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**The Influence of Ethnic and Gender Identity in Higher Education Leadership**

By

Jordan Romager

Accepted in Partial Completion  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science

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## Master's Thesis

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Jordan Romager

July 30, 2019

# **The Influence of Gender and Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education Leadership**

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science

by  
Jordan Romager  
July 2019

## **Abstract**

This study aimed to investigate the impact of ethnic and gender diversity on the practice of leadership in higher education. Fourteen higher education leaders participated in hour-long semi-structured interviews about their leadership practice/philosophy, leadership influences, leadership history/experience, and leadership recommendations. Leaders reported practicing ethical styles of leadership and emphasizing collaboration and relationship-building in their leadership. Leaders reported that their childhood environment highly impacted them, especially socioeconomic status and access to education. Leaders experienced challenges around managing financial crises and unreasonable expectations while in their positions. Leaders recommended that current and future leaders put a greater emphasis on improving diversity issues, remember the greater mission of higher education, and focus on holistic approaches/community. These findings underscore the importance of diverse perspectives in the study of higher education leadership to better serve the increasingly diverse student population.

*Keywords:* higher education, leadership, diversity

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## The Influence of Gender and Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education Leadership

Everything we know about evolution suggests it is not the strongest or most intellectual of a species that survives and thrives but rather the individuals who are most adaptable to changing environments and circumstances (Megginson, 1963). Over the last few decades, technology and interconnectedness have drastically altered the environment in which humans live, leading to rapid diversification and globalization (Chin & Trimble, 2015; Thompson, Forde, & Otieno, 2018). These rapid changes have strongly impacted higher education, which faces the challenge of preparing students to be successful in this globalized world. Leadership has played a pivotal role in human adaptability because leaders can bring groups of people together to achieve a common goal. Higher education leaders will play an important role as we move forward into a dynamic and ever-shifting future, and it will be necessary to adapt new styles and paradigms that can meet the unique challenges of this era.

The leadership literature has been largely silent on issues of leadership in higher education, and most of the research that exists is anecdotal (Bryman, 2007). Most leadership research focuses on leadership in the corporate context. Though leaders in the corporate world and academia have some disparate goals, the connection between these two spheres is increasing. Higher education has been facing budget crises, rising costs, and lowered enrollment in recent years. Universities are now trying to implement strategies and ways of leading that are similar to leadership in corporate settings. Moving forward, leaders in higher education will need to expertly balance the financial/business concerns of a university with the deeper purpose of higher education—to educate and prepare students to be competent citizens of the world. Given this overlap, leadership research that focuses on leadership in the corporate sector can provide valuable insights for higher education leadership.

The Western cultural ideal of a leader still reflects aspects of the Great Man theory that was once prevalent in organizational research. The Great Man theory prescribed ideal leaders as “chosen” men who lead large movements and are assertive and dominant in achieving their goals (Borgatta, Bales, & Couch, 1954; Carlyle, 1841). “Great men” often took a top-down, authoritarian approach to leadership. Eagly and Carli (2007) explain:

Men are associated with agentic qualities, which convey assertion and control. They include being especially aggressive, ambitious, dominant, self-confident, and forceful, as well as self-reliant and individualistic. The agentic traits are also associated in most people’s minds with effective leadership—perhaps because a long history of male domination of leadership roles has made it difficult to separate the leader associations from the male associations.

Despite the pervasive cultural belief that male, agentic qualities are inextricably associated with leadership, some of these qualities are not proving as effective in modern leadership contexts when compared with other styles (Eagly & Carli, 2004). Qualities such as aggressiveness and dominance are not well-received in modern Western leadership contexts. In response to the public’s desire for more ethical approaches to leadership following large corporate scandals, researchers have started identifying new styles of leadership that are more modest and compassionate (Burns, 1978; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Ethical leadership is “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005, p. 120). Ethical leadership styles consist of priorities such as building relationships with

followers, encouraging participation and community-building, and acting with personal integrity and authenticity.

Studies have shown that, when compared with more traditional styles of leadership, ethical leadership styles lead to employees' increased job satisfaction, effectiveness, and effort (Dumdum, Lowe, & Avolio, 2002; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Zineldin, 2017). However, though ethical styles of leadership predict better outcomes than traditional masculine styles of leadership, the conceptualization of many ethical leadership styles still has its foundations in a Westernized and somewhat ethnocentric bias (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Many leadership theories are based upon cultural norms of the majority in the United States, that place an emphasis on competitiveness, individualism, and consumerism (Eagly & Chin, 2010).

For example, one popular ethical leadership style is transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders inspire their followers by encouraging them to focus on the shared values and ideals of the organization (Chin & Trimble, 2015). Many successful transformational leaders are charismatic and visionary, using these characteristics to create buy-in from followers. However, not all cultures value charisma or define it in the same way white Europeans and white Americans do. Within the United States, leaders of color endorse traditional definitions of transformational leadership on a survey, but when researchers question them about their leadership preferences in an interview, they are more likely to advocate for communal styles of leadership (Chin, 2013). This discrepancy suggests a need for a deeper look into the types of leadership that culturally diverse leaders endorse and practice.

The priorities and lifeways of a significant portion of the world are ignored when researchers fail to incorporate the cultural values of anyone who does not belong to a majority group. Special issues about leadership in prominent journals often treat leadership as though

culture and gender do not have a large influence (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). When leadership scholars address culture and gender, they treat culture and gender as special issues rather than intricately intertwined in theories about perceptions and practice of leadership. Relegating gender and cultural issues to sidebars in leadership discourse serves to privilege the majority and further contributes to the power differentials that gender and ethnic minority leaders must overcome (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

Some researchers have developed culturally diverse leadership theories for the corporate world. In 1991, Robert House founded the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research program to investigate how different cultures might approach the understanding and practice of leadership. The GLOBE team assessed the cultural differences and leadership preferences of 17,000 middle managers in 62 different cultures (House, 2004). The GLOBE team found many similarities between cultures in terms of what aspects of leadership participants found effective and what they found ineffective. In general, participants found charismatic/value-based leadership (described as visionary, inspirational, self-sacrificing), team-oriented leadership (described as collaborative, diplomatic, administratively competent), participative leadership (described as not autocratic, participative behaviors), and humane leadership (described as modest, compassionate) to be effective. Participants found autonomous leadership (described as individualistic, independent, unique) and self-protective leadership (described as self-centered, status conscious) to be ineffective.

### **Leadership in a Multicultural World**

The GLOBE study was impressive and influential, but it had one important limitation. In the GLOBE study, the researchers analyzed each culture's data at the country level, therefore they did not examine diversity within each culture. Most countries' populations are ethnically

diverse. The United States population is a prime example of globalization in action. According to the United States Census Bureau (2014), by 2044, the United States population is predicted to exceed 600 million, and current ethnic minorities such as Latinos, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Pacific Islanders will comprise the majority of the population at just over 50% (Colby & Ortman). Furthermore, 43.7 million, or about 13.5%, of the people residing in the United States as of 2016 were foreign-born immigrants, a 400% increase since 1960 (Radford & Budiman, 2016). Studying leadership by comparing countries and ignoring within-culture variability is problematic because it only reflects the needs of the majority.

Current trends speak to the economic worth of diversity. A McKinsey and Company (2015) report analyzed the relationship between ethnic and gender diversity and business performance for 366 companies in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Latin America (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015). The results showed that companies in the top quartile for ethnic/racial diversity of executives were 35 percent more likely to have financial returns above their industry's average. The companies in the top quartile for gender diversity were 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their industry's average. Furthermore, researchers have found that long-term demographically heterogeneous groups perform better on generating alternative problem-solving strategies and have greater diversity in perspectives (Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993). These strategies lead to better group functioning and success in the long-term.

Unfortunately, there are also costs associated with managing diversity within an organization. Groups that are moderately demographically heterogeneous can experience serious communication issues, high levels of conflict, and fail to reach their performance potential in

comparison to highly demographically homogeneous groups or even highly demographically-heterogeneous groups (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). Moderately heterogeneous groups are especially disadvantaged when demographic subgroups share other homogeneous characteristics, such as personality and ability (Molleman & Slomp, 2005).

Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identification theory can help to explain some of the problems in heterogeneous groups. Tajfel and Turner state that people want to experience positive self-regard, and, in order to evaluate themselves, they compare themselves to those around them. As an initial step in this comparison process, individuals begin to mentally assign people around them to different groups based on certain categories. Some common categories, due to their observable nature, are things such as race/ethnicity or gender. However, social categories can be based on other things, such as political affiliation or socioeconomic status. People identify strongly with the group to which they belong and act in accordance with the observed norms and behaviors of that group. After strongly identifying with a group, a person will compare their own group (ingroup) against members of other groups (outgroups). In order to feel elevated self-esteem about one's group identification, people tend to emphasize the positive attributes of their own group and the negative attributes of the other group. In organizational contexts, people who identify strongly with their race or gender ingroup might have a hard time relating to other groups, and the perceived differences between groups will appear much greater than the actual differences (Molleman & Slomp, 2006).

Fortunately, those in positions of leadership can help mitigate some of these negative effects in culturally diverse groups. Leaders can impact the social behaviors of a group (Chemers, 2001; Yukl, 2010) and can influence how the other group members deal with cultural diversity (Van Knippenburg, van Ginkel, & Homan, 2013). Leaders can intentionally create a

group identity, or collective ingroup, based on inclusion (Haslam, 2004; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). Leaders accomplish this by creating a shared vision of ingroup identity and structuring the actions of the group to reflect the group identity (Haslam et al., 2011). Greer, Homan, De Hoogh, and Den Hartog (2012) found that such “visionary” leaders who help their group to create a sense of mutual purpose and meaning facilitated better performance and communication outcomes.

Simultaneously, leaders who are successful at creating collective organizational ingroups do not downplay or ignore salient differences between group members. Multicultural competence, or multiculturalism, is a process of actively valuing members of all groups and considering differences amongst group members to be a strength rather than a weakness of the group (Cox & Blake, 1991; Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). Leaders who are high in multicultural competence are called multicultural leaders. Multicultural leaders go out of their way to explicitly recognize differences among group members and frame those differences as strengths to the group. Notably, in order to avoid disengagement by non-minority group members, Stevens et al. (2008) note that multicultural leaders are all-inclusive, actively emphasizing the importance of non-minority group members as well as minority group members in the creation of a diverse and well-functioning organization.

### **Diversity in Higher Education**

American universities are rapidly diversifying, mirroring population diversification. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, ethnic minority students comprised only 21% of undergraduate enrollment in 1990, and by 2013 that number had risen to 42% (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). The rate of enrollment of minority students is expected to increase for Hispanic, Black, and Asian/Pacific Islander populations by 34%, 25%, and 11% respectively

from 2012 to 2023. By contrast, white student enrollment is only expected to increase by 7% in that same period (Hussar & Bailey, 2013).

