she anticipated and began to be more thoughtful and careful about how she spoke, even in casual conversations. She recounted another instance at her previous institution when the network went down “which is really very bad.” When the “guy who ran networking” told her how it happened, she told him “That was inept.” She made it clear that she “did not call them inept” she simply stated, “that was inept that it went down.” However, the team took her words to mean they were inept. This interpretation resonated so strongly she noticed it had “shut the team down” because “they were so upset that I thought they were inept.” This was an important lesson for her because she realized mindfulness is also about understanding others. She began to ask herself, “How do you say to somebody, ‘This isn't OK.,’ in a way that’s not amplified because it came from my job? Not from me as a person, but from my job.” Through recognizing the amplification of her voice, she now purposely sets aside time with her team and clarifies it is a “safe space” where she can ask them questions, bounce ideas, and learn from them. This is now an important part of her leadership. She realized, “That mindfulness has to come into every single conversation.”

The participants also indicated the impact of supervisors and colleagues serve as an influential aspect of leadership and helps with the balance of work and life responsibilities. For example, Diana and Tara spoke about the mutual trust they have with their supervisor(s) (i.e., the

person, or people they report to). Diana believes trust can be expressed differently depending on the culture of the university and the department in which one works. She is grateful the person she reports to (i.e., the Provost) respects and trusts her IT expertise which allows her the freedom to make necessary executive decisions for the university and her team. She stated,

I report to the Provost and he very much understands the importance of IT, the criticality of the mission, and I feel that I have a great deal of trust for doing the right thing with my staff to ensure that we retain and recruit really good people.

As previously noted, the responsibilities of being a CIO are numerous and they can weigh heavily on the individual in the CIO seat. They can also influence multiple roles when one is trying to pursue work-life balance/integration, as Diana experienced this with her supervisors.

For instance, as she stated,

Our Provost and our vice presidents and those folks all also understand the value of taking care of yourself. If I send a note to senior leadership saying I'm going to be taking a weekend but I'm not going to be checking email and if there's an emergency please call, I don't get any kind of pushback for pressure or guilt around that.

In short, this trust can alleviate some of the stress from the extensive responsibilities as CIOs can feel more confident the decisions they make when they know they will be supported by their supervisor.

Further, both Brigid and Diana also recounted times when they received support and mentorship from supervisors. They mentioned some support was provided as part of their pathway to the CIO position, but it is still an impactful part of their experience as a CIO pursuing

work-life balance because the previous supervisors acted as mentors and role models which the participants use as guides with their current teams and those who report to them now.

For instance, Brigid spoke highly about a previous “amazing male supervisor” who she believed “was definitely not only a mentor, but he was an advocate for me.” This supervisor supported her education, career, and assisted immensely in terms of her work-life balance at the time, specifically the work and family roles. He “pushed” her to pursue her master’s degree and convinced her it would help her advance her career, which she is grateful for as he was correct. As previously mentioned in the “Career Path to CIO Position” section above, Brigid was also grateful for his support when he offered her his office as a private place to breastfeed while at work since there were no other private locations.

Diana recalled the guidance and support she received from a CIO she reported to at her previous institution. This was also mentioned in the “Career Path to CIO Position” section above as this CIO supervisor influenced Diana’s pathway to her own current CIO seat. Diana shared,

My boss at the time was also a woman, she's still the CIO [at previous institution] and she's great. I started to actively work toward developing myself, and with her support, into a candidate that would be able to go after and achieve that goal.

This CIO supervisor was significant to the participant because she was also a woman in the CIO seat and thus served as a guide and role model.

Additionally, the participants referenced the impact social and professional networking has offered in their experience with work-life balance/integration. Tara mentioned the consistent benefit of communicating with the women in leadership at her institution. They often “get together for social things online and just check in and talk.” She recounted one of the interesting

things she learned from chatting with a colleague during this social time was that she could “...call ahead, drive to the liquor store, and they just put it in your trunk and you never have to leave your car! Which I had not done before, but who would have known without these [talks]?” She believes these encounters are valuable for her work-life balance/integration because it is important to “Be mindful and purposeful so that you can stay connected to the other women, where you might be isolating otherwise.”

The other two participants mentioned developing meaningful relationships and connections during intensive career advancement programs which they attended. Diana mentioned attending a fellowship through an organization called the Northwest Academic Computing Consortium. She attended this 15-person cohort-based program as training toward a CIO position and the program lasted a little more than one year. During her time there, “she was able to develop relationships with other sitting CIOs in the Northwest, get mentorship, coaching, and have opportunities to be in the room in a mockup environment with a President and Provost.” She is still very active with the organization and helps guide the curriculum which is “really fun.” Her time in the program was beneficial as it offered her an opportunity to develop her skills as a CIO and cultivate relationships with the others who were involved, and this has continued through her involvement with the organization to date.

Brigid recounted her experience attending an intensive two-week program through the Frye Institute which was also before her time in the CIO seat, but has influenced her CIO experience considerably. There were 50 people in the program when she attended, and she remains in frequent contact with many of them. She even got together with some of them to host

their own professional development experience “where we brought in a speaker and did all those development things...It was super fantastic. I’m still in touch with a lot of those people.”

Further, the participants indicated the experiences and the environment they provide for their team can be an influential aspect of leadership. For instance, they all mentioned they cultivate open communication with their teams. Diana tries hard to create a supportive workspace where her team feels supported and included and she ensures they know their work matters, that way “they can go home after a 40-hour work week and do whatever it is that they do to take care of themselves.” Tara makes a purposeful effort with her team to “give positive feedback and praise to people, and thanks really freely.” The participants also noted they check in with their team frequently in a one-on-one setting to ensure their responsibilities are clear and to ensure their needs are met. For instance, Brigid schedules time to meet with each member on her team to check in on them. Tara frequently has office hours where her team can login and talk freely so she can make sure they are doing well. For instance, she stated,

I do office hours and hundreds of people come and we just chat. We check in on people we talk about their care, we talk about work-life balance a lot, we talk about resources available to people, and we get other people talking about it. We make it mindfully conscious that it’s ok to have a full life and to have childcare. I don’t know that it’s just being a woman, but I think being a mother really made it something that I really think about.

In other words, like the other participants, Tara purposefully cultivates an open, flexible workspace where the work, family, and personal roles of her team are acknowledged and encouraged. Importantly, these experiences and aspects of leadership provided a substantial

foundation for each of these CIOs when they were forced to face the intense and tumultuous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Life During COVID-19**

The influence of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19 or COVID) has permeated communities all over the United States as many were forced into mandatory lockdowns. This also impacted many organizations and institutions as they were forced to adapt. All three participants shared their experiences dealing with the COVID outbreak as a CIO at their respective institutions and COVIDs effect on their ability to maintain work-life balance/integration.

### ***University Response to COVID***

The participants each spoke about the ways in which their institutions and their departments prepared for and managed the COVID response. For example, Brigid shared that, early on, when the pandemic began to spread and institutions became more convinced they would need to shut their doors and move to a fully online (i.e., remote) status, it became apparent that the IT department would have a significant presence in future goings-on. Thus, she was asked to join the emergency operations center, rapid response team, and public health committee. She explained,

Technology became so important in that they put me on the public health committee...I don't know squat about the public health aspects from the academic perspective, but I'm willing to ask questions. I think that's what a good leader does, no matter what it is, you bring your experience to bear, and you ask questions that can help get to answers.

They met daily to make decisions about how they were going to address various pertinent COVID related questions. For instance, she recalled questions such as, “Are we going to send students home? What does it look like? Can the networks handle it? Do we have VPN enough to allow people to completely work from home? What do we do for a video conferencing tool?.” She stated ITs involvement was paramount in addressing these questions as they “were making a lot of decisions very quickly.” The other participants experienced similar situations regarding abrupt rapid response tasks when their institutions had to refer to strict safety measures and move to remote business.

Tara and Diana explained how well their institutions, and their teams, moved from working in the office to fully online (i.e., remote). For instance, Tara shared that her institution “could tell where things were going,” so they gathered 40 senior leaders together and set to work implementing an active preparation plan which she said, “saved our bacon.” She sent her entire team home one week before the university so they could “prep, move the help desk remotely, and get people settled” before the inevitable storm of activities came their way once everyone at the university went remote. She told them “I don’t know how things are going to be, so take your equipment with you on the way out the door. Take your chair with you if you need it.,” and they did. Next, she said they,

...migrated 8000 classes in 10 days...we set up dorms for quarantining, set up testing centers...the helpdesk volume was four times the capacity, we were in non-stop meetings all day long organizing work across remote classes, remote learning, security issues, and managing the health services...it was thing after thing, and all of it was so fast. We had no choice but to deal with it.

She expressed her role as the “hub for IT” but she did not hesitate to delegate work out to her team as they all worked “to keep a thousand pieces moving together and in sync.” She had to “dig deep” to figure out how best to “orchestrate” all the chaos and keep everyone focused, but they “did a really great job” and she knew everyone worked diligently.

