

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: IN PURSUIT OF THE ACADEMIC DEANSHIP:
WOMEN'S CONSIDERATIONS, CHOICE
ENVIRONMENTS, AND CAREER PATHS

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Fewer women than men hold leadership roles in many fields, including higher education (Johnson, 2016). Despite changes in the demographics of college students (Lumina Foundation, 2015) and the traditional definitions of leadership (Kezar et al., 2006), the number of women declines as rank increases, starting at the role of full professor (Dominici et al., 2009; Johnson, 2016). The traditional path to the pinnacle of academic leadership – the role of the academic president – typically flows from faculty to department chair, dean to provost to president (Moore et al., 1983). Based on this pathway, the academic deanship is frequently viewed as a critical point in the path to academic leadership (Moore et al., 1983; Thrash, 2012; Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000). Yet little research actually examines individuals' reasons for pursuing the deanship and women lack representation at this critical point in the pipeline (Almanac of Higher Education, 2014; Behr & Schneider, 2015). The purpose of this study is to understand how and why senior women faculty decide to pursue the academic deanship. Using a qualitative, collective case study and awareness of different aspects of identity, this study examines the choice processes for 12 women serving as deans at research-intensive institutions as they reflect on their decision to pursue the academic deanship. This research is framed by Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1984), choice

architecture (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), and decision-making theories (March, 1994). Data collection included a two-step interview process and analysis of participant-generated narratives and visual depictions. Key findings suggest: 1) women choose to pursue the academic deanship in order to make an impact on their college, institution, or discipline; 2) the decision-making processes of women in pursuit of the academic deanship are shaped by their local choice environments, individual ambition, and prevailing assumptions; and 3) previous leadership experience is a critical component in women's decisions to pursue the role of dean. Implications for research and practice are provided, including a need to systemically challenge the traditional path to academic leadership and to create space for women to lead at their home institution.

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CHOICE ENVIRONMENTS, AND CAREER PATHS

by

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Dedication

To all of the women who have inspired and encouraged me through their own pursuit of leadership, especially Dr. KerryAnn O’Meara, Dr. Marybeth Joy Drechsler Sharp, and Dr. Jenna K. Templeton – my mom and most valued role model.

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As is the case for many in pursuit of a doctoral degree, my journey has been long, unpredictable, and different than I envisioned. The one constant through it all has been my support network, and for them, I am forever grateful.

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Chapter One: Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions

I attended an undergraduate institution built on a coordinate college system - one in which there were two dean's offices (one for men, one for women), two student governments (one for men, one for women), and two student body presidents (one for men and one for women). Although some of the traditions were antiquated, this structure allowed for equal access to leadership positions for students who identified as men and students who identified as women. After graduation, I worked as a leadership consultant for a college-based, all-women's organization where all of the consultants, leaders, and members identified as women. I was learning about and practicing leadership in a context where my opportunities were not inhibited by the gender biases that typically drive perceptions of leaders. I had full access to leadership positions and did not have to compete or compare with men.

When I began studying higher education, I learned that my experiences were unique. In many academic contexts, women's leadership is limited significantly. The statistics published in the *American College President Study* by the American Council on Education (ACE, 2017) year after year remind me that, while progress is being made, the number of women in the academic presidency (and most other leadership positions), is dismal and increasing at a very slow rate. In nearly every class assignment and research project, I reference these statistics - that only 30% of college and university presidents in 2016 were women, a number that has only increased 4% since 2011 (ACE, 2017; Johnson, 2016), and that the typical college president is a "white male in his 60's who has been in the position for seven years" (ACE, 2017, p. 1). These statistics highlight the gender gap that persists in academia, particularly at the level of president. As the top

position in the academy, the president makes decisions on behalf of many stakeholders, yet is not frequently representative of the majority of today's students (ACE, 2017; Lumina Foundation, 2015). Although the demographics of college students are rapidly changing to be more diverse, demographics of top leadership positions remain stagnant (BMGF, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Krogstad & Fry, 2014; Lapovsky, 2014; Lumina Foundation, 2015) and women continue to face barriers to advancement at every step of the career pathway (Bain & Cummings, 2000; Dominici et al., 2009; Longman & Madsen, 2014).

Barriers for Women in Academic Leadership

The barriers to women's career advancement in higher education are well documented in the literature (Dominici et al., 2009; Johnson, 2016; Menges & Exum, 1983) and include, but are not limited to, gender bias and social role expectations (Eagly & Koenig, 2008; Heilman, 2001; Leslie et al., 2015; Rosser, 2003; Steinpreis et al., 1999), lack of family support (Antecol et al., 2016; Armenti, 2004; Sallee et al., 2015; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2007), lack of confidence (Kay & Shipman, 2014; Sturm et al., 2014), lack of equity in academic workload (Babcock et al., 2017; El-Alayli et al., 2018; O'Meara et al., 2017; Winslow, 2010), and lack of role models or mentors (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Seltzer, 2015). Much of the literature on barriers focuses on challenges for women faculty in the tenure and promotion process, with some literature addressing challenges specific to women academic leaders.