The enrollment of female students is also increasing in proportion to male students. Female undergraduate enrollment surpassed male undergraduate enrollment in the early 1980s, and the gap is continuing to widen (Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 1996 and 2010, female enrollment in postsecondary institutions in the United States increased by 49% from 8 million to almost 12 million (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). By contrast, male enrollment increased by 42% from 6.4 million to 9 million. Projections indicate that between 2010 and 2021, female enrollment will increase by 18% while male enrollment will increase by just 10%, further widening the divide between male and female student enrollment.

Unfortunately, academia is struggling to accommodate these increased levels of diversity in the university framework (Barton, 2006). Despite the rise in enrollment rates, most ethnic minority groups are still far behind their majority counterparts in rate of graduation. According to a report by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 62% of white students and 63.2% of Asian students who enrolled in two-year or four-year institutions in 2010 had graduated within six years (Shapiro et al., 2017). Hispanic and black students, by contrast, saw graduation rates of 45.8% and 38% respectively. Campus climate may play a large part in these graduation rate discrepancies, as many diverse students do not often find their campus communities to be welcoming, and they are often met with indifference or even hostility (Chin & Trimble, 2015). Levels of campus unrest are rising as impassioned students protest institutional racism and sexism and a lack of sufficient action from university administrations in combatting injustice (Gigliotti, Dwyer, & Ruiz-Mesa, 2018). Gigliotti et al. explain that many universities

have responded to the need for safer climates for diverse students in a reactive rather than proactive way, choosing to act after crises have already occurred and left campuses reeling. Students perceive the subsequent efforts to appoint chief diversity officers or implement diversity initiatives in the wake of such crises as a hollow response rather than a true commitment to the well-being and safety of all students. For example, the University of Missouri has a history of complex race issues and diversity-related incidents (Gigliotti et al., 2018). Eventually, the university implemented several corrective actions, but not until after a public incident where the university president failed to acknowledge protestors at an annual parade.

Gigliotti et al. advocate for a broader, more intentional approach called strategic diversity leadership, which “considers the deeper structures of inequity and calls for collaboration to discover systemic solutions” (2018, pg. 213). One aspect of strategic diversity leadership is ensuring a commitment to diversity and multicultural competence is a priority for all areas of the university, not just the administrative hubs for diversity awareness such as a university’s multicultural affairs office or cultural center (Gigliotti et al., 2018; Sutton & McClusky-Titus, 2010). Academic administrators should provide diversity officers with the necessary resources to stay up to date on best practices for diversity and inclusion, and the rest of the university should actively engage with the practices these employees recommend (Jenkins, 2010; Sutton & McCluskey-Titus, 2010; Thompson, 2018). High level administrators, such as deans and department chairs, are critical to the successful implementation of diversity and inclusion efforts due to their influence over a large amount of staff policies and procedures (Gigliotti et al., 2018). Thompson et al. (2018) argue that highly visible leaders are in a unique position to enact culturally competent leadership because they can model a commitment to

cultural competency which will influence the intellectual and social development of students and push the whole campus forward towards inclusive excellence.

Hiring leaders and teachers who accurately reflect the diversity of the nation is another tangible way to demonstrate a commitment to diversity and to gain valuable insights to solve diversity problems (Gigliotti et al., 2018). Unfortunately, ethnic minorities and women are underrepresented in higher level positions in universities. The American Council of Education published an American College President study in 2017 which showed just 16.8% of college presidents are ethnic minorities, and only 30.1% of college presidents are women (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017). A 2015 report by the National Center for Education statistics shows a similar pattern for full professorships, stating only 17% of full professors are ethnic minorities and only 33% are female.

By failing to reflect college students' ethnic and gender distributions within the faculty and staff, educational institutions are missing out on valuable expertise. Leaders who belong to minority groups may be naturally inclined towards effective multicultural leadership because they uniquely understand the perspective of a minority member in their organization (Santamaría, 2014). Of ethnic minority leaders, Santamaría (2014) states:

Shared marginalized educational experiences might result in [leaders of color possessing] increased multicultural understandings, alternative perceptions, and practices of applied leadership. This may also result in possible increased likelihood for leadership practices promoting multiculturalism or social justice and equity. (p. 349)

Female leaders also tend to focus on social justice, diversity, and inclusion (Barton, 2006) as well as a willingness to be collaborative and listen to the opinions of their colleagues (Chin &

Trimble, 2015). Furthermore, female leaders tend to lead with more communal styles of leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Female leaders, when compared to male leaders, are highly participative and democratic – two qualities associated with good leadership—perhaps because they have been socialized to be inclusive and work well in groups (Diehl, 2014). Female leaders tend to be collaborative and humanistic, which leads to greater feelings of inclusion (Chin & Trimble, 2015).

Furthermore, leaders from minority groups who have achieved success despite structural inequalities and oppression can give great insight into how we can begin dismantling these harmful power structures (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Many minority leaders who have achieved great success in dismantling structural inequalities from the inside are largely ignored in the research literature (Tillman, 2004). However, a literature review by Ospina and Foldy (2009) demonstrates that ethnic minority leaders were more likely to be “bi-culturally fluent,” combining their knowledge of the values and preferences of their own group with that of the majority group. Ethnic minority leaders are also able to effectively use their experiences of oppression and marginalization to create constructive social change (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

### **Current Study**

Despite the many potential benefits diverse leaders bring to their organizations, there are very few studies that examine the way diverse leaders practice leadership as it relates to their cultural background. The aim of the current study is to examine the cultural influences and backgrounds of a sample of ethnic and gender minority leaders in higher education in the United States and the way those influences affect their leadership practice. The current study is part of a larger study which will examine these questions for leaders in various industries across the world. Specifically, in this study we seek to understand how

higher education leaders' gender and cultural backgrounds have shaped their leadership style, including barriers to their leadership due to possessing marginalized status. The current study has four main areas of inquiry:

1. **Leadership Practice/Philosophy.** What type/style of leadership are diverse leaders practicing? How do they define their own leadership, and what characteristics do they value?
2. **Leadership Influences.** What lived experiences and identities have had an impact on how these leaders practice leadership?
3. **Leadership History/Experience.** What challenges have diverse leaders faced? How do these leaders perceive the role of their gender and ethnicity in shaping their leadership experiences and style?
4. **Leadership Recommendations.** What recommendations do these leaders have for current and future leaders in higher education?

## Method

### Participants

The researcher interviewed fourteen leaders for this study. Leaders needed to be at the Dean/Director level or above in a university or organization focused on higher education. Leaders also needed to be female and/or belong to an ethnic minority group in the United States. The sample did not include ethnic majority male leaders. The sample consisted of seven (50%) female leaders and seven (50%) male leaders. Ten (72%) of the leaders were employed at a university in the Pacific Northwestern region of the United States, two (14%) were employed in the Eastern region of the United States, one (7%) was employed in the Southern region of the United States, and one (7%) was employed in the Midwestern region of the United States. The sample included three (21.4%) Hispanic/Latino leaders, two (14.3%) Asian leaders, five (35.7%) African American leaders, and four (28.6%) Caucasian leaders. Two leaders (14.3%) reported being in their 40's, six leaders (42.9%) reported being in their 50's, and five leaders (35.7%) reported being in their 60's. Twelve leaders (85.7%) were born in the United States and two leaders (14.3%) were born outside of the United States. Of the twelve leaders born in the United States, three (25%) had at least one parent who was born outside of the United States. Five leaders (35.7%) spoke a language other than English, either as a first or second language, in their home growing up. The researcher contacted prospective participants based upon their reputation as well-respected and successful leaders. In total, the researcher contacted fifteen leaders, and one did not respond to the request.

## Procedure

The same researcher conducted all the interviews for the project. The researcher provided the participants with the interview questions at least two days in advance of their interview and informed them that they were able to prepare responses, but this was not a requirement. The researcher informed each participant in advance that the interviews would be audio-recorded. Depending on location, the researcher interviewed some leaders in person and others via Skype. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher read an informed consent script aloud and asked participants to give verbal consent to participate in the study and allow their interview to be audio-recorded. The interviews took approximately 40-60 minutes to complete. After the participant answered the final question, the researcher stopped the recording, debriefed the participant, and allowed time for questions about the study.

## Materials

**Semi-structured interview.** The semi-structured interview consists of 24 questions (See Appendix A). The International Leadership Network designed each question to probe one of the four areas of inquiry for the study. The *leadership practice/philosophy* dimension consists of eight questions, such as, “How would you describe your leadership style?” and “Do you have a vision for your organization?” The *leadership influences* dimension consists of eight questions, such as, “How did you first enter a position of leadership?” and “Can you describe any ways in which your race, gender, or ethnicity has influenced your access to or exercise of leadership?” The *leadership history/experience* dimension consists of seven questions, including, “What challenges have you faced as a leader?” and “Has your leadership ever been challenged because of your gender/ethnicity/race such as your credibility and competence?” The *leadership recommendations* dimension consists of one question, “Do you have any thoughts about what

higher education needs in the moment to improve current leadership as well as train future leaders?”

### **Data Management and Analyses**

The researcher chose to use grounded theory as a means of qualitative data analysis. The researcher chose this method because testing an existing theory of leadership in a diverse population can marginalize diverse viewpoints in favor of more privileged, well-established ones (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The researcher transcribed all fourteen interviews verbatim in separate files. The research team conducted data analysis in four stages. In the first stage, the researcher created a separate file for each question wherein she compiled all fourteen participants' responses to that question. In total, the researcher compiled 25 separate documents, comprising the 24 questions from the survey plus a document for additional comments made by participants. In the second stage, the researcher carefully read the responses to each question and identified thematic patterns in the responses. During this stage, the researcher read through each participant's response individually and recorded themes from the response into a chart, along with notable quotations that represented that theme. Each theme became a code that the researcher looked out for in the other participants' responses. The researcher recorded all codes in a chart, which listed the frequency of response within that code for the group overall as well as all notable quotations that best illustrated the code. In the third stage, the researcher trained two undergraduate research assistants to go through the 24 separate documents of codes and note how the codes could be organized into larger themes within each question. Finally, the researcher and research assistants met and discussed the overarching themes that they observed. The results section reports the most frequently mentioned themes from each question as well as any overarching themes that the researcher and both research assistants agreed upon.

## Results

The results are separated into four sections based on the four areas of inquiry for the study. Within each of the four areas of inquiry, the questions that correspond to that area are analyzed independently. Each area of inquiry concludes with a summary of the findings and common themes which emerged from the questions in that area.

### *Leadership Practice/Philosophy*

**“How would you describe your leadership style?”** The researcher asked participants to self-report their leadership style without providing any leadership styles for them to choose from. Many leaders reported leadership styles that are commonplace in the leadership literature. However, the researchers did not ask leaders to explain their definition of each leadership style, so their self-reported style may not exactly match the definitions found in the literature. The research team noticed two main categories of leadership style orientation, which they named *orientation toward other people/the world* and *orientation towards the work*. Examples of orientation toward other people/the world were a collaborative/team-oriented leadership style and a social justice-focused leadership style. Examples of orientation toward the work were function/process-oriented leadership style and performance-oriented leadership style. Overall, leaders reported collaborative/team-oriented leadership, servant leadership, non-hierarchical leadership, and behind-the-scenes leadership the most frequently.