Diana also spoke about her institution’s preparedness with the pandemic. She referenced how “gracefully” their remote transition was due to the early efforts and resources she led to improve technology within the institution over the last four years. Thus, with a few adjustments, her institution was able to move relatively smoothly to fully remote status. As she explained, “We had a strategic plan that we could rally around, look at how we needed to tweak and go forward. That certainly was a very intense period. We were very fortunate that things went really well.” She also mentioned the short amount of time they had to implement “a whole new set of things.” As she stated,

It was everything from access for students, to making sure the software they can count on us to provide to all campus is available to them virtually, to facilitating technology implementations to support the faculty and teaching, and all the associated data integrations with it. We did what was probably 18 months’ worth of work under our normal pace in like three weeks. Again, it’s really high stakes.

Some examples of online assistance which Diana and her team organized and managed were implementing Zoom video conferencing, building a virtual lab infrastructure with specific software packages, investing in Chrome Books, sending out loner laptops, and sending out loner WIFI hotspots. Her institution worked collaboratively with other institutions and schools in the state to provide WIFI hotspots for those who did not have access at their home. Students from

other schools could login to the institutions WIFI and, for example, “do their homework and send it in.” She also praised her team for all the time and effort they provided throughout the entire COVID experience. For instance, she exclaimed,

One of the things that I thought was just incredible was the amount of trust that we have as a team in each other. Our whole IT community, whether they reported directly to me or whether they were distributed, came together under a common set of goals, worked together, trusted each other, and it was amazing. I am so incredibly proud to work with such a great group.

Thus, along with the other participants, Diana was grateful for the collaboration, trust, and support established with her team and others in the IT community at her institution. Once remote work was established at their institutions, the participants shared further novel experiences which will be discussed in the next section.

### ***COVID Challenges with some Positive Outlook***

Due to the chaotic atmosphere created by COVID, the participants noted challenges they experienced while working as CIOs during COVID and the influence these experiences had on their work-life balance/integration. They also mentioned some positive aspects of their experiences working during COVID.

**Challenges.** One challenge the participants noted was the personal and professional uncertainty they felt when COVID began. They were unsure of the implications COVID would have regarding their institutions, their work obligations, and that of their teams. They were also concerned for the safety and wellbeing of their teams and tried to accommodate and transition as smoothly and as swiftly as possible. For instance, Diana stated,

I think the biggest thing was that initial period of uncertainty and transitions.... It's a tremendous amount of personal uncertainty. We have staff who have been personally impacted by family members who have been sick, themselves have been sick, all the stress outside of their lives, much less the pressure internally. We tried really hard to get back to a place of engagement in the reasonable work-life balance as quickly as we could. Thus, the uncertainty also impacted their personal lives and their ability to maintain work-life balance/integration. Similarly, Brigid mentioned the many concerns she and other senior leaders discussed in their daily committee meetings as she explained, "All that stuff was happening and we were just thinking, 'Oh my gosh! We're going to go to lockdown. What are we doing?'" Tara recounted the numerous questions she considered throughout her experience with COVID, as she stated,

I had to dig pretty deep and think, 'What am I going to do about managing the situation? What are the tactics I'm going to use? How do I use my voice?...How do I balance work in a way I've never had to balance work before? What can I put on the back burner?...It was a whole series of management challenges that none of us had ever had to face before. She also mentioned using mindfulness to help with the stress and anxiety of uncertainty she felt during COVID. Tara noted the importance of taking a moment with oneself to reflect on the happenings of the day and the situations occurring at the time, as she stated, "...it's just mindfulness and knowing this balance of we are ok, the kids are ok, we are all healthy, even though we're going through this really stressful time we make it the best situation possible in our society." She believes this time of reflection helped her deal with the challenges of uncertainty and concern and is something she continues to do.

Additionally, two participants indicated the loneliness and isolation they felt during COVID was a significant challenge for them. Again, due to the extremely contagious nature of the COVID virus, it was safer for people to remain indoors and in their homes than anywhere else. Tara identified herself as introverted, enjoys her time alone doing “solo” activities, and did not mention feeling a sense of loneliness. However, Diana and Brigid considered themselves “extroverts,” and remarked on how much they miss the face-to-face connections with others.

Diana explained that she and her husband felt isolated because many places around them were “entirely shut down, it was take-out only, you really couldn’t do much of anything.” She was also unable visit the gym for exercise and connect with people in the exercise classes she enjoyed. Although classes were available through Zoom, she stated “we get to a point where there’s only so much Zoom you can take.” Thus, to combat the isolation, she and her husband packed up their RV with their dogs and horses and took a trip to visit her in-laws for some companionship. She remarked, “we were able to spend time there, and I felt much less isolated...that was really important.” The visit lasted a few months and she enjoyed reconnecting with her in-laws, being outdoors, and riding their horses, all while working remotely.

Brigid shared that she was alone most of the time during COVID because her husband was an essential worker and was not often at home. She explained her experience as,

I was home alone during most of the COVID time. There are good things and bad things about that. It's very lonely, and oh wow I'm getting a little teary. It was lonely! It's sad, but I was by myself working 12 hours a day and that was hard.

It was a difficult time for her, and she mentioned one of the things she really missed was seeing her colleagues at conferences. She missed the comradery and collaboration which flows at such

events, “especially as a CIO, there are just so many things that you have to keep up on because the landscape is changing all the time.” She stated that she “participated in a ton of virtual activities,” but it was not as enjoyable as being face-to-face and she particularly missed her women colleagues who are CIOs or in other leadership positions. When she attended previous conferences, it was a time when she and her colleagues could “get a drink and catch up on things on our lives and things going on at our institutions.” She said it was also challenging because although she attended the virtual conferences, she was still unable to dedicate the same amount of time she would have if she had been physically present. She noted that when she’s “physically present at a conference, you’re there just for that,” and unfortunately, with COVID distractions constantly demanding her time, she was unable to be “truly present” for the entirety of the virtual events.

Further, the participants identified the “insane work pace” alone was a considerable challenge for them, but it also created additional issues such as fatigue, exhaustion, and long hours of being stationary. They also mentioned the influence these challenges had with their life outside of work. Each participant shared their average daily working hours, namely Tara experienced “unending 15-hour days” of managing COVID related projects; Diana noted working “20-hour days along with a core group 20 to 30” of her team, all of whom she is incredibly proud of; and Brigid noted spending “entire days from seven am to seven pm in back-to-back meetings with no breaks.” This work regime combined with the responsibilities of being a CIO during COVID was “intense,” raised their stress and anxiety levels, and took an “enormous toll” on their daily lives. They explained most of their time was spent “putting out COVID ‘fires,’” or “making improvements on things we implemented for COVID,” or “dealing

with my own COVID concerns and paying attention to the things happening with my staff and their families at the same time so we could all be on the same page.”

They were often exhausted throughout the day. Tara explained it became crucial for her wellbeing to purposely make time “digging deep” and find ways to manage her fatigue and reconnect with her own sense of balance. Brigid noted the influence the “insane work pace” had on her time with her husband and his concern for her. She said she was so exhausted by the end of the day that by the time her husband came home from work she was too drained to engage in a simple conversation; she said,

I didn't want to talk to anybody because I'd been on Zoom all day long. I was like, 'No, I need to watch the news hour, get a glass of wine, and you may not speak to me. No talking.' I would say it wasn't easy for him, poor guy...

However, she noted once the news hour was done and she had time to deflate from the day's events, then she was willing to engage with him. The work pace she was enduring also worried her husband because he noticed she was not taking breaks to eat, and since he was not home to remind her, he had her send him a picture of her lunch every day. She explained, “I would take a picture of the food that I ate and send it to him, so I reminded myself to eat. I know it sounds blah, but I mean it's true. That did happen.” She said it helped encourage her to take a periodic break among the chaos of work.

The participants also stated the intense work pace was a challenge because they were spending all those working hours with little movement as they had to constantly sit or stand in front of screens. As noted above, Brigid was rarely able to take breaks between her meetings when she was dealing with the chaos of COVID, as she stated, “with the pandemic, the zoom

meetings, oftentimes 30-minute meetings back-to-back, all that context switching is brutal.” She missed walking from meeting to meeting when she was on campus as it gave her time to “get your mindset into the next meeting” and allowed her a chance to take little breaks in-between. Tara also missed “running around the campus” and found being stationary was a big challenge for her while working during COVID. She believes it is “...important to get outside and get some fresh air and keep the body in motion,” and one should find ways to be purposeful about moving throughout the day.