By women, I refer to individuals who identify as women as their primary gender identity. When I refer to "women," I am aware that women have multiple, intersecting identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000), including race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation,

among others. While I focus specifically on the gender dimension of identity in this research, other identity differences are highlighted throughout the literature review and data analysis.

By academic leaders, I refer to the individuals directing and/or governing institutions of higher education at various ranks in administration – including the president, provost, vice presidents, deans, department chairs, program directors, and others with formal titles and authority – though the concept has changed over time. For example, in *How Academic Leadership Works*, Birnbaum (1992) focused exclusively on college and university presidents. Alternatively, Kezar et al. (2006) suggested academic leadership is moving away from traditional, hierarchical models to be more collaborative. In more recent research, Lester and Kezar (2012) examined faculty grassroots leadership. These efforts are frequently considered ‘bottom-up’ and do not require positional leadership (Lester & Kezar, 2012). Many women in academia take on these non-positional types of leadership roles, whether through volunteering, taking on more service than their male counterparts (O’Meara et al., 2017; Terosky et al., 2014; Winslow, 2010), or leading with a different purpose than men (Gmelch & Wolverton, 2003; Kezar et al., 2006). Efforts toward leadership can be carried out in more informal ways, but they may not come with the deserved recognition and benefits of promotion or power.

For purposes of this research, I acknowledge that leadership can and should be recognized separate from title. However, given the potential limitations related to informal leadership, I focus more specifically on formal leadership roles in institutions of higher education for my conceptual framing of academic leadership. It is important to note that having the potential for leadership or a leadership-related role does not

guarantee that an individual exercises effective leadership, but for purposes of this work, a formal title denotes an academic leader.

Although women face countless barriers in navigating career advancement through the early faculty ranks, academic leadership is a different career than a traditional faculty role. When faculty members become academic leaders with formal titles, they shift from operating on their expertise in research and teaching and take on a new role focused in management, operations, and other areas for which they are frequently unprepared (Arntzen, 2016; Gmelch, 2013). Given the deviation from the traditional focus on research, service, and teaching, administrators “would encourage faculty to think long and hard before taking on a leadership role” (Seltzer, 2015, pp. 186-187). Making the leap into academic leadership not only requires a choice to face additional organizational barriers, but also a different skill set altogether (Gmelch, 2002, 2013; Templeton & O’Meara, 2018). Many of the barriers plaguing women faculty also impact women who choose to pursue academic leadership at any level. In addition to navigating the gender bias, inequity in workload, and other barriers common in the faculty pathway, the alternate skill set required of academic leaders poses an additional barrier for women in their attempts at advancement.

The Academic Deanship

Pathway from Dean to President

In the traditional career path to the academic presidency, the first real leap to academic leadership occurs at the position of dean. Following graduate training, the average career path for college and university presidents starts in the tenure-track faculty ranks, may include a department chair or associate dean role, and then moves to the dean

and provost before assuming the role of president (Moore et al., 1983). Although there are many possible career pathways, Moore et al. (1983) identified this path as the most common or “normative” (p. 503). Research on this pathway has remained relatively unchanged for the last 30 years, despite the many changes to the academic workforce (Selingo et al., 2017). For example, it is becoming more common for academic leadership roles to be filled by individuals with administrative backgrounds or by those who transition to academic leadership after work in external, professional fields like business, medicine, or law (ACE, 2017; Selingo, et al., 2017). The “normative” path to the college presidency, identified over 30 years ago, does not account for these variations.

Despite changes in the academic workforce, the deanship is still a pathway to the presidency today. The majority of college and university presidents come to the role from the position of Chief Academic Officer (CAO; also known as provost) (Johnson, 2016), and dean is the primary stepping-stone for individuals into the role of CAO (Hartley & Godin, 2010). Authors of a recent report on the path to the presidency even argued, “Academic deans are increasingly moving right to the top job and bypassing the provost’s office altogether” (Selingo et al., 2017, p. 3). In fact, more than half of college presidents in the 1980s had served as dean at one point in their career (Moore et al., 1983), and in 2016 nearly 10% of college and university presidents transitioned directly from the deanship (ACE, 2017). When studying the career paths of deans and presidents, Moore et al. (1983) acknowledged this connection, arguing that the dean “plays an important, and perhaps pivotal, role in the route to the presidency and, hence, deserves closer scrutiny in that context” (p. 505). In order to provide this scrutiny, I turn to the history, role, and career path of the academic dean.

The History and Role of the Academic Dean

The role of academic dean has evolved since the late 1800s, though accounts of the origin and evolution of the position are debated in the literature. According to Bowker (1981), the role of dean first began in 1870. The primary responsibility was to alleviate some of the administrative burden from the president and registrar and take on additional responsibilities related to student needs (Bowker, 1981). Women entered the administrative leadership realm as “deans of women” when the number of women students began to increase in the early 1900s (Nidiffer, 2000; Schwartz, 1997). Schwartz (1997) argued that deans of women largely shaped the role of dean, “many of the significant and well-established practices of student affairs work and higher education administrators that exist today were first put in place through the work of the deans of women” (p. 422). Despite deans of women having a longer tenure in higher education, deans of men eventually replaced deans of women altogether, thus shaping the inequity in academic leadership early in the history of higher education (Schwartz, 1997).