Five leaders endorsed collaborative/team-oriented leadership, four participants endorsed servant leadership, and four participants endorsed behind-the-scenes leadership.

Collaborative/team-oriented leadership is leadership focused on collaboration and consensus-building (Chin & Trimble, 2013). In the literature, leadership scholars define servant leadership

as leadership wherein the leader holds their position with the primary objective of serving others and not gaining power or prestige for themselves (Greenleaf, 1970). One Hispanic male leader explained what servant leadership means to him:

When I think about what it means to be a leader... was really trying to do something not because I was trying to do it for my own personal career goals or satisfaction but rather because I felt like I need to serve others... that this was an opportunity for me to give back, especially from the community that I came from, and so I keep that same ethic of servant leadership or servant into the leadership roles that I play.

Four leaders talked about being behind-the-scenes in their approach to leadership. One Hispanic male leader explained that he would describe himself as “leading from the middle or even sometimes leading from behind.”

Many leaders were especially concerned with issues of social justice and relationship-building in their self-reported leadership styles. One Hispanic male leader stated:

I have a really strong commitment to questions of equity, diversity, inclusion, and working to not just say, “How do we continue to keep doing the same things we’ve been doing?” but “How do we change and grow as an organization in a way that moves towards a greater sense of equity and justice from a social justice lens?”

Overall, leaders reported taking a very collaborative and team-oriented approach to leadership with an emphasis on the needs of the group.

**“The following are some common characteristics of leaders. Check those which you think characterize how you lead. Please describe how you incorporate those characteristics into how you lead.”** Researchers asked leaders to select leadership characteristics they used in

their leadership from a list provided by the researcher. The researcher did not impose a limit to the number they could select. The median number of characteristics selected was eight out of 18. Table 1 shows the list of characteristics and frequency with which participants selected each characteristic. The researcher asked the participants to describe how they incorporate the qualities they selected into their leadership. The research team grouped the responses into two overarching themes, which they named *orientation toward interpersonal relationships* and *orientation toward the work*. Being inspirational, collaborative/team-oriented, and humane-oriented are examples of orientation toward interpersonal relationships. Being administratively competent and being decisive are examples of orientation toward the work.

Overall, leaders most frequently endorsed the categories of having integrity, being humane-oriented, being collaborative/team-oriented, and being authentic. Thirteen leaders reported identifying with the characteristic of integrity. Thirteen leaders reported identifying with the characteristic of being humane-oriented. Leaders expressed many notions of social justice when talking about being humane-oriented. A Caucasian female leader stated the following:

I'm very humane-oriented. The initiatives that we've adopted are intended to bridge the gap between the ivory tower's willful disconnect from practical matters of everyday life and the real-life concerns of individuals outside of the academy. Looking at truth, racial healing, and transformation; speaking across religious differences; looking at those who have been marginalized in academia and how we can create an asset model and jettison a belief in a deficit perspective on students and what they bring to the classroom, especially students who are first generation, women, students of color.

Thirteen leaders identified with the characteristic of being collaborative/team oriented. One Hispanic male leader talked about how approximately 98% of the decisions that he made in his

position were arrived at in consultation with others. Ten leaders identified with the characteristic of being authentic. A Caucasian female leader had the following perspective on authenticity:

I know Social Construction of the Self. I know that we're different selves in different situations and yet there must be an authentic core to who you are, otherwise, you're faking it. And so being real and being who I am is a really important part of who I am as a leader.

Notably, characteristics associated with being independent or self-serving were the least endorsed by leaders. One leader endorsed focusing on their goals and needs, and one leader endorsed being autonomous/acting independently. No leader endorsed the category of being commanding and in charge.

**Do you have a vision for your organization?** The researcher asked leaders to describe their vision for their organization. Many of the leaders in the sample work in different areas of higher education and therefore their visions are somewhat specific to their areas of specialization. The research team grouped responses into two overarching themes—*orientation towards the world/society* and *orientation towards the work/expertise*. The top three categories for leaders' visions were: Service to a greater organization/cause, recruitment and retention of diverse students/staff/faculty members, and creating buy-in/encouraging constituents to participate and use services.

Four leaders spoke of a vision that involved service to a greater organization/cause. One Asian male leader talked about wanting his university to be “grounded locally” but to “think globally.” He expressed wanting to help students learn about other cultures and values so they can function well in a global society. An African American male leader talked about wanting to

make a political impact that would change the lives of residents of his state, especially in underserved ethnic minority populations.

Four leaders talked about wanting to recruit and retain more diverse students/staff/faculty members. One African American female leader talked about how her goal was to have “diversity in people, perspectives, and processes” because she believes that “we need to grow a bigger circle of inclusion so that we can make a difference in the world.” Another African American female leader talked about her passion for retaining undergraduate students of diverse backgrounds who struggle to keep up with their Caucasian peers. One Hispanic male leader spoke about the need to hire and retain diverse faculty members in order to effectively instruct diverse students because he sees a growing disproportion between teachers of color and students of color.

Four leaders talked about having a vision that involves cultivating buy-in for the organization and encouraging constituents of the organization to participate and use the available services. One Caucasian female leader talked about her desire to create opportunities for constituents to be engaged in the work of the university and feel pride in what the university does.

Overall, the leaders’ visions seemed to be infused with ideas about social justice, community building, and focusing on the greater purpose of higher education.

**How do you view your relationship with members in your organization? What do you do to create/sustain these relationships?** The researcher asked leaders about their philosophy on relationships with their subordinates as well as what they do to create and sustain those relationships. Seven of the leaders mentioned that they value a team framework with their

subordinates and do not value hierarchy. Many of the leaders specifically talked about power dynamics and how they handle them. One African American male leader talked about being warm, friendly, caring, and nurturing with staff while minimizing power differentials and hierarchies. He acknowledged that power differentials are a reality but that he doesn't want people to feel subordinate to him. An African American female talked about how "whether you feel powerful or not, people will project power onto you." She went on to explain that it is the leaders' responsibility to "make people feel okay" in light of those power differentials. One Hispanic male leader talked about how he feels obligated to treat people differently based upon their hierarchy in the organization. He discussed having a friendly relationship with his direct reports, a mutually respectful and professional level with his same-level colleagues, and a supportive/mentoring relationship with lower level members of the organization.

Several leaders talked about their focus on building relationships with their subordinates that extend beyond the workplace. Four leaders talked about holding space for frequent communication in order to foster openness and trust within the organization. One African American female leader talked about reaching out to people to connect, soliciting their feedback, and having coffee to talk about things. Three leaders talked about specifically going out of their way to meet subordinates in their own space in order to inspire communication. One African American female leader talked about going out into the organization and sitting down to talk with people every single day in order to remain approachable.

Two leaders emphasized that addressing problems as they arise is an important part of maintaining strong relationships with their subordinates. One African American male leader talked about reassuring staff members that any disagreement between them does not take the place of the relationship that they have built.

Overall, the leaders repeatedly mentioned being heavily focused on building strong and mutually respectful relationships with their subordinates in order to function well as a team. Most leaders recognized power differentials but also talked about making intentional efforts to minimize them. The leaders presented a strong understanding of different social identities such as socioeconomic status, race, and gender, and how those factors influence people's interactions in the workplace. Most leaders seemed to understand that it was their responsibility to acknowledge these differences and make everyone as comfortable as possible.

**What do each of the following terms mean to you with regard to leadership?** The researcher asked leaders how they felt about twelve different terms which they might perceive differently based upon the participant's cultural values.

*Being humble.* Thirteen leaders thought being humble was an important part of leadership. Two of the thirteen leaders clarified that while being humble is important, being assertive and getting things done is also important.

*Being assertive.* Nine leaders thought that being assertive was important. Two participants thought it was not important, and two participants thought it was useful in certain contexts but not in others.

*Being indirect or direct.* Eight leaders believed that being direct is preferable to being indirect. Two leaders believed that being indirect is preferable to being direct. Two leaders believed that a strong balance between the two is important. Two leaders mentioned that they are typically indirect, but they believe that directness is important in leadership. Two leaders mentioned that being direct is part of their cultural background.

*Being conscious of your own and others' social position.* One leader mentioned that being conscious of their own and others' social position is important. Two leaders mentioned that they are conscious of this so that they can eliminate gaps in these positions. Two leaders indicated that they are very conscious of their own social position and that of others because of their cultural/family background. Two leaders stated that they are conscious of their own and others' social position so that they can give a voice to marginalized group members. Two leaders mentioned being conscious of their own and others' social position so that they can understand the weight of their words to different people and in different spaces. One African American male leader stated the following:

I think that leaders should be conscious of and sensitive to people's social positions, the differences in the social positions and all that that entails. I think that leaders have to be sensitive to, I think about it like SES differences, for example, sort of being sensitive to that and making sure that you have policies in place or you are responsive to how the differences in social positions, whether it's SES or whatever, that you are responsive to that in ways that people know that you sort of recognize that there are differences in social position, that you don't sort of blindly see people as being the same. And I don't mean that in an inequitable sense, but just that people have different social statuses.

*Being self-protective against challenges to your leadership.* Four leaders believe that challenges to leadership are normal, so they are not threatened by them. Three leaders mentioned having an impulse to be self-protective and defensive but that they try to manage those impulses. An African American male leader had a different response to challenges to his leadership, mentioning that they cause him to question himself. He explained that he had to learn not to be defensive and to remind himself that he was put in his position for a reason. He stated that, in

these situations, he reminds himself that he may not be a perfect leader, but he is a good leader and a caring leader. One leader mentioned that they see themselves as filling a servant role in their leadership, therefore they do not need to be self-protective because they would be happy to step down if it is in the organization's best interest.

*Being competitive versus cooperative in exercising your leadership.* Nine leaders stated that being cooperative is best. Four leaders mentioned that cooperation is better but that they believe there is a place for competitiveness when there is a challenge to complete or a need to get limited resources. However, each of these leaders explained that they are being competitive as part of their team and not with their own team members. One African American female leader explains how she sees the distinction:

If I find myself being competitive, it doesn't feel all that good. Now, I'll tell you, if I have a team though, if it's my team and we're competing against somebody else's team, we're going to go hard to win, that's a fact. But then I still will congratulate them and want them to know that it's all in fun even though I plan to just really kick your butt. So, I do have that one, but not as an individual, more as a team. So, I want us to step up and do it, but I want us to be cooperative when we're doing it.

Two leaders mentioned that they are naturally competitive but that they do not find that characteristic particularly helpful in their leadership roles. Two leaders explained that they were more competitive when they were younger, and they believe that cooperation comes naturally with age and maturity.

*Importance of interpersonal favors and relationships in your leadership.* Eleven leaders stated that relationships are an essential part of leadership but that favors are inappropriate. Two

leaders believe that both relationships and favors are important. One Caucasian female leader explained that she sees having a supportive conversation with a colleague who is facing sexism, for example, as a type of favor. She is happy to sacrifice her time to support someone in this capacity, and in return she believes that that colleague will be there for her if she needs support in the future.