Finally, Brigid shared a unique personal challenge which had a significant impact on her work-life balance/integration. She considers the year 2020 “The Trifecta” or “The Three C’s,” as she battled breast cancer and transitioned to the CIO seat all during COVID and in the year 2020. She explained, “I was diagnosed with breast cancer literally the day before they offered me the CIO job.” She was grateful the communication with the other senior leaders was all done through Zoom because she was “recovering from a lumpectomy” and was “all bandaged up,” but no one noticed because of the angle she placed the camera. She said she knew the hospital would call during her interview and tell her she had cancer. She said, “I refused to answer the phone. I literally turned my phone off that day because I just knew they were going to call. I knew in my head I had cancer. You just know these things sometimes.” The circumstances were also extremely difficult because, due to COVID, no one could go into the hospital with her, thus she had to do it alone, and said “it was a sucky time.” However, she was grateful for the abundant love and support she received from her family and “friend colleagues.” Her family provided her with the love she needed as she stated, “I had my mom to cry to, my daughters to talk to, and my husband who is amazingly supportive” and her friend colleagues were there to help her through

professional doubts and concerns as she transitioned into her full CIO position. She was also grateful because she worked remote, and it allowed her to continue working without “having to take time off.” Remarkably, she only took three days off during the entire process. She admitted it “didn’t help on my self-care because I probably should have rested more and taken more time off,” but she did not want to “just lay around all bandaged up all day long.” She found that although she was “a lot more tired,” the distraction of work helped take her mind off her personal situation and she chose to “muscle through it and that was good for me.” She is now cancer free and said, “I was lucky because it was a small cancer.” This positive outlook on an extremely difficult situation is one of a few which the participants mentioned regarding their experiences working as CIOs and living during the pandemic.

**Positive Elements.** Importantly, although the participants all experienced significant challenges pursuing their work-life balance/integration during COVID-19, they also recognized some positive elements within their experiences. For instance, Tara used the opportunity of working remote to spend some moments outside to reset her mind between meetings. As she stated,

Finding balance was, in some ways really easier [while working remote], because I know I need fresh air, sunlight and movement. I've got 15 minutes between meetings and I'm not going to spend it doing email. I'm going to spend it going out and walking around the block.

Simply put, although much of her time was spent at her desk “glued to screens,” she made a point to purposefully move around and spend time on something she enjoys.

Additionally, the participants noted the positive ways they believe leadership has changed during their time working remotely. Brigid mentioned her empathy and patience have grown as she “definitely had to recognize and really bring those empathy pieces to bear when managing a large organization of many people with many different experiences.” Tara found working remotely allowed everyone to be “more personal and more available to people.” She expressed,

If you think about like power structures at the university, there's a lot of power around what building your office is in, where it is, how big it is, or if you're in a suite. There's that bridge between you and the outside world, like administrative assistants who protect us. When you walk into a room, do people stop talking? Is there a seat at the table where you always sit because you're the boss or not the boss? This is entirely gone. It is incredibly democratic at this point.

She mentioned this new structure made her feel connected to her colleagues in a way she had never experienced. She believes “because these trappings are gone, people are more comfortable with me and they chat me up online and reach out a little bit more.” She remarked on the way Zoom (i.e., video conferencing) has made it easier to match names with faces for people in other departments because they are simultaneously displayed on the screen. For instance, she shared a story about visiting the grocery store where she bumped into someone from the finance department who she had never met in person, but they recognized her from seeing her in many Zoom meetings. The woman told her “I know you because I see you on screen all the time!” She described the encounter as “awesome” and acknowledged that her leadership has developed a deeper “social and emotional tone with being available in different ways” and connecting with others.

Thus, although COVID posed significant challenges in the participants lives, they did recognize a few “silver linings” within their experiences. Further, although they specified the beginning of the pandemic was “an intense” time, it has had a continued influence on their lives, and they believe it will influence the future of their institutions.

### ***Future Expectations for Higher Education***

All the participants specified the beginning of the pandemic (i.e., March 2020 and the few months following) as the most chaotic period, but unfortunately, the passing of time did not ease the demands and responsibilities for CIOs. As Tara expressed, “get to the middle of the pandemic, and we’ve got the groove on at that point, but the projects did not stop.” She continued with explaining one of the continuous projects were the COVID testing centers which were established throughout her campus and “that’s a really big IT thing” due to the networks and computer and data which needed to be constantly updated and maintained. However, 17 months following the start of the pandemic, most of the COVID related projects were completed and her institution wanted her to go back to the business of the university and moving forward.

Brigid mentioned her institution wants to go back to “raising money and to the way it was” but she does not think things will easily revert and she feels people are not yet ready to be on campus full-time, but the brick-and-mortar institutional culture is not easily altered. For instance, she argued,

...early in the pandemic, we did a lot of great work, but right at this very moment, I think my campus and all campuses, by the way, are really feeling this pressure to just be done. And that pressure is really coming out in ways like really wanting people to be on campus, even though we're not ready, honestly...I do think it'll be interesting to see how

this all works out, but higher ed, and particularly R1 elite institutions like mine, have a very hard time changing. I think a lot of people thought that the pandemic was going to change the culture more than it has.

She did mention, however, she looks forward to reconnecting with colleagues once back on campus. She believes her presence will be necessary as a senior leader whose job is to advocate for others, but she does not anticipate spending the same amount of time in the office as she used to. Also, she noted she has created a work from home policy, and she has been clear with her team the “goal is to allow people to be as flexible as possible given what their responsibilities are.”

Similarly, Diana expressed her readiness to be partly back in the office. She plans to work two days remote and three days on campus. She also looks forward to engaging and reconnecting personally with others and “not just boxes on the zoom screen.”

Further, when asked what an ideal workspace looks like for them, each participant agreed work flexibility was a huge factor. They make it a point to be flexible with their teams because they acknowledge and appreciate the benefits of a flexible workspace for themselves. With this, they also believe HE institutions should maintain the current flexible work options. One reason they believe HE institutions should keep remote or hybrid (i.e., partly remote, and partly on campus) options is because remote working was executed successfully during and due to COVID. People did their jobs exceptionally well considering the most tumultuous global pandemic of our lifetime. For example, Diana noted, “COVID proved to the university and to a lot of different folks that that we can do this hybrid modality.”

Additionally, remote working has benefited the family role for individuals during COVID because they were able to conduct office business while in the safety of their home with their family. As noted above, Brigid has already established a work from home policy at her institution to offer her team flexible work options. Also, as previously discussed in the “Mindful and Supportive Leadership” section, Diana has the trust and support of the Provost she reports to, therefore, when she makes executive decisions, like establishing flexible protocols to maintain her staff, she knows he will support her. For instance, she said,

If I tell him that means we need to maintain an excellent work-life balance and we need to maintain this new flexibility and expectation of hybrid and flexible schedules that COVID-forced experiments created, then he supports us, and I feel entirely empowered to create those structures.

She also mentioned she has spoken to her Provost about cultivating a workspace which is more conducive for people who work remotely or on a hybrid schedule. For example, she suggested if one or more people cannot be present in a meeting, they should always have a Zoom option open, so the person(s) are not disadvantaged by their physical absence. Thus, Diana is working to shape a work environment which can facilitate more flexibility for her team and institution.

Also, previously note in the section “Mindful and Supportive Leadership,” Tara actively makes it a point to give her team all the flexibility they need for family responsibilities and checks in with them frequently to make sure they are doing well. She mentioned flexibility and communication with her team was an important component of her leadership before COVID existed, but with the presence of COVID and fully remote status, it became a priority. She stated,

...with the pandemic, [being supportive] actually became a necessity, because people are home with their kids. So, we went beyond just being cool about it to actively caring...And just being and making it OK to manage this complexity. I certainly have seen men do this, but I will say as a woman who's lived this life in general, saying I can go out of my way to make this not just as easy as possible on people but something that really becomes part of our ethos, to say we are caring for each other, we're caring for the whole life, the whole family.

In short, like the other participants, Tara understands and acknowledges the benefits a flexible work environment can have for her team and purposely works to ensure they have opportunities to be present all their life roles.

Further, the participants mentioned losing current team members and not being able to hire new team members as an inevitable consequence if institutions choose to remove flexible hybrid or remote options. For instance, Diana stated, "If we all say, 'No, you have to be on campus.' we're going to lose staff and I don't want that to happen." Also, Brigid mentioned, "I'm not going to be able to hire people. I see the sheer lay of the land is that we, particularly in technology, we are going to have to change because people are going to leave." Thus, because COVID has proved many can effectively and efficiently work remotely, it has benefited the families of their team, and there is a looming possibility of losing current employees or the inability to obtain new employees, the participants have and continue to advocate on behalf of their teams for their institutions to actively maintain flexible hybrid or remote work options.

## **The Power of Self-Care**

In this section, the participants shared their experiences with and perceptions of self-care as a component of work-life balance/integration. The participants explained their interpretations of self-care (i.e., what it means to them), the activities they engage in which demonstrate their interpretation of self-care (i.e., what does it look like), and the emotions which emerge through their self-care experience (i.e., how does it feel).