In addition to questions about the origin of the deanship, confusion about the role itself persists, with literature citing the “role conflict” and “ambiguity” that comes with serving between the faculty and administration (Arntzen, 2016; Bowker, 1981; Gmelch, 2002; Sarros et al., 1998; Wolverton et al., 1999). This conflict is evident in findings from a study in which university administrators and faculty were asked to subjectively define what it meant for a dean to be successful. “To central administrators, a truly successful dean was one who could attract and retain high quality faculty and who possessed an ability to articulate an institutional norm that represented the best interests of the institution” (Matczynski et al., 1989, p. 10). Alternatively, faculty “seem to want

an articulate and forceful spokesperson, someone who can secure needed resources but who will not intrude substantially on programs or faculty prerogatives” (Matczynski et al., 1989, p. 13). Even in considering the perspectives of faculty and administrators, a lack of clarity on the dean’s role, responsibilities, and goals exists. More recent popular press suggests that the role of dean mirrors that of the academic president with increasing emphasis on fundraising, strategic thinking, and risk management, with less focus on research and scholarship (Bugega, 2018; Butin, 2016; Jenkins, 2018). With these areas of focus, the deanship serves not only as a step in the career path toward the academic presidency, but also a potential training role for senior leadership.

In addition to serving as a midpoint in the academic leadership pathway and liaison between the faculty and administration, the deanship is frequently associated with campus leadership. In a study of deans in teacher education, Thrash (2012) argued “the role of academic deans is critical to the success of higher education” (p. 1). According to Birnbaum’s (1992) Institutional Leadership Project, when individuals were asked to name campus leaders:

Deans were named by 44 percent of respondents, with the importance of the role related to institutional type. Among universities, which were larger and more decentralized than other institutions, deans were mentioned as leaders more frequently than any other figure, including the president. (p. 106)

Based on this research, deans are perceived by different stakeholders as being leaders on campus, at times more often than the president.

In more recent work, Layne (2010) acknowledged the role of the academic dean in “defining the work environment and establishing the climate for faculty and students” (p. 186). The academic dean is a significant leadership role with the potential to impact the culture of a college, as well as the experiences of the faculty, staff, and students

within it. As Arntzen (2016) shared, “Deans walk a delicate administrative tightrope. They head professional bureaucracies within professional bureaucracies” (p. 2071). As the head of a college, the academic dean oversees a number of resources, staff, faculty, and students. The scope of this oversight likely depends on the institution type and discipline, but still requires balancing a number of varying and large-scale responsibilities (Arntzen, 2016). The role of academic dean is unique in that this individual operates within both the culture of the institution and that of their individual college and discipline, all while maintaining elements of their former faculty role (Gmelch, 2013). The complex, unique, and demanding nature of the academic deanship is reason enough to increase our understanding of the position and the pathways to get there.

The (Outdated and Unclear) Path to the Deanship

More recently, researchers have started to re-examine the path to the academic presidency (see for example ACE, 2017; Selingo et al., 2017), but little is still known about the career trajectory for those aspiring to the deanship. Do individuals move directly to the role of dean from senior faculty? Do other pathways exist? Wolverton and Gonzales (2000) suggested that there is no typical pathway, but their study is one of few that actually examined this process. The authors (Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000) found no significant differences in the pathway by institutional type but did note that deans at research universities more frequently served as department chair prior to assuming the academic deanship.

Wolverton and Gonzales (2000) also argued that the lack of a clear path leaves room for bias in hiring and advancement processes which can then disadvantage historically marginalized groups. Research highlights the impact of unclear evaluation

processes on bias in service workload (Lennartz & O'Meara, 2018; O'Meara et al., 2018) and other tenure and promotion elements, including external letters and committee input (Jones et al., 2012). In this case, bias fueled from ambiguity in the career pathway to the deanship can decrease the likelihood that women faculty and faculty of color will advance to the role of dean at the same rate as their White, men peers (Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000), thus contributing to the leadership inequity in higher education.

Additionally, despite the connection between the deanship and the academic presidency, gaps in knowledge exist on how and why individuals come to the role of dean. Bowker (1981) acknowledged, "we need to know more about what attracts individuals to the deanship and how the balance of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in office leads to the resignation of deans after a time" (p. 4). Limited research has examined these questions after Bowker's (1981) note several decades ago and literature on the academic deanship remains outdated. More recently, Gmelch (2013) argued "academic leadership development is the least studied and most misunderstood management process in America," particularly as it relates to department chairs and deans (p. 26). Understanding why individuals choose to pursue or leave the role of dean, and the preparation in that process, remains an important area for future research.