*Not losing face; giving and having face.* Four leaders discussed that they believe it is important to be transparent about mistakes and be willing to lose face. Three leaders explained that they are much more concerned with giving face than they are with having or losing face. Two leaders stated that the idea of giving or having face is not part of their cultural tradition. Three leaders mention that both giving and having face is important, and one of the three specified that they work very hard at maintaining face for self and others. One leader specified that it is especially important for the high-level leadership of a university not to lose face, for the sake of the university.

*Benevolence.* All fourteen leaders mentioned that benevolence is very important in leadership. Two of these leaders further explained that a critical piece of benevolence comes from demonstrating true care to employees and acknowledging that they have lives outside of their work. One leader mentioned being motivated to demonstrate benevolence because of times in the past when they were not shown benevolence..

*Being egalitarian with members of your organization.* Four leaders mentioned that they find being egalitarian with members to be challenging because of the realities of power differentials and differing access to information and experiences, but they believe that all people should be included and treated with respect. A Hispanic male leader explains that being egalitarian is challenging because people have different positions of power and access to

different types of decision-making or information. He explained that he doesn't believe everybody should be equal in those situations, but he does believe that everybody should have a part in the process and a right to be involved in some decision-making. Three leaders think being egalitarian with members is extremely important. Two leaders believe that it is somewhat important, but it needs to be in balance with other priorities. One leader believes more in giving people what they need rather than giving everyone the same things.

*Forgoing your self-interest for the members of the organization.* Five leaders believe forgoing self-interest for the organization is common in their line of work and necessary at times. Three leaders believe they do this sometimes but not all the time. One leader believes that they forgo their own self-interest too frequently. One leader stated that they used to be more selfish but that they have learned to develop more compassion and forgo their own self-interest as they have gotten older.

*Being oriented to individual needs versus group needs.* Six leaders believe that there needs to be a combination of both. Four other leaders also stated that there needs to be a combination of both but that ultimately group needs take precedent over individual needs. Three leaders reported that group needs are more important.

**Leadership Practice/Philosophy Summary.** Overall, the leaders seem to hold a balance of values/styles that are privileged in Western masculine leadership contexts and values/styles that represent more modest and compassionate leadership styles. The researchers grouped many of the responses into two similar categories: *orientation towards other people/the world* and *orientation towards the work*. Most of the elements of orientation towards other people/the world represent aspects of ethical leadership styles that are found in the literature. In contrast, most of the elements of orientation towards the work represent aspects of traditional masculine

leadership styles. For example, participants verbalized a strong commitment to developing relationships with the other members of their organization, which reflects ethical styles of leadership. Leaders also talked about being task-oriented, assertive, and direct, all of which reflect elements of more masculine, agentic leadership styles. The leaders express both orientations, but, ultimately, they express more orientation towards other people/the world. They value doing good work, but their ultimate aim is to complete this work by building relationships with people and making a difference in the world.

### *Leadership Influences*

**How did you first enter a position of leadership?** Researchers asked leaders how they first entered a position of leadership, and the researchers identified two overarching themes in the responses. Leaders entered positions of leadership by people asking them to step into those roles or by intentionally seeking out leadership opportunities. Six leaders reported that superiors asked them to step into leadership positions, and they did not seek them out intentionally. One African American female leader explained that she believes this is common for people of her gender and ethnicity, stating that, “I think I’m like many women of color who fall into leadership as opposed to assert leadership.”

The paths that the leaders took to leadership differed as well. Six leaders reported that they first entered a position of leadership while they were a faculty member at a university. Four leaders reported that they entered a position of leadership before their career, such as in high school or while completing an undergraduate degree. Four leaders reported that they entered a position of leadership through a non-faculty professional role.

**How important is your ethnicity part of your identity (on a scale from 1-7, with 1 being low)?** Researchers asked participants to indicate how important their ethnicity part of their identity was to them. Six leaders rated their ethnicity as a 7. One African American male leader explained that his ethnicity is important to every aspect of himself, including both the way he sees himself and his professional and personal goals. He explained his passion for contributing to the well-being of the African American community and black communities around the world.

Four leaders rated their ethnicity as a 6. One Caucasian female leader explained that she selected a six because she is aware of the privilege that she holds as a White American. She talked about how, because of that awareness, she has done a lot of work to expose herself to different ways of leading and different cultural influences. She has a desire to address stereotypes or assumptions she has developed as a member of the majority race in the United States.

Three leaders rated their ethnicity as a 5. One Caucasian female leader echoed the previous leader's understanding of her own privilege, explaining that her whiteness gives her a voice in arenas where she otherwise wouldn't have one and that she is working to counteract the legacies of white supremacy in higher education.

The average rating for the importance of ethnicity to participants overall was 6.0. The average rating for ethnic minority members was 6.3, while the average rating for ethnic majority members was 5.25.

**How important is your gender part of your identity (on a scale from 1-7, with 1 being low)?** Researchers asked participants to indicate how important their gender part of their identity was to them. Six leaders rated their gender as a 7. One Caucasian female leader

explained that she selected a 7 because “there’s been such low progress for women in the academy.” She talked about how the rate of female college presidents has not improved much since 1985 when she started her career, and she thinks it’s vital for women to have a voice in higher education and to “exercise the authentic leadership and collaborative leadership that is often linked to women’s leadership.”

Two leaders rated their gender as a 6, two leaders rated their gender as a 5, three leaders rated their gender as a 3, and one leader rated their gender as a 2. The average rating overall was 5.57. The average rating for a female leader was 6.42, while the average rating for a male leader was 4.7.

**Are there things you do that reflect how your ethnic or gender identity is important to you?** Researchers asked participants to describe things they do that reflect the importance of their ethnic or gender identity, such as community participation, food, customs, family, or interests. Seven leaders mentioned that they engaged in community participation that reflects their ethnic or gender identity. One African American female leader explained that she always participates in community-oriented projects that affect African Americans and people of color wherever she lives.

Six leaders mentioned making food that reflects their ethnic or gender identity. Five leaders mentioned doing things with their family that reflects their ethnic or gender identity. One Caucasian female leader explained that she was in the “first vanguard of working moms” going to work in the 1970’s. She talked about how her sisters who are 9-13 years older than her “wouldn’t have dreamed of working when they had babies.” She explained that being a working mother caused a stigma in her family which influenced her.

Two leaders mentioned that their research and work focus is reflective of their ethnic or gender identity. Only two leaders mentioned having traditions or customs related to their ethnic or gender identity. One leader mentioned being bilingual and speaking both languages is a way to reflect his identity.

Overall, the leaders reported being very involved in their community, making food that is reflective of their identity, and having family dynamics that are reflective of their identity.

**Can you describe any ways in which your race, gender, or ethnicity has influenced your access to and exercise of leadership?** The researcher asked participants to describe any ways in which their race, gender, or ethnicity had influenced their access to or exercise of leadership. Three leaders mentioned that being an ethnic minority negatively impacted their access to leadership. These leaders described people discriminating against them in the beginning of their careers and explained that these experiences motivated them to treat people better than they were treated. Two ethnic minority leaders talked about how being an ethnic minority with white physical features positively impacted their leadership opportunities. One Hispanic male leader explained that his status as “white-passing” helps him to be seen as “complete” as a leader because he gets the privilege of being seen as part of the ethnic majority while also having unique life experiences and perspective as an ethnic minority member.

Two ethnic minority leaders discussed the ways in which being an ethnic minority positively impacted their access to leadership. A Latino leader explained that he believes people saw him as having all of the necessary qualifications to lead and then considered his ethnic minority identity as a bonus to his leadership.

Two leaders discussed how being an ethnic majority positively impacted their leadership, explaining that over time they have learned to notice the ways in which their whiteness brings them privilege that translates to leadership opportunities.

Overall, male leaders seemed to believe their gender positively impacted their access to leadership, while women leaders felt that their gender negatively impacted their access to leadership. One leader mentioned that being male positively impacted his access to leadership. Three leaders mentioned that being female negatively impacted their access to leadership. One Caucasian female leader gave an example of the barriers to female leadership when she told the story of not being able to enter a private business club without a male escort in the 1980's because women were not allowed.

Three leaders talked about how their ethnic identity influenced their practice of leadership by fostering a commitment to humane leadership and diversity concerns. One leader mentioned that servant leadership style is "Very Latino-focused. It comes from strong values I see in the Latino community." One African American female leader talked about how being part of a historically marginalized community inspires her to treat people in a very humane way.

Two leaders talked about how the intersection of their gender and ethnicity has impacted their leadership. One African American female leader talked about how she uses herself "as an instrument in the room" to create an environment where people feel comfortable and respected because of her experience as a member of a marginalized group. Another African American female leader talked about how she feels a sense of responsibility to step up and use her voice because she wants to use her position to bring about change. She discussed how she uses personal details from her own life to "open doors, inspire, dispel myths, and assert positiveness in those areas." Another African American female leader talked about how her leadership is

sometimes dismissed by white people who do not adopt a social justice orientation because they assume she is “incompetent and incapable of leading unless [I] adopt what people traditionally call a Western male way of being.”

Two leaders talked about how being female impacted their exercise of leadership. One Caucasian female leader explains that her gender identity has caused her to learn how to “code switch,” or change the way that she speaks depending on who she is around. She stated that this code-switching skill makes her aware of how other people have to code switch because of various identities that they hold, such as race or ability/disability. This realization causes her to listen more and attempt to recognize her own power in a situation so that she can “empower them and disempower [herself] if [she] wants them to feel recognized and heard and supported.” Another Caucasian female leader talked about the emphasis on appearance that female leaders face in comparison with men. She explained that evaluations will comment on anything from a woman’s nails to her posture to how high-pitched her voice is and that men rarely have to think about these issues.

Overall, participants had very mixed views of how their gender and ethnicity had impacted their access to and exercise of leadership. Many of the ethnic minority leaders felt as though they had experienced discrimination at some point during their careers, but several felt that their identities were also positive in helping them to access leadership. Most of the ethnic majority leaders acknowledged the privilege of their ethnic identity and explained their efforts to minimize power differentials caused by their ethnicity. Many of the women felt as though their access to leadership was negatively impacted by their gender, but they believe their exercise of leadership was improved by being able to understand what it is like to be a member of a marginalized group. The ethnic minority female leaders talked a lot about their ability to use

their gender and ethnicity to make other people feel comfortable and challenge assumptions that people have.

**What do you feel you bring from your life experience to your role as a leader?**

Researchers asked participants what they bring from their life experience to their role as a leader, such as social class, oppression, privilege, or challenging life events. Six leaders mentioned growing up in poverty or a low social class. These leaders talked about how their family was very poor when they were growing up and therefore going to college was a very big privilege. Four leaders remarked on how extraordinary it feels to hold a privileged place in society as an academic or high-ranking employee of a higher education institution after coming from these humble beginnings. One leader mentioned that growing up without privilege inspired her to work hard to achieve better for herself and the people around her. Another leader mentioned that she goes back to her hometown to encourage other people who are growing up in circumstances like the one she grew up.