### ***What Does Self-Care Mean?***

The participants believe the meaning of self-care is different for everyone and can take multiple forms. For instance, Diana believes self-care is “incredibly personal” because “what works for me doesn’t work for everyone else.” She has seen this with her colleagues who have different ways of exhibiting self-care. She noted they exhibit self-care through hobbies such as gaming, being on boards, and “tinkering” on their high-performance home computer systems. She believes there is “no one formula” and “it takes some experimentation” to determine what self-care means for each person. To her, self-care means “putting boundaries around your schedule” which “allows you to take care of yourself to make you better at work while still balancing the expectations of your institution.”

Similarly, Brigid believes self-care is a relatively new concept which is “interpreted differently by everyone,” and can take different forms. She believes “stepping back and making decisions is about self-care,” and it “means not taking things personally.” She is deeply “invested in” and “cares about” her work as a CIO, especially her role as an advocate for the continued advancement of technology at her institution. She explained due to this investment, she

sometimes “takes it personally” when her efforts to manage and improve the technology at her institution are thwarted by things such as funding. For example, she stated,

I wish I could say I don't take things personally, but I love my job and it's personal for me. So, I really have to find ways to let stuff go and be conscious about thinking, ‘Okay, they didn't fund that. Don't take that personally that they didn't want to give you money for your Wi-Fi project, they have other things.’

Prioritization is also a key component in her meaning of self-care and balancing her roles because, as previously mentioned in the “Family” section, she has made “difficult but necessary decisions” based on priorities regarding her family and work, and she found these exemplified her meaning of self-care. To her, self-care also means paying attention to yourself and “considering which things are a priority” at any given time.

Tara believes self-care means being mindful and purposeful in taking care of oneself and one's needs. For instance, she noted an important part of self-care is “to know that it's necessary and required to take a break away.” She also believes self-care means being gentle and forgiving with oneself. She thinks “a lot of us worry about appearances and our weight” and “I think all of us have had moments of self-doubt.” Awareness regarding one's needs and giving oneself “some space and grace” are important components to her meaning of self-care.

The participants also mentioned the influence of stress on their self-care. For instance, Diana mentioned having experienced physical symptoms of stress such as eye twitching, heart racing and high blood pressure, and mental symptoms like issues with short-term memory. She explained that she experienced these symptoms particularly when she started in her role as a CIO, and they were due to the stress and pressure felt from the “tremendous sense of

responsibility and obligation to make sure things go well.” She realized she experienced a constant eye twitch and heart racing, and after confirmation from her doctor, found they were due to high levels of stress. She also recognized short-term memory issues because she would forget simple tasks or information on topics outside of work. For instance, she recounted a time when her husband called and asked her to pick up bananas on her way home from work, but thoughts of responsibilities at work were so demanding she, “would get home and wouldn’t have stopped at the store, didn’t even remember he asked me for anything, much less that it was bananas.” She realized the stress was negatively impacting her time with her family as it “took away from my ability to be present in my personal life,” and recognized the need to be “more intentional about dealing with it.”

Tara and Brigid noted experiencing sleeplessness due to stress. For example, Brigid “often wakes up in the middle of the night stressing about work” and Tara worries and ponders about the day’s events thinking, “What could I have done better?” or “Oh man, I didn’t handle that right.” Importantly, Brigid noted the stress “is not new” and attributes it to the investment she has for her work.

### ***What Does it Look Like and How Does it Feel?***

All the participants shared the self-care activities which they enjoy/practice. They believe these practices help them promote and maintain their work-life balance/integration. They also believe self-care practices contribute to coping with and managing life stressors.

**Tara’s Self-Care.** Tara enjoys self-care activities which keep her active and her body in motion, such as yoga, walking, and riding on a spin bike. Before COVID, she also enjoyed working out at the gym. She takes her yoga practice seriously and stretches every day to help

with the fatigue of long hours being stationary while working. Importantly, this supports self-care literature as researchers have found yoga is an excellent self-care practice as it unites the body with the mind, connects the physical with the emotional, and is a way of caring for one's whole self (Daut, 2016). She finds it is important to use the time between work meetings to take a walk or stretch on her yoga mat, which she keeps next to her desk for convenience, and purposely schedules breaks in her calendar so she can relax her mind for a time and engage in self-care activities. When taking a break to vacation, disconnecting is important for her self-care, because it truly provides an opportunity to be present. When she goes on vacation, she is adamant about completely disconnecting from work and has told her team, "If you need me to stop being on vacation and come back, I will do that, but make that choice that you need me to no longer be on vacation." She believes it is "hugely important to let yourself go all the way offline." She also engages in self-care by riding on her spin bike "3-5 times a week between 30 and 60 minutes," and has ridden during meetings which do not require her to speak often. She also eats a "pretty healthy plant-base diet" and is conscious of her snacking habits which she finds contributes to her energy levels and overall mood. She believes, "these things give my brain a break, give my body a break, and keep myself healthy and together." Further, she admitted she "craves" these self-care practices as she feels relieved and uplifted because as she said, "it is just time with me for me." She feels it is relaxing and soothing to take out time devoted just for herself, away from work and screens, to be in her own head or with her loved ones.

**Diana's Self-Care.** Diana also takes pleasure in self-care activities which keep her body moving and she likes to be outdoors. She rides horses competitively, takes breaks to walk with

her dogs, and likes to spend quality time with her family while riding, camping, wake surfing, boating, and hiking. She remarked that her horses are “an incredibly huge part” of her life and the activities she does with them (e.g., competing, lessons, riding) and “the horses themselves” all contribute to her self-care. She also enjoys engaging in guided meditation, taking Barre classes at the gym or through Zoom due to COVID, and believes finding and connecting with a mental health professional (i.e., therapist) is a crucial tool which “makes you better to manage stress, and it helps you better to understand yourself, it makes you better at work, and it makes you better at home.” Additionally, she believes it is important to take “mini breaks” (e.g., on long weekends) to relax and recenter her mind and body. During these breaks she stays semi-connect to work in that she only checks in periodically. However, she and her husband make it a point to take a 10-day vacation every year, which she says is “an enormously important thing to come back recharged and refreshed and ready to dive back in.” During these trips she finds it is crucial to disconnect from work so she can be present and fully engaged with her family. She finds speaking with her therapist greatly improves her mental quality of life and believes it is important to remove the stigma around this invaluable self-care activity. She feels the strain of stress is relieved when she engages in these self-care practices and they help her to create a more balanced life.

**Brigid’s Self-Care.** Brigid engages in self-care practices which are outdoors, such as hiking and walking, however, she also enjoys poetry, cooking, reading, storytelling, and watching TV. She shared that she is a “binge reader and binge TV watcher” and enjoys reading books or uses her Kindle when she has sleepless nights. She also reads poetry almost every day. She is “a huge poetry fan,” receives a daily email with the poem of the day, and purposely takes

a few minutes away from her work to either read or listen to the poem. It is an important part of her day as she said, “it is something that I do only for myself.” She also believes taking breaks, going for walks, and talking to her mom on the phone helps her manage her stress as she uses the time to “vent” and she believes “finding the right person to vent to is about self-care.” She finds storytelling is an exceptional healing tool in overcoming personal difficulties. As previously mentioned, she considers herself an extrovert and does not consider herself a “particularly private person,” thus she said she “feels comfortable sharing my experiences with people.” She enjoys being a panelist at events and shares her experiences with others as motivation and inspiration to other women in leadership or those aspiring to such roles. She explained,

One of the ways I do self-care is just by telling stories and I think makes them less [painful]. You can separate yourself from them a little bit and they become a tool to help others rather than just your own [challenging experience]. I think part of that is figuring out how you can use whatever has been hard for you [in life] to help others...It’s not as trite as making lemonade, but it definitely is a way of healing.

While on panels, she has helped others by sharing “her stories” about her experience with breast cancer, calling on women mentors who have and continue to influence her personal life and professional career, and making difficult decisions about prioritization. As stated above, when she engages in these self-care practices, she feels a sense of healing. She also feels pride and relief when she prioritizes and acknowledges her needs.

## Chapter Summary

Ultimately, this chapter contains rich findings which include the work and family life of these women HE CIOs, their experiences with COVID-19, and their interpretations of self-care.