Research Problem

Despite research and theory on the barriers to women's advancement (Bain & Cummings, 2000), the emergence of alternate paths to leadership (Kezar, et al., 2006), and slowly increasing numbers of women in higher ranks of the professoriate (Johnson, 2016), women continue to hold fewer positions in academic leadership, from dean, to provost, to president (Dominici et al., 2009). This phenomenon of the

underrepresentation of women in academic leadership is termed “the higher, the fewer” (Johnson, 2016, p. 6). As rank increases, the number of women decreases, with the first noticeable difference between representation of men and women documented at full professor (Johnson, 2016). Although some equity in representation is starting for women in the junior faculty ranks, the number of women in academic leadership tapers off at the role of dean (Johnson, 2016; Wolverton, 2002). Most recent accounts suggest that less than 40% of academic deans identify as women (Almanac of Higher Education, 2014; Behr & Schneider, 2015; Bichsel & McChesney, 2017; Pritchard et al., 2019), and the percentage of women in the academic deanship can vary significantly by discipline, institutional type, and paygrade. According to a survey of Deans of Engineering Schools, only 10.8% of academic deans in engineering identify as women (Hargrove, 2015). Alternatively, 25.2% of deans of business schools identify as women (AACSB, 2018). In research institutions overall, women hold less than 30% of academic deanships (Bilen-Green et al., 2008). According to the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources’ (CUPA-HR) annual report of administrators in higher education, women academic deans have the greatest representation in the “lowest-paid” roles (Pritchard et al., 2019, p. 5). Thus, the number of women in the academic deanship is not only low but varies significantly depending on the context.

The deanship represents the first position in the career pathway that deviates significantly from a traditional faculty role centered on teaching, research, and service, and focuses more on management, leadership, fundraising, and organizational culture (Birnbaum, 1992; Gmelch, 2002). With all of these responsibilities, Gmelch (2002) asked, “Why leave the world of the tenured professor for one that appears to have so

many personal and professional challenges?” (p. 7). Despite the importance of the role in overall college and university operation (Birnbaum, 1992) and fact that the dean represents a critical point in the academic career path (Moore et al., 1983), women remain underrepresented in the deanship. This lack of gender equity in the role of academic dean is the focal problem of this study.

Additionally, a lack of research on the academic deanship, particularly for women, persists. Some literature on women’s advancement in the career pathway in higher education centers on individual factors, like how women lack confidence or ambition (Kay & Shipman, 2014; Keohane, 2010) and how they can pursue leadership development to enhance their own skills (Longman & Madsen, 2014; White, 2005). In his book on decision making, March (1994) argued that we “profit from an understanding of how decisions happen in order to make them happen better” (p. 271). Knowing the many barriers faced in both faculty and administrative roles, why do women choose to leave the faculty ranks and pursue academic leadership through the role of dean? Do their career paths differ in any way from the traditional path identified by Moore et al. (1983)? More recent work examining deans’ experiences looks at their institutional fit (Reason & Gmelch, 2003), challenges faced once serving in the role (Bray, 2012; Isaacs, 2014; Montez & Wolverton, 2000), reasons for satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the role (DeAngelis, 2014; Gmelch et al., 1999; Gerdes, 2010), preparation for the deanship (Airini et al., 2011; Draugalis & Plaza, 2010; Gmelch, 2013), and leadership styles and approaches (Arntzen, 2016; Thrash, 2012), but less is known about decisions to pursue the deanship in the first place, especially for women. Without understanding the decision-

making processes of women in pursuit of the academic deanship, we do not know how these decisions are made, or what factors impact the process.

Purpose

Following my own unique experiences which included access to equitable leadership opportunities, I have dedicated my research and studies to leadership advancement and career trajectories for women in academia. Ample research has been conducted on the barriers to women's advancement at many steps of the academic pipeline (Bain & Cummings, 2000). Less is known about the decisions that women make to advance and reach the deanship in spite of these barriers, or the other factors that might impact the process. For example, role models may be a factor impacting women's career advancement, either by their presence or lack thereof (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Seltzer, 2015).

The lack of understanding around women's pursuit of the academic deanship limits knowledge at a critical point of the career path to the academic presidency. The purpose of this research was therefore two-fold. First, I aimed to identify *why* senior women faculty choose to pursue the academic deanship by identifying the factors that motivate their decision to advance. Why, despite the commonly cited barriers to advancement, do women choose to pursue the role of dean? Second, I aimed to understand *how* women decide to pursue the academic deanship. More specifically, I sought to identify factors that have prevented or propelled women's decisions to take the leap into academic leadership at this point in the career path. When reflecting on their decision to pursue the academic deanship, do women place emphasis on individual attributes, organizational factors, or both? What elements of choice architecture serve as a

backdrop for their decision to pursue the academic deanship? In doing so, I hoped to shed light on this potentially “pivotal” (Moore et al., 1983, p. 505) role, and identify alternate ways to address the gender equity gap in academic leadership. Focusing on these two areas allowed me to examine women’s decisions to pursue the academic deanship in depth and contribute a level of qualitative analysis that does not exist in current literature.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. **Why** do senior women faculty decide to pursue the academic deanship?
 - a) What aspects of a women’s career history, skills, professional knowledge and experience, or aspects of identity, shape the decision?
 - b) What aspects of women’s local environment or career experiences act as cues to pursue (or not pursue) the position of academic dean?
2. **How** do women decide to pursue the academic deanship?
 - a) When faced with the opportunity to pursue the academic deanship, what decision-making strategies do women employ to make their choice?
 - b) As women make the decision to apply for the deanship, which factors most shape their decision-making process?