Four leaders mentioned that their parents lacked access to education which had an influence on their choice to pursue careers in higher education. One Caucasian female leader mentioned that her father quit school in fifth grade and her mother after eighth grade due to poverty. She explained that her parents valued education very highly and invested a great deal into her education, which subsequently inspired her to invest in her students. Another Caucasian female leader talked about how her parents never graduated from high school and they emphasized education to her, as well as the idea of giving back to your community. Finally, an African American female leader talked about her father immigrating to the United States from Jamaica and the West Indies with big aspirations for his family. This leader stated, “Every

degree that I got was always in honor of my father because being an American and being in that social class, I was able to achieve things he always wanted, and his family always wanted.”

Three leaders mentioned parents who immigrated to the United States and faced challenges as minority members of their country. One Hispanic male leader talked about the struggles that his father went through and how he had a vicarious experience of struggle through him. Another leader talked about how his father grew up in India and migrated to the United States which caused him to face struggles as a minority member in a new country.

Three leaders talked about having to take on responsibility within the family and help their parents while they were growing up. One Caucasian female leader talked about growing up with a chronically ill mother and having to remain in her hometown and go to community college in order to take care of her mother. She stated that going to community college on CETA funds, Pell Grants, and Perkins loans had a profound impact on her. She went on to attend an Ivy league school, and she believes that this varied experience at different types of institutions of higher education greatly influenced her leadership path. Another Caucasian female leader grew up with a military father who taught her that “officers eat last,” which meant that she always ate last and learned to help others first as the oldest child in the family. She talked about how she dislikes the term “servant leadership” but she believes her leadership comes from a sense of responsibility to care for others. Finally, an African American female leader talked about her father being part of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior’s sanitation strike and how she needed to make money while she was away at college to send home to her family.

Two leaders discussed their experience having a significant part of their education take place outside of the United States. One African American female leader talked about how she went to school for 7 years in Jamaica/the West Indies at a British school. She stated that this

experience helps her to relate to students who come from other places so that she can help them get acclimated. An Asian male leader talked about how he went to school in a British-run school in Pakistan. He discussed that he would not trade his education outside of the United States because he believes it brought a “level of richness,” and that it “enlarges the way one thinks about things, or at least one thinks about it from different perspectives.”

Two leaders discussed having siblings who faced discrimination. One Caucasian female leader had an intellectually disabled sister whom people ridiculed, and people also ridiculed her for being related to her sister. She explains how it helped her by stating, “That marginalizing experience, I carry very viscerally with me, and I use it to empathize with my students who express their inabilities to feel connected and included and integrated.” Another Caucasian female leader talked about how her parents adopted interracially and adopted children with disabilities, so she grew up “sort of aware of the socially constructed nature of disability, the impact of racism on people’s daily lives.” She explained that that knowledge always comes into the room with her when thinking about leadership.

Two leaders talked about experiencing racial discrimination and oppression in their lives. One Hispanic male leader talked about how these experiences made it especially important to him to address questions of equity and diversity in his teaching. An Asian male leader talked about how he strives to be open, honest, and fair because he did not always have that happen to him as a member of a minority group.

Overall, the leaders reported having a lot of experiences related to growing up in a lower social class and facing discrimination of various kinds. Leaders reported developing passion for higher education because of watching family members being denied those opportunities. Many

leaders felt that their experiences allowed them to connect more deeply with students and inspired them to help empower the historically marginalized.

**Is there one thing or person that influenced your leadership?** Researchers asked leaders if there was a person or thing that influenced their leadership through mentoring or role modeling. The responses varied, as leaders talked about learning from colleagues, superiors, parents, teachers, famous figures, and spouses. Six leaders mentioned that they learned from many different types of role models and could not select just one or two. The leaders referenced learning from colleagues, parents, and superiors most frequently.

Four leaders talked about learning from their colleagues. One African American female leader talked about observing a colleague as a leader and learning from him despite their differences. She stated that he taught her “the importance of listening to the voice of others, of incorporating everybody’s voices... of being gentle in the room... the importance of having difficult dialogues.” She explained that even though they were not similar in terms of gender and race, he did an excellent job of modeling good leadership.

Three leaders talked about learning from their parents. One Hispanic male leader talked about his father being the principal of a bilingual school and learning a lot from him. An African American female leader talked about the lessons her parents taught her, namely, “always be true to your principles, being committed to social justice, and the well-being of other folks, and having an ethical compass.” Another African American leader talked about her father immigrating from Jamaica and the West Indies and highly valuing education and the ability to elevate oneself through working hard and taking opportunities.

Three leaders talked about learning from their superiors—some positively and some negatively. One Hispanic male leader talked about learning from people who did not do a good job and allowed situations to “blow up” when they did not need to. A Caucasian female leader talked about learning what not to do from a supervisor who treated her subordinates poorly and changed her leadership based upon her emotions. A Hispanic male leader talked about always looking to the person above him and watching how they did their work so he could learn from them.

Overall, the leaders reported being impacted by many different types of people. Notably, leaders reported learning from their same-level colleagues most often. Many leaders also talked about learning from their family members.

#### **Has your leadership ever been challenged because of your gender/ethnicity/race?**

Researchers asked leaders if anyone challenged their leadership because of their gender, ethnicity, or race, such as questioning of their credibility or competence. Five leaders stated that they did not believe anyone questioned their leadership because of their gender, ethnicity, or race. Four leaders who responded that nobody questioned their leadership were ethnic minority men, and one was a Caucasian woman.

Several leaders experienced questioning related to their gender, ethnicity, or race while in leadership positions. Someone accused one Latino male leader of being too focused on diversity and possessing a bias toward his own ethnic group. He explained that this criticism often came through in evaluations of his work that his peers and subordinates completed. Two leaders mentioned being challenged due to being female. One Caucasian female leader explained that in every class she teaches, she always has a male student who will try to undermine her. An African American leader talked about how male colleagues try to “push her around” and treat her in ways

that they would not treat a man. One African American leader explained that people did not give her proper credit for her work because of her race/ethnicity but that the reasoning was never explicit. Two leaders indicated that people questioned their credibility because of their minority ethnicity. Two Caucasian female leaders mentioned that people questioned their ability to adequately serve the population they worked with because they were not ethnic minorities themselves.

Many leaders explained facing challenges in their leadership that were related to their race, gender, or ethnicity. One African American female leader talked about how people intentionally excluded her from assignments because of her gender and ethnicity. She told a story about how a department chair would always include the senior white male in her department in emails because he did not trust that she could get work done for herself, even though she was the chair of the program. In another situation, a committee was looking for chairs and they asked every senior person in the department except her to participate. An Asian male leader felt as though he had to work harder than his counterparts to prove himself because of his ethnicity. The same leader also talked about how he struggled to balance the cultural values of his upbringing against the dominant cultural values in his working environment. He gave an example of a time when someone supervised him as a student and then he went on to supervise that person in a job position he took after graduating. Supervising someone who used to be his teacher was very difficult for him because he was raised in a culture where teachers are highly respected.

Overall, the leaders reported many types of challenges due to their ethnicity and gender. Many of the participants felt confident that people challenged them because of their ethnicity and gender, while others felt that the challenges were more subtle and indirect.

**Have you ever experienced perceptions or expectations about your leadership related to your race, ethnicity, or gender? How did they see you or expect you to behave?**

Leaders gave extremely varied responses to this question. Only one leader stated that they did not believe people had any perceptions or expectations about their leadership related to their gender or ethnicity. Three leaders explained that their subordinates and colleagues expected them to adopt a white male leadership style. One Latino male leader described how his subordinates and colleagues expected him to be very commanding and directive, but he preferred to give people the benefit of the doubt and trust that they were doing their work. An Asian male leader explained that subordinates and colleagues expected him to be very autocratic and non-participatory which are the antithesis of what he tries to embody. Finally, an African American female leader explained that white colleagues and subordinates expected her to have a white male leadership style that reflected their values and communication style. She stated that there was an expectation to mimic or adopt the mainstream white male leadership style but that did not align with her personality.

A Caucasian female leader talked about how her students expect her to be less confident than she is and perceived her as arrogant due to her confidence. She explained that people talk about her being “full of herself” due to her demonstrative, energized presence in the classroom.

Some leaders talked about unreasonable expectations that people had of them due to their gender or ethnicity. One Caucasian female leader talked about how people expected her to act more like a woman in some contexts and more like a man in others. For example, people expected her to be less empathetic but also expected her to smile more. Two leaders talked about people expecting them to solve all an organization’s problems due to holding a minority identity.

A Caucasian female leader described people expecting her to over-extend herself and be a caretaker for people due to her gender.

Overall, many of the leaders expressed others expecting them to lead in accordance with the leadership style of the majority. They were expected to enact agentic, masculine styles of leadership. Leaders also reported being held to unreasonably high expectations. Ethnic minority leaders expressed others expecting to do more than is humanly possible because of their identity. Female leaders talked about being expected to enact both masculine and feminine qualities at the same time.

**How did these challenges, perception, or expectations make you feel? What did you do, if anything?** The researcher asked the leaders how the perceptions and expectations of their leadership related to their gender and ethnicity made them feel. The researcher also asked the leaders to describe what they did in response to these challenges, perceptions, and expectations. The leaders had varied responses to this question as well.

Several leaders mentioned taking outward action steps in response to these experiences. One Asian male leader talked about how he “directly challenge[s] those who jump to conclusions based on outward perception and tries to establish that that’s not how we do things.” One African American leader talked about how she chooses moments to address or not address these situations. This leader talked about how she often feels as though bringing instances of racism up is a burden because it makes people get defensive and can change relationships, so she feels that she must really think through when it is appropriate to respond. One Caucasian female leader explained that she wrote and talked about the situations that she experienced in order to “unveil the opinion of our biases that continue to plague the academy and society in general and talk about ways that we can address those through shared action.” Two leaders explained that they

respond to this situation by making every possible effort to be inclusive and kind. One African American female leader explained that she tries her best to attend to people and make them feel comfortable. She talked about how she does her best to “be empathetic with what is there and, at the same time, keep us moving forward on what needs to get accomplished.”

Several leaders reported using more inner coping strategies to deal with these situations. One African American leader talked about how these situations often make her feel very alone and defensive, so she dealt with the situations by speaking with like-minded people and attempting to process the biases. One Hispanic male leader talked about how he used these biases to reflect on his own leadership; he believes that you learn and grow as a leader by “listening and interacting with people who have different expectations about what you should be.” One Caucasian female leader talked about taking a very hands-off approach and choosing to stop trying to convince male students that she can be helpful for them. Another Caucasian female leader talked about how she did nothing to respond to expectations and biases, saying, “For a long time, because I am a very good-natured person, I just accepted it. Again, you know, I don’t tend to have those extremes... but that’s a very gendered thing too—accepting and moving on.”

Overall, leaders experienced many negative emotions due to the challenges and expectations they faced. Leaders handled these issues by turning to others for social support as well as engaging in internal coping strategies.