In summary, key findings included:

- Work and Family Life
  - Career Path
    - Tara and Brigid began their careers in HE and remained, whereas Diana began her career in the private sector and moved into HE later
    - Tara and Brigid experienced opportunistic career jumps
  - Family
    - All participants are married and have supportive spouses
    - Tara and Brigid have grown children; Diana has no children
    - None have had children in their home during their time as CIOs
    - When family stressors or challenges arise:
      - Take time to find all the information about a problem and work to find a solution
      - Assess priorities and adjust one's actions according to which role(s) requires the most attention at any given time
  - Gender Discrimination
    - Brigid witnessed sacrifices multiple women have made while working in HE
    - All indicated they do not think the fact they are women negatively impacted their career

- All acknowledged a clear disparity between the number of women and men in HE, specifically in the CIO position
- All believe gender discrimination is progressively improving as institutions are more intentional regarding diversity initiatives
- All identified the gender gap and implicit gender discrimination in HE, but none mentioned experiencing gender discrimination as a CIO
  - All viewed the senior leadership position as a barrier against gender discrimination
- Senior Leadership
  - Key aspects of the position which have influenced their life are delegation, advocacy, and the singularity of the role
  - View the CIO position as high demand and time consuming
  - Serve as advocates for advancement of technological services at respective institution
  - CIO position is “people oriented” and requires collaboration with other teams within the university and community
  - Good leadership entails being a role model and being “mindful” when addressing the team
  - Supervisors and colleagues are influential and help with the balance of work and life responsibilities
  - Social and professional networking and an open, flexible workspace environment are important and beneficial to them and their teams

- COVID-19
  - Experienced abrupt rapid response tasks when their institutions adjust to strict safety measures and move to remote business
  - Challenges
    - All felt personal and professional uncertainty
    - Brigid and Diana felt lonely/isolated
    - All identified an “insane work pace” which created additional issues like fatigue, exhaustion, and long hours of being stationary
    - Brigid experienced “The Three C’s,” as she battled breast cancer and transitioned to the CIO seat all during COVID
  - Positives
    - Leadership has changed in positive ways during time working remote; namely, increased empathy and patience and more intimate connection to colleagues and university community
  - Expectations for HE
    - Experiencing tension and pressure from institutions to revert to on-campus operations although campus community may not be ready
    - Their ideal workspace is work flexibility; thus, they are flexible and attentive to needs of their teams
    - They believe HE institutions should maintain the current flexible work options
- Self-Care
  - What It Means

- It is different for everyone and can take multiple forms, such as setting boundaries, do not take things personally, prioritize, and be mindful and purposeful in caring for yourself
- Stress has a large impact on self-care, and has been evident through mental symptoms like short-term memory issues or physical symptoms such as high blood pressure, eye twitching, and sleeplessness
- What It Looks Like and How It Feels
  - Self-care practices help promote and maintain work-life balance/integration and contribute to coping with and managing life stressors
  - Self-care activities they enjoy/practice and how they feel:
    - Tara engages in yoga, walking, and riding on a spin bike, and feels relaxed and soothed during and/or after these activities
    - Diana engages in riding, camping, wake surfing, boating, and hiking, and feels relief during and/or after these activities
    - Brigid engages in poetry, cooking, reading, storytelling, and watching TV, and feels a sense of healing, pride, and relief during and/or after these activities

Thus, as CIOs, these women hold the demanding and intricate responsibilities of the technology management and development within their respective institutions. They work long hours, endure the stress and pressure associated with this position, and adjust to enormous strain when necessary, as seen with the introduction and chaos of COVID-19. They spend much of their energy toward the obligations and enrichment of their careers and their passion for this

work is evident. They also acknowledge the impact their work as CIOs has on their home and personal lives. Lastly, they organize their roles and responsibilities according to priority, and they recognize the importance of their own wellbeing and practices of self-care as major factors in the success of their other roles.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This qualitative study was designed to explore the ways in which these women HE CIOs experience and perceive work-life balance/integration as a means to investigate women leader's perspectives, activities, and behaviors to further understand and take action to improve the representation of women HE CIOs. It was situated in the context of feminist theory, specifically liberal feminism, which aims to examine and remedy the lack of personal autonomy women experience in this gendered society. Three women CIOs working in HE institutions were interviewed. The interviews were analyzed in response to three research questions aimed at exploring the perceptions and experiences they had in their pursuit and maintenance of work-life balance/integration in general and during the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic.

### Liberal Feminism and Study Findings

As previously noted, liberal feminism posits that freedom is based on personal autonomy (i.e., one should live the life they choose). However, as our gendered society has been established through a traditionally patriarchal culture, personal autonomy is not fully available to women (Baehr, 2021). The following key findings serve as examples which influence the autonomy/freedom these women experienced in this gendered society and further supports the necessity and importance of liberal feminist research.

- Less “career jump” opportunities for women pursuing a senior-level position (i.e., viewed as masculine) (e.g., Tara’s experiences in mid-level positions may be linked to opportunistic career jumps, but when she pursued the senior-level CIO position, she was required to apply)

- Brigid's experience with lack safe space to breastfeed/pump (i.e., women are blocked by barriers/obstacles to obtain senior level positions)
- Lack of freedom to pursue other roles besides family without guilt or pressure from society (e.g., Brigid prioritized career goals above family which broke from the "ideal woman" as mandated by societal expectations)
- Implicit gender discrimination can threaten one's self-esteem and identity (e.g., although these women CIOs specified they do not think the fact they are women negatively impacted their career, they indicated instances of gender discrimination)
- Senior leadership position may protect women from observed gender discrimination; however, perhaps it is the masculinization of the role which is being perceived as power (i.e., women's freedom to pursue/obtain senior leadership positions may be jeopardized due to the masculinization of the role)
- Gender gap remains prevalent in HE; specifically, the CIO position (e.g., these women CIOs all experienced times when they were the only woman in a room full of executives)

Please note each of these examples are expanded upon in detail in the following section(s), however, it is crucial to first identify their connection to these women's autonomy and liberal feminism. Ultimately, using the liberal feminist lens was beneficial in this study, because the goal was to investigate the unique experiences these women HE CIOs encounter, the novel perception they provide, and the influence of stressors they face when attempting to integrate the responsibilities of their work, family life, and personal self-care while simultaneously enduring pressures to conform to gendered societal stereotypes.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In this study, I sought answers to three research questions:

- What are the perceptions of women HE CIOs regarding their ability to find and maintain work-life balance/integration?
- What do women HE CIOs experience in their pursuit of work-life balance/integration, specifically the self-care component?
- How has the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic influenced women HE CIOs seeking work-life balance/integration?

These questions acted as a guide throughout the data collection and data analysis processes and permeate throughout the findings in chapter four in which three major themes with nine subthemes emerged. The major themes which emerged included (1) Understanding the Work and Family Life of a HE CIO, (2) Life During COVID-19, and (3) The Power of Self-Care.

Subthemes are discussed within each respective major theme below. Based on the data, the following findings are discussed in relationship to the major themes and relevant literature. Then, an interpretation regarding how these women ultimately perceive the way in which they balance or integrate their roles as a worker, family member, and self-care is discussed. This chapter concludes with recommendations and suggestions for future research.

### ***Understanding the Work and Family Life of a HE CIO***

This study indicates these women HE CIOs are passionate about their work and contributions to their respective institutions, teams, and the greater community. This is important because researchers have found faculty, staff, and administrators working in HE institutions are crucial to shaping and altering campus cultures, including the influence and perspectives of

work-life balance/integration within an institution (Hart, 2008; Kezar & Lester, 2011; Sallee, 2013).

**Career Path to CIO Position.** Further, these women HE CIOs experienced different paths in their journey to obtaining the CIO position. For instance, although all the participants have extensive experience working in a HE setting, Diana also experienced working in the private setting. Interestingly, she indicated, “I think Higher Ed is a lot more conducive to work-life balance than the private sector, based on my personal experience.” In other words, the HE culture is more conducive to work-life balance/integration pursuits than is the private sector. This is interesting because it differs from previous research which has found that as HE institutions have been moving toward a “business model” culture, employee (e.g., faculty, staff, administration) responsibilities have increased substantially and the ideal worker norm of always being available to the employer has become more prevalent (Bailyn, 2011; King-White & Rogers, 2018; Williams, 2001). Additionally, according to the findings, both Diana and Brigid specified their intention to pursue the CIO position, whereas Tara did not specify this information. However, Tara did indicate that although she jumped careers completely due to chance opportunities, her CIO positions were obtained through a formal application process. This finding may be explained by research which states HE mid-level administrative positions are often viewed as feminine and the majority of women administrators in HE hold mid-level positions; whereas senior-level positions are often viewed as masculine (Yakaboski and Donahoo, 2010). Thus, as a woman HE administrator, Tara’s early experiences in mid-level positions may be linked to her opportunistic career jumps. However, once she wanted to pursue the CIO senior-level position (i.e. viewed as masculine), she was required to apply as this

position was not “opportunistic.” Diana and Brigid also mentioned support from a previous supervisor and networking as influential parts of their path to their CIO seat. Further, Brigid’s experience in which she had to use her supervisor’s office to lactate because there were no private spaces for women to do so supports the research which suggests women are blocked by barriers such as the navigation of a labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Keohane, 2014) of obstacles to obtain senior level positions. It leaves me to consider if this accommodation had not been provided or available, how would this barrier have ultimately impacted her career? Interestingly, the study did not indicate specific barriers which hindered or could have potentially hindered the other participant’s paths toward the CIO position.