Study Significance

By addressing the research questions and purpose proposed in this chapter, my study contributes to existing literature in three key ways. First, I believe this research contributes to increased understanding of factors impacting women’s advancement in the academic career path at the critical juncture of academic dean. Second, this research provides differentiation between individual and organizational factors impacting this

advancement. And third, this study adds a qualitative approach and depth to this topic that has not been employed in a U.S.-based context or across academic disciplines before. Each of these components contributes to efforts to decrease the gender gap and inequity that currently exists in the academic deanship. The details of each significant contribution are outlined in the following sections.

Increased Understanding of Women's Advancement

Diversity in leadership can benefit organizations in a number of ways. For example, research shows diversity in leadership can enhance institutions of higher education by improving the culture (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Hurtado, 2001). However, higher education institutions currently lack diversity in top leadership roles, particularly as it relates to race and gender (ACE, 2017; Johnson, 2016; Lapovsky, 2014). I focus on understanding the decision-making processes by which senior women faculty choose to pursue the academic deanship as a way to address a piece of the gender gap issue in academic leadership. I believe doing so has practical and theoretical implications for women aspiring to leadership and for higher education institutions seeking to diversify leadership overall.

The academic dean serves as both a “pivotal” position in the career path to the academic presidency and a critical role in shaping the culture of colleges within higher education institutions (Layne, 2010; Moore et al., 1983). By focusing on women's advancement to the academic deanship, this research has the potential to examine and increase understanding of this important position in higher education. Wolverton and Gonzales (2000) argued for the importance of the deanship in understanding leadership more broadly:

The academic deanship has become an increasingly viable position in the academy. The more we understand about what the position entails, who the people who fill the position are, what types of training and administrative experience they possess, and where they plan to go once they have completed their deanships, the more likely we will be to select and develop effective academic leadership. (p. 15)

The authors go on to share the struggles that exist in advancing “women and minorities” to this role, “especially in disciplines which have historically been dominated by White men” (p. 17). By addressing the issue of gender inequity in academic leadership through the career point of dean, this research offers an increased understanding of, and possible recommendations to resolve, the barriers to women’s advancement in higher education.

Differentiation of Factors

Understanding the factors that impact women’s decisions to pursue and accept the role of dean may shed light on the individual and organizational factors enhancing or impeding women’s career paths in academic leadership. Proposed solutions to overcome barriers to women’s advancement in academia frequently place the onus on the individual woman to develop her leadership skills and navigate existing politics, sexism, and hierarchies (Acker, 1990; Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Dean & Koster, 2013; Laursen & Austin, 2020; Longman & Madsen, 2014; Stewart & Valian, 2018; White, 2005). Far less research in higher education addresses the role of organizational culture in women’s experiences with or decision to pursue positions of academic leadership (see for exception, Acker, 1990; O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005; Schein, 1985). Addressing these research questions can help the field of higher education pinpoint which factors impact women’s decisions and determine if there are issues in the hiring processes, cumulative factors throughout career, or other organizational factors that impact women more broadly at this critical juncture in the career pathway.

It is important to provide short-term solutions to help women currently navigating the academic career path. Through this research, understanding the career path and strategies of current women academic deans may provide insight to other women aspiring to leadership, as well as strategies to overcome existing barriers. However, creating sustainable, long-term change in the field of higher education is also necessary and may stem from better understanding the decision-making processes and factors impacting women's choices to pursue the academic deanship in the first place – as offered through this research.

Qualitative Depth

Existing literature on the academic deanship tends to be quantitative in nature (see, for example, Isaacs, 2014; Melon-Galvez, 2018; Thrash, 2012) and focuses on both men and women. The lack of comprehensive, qualitative research on women academic deans remains a problem in this body of literature. Although we can understand that women lack representation in the academic deanship through quantitative approaches, less is known about the quality and nuance of their experiences at every step of the pathway, and once in the role. I contribute to the current research on the academic deanship by pursuing a qualitative approach to better understand how women academic deans experience their choice to pursue the deanship. Using a social constructivist approach (Creswell, 2013), I examined the pathway to academic leadership through the lens of women who have successfully navigated the transition from faculty to academic dean.

In addition to being quantitative, much of the existing literature on the academic deanship is conducted within a specific discipline (see, for example, Daugalis & Plaza,

2010; Hargrove, 2015; Layne, 2010; Padilla, 2006). Although still relevant to this study, different cultures, expectations, and gender norms can exist in different disciplines (see, for example, Hargrove, 2015). In order to address some of these differences and add depth to the current landscape of academic leadership for women, I included women academic deans from a variety of disciplines in my research and thus contribute a unique approach to existing literature.