**Can you describe any cultural values which influence how you lead?** The researcher asked participants to describe any cultural values they hold which might influence how they lead. Three leaders explained that their communal/collaborative approach came from their cultural values. One Caucasian female leader talked about the influence of not only the culture she was raised in but also the broader cultural context in which “we’re stronger together than we are

alone.” She said this philosophy helped her develop a collaborative, cooperative approach to leadership. One African American leader talked about how he believes he is more in tune with “how people are feeling, thinking, whenever there’s disharmony in the group,” and this cultural value has influenced how he approaches leadership.

Two leaders talked about how their culture taught them that leadership is about your family and not just yourself. One Latino male leader talked about how his aunt pushed him to get his doctorate, telling him that it was not just about him, it was also about his cousins and nieces and nephews knowing who they could be. For this leader, pursuing opportunities was about advancement and inspiration for his family as well as himself. An African American female leader told a similar story about her father, who told her that what she achieved was not just for herself.

Two leaders talked about community participation and inclusion being a part of their cultural value system. One Hispanic male leader talked about growing up under a dictatorship in a culture where the government excluded many people from having a voice. He believes that learning from this experience helped him become a leader who values inclusion. One African American female leader talked about the values of social justice and human dignity as playing a large part in her leadership role. She reflected on civil rights movements and people marching just to be considered human.

Two leaders talked about religious values that impacted their leadership. One Caucasian female leader talked about the influence of her Quaker parents from whom she learned the value of persistence and being “super annoying” for the right reasons. She told the story of Mary Dyer, a famous Quaker from the 1600s who was so persistent in her goal of preaching nonviolence and non-hierarchy that she was ultimately put to death. She talked about Mary Dyer being a famous

figure in her upbringing and how her religious leaders taught her to be persistent in pursuing what's right, no matter the personal cost. Another Caucasian female leader talked about growing up Catholic and blaming the Catholic church for her "over-developed sense of responsibility." She explained that she "feels responsible for the world" due to some combination of the church and her family growing up.

Overall, leaders articulated many types of cultural values that impacted their leadership. Most of the cultural values revolved around the importance of relationships and connection with other people, such as a commitment to family and religion.

**Leadership Influences Summary.** Leaders reported lived experiences related to both their upbringing and their time in leadership positions. Many of the leaders in the sample grew up in poverty, and their parents lacked education. A few of the leaders' parents were immigrants and faced challenges related to language barriers and discrimination. The leaders report these experiences as very influential in their desire to pursue higher education as well as give back to their communities and help others to improve their life circumstances. Leaders reported their ethnicity and gender as highly important to their identity. Many of the ethnic minority participants viewed their ethnicity as having been both a positive and negative force in their access to and exercise of leadership. Leaders faced discrimination and prejudice, but they also felt that their backgrounds and perspectives made them uniquely capable leaders. Many of the female participants felt that their gender negatively impacted their access to leadership but positive impacted their exercise of leadership. Ethnic minority leaders explained many of the challenges they faced due to their ethnicity, such as not being taken seriously, being accused of bias towards their own group, having to balance dominant cultural values with their own cultural values, and being expected to perform miracles. Female leaders explained the challenge of being

expected to act both masculine and feminine in different contexts. Leaders explained that their cultures strongly emphasized collaboration, community participation, and taking responsibility, which influenced their leadership. Overall, the leaders seemed to have experienced a balance of positive and negative experiences in leadership because of their ethnic identity, and most of the leaders seemed to feel positively about being able to take those experiences and use them to improve their ability as leaders.

### *Leadership History/Experience*

**What challenges have you faced as a leader?** The researcher asked participants to describe what challenges they have faced as a leader. Participants gave a wide variety of different answers. The research team identified the two most common themes as *budget issues* and *personnel challenges*. Five leaders mentioned facing a budget crisis or having resource issues. One Hispanic male leader talked about going through the recession and having to have difficult talks, about issues like the potential elimination of certain departments, without creating panic over something that may never happen. A Caucasian female leader also talked about the impacts of the recession and making difficult decisions without creating chaos. She talked about being creative with resources in order to help ensure that people do their work well and that they achieve the desired outcomes despite limited funds. She also mentioned having to consider eliminating certain job duties or positions. An African American male leader talked about having tough conversations with staff when they felt that they deserved better compensation for their work but that no more money was available.

Five leaders talked about personnel challenges. Two leaders recollected situations where they had to let an employee go. An African American female leader talked about finding this challenging because she dislikes “interrupting somebody’s life” and not knowing what will

happen to them when they are let go. She also found it challenging because despite worrying for this person's well-being, she knew the rest of the team was miserable because that individual was not doing their work correctly. An Asian male leader talked about a situation where he had to let two female leaders go because there was so much conflict between the two of them that it was jeopardizing an important university fundraising campaign. He talked about how he "loses a lot of sleep before [he does] that" and how it was particularly difficult for him to let two women leaders go because of how strongly he believes that women should be in leadership positions in academia. One African American leader talked about general personnel challenges. He talked about the difficulty of situations where strong employees start to let their performance slip because of personal issues and do not want to tell anybody the underlying cause. He believes that part of his job is being able to see that "human aspect" and give people the benefit of the doubt when they are struggling. One Caucasian female leader talked about the challenge of encouraging and inspiring people in their positions. She discussed the need to build credibility and trust with people while also admitting that everybody messes up sometimes.

Two leaders talked about challenges around gender issues in the workplace. One African American male talked about being the only male staff member in his unit and needing to be sensitive to that dynamic. He explained that he does not want to "enact any sort of leadership styles or traits or characteristics that are very sort of masculinist, in terms of stereotypical masculinity." He further elaborates that while he tries to avoid enacting or engendering stereotypically masculine traits, sometimes people perceive that as him being hesitant. A Caucasian female leader talks about the sheer volume of "gendered" situations that she encounters on a regular basis. She used the example of a man coming into a meeting late and dominating the entire agenda for an hour "because he needs his ego stroked." She explains that

while one might expect male academics to be more aware of gendered situations, in her experience they are frequently worse at sharing the workload than their non-academic counterparts.

**Can you describe an instance of how you handled a difficult or challenging situation?** The researchers asked participants to provide an example of how they handled a difficult or challenging situation. Once again, leaders presented many different approaches to meet their challenges. Three leaders explained that they enlisted help from qualified colleagues in order to handle the situation. One Caucasian female leader explained that she talked with several people about a situation before coming to a decision, but she also explained that she is always careful to make sure she is connecting with the right people when dealing with personnel situations.

Three leaders talked about addressing problems with colleagues directly, but they had different approaches to get to that point. For one African American female leader, she chose the mantra to “name it, own it, and confront it” by pulling the person aside and being direct with them about the problem. A Caucasian female leader talked about consulting with other people first and then talking to the person one-on-one. She explained that women are often not able to confront situations in the moment because they take place in group settings and women will look bad if they choose that context.

Two leaders talked about using creativity to solve the problem. One Hispanic male leader talked about how he handled a situation where he took on a new role and realized there was a person among his new subordinates who was not a good fit for their position. In response, he created a new position that would fulfill the needs that this individual was not meeting, and he allowed the individual to consult with him on the process. He then gave the individual a new role

as an assistant, and that person chose to retire after that year. The leader explained that patience and willingness to listen to other people's ideas really helped him in this situation.

Two leaders talked about taking a diplomatic approach to solving problems. One Hispanic male leader explained that he is "frustratingly fair," always working to see the point of view of both parties in conflicts he is helping to mediate. He believes he has been successful because people believe that he will treat them equally and that he will hear both points of view. One Latino male leader talked about starting from a point of agreement when handling conflict, stating that he would say the following: "Can we agree on where the end goal is? We may disagree about how to get there, but can we agree that you and I are on the same page, that we're trying to get to the same point?" After having this conversation, he said they would work together to move toward that common goal.

Overall, the leaders handled their situations differently, but they were all very caring and person-centered in their approaches. The leaders emphasized having open and honest conversations with people to solve the issues.

**What is an example of a successful action or accomplishment as a leader of which you are most proud?** The researcher asked participants to describe successful actions/accomplishments that made them most proud. Overall, the leaders seemed most motivated by *changing the culture of their organization* and *leaving a legacy*. Changing the culture of the organization included actions such as improving the diversity/commitment to diversity in the organization. Leaving a legacy included actions such as fundraising and renovating/improving student spaces.

Five leaders spoke about being proud of improving the diversity/commitment to diversity in their organization. One Caucasian female leader talked about working on a policy that allowed transgender women to attend the women's college she worked at. She explained that this project had potential implications for alumni giving to the university as well as her job, but she followed through with it because it was the right thing to do. One African American female leader talked about creating a new diversity values statement for the university. She explained that the process came together quickly, and she felt good about this legacy.

Three leaders talked about creating important documents or policies. One Hispanic male leader talked about collaboratively creating a strategic plan for his organization. He was especially proud of the fact that the whole organization was able to participate in the creation of the plan and feel a sense of ownership. An African American male leader talked about instituting a state-wide poll of registered voters on specific topics that would allow for a comparison of African American voters to other voters in the state. He felt proud of this achievement as a "signature product" that the organization could be known for over time.

Three leaders talked about securing funds to improve the organization. Two leaders talked about improving/renovating student spaces. One African American female leader talked about being engaged in a project to build a new student center. She was involved in getting student buy-in to fund the project and making sure it the team completed it in a way that would benefit everyone. She talked about specifically designing the structure of the building so that diverse groups of people would interact with each other more often than they had in the previous building.

Two leaders talked about successfully hiring new staff. One Hispanic male leader talked about hiring faculty members who continue to be successful in the department many years later.

A Latino male leader talked about hiring many new people, half of whom were people of color. He felt very proud of creating that legacy for the organization during his tenure.

Two leaders talked about being proud of the quality of their teaching and mentorship. One Caucasian female leader talked about mentoring students who then went on to mentor other students. An African American male leader talked about a student he mentored who went on to work for a famous political leader.

Finally, two leaders talked about being proud of changing the culture in their organization. One Caucasian female leader talked about how she changed university attitudes towards private fundraising for a public college. An African American male leader talked about how he created a cultural competence program series in his unit which ended up spreading to many other units in the university. He explained that staff enjoyed the program so much that they decided to enact it in other areas and asked for his help. He believes that this legacy will live on long after his retirement which makes him very proud.

Overall, leaders reported being proud of actions and accomplishments which made a difference in people's lives and helped propel their organizations forward. Leaders did not report successful actions and accomplishments that were related to their own personal gain.

**To what do you attribute your effectiveness as a leader?** The researcher asked leaders to explain what they believed made them effective as leaders. Notably, most leaders did not give very lengthy responses to this question. The answers fell into two categories—*internal qualities* and *community qualities*. Leaders mentioned internal qualities such as passion/caring, genuineness, decision-making, follow-through, organization, and problem-solving. Leaders also

mentioned community qualities such as being collaborative/participatory, helping workers feel valued, being able to engage with different groups of people, and having amazing teams.