**Family Life.** This study has also shown these women HE CIOs experience and perceive various responsibilities and stressors in regards to their role as a family member. Importantly, two of the participants had grown children, whereas one had no children. Thus, none of these women HE CIOs had children living in their home during their time in their CIO position. Further, the CIOs with children experienced stressors regarding their family role which influence their other roles (i.e., work and self) as well. For instance, Brigid indicated a family challenge in which her time could have been spent working, but she made it a priority to help her daughter instead. This suggests the attention to family needs is not diminished once one’s children have “left the nest,” and although the dynamic may be different, the intention to ease a loved one’s conflict remains. It is also an example of how one’s work role may be influenced by one’s family role in the experience of maintaining work-life balance.

The evidence from this study also suggests that prioritization of roles is an important tool for these women HE CIOs pursuing work-life balance. This was an important observation as it

brings forth the necessity for women to feel comfortable with “stepping back” from the constant family responsibility and not feel guilty when they choose to focus on their work or personal role. For instance, when Brigid chose to attend an event which would benefit her career over a family event, she broke from the “ideal woman” as mandated by societal expectations and pursued her work. This finding is supported by the research which states women in HE leadership roles face the added pressure of society’s view of the ideal woman which conflicts with the ideal worker norm (Williams et al., 2016).

**Perceptions of Gender Discrimination in HE.** The findings of this study also suggest that although working in HE can be gratifying, it may come with some obstacles. Researchers have found the men-dominated culture of HE institutions was not built to accommodate women leaders and has not reached equality between the women and men who work in the HE domain (Baehr, 2021; Dunn et al., 2014; Zemsky, 2001). These women’s experiences suggest the unbalanced culture of HE remains. For example, instances of implicit discrimination remain in HE in the form of undervalued work of women in senior leadership positions. Brigid recounted numerous instances in which women in senior leadership sacrificed their time and energy at the detriment to themselves while working for HE institutions. This finding supports the idea that “the quality of women’s work tends to be undervalued” (Lips, 2017, p. 295). However, none of the participants mentioned they encountered explicit gender discrimination while working as a CIO. These findings support earlier studies in which researchers have found that although people working in HE administration do not often exhibit explicit gender discrimination, implicit gender discrimination prevails (Ballenger, 2010; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Further, it is important to note although they described instances of gender discrimination (e.g., Brigid’s experience with

lack of lactation space, Diane's experience reporting to someone who was "outright sexist," and Tara's experience with jokes and snide remarks), these women CIOs explicitly remarked that they do not think the fact they are women negatively impacted their career. This is contrary to the literature which states women consistently encounter greater demands when attempting to juggle their professional and personal responsibilities (Sallee, 2013). However, these findings are congruent with researchers who have found women's experience with discriminatory treatment may be retrospective as they can be unaware or in denial of its presence until long after an occurrence (Skkra, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). This is exemplified in this study as although these women indicated they did not experience discrimination, they provided stories and examples of the presence of discrimination in their experience(s). This may be because to acknowledge one is experiencing discrimination can be a threat to one's self-esteem and identity (Armenta & Hunt, 2009; Brown, Bigler, & Chu, 2010). Thus, many people only see or acknowledge it retrospectively or in hindsight (Skkra, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000) or unless they receive concrete data as proof (Hopkins, 2002).

Interestingly, a novel finding in this study suggests the senior leadership position (i.e. the CIO role) may be a barrier which protects women in these positions from observed gender discrimination. In short, these women believe there may be more to the authority of the senior leadership position than to the gender of the person who holds the position. However, it is important to consider the extent to which they may be perceiving the power associated with a traditionally masculine role like the CIO position. In other words, it may not be the senior leadership position or CIO role which might block observed gender discrimination, but perhaps it is actually the masculinization of the role which is being perceived as power.

Further, this study has shown there is a prevalent gender gap in HE, and specifically the CIO position. These findings are congruent with the literature which states there is a perpetual gender gap between men and women representatives in top leadership positions in HE institutions, specifically the CIO seat (Clark, 2013; Frye and Fulton, 2020; Young, 2004). Additionally, as indicated by Tara, the gender gap may be due to pipeline issues which influence hiring trends. This pipeline issue is also congruent with the literature (Lips, 2017; Clark, 2013) as, for example, researchers have found that hiring managers perpetuate gender discrimination by using prescribed stereotypes when deciding who should be in leadership positions (Clark, 2013). Also, the findings indicate that although gender discrimination still exists in HE culture, HE institutions are working to improve this issue by deliberately focusing on gender diversity efforts and these women HE CIOs are noticing the slight difference over time. These findings are important as researchers have specified a need for reshaping and redesigning higher education work culture to create an environment which fosters the ability for women to integrate their lives into the workplace rather than having to separate their work on campus from their time at home or time spent on their personal wellbeing (e.g., self-care) (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2010).

**What it Means to be in Senior Leadership.** The findings of this study suggest that certain leadership attributes contribute to the work-life balance/integration for these women HE CIOs. Some influencing aspects of leadership included being mindful of oneself, thoughtful toward one's team, and receiving support and trust from supervisors and colleagues. The findings indicate these can take the form of mentorship, role modeling, advocating, and networking. These aspects of leadership have contributed significantly to their experience as a CIO. These findings support previous research regarding mentoring by Warner and DeFleur

(1993) who posit that the influence of mentorship and role modeling can greatly impact a woman's advancement to top leadership in HE. However, they contradict the research by Hill and Wheat (2017) who find mentoring has only minimal impact on women's advancement to top leadership in HE.

Interestingly, Brigid identified research which supports her experience with the connections she made with her colleagues at the Frye Institute. In their study, Gonzalez et al. (2019) investigated the differences between how men and women network. Men network by collecting as many people as possible without regard to a close relationship or long-term contact. Whereas women network by cultivating close relationships with a smaller number of individuals who they usually remain in contact with overtime. When asked if that is how she perceives her networking style, Brigid admitted "...that was totally my experience."

Additionally, the evidence suggests these women HE CIOs are greatly impacted by the positive contributions of mentors, role models, and colleagues as they pursued their careers. They use these individuals as inspiration for their own leadership which they extend to their current respective teams. These findings confirm the research which states that a singular leader can often have a great effect on collective groups such as teams and organizations (Bolden, 2008; Contractor et al., 2012) as the participants recalled specific individuals (e.g., supervisors, and colleagues) who made a positive long-term impact on their lives. These findings also support leadership research which states leaders build trust and support by coaching others and taking a genuine interest in both the tasks which need to be accomplished as well as each individual responsible for accomplishing them (e.g., the participants receive leadership guidance from their supervisors and purposely spend time with their own team to discover their needs); leaders

exhibit their trustworthiness by modeling behavior and attitudes which promote the best interests of those in their environment and creating an atmosphere which encourages others to behave in a similar manner (e.g., the participants feel trusted and supported by their supervisors and colleagues which serve as role models for them, and in-turn their actions serve as examples for their teams); and trustworthy leaders learn to manage themselves as well as others by recognizing each member's contribution to the group, releasing responsibility to them, and exuding the confidence that they will complete their tasks efficiently and effectively (e.g., the participants feel confident their supervisors trust them to make the best decisions for the university and their team) (Fullan, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2013).

### ***Life During COVID-19***

Since the novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19 or COVID) outbreak began in February 2020, it has impacted the entire world immeasurably. Due to the highly contagious nature of COVID-19, it became essential for people all over the globe to remain in their homes as much as possible and decrease contact with others for the safety of their own life and others. Many communities went under a lockdown which forced most businesses and organizations to close their doors and move to remote status, if possible, to conduct work. Thus, as COVID spread, organizations such as HE institutions transferred their administration, staff, faculty, and students to remote business, teaching, and learning in an unprecedented amount of time. As previously noted, the CIO plays a critical role in the innerworkings of the institutions technology systems. Therefore, as all the business of the institution transferred to online/remote status, the involvement, and responsibilities of HE CIO also rose exponentially.

**University Response to COVID.** The findings of the study showed the COVID-19 pandemic had a momentous impact on the participants ability to pursue and maintain work-life balance/integration. Transitioning the business of an entire HE institution to fully remote within one to three weeks because of a global pandemic was a significant and novel experience for all the participants. As one participant put it, “I know how to run IT at a university...but none of us have ever experienced having to move to an entirely remote university in a week.” They worked diligently with their teams and other organizations within their institutions and community. As noted in the previous section regarding leadership, the trust and support built with one’s team is an important aspect of leadership, and the evidence of this study has shown these leadership components contributed positively and critically as a foundation during the hectic goings-on which COVID initiated.