Several more recent studies of the academic deanship are conducted outside of a U.S.-based context (see, for example, Airini et al., 2011; Arntzen, 2016; Nguyen, 2013). For example, Nguyen (2013) studied factors and barriers impacting women's career advancement to managerial roles, like the deanship, in Vietnam. This work may be connected to my topic, but the context varies greatly. As Arntzen (2016) shared in a study of deans from Norway and Scandinavia, "the concept dean is used differently in countries throughout the world and even varies between institutions in the same country" (p. 2070). Recognizing that promotion processes, organizational cultures, and the concept of leadership may vary in an international context (Gelfand et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2013; Walumbwa et al., 2007), I conducted my study in a strictly U.S.-based context and narrowed my focus to certain institutional types, thus contributing to a specific area of missing literature.

Perhaps most noteworthy is my theoretical approach. I employed Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), elements of rule-following and rational decision-making (March, 1994), and concepts from choice architecture literature (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) to illuminate women's stories about their choices to pursue the academic deanship. This novel approach adds to our collective understanding of the gender

inequity in academic leadership while helping to fulfill the other points of significance related to increased understanding and differentiation. Additionally, employing three distinct yet overlapping lenses on the issue of women's advancement to the academic deanship allowed me to contribute a more comprehensive view of the process. In Chapter Two, I provide a synthesis of existing literature related to women's decisions to pursue the academic deanship and further detail my theoretical and conceptual framing.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framing

In this study, I sought to understand how and why senior women faculty decide to pursue the academic deanship. More specifically, I used conceptual framing related to career development, decision-making theory, and choice architecture to examine women's decision-making processes in their career advancement at this particular juncture. In order to address my research questions and fulfill the purpose of the study, I relied on two broad areas of existing literature: 1) research on the academic deanship, and 2) factors impacting career advancement for women faculty.

I begin this review of the literature by examining the existing literature and research on the academic deanship related to both gender differences and the career pathway from faculty to dean. I then examine literature on factors women faculty encounter in their career advancement and connect these factors to existing research on academic deans. The literature review concludes with analysis of current methods used to study academic deans, and other gaps in the extant literature. I then shift to a discussion of concepts used to frame my study, including Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al.,1994), choice architecture (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), and theoretical decision-making (March, 1994).

The Academic Deanship

The academic deanship is an area of higher education that has room for further research and understanding. According to Gmelch et al. (1999), “the academic deanship is the least studied and most misunderstood position in the academy” (p. 717). One of the largest studies focused solely on the academic dean is the National Survey of Academic Deans in Higher Education (Gmelch et al.,1996), a project spearheaded by the Center for

Academic Leadership at Washington State University. The survey included measures from the “Dean’s Stress Inventory,” “Task Inventory,” “satisfaction with dean’s role,” (Gmelch et al., 1996, pp. 9-10) and the “Dean’s Leadership Inventory” (Rosenbach & Sashkin, 1995). The survey data sheds light on the complex role, career path, and stressors unique to the deanship. While reports on other academic leadership positions, like the college presidency, are conducted annually (see, for example, ACE, 2017) and a national study of associate deans was recently conducted (Sayler et al., 2017), reports on the academic deanship to this scale have not been conducted since the 1996 survey. Several researchers have since used the data from the National Survey of Academic Deans (Gmelch et al., 1996) to examine the role and demographics of deans. For example, Nies and Wolverton (2000) found that the average age for deans is 54 and the typical tenure is 5.6 years. A more recent report from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) suggested the average age of deans of business schools is 52 when they start in the role, with the average age closer to 47 for those who have served as dean more than once (Drozdowski, 2012). Similarly, Wolverton (2017) confirmed that the typical tenure in the role still ranges from five to six years. More recent demographic data on academic deans from a comprehensive set of disciplines is not available.

In addition to demographic data, deans are frequently discussed in higher education research and literature as individuals responsible for maintaining the culture of a department or college (Dannels et al., 2009) or are discussed in regard to a specific academic discipline like deans of nursing or deans of engineering. For example, in their

study of 21 women engineering deans, Layne (2010) outlined the complex role of the dean and the responsibilities it entails:

A dean is in some ways a classic middle manager, located between the faculty and department heads on one hand and the provost and president of the university on the other, responsible for mediating between the two. However, in many ways deans have a high degree of autonomy in leading their colleges, developing a strategic vision, setting priorities, raising money, hiring faculty, allocating resources, and ensuring educational quality. (p. 186)

In Dannels et al.'s (2009) study of women dental deans, the authors described the deans as “important advocates to their universities’ senior administration about the needs for human resource policies and the implementers and shapers of policies within their schools” (p. 677). In addition to serving as the liaison between the faculty and senior administration, deans have increasingly greater responsibilities that cover a wide range of areas (Bugega, 2018; Butin, 2016; Layne, 2010). As Gmelch and Wolverson (2003) warned, “one of the prices deans pay when they enter the deanship is time commitment and the pressure to find balance in their lives” (p. 24). Although this strain is not unique to the role of academic dean in higher education, it is still important to note that the role comes with costs as well as benefits.