**Leadership History/Experience Summary.** Overall, the leaders felt pretty similarly about both their challenges and successes. The main challenges leaders faced were focused around budget crises and personnel issues. They handled those issues by consulting with colleagues and reinforcing the strong relationships they had worked to build within their respective organizations. The leaders' main successes came from their passion for diversity/culture and their commitment to creating valuable legacies in their organization. These challenges and successes again seem to represent both a focus on traditional masculine goals of leadership and more communal, collaborative forms of leadership.

#### *Leadership Recommendations*

**Do you have any thoughts about what higher education needs in the moment to move forward and train future leaders?** The researchers asked participants if they had any advice to use in training future leaders or improving the leadership of current leaders. Three main categories emerged: 1) Higher education needs greater diversity/leaders who understand value of diversity, 2) Higher education needs leaders who embrace the value of higher education for a greater purpose, and 3) Leaders need to focus on taking a holistic approach to leadership and involving the community.

Seven leaders mentioned that higher education needs more diversity as well as leaders who understand the value of diversity. Two of these leaders talked about diversity in terms of the professional background of individuals who are leading in higher education. One Asian male leader talked about how higher education should welcome leaders of a variety of different

professional backgrounds. A Caucasian female leader echoed this sentiment, discussing the way in which higher education could benefit from people in the corporate world. She stated that if higher education institutions want to attract and retain diverse talent, especially female and ethnic minority candidates, they should develop teams who dedicate themselves to ensuring that the candidates are comfortable. She stated:

And sure, [company] has resources that we don't, but what could we learn that we could tweak, could do a little differently? How does that change our culture to becoming a welcoming campus for diverse candidates, for female candidates? How do we get women into these leadership positions because we want them? So, I'd say learn differently, bring as broad an experience as possible into your thinking.

An Asian male leader talked about hiring people from outside of higher education to bring a different perspective to the organization.

Three leaders talked about diversity in terms of hiring practices and attitudes towards students. A Caucasian female leader stated that more different types of people should be doing work in higher education, especially around the student affairs side of the university. She elaborated that she believes the emphasis should be on bringing in more people of color as well as LGBT individuals. One Latino male leader talked about the importance of hiring people of color and how that helps to address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds because people in important positions are reflecting their identity. One Hispanic male leader talked about the need to let students, faculty, and staff of color grow in order to allow the university to become more diverse. He also emphasized the importance of faculty of color in the lives of students of color, stating:

It is essential to give opportunities to students of color to have a teacher that looks like them and has similar cultural experiences. . . . There's so much research evidence that corroborates that, that there's less dropout rate for people of color when they have a teacher in their lives that looks like them. Better, more academic success. . . . If we are attracting more students of color, it is so important for those students to have faculty that will represent the real world, as opposed to just the white part of the world.

An Asian male leader talked about the importance of improving the position of both female leaders and ethnic minority leaders in higher education. One of his pieces of advice in order to accomplish this is to improve the mentorship that is available to women and ethnic minority members of the population. He suggested developing a women's center to support faculty and staff where mentors would be able to provide guidance to women and help them with issues like salary. Finally, he talked about the #MeToo movement and suggested that academia needs a similar movement to address problems in situations where people are taking advantage of women.

Three leaders stated that higher education needs leaders who embrace the value of education for a higher purpose and take a holistic approach. An Asian male leader talked about how academia involves business-related problems such as managing finances but that ultimately it has a much higher purpose because learning is a part of human values. An African American male leader explained that higher education needs stronger leadership because education is no longer "philosophical and for the elite." He stated that using the public's money is a privilege and institutions of higher education should use that money to do public good. An African American female leader also described the balance of handling financial issues in an institution but also encouraging growth and success in students. She explained that she wants the students

she works with to be successful and do something good for the world. She talked about the importance of people in higher education being involved in the community in order to remember that they are serving a higher purpose.

Overall, leaders recommended a very people-centered and holistic approach to higher education. They talked about leadership at the university level, bringing in more ethnic minority and female leaders to represent the diversity of the student body. They also talked about going out to the community and bringing that engagement into the university. Finally, they talked about extending their focus to encompass a global scope, preparing students to be productive members of society.

## Discussion

### *Leadership Practice/Philosophy*

The diverse leaders in this sample seemed to demonstrate many leadership styles. Though they never called it by name, many leaders seemed to practice Gigliotti et al.'s (2018) notion of strategic diversity leadership. Strategic diversity leadership is proactive and must involve a high level of commitment from the upper administration of a university. Gigliotti et al. emphasize that it is especially important for leaders who have no direct involvement in operations related to diversity issues to embody these values. Most of the leaders in this sample worked in areas of higher education that were not directly related to diversity issues and yet they demonstrated a strong commitment to diversity concerns and talked about how they incorporate those ideas into their own areas of campus.

Many leaders also demonstrated multiculturally competent leadership (Cox & Blake, 1991; Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009, Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). Multicultural leaders actively note and embrace the ethnic and gender diversity of their employees as a positive aspect of the group rather than ignoring these differences and attempting to treat everyone the same. Leaders in this sample endorsed the idea of being conscious of their own and others' social positions but did not endorse being egalitarian with group members. These results seem to demonstrate their understanding of the importance of acknowledging differences between individuals but not trying to eradicate those differences.

Notably, most of the characteristics that leaders in the sample endorsed do not fit into the traditional masculine authoritarian leadership style. Participants highly valued being communal/collaborative, non-hierarchical, and focused on integrity. However, participants did

value some task-based agentic qualities such as assertiveness and being performance-oriented. These results suggest that successful leaders in higher education must strike a balance between being performance-oriented and being humane-oriented/team-oriented, with cooperation and relationship-building as the foundational elements of their leadership. Past research supports this by demonstrating that more ethical, humane-focused leadership leads to better task-based outcomes (Dumdum et al., 2002; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe et al., 1996; Zineldin, 2017).

However, despite these leaders' demonstration of elements of traditional Western ethical leadership styles, the results also support Chin's (2013) finding that ethnic minority leaders approach their ethical leadership somewhat differently than do their ethnic majority counterparts. Transformational leaders in the Western sense, for example, tend to focus on relationships with followers and create those relationships by being charismatic. In this sample, only three of the 14 leaders described themselves as charismatic, and yet they described themselves with other elements of transformational leadership such as a focus on relationship-building.

Many of the leaders in the sample self-identified as servant leaders. In many organizational contexts, meeting the needs of the people is merely a means to an end to meet organizational objectives. In servant leadership, the leader focuses primarily on the needs of the people as their sole objective. Chin & Trimble (2013) assert that servant leadership models arose from ethnic and racial minority leaders who worked towards equity in situations where they held little power or privilege. The primary objective of these servant leaders was seeking a voice for the disenfranchised. One famous example of a servant leader is Martin Luther King Jr., who led with the intention of seeking justice and equality for his fellow African Americans. Past president Barack Obama serves as a modern-day example of servant leadership in action. Many of the participants who mentioned servant leadership explained that they led this way due to

cultural and community values. This result suggests that the legacy of servant leadership is still passed down through ethnic minority communities. Once again, the sample seems to demonstrate ethnic and gender minority leaders' commitment to balanced leadership that has some Western influence but also takes influence from other cultural traditions.

Several leaders also identified as behind-the-scenes leaders. The leaders' description of themselves seemed to echo elements of both invisible leadership and reluctant leadership. In the literature, invisible leaders tend to be more silent in their leadership, "stepping back and allowing the strengths of others to emerge" (Chin & Trimble, 2013). Much like servant leaders, invisible leaders work to create space for their followers' voices to be heard and downplay their own power in the leadership situation. Members of ethnic minority populations, such as Asian Americans and Native Americans, are more likely to practice invisible leadership (Chin & Trimble, 2013). Similarly, reluctant leaders hesitate to define themselves as leaders and often need to be asked to take on leadership positions rather than seeking them out. The leaders' description of themselves as behind-the-scenes seems to fit into these two styles of leadership that are often attributed to ethnic minority groups.

Ospina and Foldy's (2009) notion of bicultural fluency may shed some light on ethnic and gender minority leaders' ability to achieve a balance between Western masculine modes of leadership and leadership that has its origins in other cultural traditions. Due to their experiences as a minority member in a majority culture, diverse leaders can flexibly integrate their own cultural values with the predominant values of the majority culture. This skill makes them uniquely able to find balance and understand various perspectives in their leadership. Indeed, many of the leaders talked about feeling as though they could see problems from multiple

perspectives and make people feel included because of their own experiences with discrimination and prejudice.

### *Leadership Influences*

The results support the importance of providing opportunities to individuals from less privileged backgrounds. Many of the leaders in the sample grew up in low socio-economic circumstances, which influenced their career paths and inspired their passion for helping others gain greater access to opportunities through education. These results echo Santamaría (2014) and Barton's (2006) notions that ethnic minority leaders and female leaders respectively often use their experiences and challenges as members of marginalized groups in order to help others. In the sample, ethnic minority male leaders frequently discussed their passion for helping female leaders and students find success in addition to their focus on other ethnic minority leaders and students. Similarly, ethnic majority female leaders talked about their passion for helping ethnic minority leaders and students as well as female leaders and students. Finally, ethnic minority female leaders brought up other marginalized groups they are passionate about helping, such as the LGBT community, in addition to their passion for improving circumstances for ethnic and gender minorities. The leaders demonstrated a strong understanding of intersectionality and the importance of helping all marginalized groups find success. The frequency with which participants brought up their passion for diversity issues seems to support Santamaría's notion that minority group members may be predisposed to leadership practices that emphasize social justice and multiculturalism. These results lend further support to the idea that American universities need to give diverse students the opportunity to thrive alongside their peers. Diverse students will become the next generation of leaders, and they have the potential to strengthen

higher education leadership as well as global society with their unique experiences and perspectives.

### *Leadership History/Experience*

The results of this study support the idea that elements of successful leadership in the business world, such as the ability to navigate complex financial circumstances, are becoming increasingly important in higher education leadership. When asked about the most challenging situations they had faced in their careers, many leaders talked about the difficulty of performing their jobs effectively during the recession and other budget crises. Several leaders specifically advocated that higher education leaders should learn from their corporate peers. However, leaders also reinforced the idea that higher education institutions should maintain their focus on higher education as a place with a greater purpose and a civic mission which is distinct from the corporate sphere. Overall, the leaders seem to advocate for a balance of learning from business leaders but also maintaining the specific focus and purpose of academia.

Leaders also reported that their superiors and subordinates hold them to extremely high expectations due to their minority status. Ethnic minority leaders talked about how they are expected to fix everything and do more than is reasonable for one person because of their unique perspectives and background. This result serves as a warning to higher education leaders to avoid placing undue burden on ethnic and gender minority leaders because of their unique perspectives. Institutions should embrace diverse leadership without expecting diverse leaders to single-handedly solve diversity issues.