**COVID Challenges with some Positive Outlook.** According to the findings, these women HE CIOs experienced novel complex challenges working as CIOs during COVID which significantly influenced their ability to maintain work-life balance/integration. They experienced a significant and rapid increase in the stress, responsibilities, and complexities of their CIO position. Significant challenges included feelings of uncertainty, isolation, and loneliness, and a stationary “insane work pace” which increased daily fatigue and influenced their life outside of work. One participant also shared a personal challenge which she deemed “The 3 C’s: CIO, COVID, and Cancer.” These challenges greatly influenced the participants work, family, and personal roles. However, positive aspects also emerged within these experiences, namely greater empathy and patience, and working remotely offered availability to venture outdoors between

meetings and provided the ability for leadership to be more personal and available to people than before.

**Future Expectations for Higher Education.** Previous researchers have indicated HE institutions are attempting to adopt policies which allow for flexible hours and accommodations. However, these efforts are sluggish compared to demands and requirements of their employees (e.g., faculty, staff, and administrators) (Lester, 2013). However, this study has found the intrusion of COVID-19 on organizations such as HE institutions forced the business of these entities to move to remote work which significantly influenced flexible work options for its employees. Additionally, the findings in this study indicate these women HE CIOs consider an ideal workspace for themselves and their IT teams as one in which work flexibility is paramount. Thus, HE institutions should consider maintaining the current flexible work options for employees, particularly those in HE IT departments including the HE CIO, based on three key reasons. (1) Because even through the influence of the global COVID pandemic the success of remote work was proven as employees did an exceptional job considering the chaotic and turbulent circumstances. (2) Because remote work benefited many families during COVID as they were able to conduct business while in the safety of their home with their family, thus influencing the work and family roles for these CIOs and their teams. (3) Because losing current team members and not being able to hire new team members may be an inevitable and considerable consequence if institutions choose to remove flexible hybrid or remote options permanently.

Ultimately, COVID-19 influenced the lives of these women CIOs in ways they could never have imagined. They were crucial agents in the move to remote work, teaching, and

learning for entire institutions as the universities were forced to shut their doors in a considerably short amount of time. They endured challenges which were unimaginable before COVID and found some highlights within these events. They voiced their concerns regarding the future of flexible work for themselves and their teams as advocates in pursuit of work-life balance/integration. They explained how COVID altered their daily lives and they briefly shared instances regarding its influence on their personal wellbeing (i.e., self-care). The next section expands on the participants experiences finding and maintaining self-care as women CIOs.

### ***The Power of Self-Care***

This study has argued that working as a CIO is often a complex job as it encompasses varying pressures, obligations, and responsibilities. When uncertainty, isolation, fatigue, and endless work hours due to COVID-19 are added to the mix, the job can become overwhelming, and one can easily become engulfed in the work and forget the needs of oneself. This has detrimental effects on one's pursuit and maintenance of work-life balance/integration, as per Irvine (2009), "How can we hope to care for others if we, ourselves, are crippled by ill health, burnout, or resentment?" (p 127). Thus, personal wellbeing is a critical consideration when conducting responsibilities in all other aspects of one's life (e.g., work, family). Wellbeing is the balance of one's mental, physical, emotional, and social dimensions. One example which contributes to state of wellbeing is the act of self-care. Per Brian and Blackman (2018), self-care is exemplified through behaviors which promote, strengthen, and maintain wellbeing.

**What Does Self-Care Mean?** According to the findings, self-care is a personal experience which differs for each person and can take numerous forms. Also, stress is a key factor influencing the definitions of and necessity for self-care for these women HE CIOs. This

supports previous research (Gillespie et al., 2001; King-White & Rogers, 2018), which identifies work-associated responsibilities as a major source of stress for HE employees. This study also found that intentionality and recognition of self-care is important for these women HE CIOs, and it can be used to cope with or manage life stressors which is also consistent with previous research by Bryan and Blackman (2018).

**What does it Look Like and How Does it Feel?** The evidence from this study suggests that just as the meaning of self-care differs per person, so do many of the self-care practices. For instance, Tara mentioned her daily yoga practice, Diana expressed her love for spending time with her horses, and Brigid spoke of her love for poetry. However, although these women HE CIOs experience some various self-care practices, the findings suggest physical movement, mental breaks, and outdoor activities are practices which significantly impact their pursuit of personal self-care, contribute positively to their emotional wellbeing, and provide considerable benefits to their maintenance of work-life balance/integration. Additionally, two participants specifically identified the usefulness of talking to someone as an essential practice of self-care. Diana noted the impact regularly speaking with a therapist has had on her stress management and work-life balance, and Brigid expressed the relief she feels when she vents to her mom daily and feels a sense of healing when she engages in storytelling. Lastly, the participants indicated the relief, pride, and healing they feel when they practice self-care. These findings are consistent with the self-care research describes best practices for promoting self-care in the HE workplace include giving oneself permission to make mistakes and learning from them, selecting a healthy support system, and prioritizing items and undertaking one at a time (Anitha & Sritharan, 2014; Gillespie et al., 2001; King-White & Rogers, 2018).

### **Interpreting Work-Life Balance/Integration**

As specified previously, my definition of work-life balance is the compartmentalized approach to viewing the roles of work, family, and personal self-care as separate from each other; whereas my definition of work-life integration is the holistic approach to viewing and combining these roles as all part of one person's experiences in life which are intertwined with one another and not separate from one or another. All three participants mentioned the importance of balancing roles or obtaining a balance in one's life, however, none specifically mentioned an integration of those roles. For example, Diana's definition of work-life balance is like mine in that she regarded it as a compartmentalization of work and daily life. For instance, she stated, "There's definitely a process of figuring out how to balance your time and be able to compartmentalize and be really present at work and then be really present in your daily life." Brigid also believes there is a balance in roles, and it shifts according to priority at any given point in time, as she stated, "I think work-life balance is exactly that, it's work and sometimes one thing weighs a little more than the other." Tara mentioned "digging deep" to find balance by being "mindful" of her role as a CIO, acknowledging family is "the heart," and doing things to keep herself "healthy and together."

Although the participants mentioned the word "balance" often and did not mention the word "integration" at all, I found the stories and descriptions they shared often incorporated more than one role. This was seen most often with the combination of work and self-care roles. For example, when Tara has breaks between work meetings (i.e., work role), she intentionally exercises (i.e., self-care role) to give her brain and body a chance to recover. Also, when Diana started in her CIO position (i.e., work role) she experienced extreme stress which prompted her

to speak with a therapist and find ways to manage the stress (i.e., her interpretation of self-care role). There were also instances in which the family role influenced the self-care roles. For example, when Brigid made the tough decision to skip her daughters middle-school promotion (i.e., family role) to travel to a conference (i.e., her interpretation of self-care role) which was scheduled at the same time. Lastly, I found there were instances in which the work role influenced the family role. For example, Diana mentioned the strain work was putting on her short-term memory (i.e., work role) and how it has influenced her time with her husband (i.e., family role). She shared one story in which her husband called and asked her to bring home bananas on her way home from work, but due to the responsibilities and stresses present at the office on her mind, she completely forgot he had asked her and arrived home confused and without bananas. Thus, although the participants did not explicitly mention an integration of their roles as a worker, family member, and personal self-care, it is evident in this study that these roles can and often do intersect.

### **Recommendations**

This study has argued the gender gap in HE senior leadership is prevalent, particularly in the CIO role as women remain underrepresented. Further, after investigating the experiences and perspectives of work-life balance/integration for these women HE CIOs and to further understand considerations which could improve the representation of women HE CIOs, the following recommendations have been suggested. These recommendations are in no way exhaustive, but they offer options, are intended for and may be beneficial to HE organizations, HE CIOs, and those aspiring to such role.

According to the findings in this study, the participants identified the positive and significant impact that mentoring, role models, collaboration, and networking had on their ability to find and maintain work-life balance/integration both before and during their time as CIOs. They attributed this considerable impact to previous and current support from supervisors who acted as mentors and role models, collaboration with the CIO community, and networking through programs which contributed to the preparation and success of their senior leadership career goals. These findings are supported by research which references the positive influence of mentoring and networking (Clark, 2017; Helfat et al., 2000; Trauth et al., 2009; Wilde, 1997). Thus, HE institutions may want to consider more purposefully introducing and incorporating CIO mentorship opportunities either through one-on-one mentorship pairing or through group mentorships to provide opportunities for support to those aspiring to the CIO senior leadership role. Further, organizations should consider offering more support to their current CIOs by encouraging and assisting in their involvement in programs, conferences, and the like as this study has shown there are significant benefits to attending and receiving guidance from such programs. These benefits influence the institutions and the CIOs representing them as, for example at conferences, the cooperative and informative nature of the events keep CIOs up-to-date on the latest technological advancements which they can then transfer to their home institutions. Further, current, and aspiring CIOs should attempt or continue to pursue and attend such events as they may offer valuable insight and afford opportunities for familiarization, networking, comradery, and collaboration with others in the field.