Despite this occasional positioning in the literature and the importance of the role to higher education institutions, research with a primary focus on academic deans is limited. As Bowker noted in 1981, “the existing literature on academic deans is spotty at best... there are few empirical studies of representative samples of deans” (p. 4). Little progress in empirical research has been made since that time, with the exception of some research on the experiences of deans within specific disciplines (see, for example, Layne, 2010; Padilla, 2006). In order to address the lack of women in the critical role of dean, we need to better understand the barriers women face in their pursuit of leadership and why

women decide to pursue the deanship despite them. Existing literature on academic deans can be arranged into two categories: gender differences (related to representation and motivation) and the career pathway to the deanship. Research and literature on each of these topics is synthesized in the following sections, after acknowledging the importance of other layers of identity.

Beyond Gender: Dimensions of Identity

This research primarily focuses on gender in the academic deanship, but it is important to recognize that gender is rarely, if ever, the only element of identity that women are considering, projecting, or internalizing when pursuing career advancement. For example, Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) examined the leadership experiences of both White women and women of color, recognizing that gender and race can impact leadership concurrently and independently. Bullard (2013) conducted doctoral research on lesbian women presidents, and, more directly aligned with this research, Lindsay (1997) examined the “absent legacy of African American women education deans” (p. 3). In each example, researchers captured the unique experiences of individuals based on multiple layers of identity.

The extant literature summarized here examines differences in the academic deanship by gender and factors impacting career advancement for women in higher education more broadly. Less literature acknowledges the barriers for faculty of color in pursuit of the academic deanship (see, for example, Wolff, 2010). However, a growing body of literature on factors impacting faculty career advancement addresses intersectionality and layers of identity, especially for women of color. Williams (2014) referred to the experiences for women of color in academia as “double jeopardy” since

they are facing bias related to both gender and race. Turner (2002) described the experience as “living with multiple marginality” (p. 74). For purposes of this literature review, it is important to acknowledge additional areas for future research and the nuances that may further impact the decision-making processes as we extend beyond gender identity alone. This could be related to race, sexual orientation, or other aspects of identity that lead to additional inequities, especially in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020). Differences in dimensions of identity and lack of research on historically marginalized groups are acknowledged throughout this review of the literature.

Gender Differences in the Deanship

Demographics and Representation. Despite limited literature and research on academic deans, we do know that fewer women serve in this leadership position than men (Gmelch, 2002; Layne, 2010) – a trend that has continued since the role of dean of women was eradicated from most higher education institutions (Schwartz, 1996). As outlined in Chapter One, the history of the deanship originated with deans of women who were largely responsible for acclimating women students to higher education institutions. Schwartz (1996) argued, “the deans of women worked hard to “professionalize” the position of dean and to legitimize their role on the predominantly male college campus... Yet to a large degree, the deans of women have been excluded from the story of higher education” (p. 3). Since the time when deans of women shaped much of the role, higher education has reverted back to the societal norms of having men in leadership positions, with far fewer deanships held by women (Schwartz, 1996).

The lack of women in the academic deanship has since continued. Using data from the National Survey of Academic Deans in Higher Education, Gmelch et al. (1999) reported that 59% of the sample identified as men, acknowledging that less than half of deans in the study identified as women. The most recent statistics available on national demographics of deans come from the Almanac of Higher Education (2014) which shares that, of newly appointed deans in the 2013-14 academic year, 42% were women. This number, however, does not account for all deans, only those recently appointed, and only within some disciplines. Behr and Schneider (2015) conducted a survey of deans from colleges of arts and sciences in 2013 through work with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), finding that 39% of deans in their sample identified as women. While the number is similar to that reported in the Almanac of Higher Education (2014), this statistic again only captures some academic disciplines. Thus, much of the literature and research on the status of academic deans remains outdated or is analyzed only in the context of one institutional type or academic discipline. Research on women's representation in the academic deanship is therefore not comprehensive.

Research beyond national surveys also examines representation of men and women deans. For example, in a study by Bilen-Green et al. (2008), the authors noted "that female deans are about equally plentiful (or scarce, depending on viewing the glass half-full or half-empty) across all types of schools examined" (p. 9). Wolverton and Gonzales (2000) also recognized the difference in representation, finding "after almost twenty years, women and minorities remain underrepresented in the deanship" (p. 14). Contrary to Bilen-Green et al. (2008), the authors acknowledged that the percentage of women deans included in their study would have been significantly less if the study had

not included nursing schools – a field that is typically dominated by women (Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000). Although there is agreement in this literature about gender inequality in the deanship, there appears to be less consensus around gender differences by discipline.

Motivation. Aside from demographics and representation, research on gender and the deanship focuses on men and women deans' motivation to pursue the role. Gmelch and Wolverton (2003) first compared men and women deans more broadly, finding difference in marital status (women deans were more likely to be single), outlets for stress (women deans were more likely to report high stress levels), and presence of mentors (women deans were more likely to have mentors). In terms of motivation to pursue college-level leadership, Gmelch and Wolverton (2003) shared:

Women are more concerned than men about representing their college to the university, maintaining a conducive work climate, engaging in financial and long-range planning, maintaining effective communication, fostering diversity, and soliciting ideas from others. In addition, their leadership style can be characterized as cooperative and collaborative. (p. 28)

This quote suggests a stark contrast in the values of men and women deans, with women focused more on collaborative leadership and the culture of the college than men.