The results also indicate that female leaders in higher education are facing double binds in their leadership wherein they are simultaneously expected to exhibit both masculine and

feminine characteristics. One female leader talked about being considered brash and arrogant for displaying confidence in her classroom, while another talked about being criticized for not displaying more masculine characteristics. Another leader talked about receiving a great deal of comments on her wardrobe and physical presentation. Women are expected to be both assertive and task-oriented as well as warm and nurturing (Chin & Trimble, 2013). This result echoes the Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice (Eagly & Karau, 2002) wherein feminine qualities are considered less desirable in leadership roles therefore women feel the need to display masculine characteristics to be successful, but women who display masculine qualities are seen unfavorably due to stepping outside of their stereotypical role in society.

### *Leadership Recommendations*

Ospina and Foldy (2009) argue that diverse leaders may be uniquely useful in helping to dismantle harmful power structures due to their successful experience navigating within systems built on inequality. For this reason, it seems appropriate to close with this sample of diverse leaders' advice about how to improve higher education leadership moving forward. The first and most prevalent recommendation from the group is that higher education should place a greater emphasis on diversity. Their advice extends from the student level to the university president level. Institutions of higher education must do a better job of integrating ethnic minority students into the university framework, and they must do so by demonstrating a commitment to diversity at every level. Participants suggested that hiring practices are a pivotal part of this process; hiring ethnic minority faculty members allows students to learn from people who have similar experiences as well as allowing them to see what is possible. The second recommendation is that higher education needs more leaders who embrace the value of higher education for a higher purpose. Chin and Trimble (2013) discuss the notion that while higher education is designed to

“create knowledge and train future citizens to live and work productively in society as the ultimate goal,” often universities place more emphasis on maintaining accreditation and funneling students through to meet degree requirements. The leaders in the sample encourage higher education leaders to maintain focus on the purpose of training students for a higher purpose. The third recommendation is that leaders need to focus on taking a holistic approach to leadership and involving the community. This sample of diverse leaders believe that the community is looking to leaders in higher education to be an example for how the community should handle issues of social justice and inclusion.

#### *Limitations/Future Directions*

One limitation of the study was the small sample size. With a larger sample, future researchers could examine differences between ethnic or gender groups. The leaders in the sample reported a great deal of similar experiences, but a deeper exploration of group differences would be useful in order to determine the unique challenges and viewpoints of leaders from different ethnic or gender backgrounds.

Another limitation was that the researcher did not interview these leaders’ subordinates to determine their actual effectiveness and success in their roles. However, the researcher selected them based upon their reputation in their respective fields where their peers and subordinates consider them effective. Future studies may wish to interview or survey diverse leaders’ subordinates in addition to interviewing the leaders themselves.

A third limitation is that the leaders in the study hold important positions at their universities and thus serve as university figureheads. As a result, it is possible that the leaders felt compelled to answer the questions in somewhat curated ways, despite being assured that they

would remain anonymous. Given that leadership takes place in a public space and requires a public display of values, it is still useful to examine curated answers to these questions.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that their answers may not fully represent their own deeply held values and beliefs.

Fourth, all the participants in this study were middle-aged and have been leading for many years. Multiple leaders discussed having led differently when they were younger but learning to be more collaborative and less competitive as they aged. It is possible that a younger sample of diverse leaders would practice their leadership differently, and future studies may wish to examine this population.

Additionally, many of the leaders who participated come from the Western part of the United States. Certain viewpoints and ways of leading may be successful in the west but not other parts of the United States, therefore further exploration in other regions would be useful.

Finally, the data analysis was conducted by one researcher, which leads to potential biases in the data analysis. The researcher has spent time studying the increased benefit of ethical leadership styles when compared to masculine leadership and thus had to work to manage those biases during data analysis. The researcher also holds an ethnic majority identity and a gender minority identity which may have impacted the interpretation of the data as well as the way in which respondents answered the questions. The researcher made every effort to be aware of and manage these biases during data collection and analysis.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the study suggest that studying the leadership perspectives of ethnic and gender minority leaders provide viewpoints that differ from conventional masculine modes of

leadership. The perspectives of the leaders in this sample underscored the potential benefit of leadership by people who have diverse life experiences because of their ethnic or gender background. These diverse leaders demonstrated leadership styles and values that researchers consider highly effective in changing environments. Furthermore, the leaders in this sample are especially passionate about and committed to social justice and diversity initiatives. Continuing to give a voice to leaders with diverse backgrounds will contribute to creating a more inclusive paradigm of leadership that will be more effective in our increasingly globalized society.

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Table 1

*Frequency of Selection of Leadership Characteristics (N=14)*

Characteristic	Frequency
Integrity	13
Collaborative/team-oriented	13
Humane-oriented	13
Authentic	10
Inspirational	8
Performance-oriented	8
Diplomatic	8
Visionary	7
Team Integrator	5
Administratively Competent	5
Participative	5
Decisive	5
Self-sacrificial	4
Modest	3
Charismatic	3
Focus on your goals and needs	1
Autonomous/acts independently	1
Commanding and in charge	0

Appendix A. Semi-structured interview.

**Demographics – Identify the following or confirm**

- Gender
  - Male
  - Female
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Optional: sexual orientation (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Age
  - What is your age in years (range is OK, e.g., 50s)?
- Country of citizenship?
  - US
  - Hong Kong, China
  - Australia
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- In what country were you born?
  - If foreign born, how long have you lived in this country?
  - Besides your country of birth, how many other countries have you lived in for longer than a year?
- Ethnicity – How would you identify your race and ethnicity? Please also Identify the specific ethnic subgroup (e.g., Chinese, Chinese-American, Hong Kong, Mexican, Caribbean) to which you belong.
  - Native American/ \_\_\_\_\_
  - Asian/ \_\_\_\_\_
  - White/ \_\_\_\_\_
  - Black/ \_\_\_\_\_
  - Latino/Hispanic/ \_\_\_\_\_
  - Middle Eastern/ \_\_\_\_\_
  - Indigenous/ \_\_\_\_\_
  - Mixed/ \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other/ \_\_\_\_\_
- Do you have a religious affiliation? Y/N

- If yes, what is the name of the religion? \_\_\_\_\_
- Family Background
- In what country was your mother born?
- In what country was your father born?
- What language(s) were spoken in your home growing up?

### **Work/Leadership Background**

- Leader – **Do you currently hold a leadership position? Y/N** Please specify the following about your work or volunteer position:
  - Employed position:
    - Title:
    - Volunteer/Service position
    - Title:
- Sector (type of setting): In what sector is your current position?
  - Mental health/psychology
  - Higher Education (e.g., university)
  - Corporation/Business
  - Health
  - Community non-profit agency
  - Student Organizations
  - Other\_\_\_\_\_
- What kind of work is done primarily by the unit that you manage or work in?
  - Administration
  - Manufacturing/Production
  - Finance/Accounting
  - Service Delivery/Practice
  - Research
  - Teaching/Education
  - Sales/Marketing
  - IT
  - Support Services

- Volunteer Community/Professional Organizations, please specify\_\_\_\_\_
  - Other\_\_\_\_\_
- **Leadership Experience** – If you currently hold a leadership position, please answer the following:
    - What is the # of years have you been in a leadership role?
    - How many years have you been in your current position?
    - How many people report directly to you?
    - How many people work in the subunit of the organization you manage?
    - How many organizational levels are there between you and the CEO of your organization?
1. How would you describe your leadership style?
  2. Do you have a vision for your organization? Please describe.
  3. The following are some common characteristics of leaders. Check those which you think characterizes how you lead.
    1. Visionary
    2. Inspirational
    3. Self-sacrificial
    4. Integrity
    5. Decisive
    6. Performance Oriented
    7. Collaborative Team Oriented
    8. Team Integrator
    9. Diplomatic
    10. Administratively competent
    11. Participative
    12. Commanding and in charge
    13. Modesty
    14. Humane Oriented
    15. Autonomous and acts independently
    16. Focus on your goals and needs
    17. Charismatic

18. Authentic

19. Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Please describe how you incorporate the above characteristics into how you lead.

5. How did you first enter a position of leadership?

Please explain and rate using a scale from 1-7 with 1 being low:

6. How important is your ethnicity part of your identity?

7. How important is your gender part of your identity?

8. Are there things you do that reflect how your ethnic or gender identity is important to you (e.g., community participation, food, customs, family, interests)?

9. Can you describe any ways in which your race, gender, or ethnicity has influenced your access to or exercise of leadership?

10. What do you feel you bring from your life experience to your role as a leader (e.g., social class, oppression, privilege, challenging life events)?

11. Is there one thing or person that influenced your leadership? (e.g., mentoring, role model)? Please describe.

12. Has your leadership ever been challenged because of your gender/ethnicity/race, e.g., credibility, competence? Please explain.

13. Have you ever experienced perceptions or expectations about your leadership related to your race, ethnicity or gender? How did they see you or as a leader or expect you to behave? Please describe and explain how it affected your behavior or performance as a leader.

14. How did these challenges, perceptions, or expectations make you feel? What did you do, if anything?

15. How do you view your relationship with members in your organization?

16. What do you do to create/sustain these relationships?

17. What is your rationale about relationships with members in your organization?

18. What challenges have you faced as a leader?

19. Can you describe an instance of how you handled a difficult or challenging situation?

20. What is an example of a successful action or accomplishment as a leader of which you are most proud?

21. To what do you attribute your effectiveness as a leader?

22. Can you describe any cultural values which influence how you lead?

23. What do each of the following terms mean to you with regard to leadership?

1. Being Humble
  2. Being Assertive
  3. Being Indirect or Direct
  4. Being conscious of your own and others social position
  5. Being self-protective against challenges to your leadership
  6. Being Competitive vs. cooperative in exercising your leadership
  7. Importance of interpersonal favors and relationships in your leadership
  8. Not losing face; giving and having face
  9. Benevolence - showing kindness, empathy, and concern for the [welfare](#) of others
  10. Being egalitarian with members
  11. Forgoing your self-interest for the sake of your members or the organizations
  12. Being oriented to individual needs vs. group needs
24. Do you have any thoughts about what higher education needs in the moment to improve current leadership as well as train future leaders?
- 25. Anything else you would like to share?**

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**Thank you for participating in this study.**

Categories for Analysis:

5. **Leadership Practice/Philosophy.** What type/style of leadership are diverse leaders practicing? What characteristics do they value, and how do they define their own leadership?
  1. Question 1, Question 2, Question 3, Question 4, Question 15, Question 16, Question 17, Question 23
6. **Leadership Influences.** What lived experiences and identities have had an impact on how these leaders practice leadership? What experiences began before their leadership and which ones came after?
  1. Question 5, Question 6, Question 7, Question 8, Question 9, Question 10, Question 11, Question 22
7. **Leadership History/Experience.** What challenges and successes have diverse leaders faced? How do these leaders perceive the role of their gender and ethnicity in shaping their leadership experiences and style?

1. Question 18, Question 19, Question 12, Question 13, Question 14, Question 20, Question 21
8. **Leadership Recommendations.** What recommendations do these leaders have for current and future leaders in higher education?
  1. Question 24