Additionally, this study identified flexible work options as a crucial contributor to the ideal workspace setting for these women HE CIOs and their IT teams. Therefore, it may be

important for HE institutions to consider adopting policies and procedures which allow continued flexible work options for employees, particularly those in HE IT departments including the HE CIO. This is advised based on three main reasons, namely most employees exhibited excellence and efficiency working remotely throughout the chaotic COVID pandemic, working remotely allowed flexibility for employees with families, and losing current or potential employees may be an inevitable and considerable consequence if institutions revert to fully brick-and mortar work cultures and flexible work options are removed permanently. Further, current CIOs may contribute to this cause by working with their superiors to develop and implement new or adjust current flexible plans, policies, and procedures which can be tailored to the needs and responsibilities of themselves and their teams. Lastly, institutions may wish to consider topics such as, which other areas of the university might it be important to have workplace flexibility, which aspect(s) of the culture of the university might promote or hinder flexible work arrangements, and whether the gender of administrators in charge of the university play a role in whether flexible work arrangement is seen favorably at an institution.

### ***Future Research Directions***

This research study looked specifically at the experiences and perceptions of work-life balance/integration for three women CIOs and turned up some intriguing findings. Several of the findings lend themselves to further investigation and research. First, as the participants in this study were all white women, researchers should consider incorporating ethnic and racial diversity by conducting parallel interviews with women CIOs of color. This would allow researchers a more comprehensive view regarding how women CIOs experience and perceive work-life balance/integration, particularly the self-care component and the influence of COVID-

19. Second, as the participants are all employed at large public research institutions, researchers should consider investigating the comparative experiences of women CIOs at small public institutions as well as private institutions. This would allow scholars to compare work-life balance/integration, self-care, and COVID-19 experiences for women CIOs across institution size (i.e., small vs large) and type (i.e., public vs private). Third, because this study only involved interviews with women CIOs, future similar research should consider incorporating interviews with men CIOs to understand their experiences and perceptions of work-life balance/integration, self-care, and COVID-19. Such information could add insight to the varying experiences of women and men CIOs in HE. Finally, as there is no research yet on the long-term effects of COVID-19 and the pursuit of work-life balance/integration is an ever-evolving concept, future researchers should investigate the influence of COVID-19 on the pursuit and maintenance of work-life balance/integration over time, especially as it relates to women. These areas are all ripe for further investigation and inquiry.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to enhance our understanding of the experiences and perspectives of these women HE CIOs and their ability to find, and maintain work-life balance/integration with their roles as a worker, family member, and self-care and the significant impact of the novel COVID-19 pandemic in the pursuit of this goal. The work-life journeys these women CIOs have experienced are intricate and inspiring. They moved through their careers to the top senior leadership position in technology at their institutions; they endured and adapted to the demands COVID-19 forced on their personal and professional lives; and through these lived experiences, they learned about themselves, how to balance their priorities, and the best ways to

enhance their lives through self-care. Ultimately, the pursuit and maintenance of work-life balance is an ever-evolving yet crucial aspect of their lives; and it is clear through these findings, their roles as a worker, family member, and personal self-care intertwine throughout their experiences.

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## **Appendix A: Introductory Email**

### Potential Participant Introductory Email

Hello [Name of Participant],

My name is Candice Veilleux-Mesa. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Florida. I am contacting you because according to the [institution name/department] site (link site), you are employed as the [participant job title].

Your insight is of great interest, because I am conducting a study examining the experiences of work-life balance/integration for women higher education administrators working in higher education institutions as Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and Chief Technology Officers (CTOs). Specifically, I am interested in exploring the experiences of women CIOs and CTOs currently working in a 2- or 4-year higher education institution with ideally 3 years of experience in the position.

Participation is completely voluntary and participating in this research study is beneficial in that the study will contribute novel insight to the existing literature with a focus on the perspectives of women CIOs and CTOs working in higher education institutions.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience if you fit the criteria above and are interested in participating in this study.

Best,  
Candice Veilleux-Mesa

## **Appendix B: Invitation Email**

### Potential Participant Invitation Email

Hello [Name of Participant],

Thank you for your quick response regarding the initial introductory email.

To confirm, I am kindly requesting your participation in the doctoral research study which I am conducting titled: Women CIOs/CTOs in Higher Education Pursuing Work-Life Balance/Integration, Self-Care, and the Influence of COVID-19.

The intention is to examine the experiences of work-life balance/integration for women higher education administrators working in higher education institutions as Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and Chief Technology Officers (CTOs). Further, in this study, I aim to investigate how the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic has influenced CIOs and CTOs seeking work-life balance/integration.

Your participation in this research study is beneficial in that the study will contribute novel insight to the existing literature focusing on the perspectives of women higher education CIOs and CTOs, will incorporate the importance of self-care as a component of work-life balance/integration, and will consider the influence of the global COVID-19 pandemic on women's pursuit toward work-life balance/integration.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

As a participant, you will be asked to share your experiences and perceptions regarding work-life balance/integration via recorded Zoom video conferencing which should take approximately 1 hour. Following the first interview, a second interview will be scheduled to conduct a member check. During the member check interview, I will revisit and confirm the initial information is correct and offer additional opportunity to expand which should take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.

At your earliest convenience, please contact me with your availability and I will email you a Zoom invitation and a copy of the oral informed consent script which will be read during the first interview.

Thank you for your time and participation. Your insight and expertise are greatly appreciated.

Best,  
Candice Veilleux-Mesa

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent**

### Oral Informed Consent Script

Hello,

My name is Candice Veilleux-Mesa and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Florida.

The title of this project is “Women CIOs/CTOs in Higher Education Pursuing Work-Life Balance/Integration, Self-Care, and the Influence of COVID-19.”

Please note this is a research study.

The guiding purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of work-life balance/integration, and self-care as a component of such, for women higher education administrators working in higher education institutions as Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and Chief Technology Officers (CTOs). Further, the study aims to investigate how the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic has influenced women higher education administrators working in higher education institutions as CIOs and CTOs seeking work-life balance/integration.

For the purposes of this research study, you will be asked to share your experiences and perceptions regarding work-life balance/integration via recorded Zoom video conferencing. The initial interview should take approximately 1 hour. Following the first interview, a follow-up interview will be scheduled to conduct a member check. During the member check interview, I will revisit and confirm the initial information is correct and offer additional opportunity to expand. The member check interview should take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. No more than 5 interviews will be conducted.

Participating in this research study is beneficial in that the study will contribute novel insight to the existing literature with a focus on the perspectives of women CIOs and CTOs working in higher education institutions, will incorporate the importance of self-care as a component of work-life balance/integration, and will consider the influence of the global COVID-19 pandemic on women's pursuit toward work-life balance/integration. The only foreseeable risk of research participation is the possibility of a confidentiality breach. However, to prevent any chance of a confidentiality breach, all data will always be locked and securely maintained.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Your responses in this research are strictly confidential. You should know that your identity will remain confidential to the extent provided by law. All data you provide in response to this research will be accessible only to authorized individuals. Government or university staff sometimes review studies to make sure they are being done safe and legally. Data gathered from this research may be presented in scientific outlets, but your identity will remain entirely

confidential. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym. Thus, anyone who sees your responses will only know that they are looking at “someone’s” responses, not your responses in particular. Any information that you provide will be used solely for research purposes. In addition, the data will be stored on password protected computers and servers in locked rooms.

If you have questions that may aid in your decision to participate in this research or if you have any general questions or concerns, please contact Candice Veilleux-Mesa at [c.veilleuxmesa@unf.edu](mailto:c.veilleuxmesa@unf.edu) or Dr. Linda Skrla at [l.skrla@unf.edu](mailto:l.skrla@unf.edu). Additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at [irb@unf.edu](mailto:irb@unf.edu) or at (904) 620-2498.

Do you have any questions about the information provided?

Do you understand the information provided and do you willingly agree to participate?

## Appendix D: Interview Questions

### Work-Life Balance/Integration Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about your career path and how you came to be a CIO at your institution?
2. Tell me about your roles as a worker, family member, and your personal self-care.
3. How do you navigate these roles?
4. Can you tell me a time when you encountered challenges navigating your family and career with your personal self-care?
5. What are some coping mechanisms you utilize to manage life stressors?
6. Tell me about what you do to demonstrate self-care outside of work and family responsibilities.
7. How do you feel when you demonstrate self-care outside of work and family responsibilities?
8. Do you have a particularly effective self-care strategy you'd like to share with other women CIOs?
9. How does your role as a woman working in higher education influence your experiences in navigating these roles?
10. What does your work do to support your roles as worker, family member, and your personal self-care?
11. What would an ideal workspace which supports these roles look like to you?
12. Tell me how COVID-19 has influenced your roles as a worker, family member, and your personal self-care.
13. How did you feel about this influence?
14. What haven't I asked you that you feel is important to talk about in relation to what we've talked about so far?