Alternatively, Wolverton and Gonzales (2000) used data from the National Survey of Academic Deans to discuss the motivations for individuals pursuing the deanship. They found that men and women's rationale for pursuing the role similarly "revolved around a desire to contribute to and improve the college" (p. 6). This conflicting research suggests both similarities and stark differences in leadership motivation between men and women. Additional research is required to fully support either claim.

The difference in motivation between men and women extends to the ambition and career aspirations of deans. Isaac et al., (2009) found women deans in their study followed opportunities for advancement rather than actively seeking out the deanship. Through analysis of the stories of 10 women deans from different colleges, Isaac et al., (2009) concluded, “although these women were ambitious, most did not set out to become deans” (p. 140). They go on to argue that the women were practicing leadership but did not feel strongly about having a specific title. Although the women in this study may not have been motivated strictly by the title of academic dean, the study did counter traditional narratives and gender norms, as the “stories validated that women can be both reproducers of the species and producers of the culture” (Isaac et al., 2009, p. 151). Thus, women were motivated to affect the culture of the college and develop leadership but were less motivated by title.

As highlighted by Gonzales and Wolverton (2000), additional research on deans examines women and men faculty’s motivations to pursue or forego advancement to the role of dean. Padilla (2006) shared, “one reason why women would forego available leadership roles: a distaste for what comes with a leadership position” (p. 482). Padilla suggested that this “distaste” comes from some of the organizational and societal barriers that women face once they assume leadership roles, and postulates that this may be due to dissimilarities in women and men’s motivations for leadership:

Perhaps women’s motivations to become dean have traditionally been more similar to each other, and different from men’s, thus limiting the number of women applying for deanships in the past...a number of women deans... indicated that they thought women went into deanships for different reasons than men, with a greater desire to serve, and less of an emphasis on the prestige of the title or the power it confers. (Padilla, 2006, p. 479)

Padilla's (2006) study is consistent with other literature, highlighting women dean's motivation to pursue the role based on the purpose of the work more than the title.

More recent research examines women's motivation to pursue leadership roles in academia more broadly. Hinck et al. (2017) surveyed current, former, and future administrators to understand their motivations for pursuing these roles and identify any differences by gender. They found that being encouraged to apply was one of the most important factors in ultimately deciding to apply, especially for women. They also found that women were more likely to be concerned about time when considering administrative roles than men, and that men were more likely to be motivated by pay than women (Hinck et al., 2017). Although this study is not directly related to the academic deanship, it provides an example of empirical research on motivations for women to pursue leadership roles in academia, which may be applicable to the academic deanship.

Career Path to the Deanship

The Unclear Path. Given the many responsibilities and trade-offs that come with the deanship, it is important to understand how one typically arrives at the role and acknowledge training or preparation sought along the way. One of the more noteworthy studies by Moore et al. (1983) sought to understand the career paths of deans and presidents, as well as any deviations by discipline. Building on Cohen and March's (1974) framework of the academic career ladder, Moore et al. (1983) identified the path to the presidency as one that originated in the faculty ranks, moved to department chair, dean, provost, and president. Similarly, the path to the deanship was thought to begin in the faculty, move to department chair, and include some level of assistant or associate dean before assuming the role of dean. Moore et al. (1983) argued for the importance of

the deanship since “the position constitutes the middle rung on the presidential ladder” (p. 505). They found just over half of the presidents surveyed had served as dean at some point in their career, solidifying the importance of the role to those pursuing senior ranks. Additionally, the most common path to the deanship was straight from a faculty role, with fewer deans gaining experience as a department chair or assistant/associate dean first, showing that “more individuals conform to variations of the ‘norms’ than to the ‘norms’ themselves” (Moore et al., 1983, p. 514).

Although the work from Moore et al. (1983) is decades old, the limited, more recent research on the career pathway also shows variation in career trajectories to the deanship. For example, in work from Gmelch (2002) stemming from the National Study of Academic Deans, department chairs were observed to have a greater presence in the career path of deans, with over half of deans gaining the experience of chair first. Overall, the difference in career experiences from deans in Moore et al.’s (1983) study and Gmelch’s (2002) work “demonstrate that there is no formula for becoming a dean, and many routes can ultimately lead to a deanship” (Layne, 2010, p. 188). Some studies suggest advancing to the deanship is about being in the right place at the right time (Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000), while others suggest women have a stronger desire to pursue the role of dean than men (Kilson, 1996). More research is needed to address the lack of clarity around the career path to the academic deanship.

The Traditional Path. For both the presidency and the deanship, the majority of leaders begin in the faculty ranks (Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000). As a result, women who aim to pursue the deanship are likely to have to navigate the academic hierarchy and system of tenure and promotion before even being eligible for the role of academic dean.

Wolverton and Gonzales (2000) referred to this as the “time-in-line mobility” (p. 2) in which individuals must withstand a set amount of time in certain roles and achieve certain milestones (like a third-year review or tenure and promotion) to advance. They further articulated that this process “impacts how fast an individual can travel up the academic ladder” (p. 2). By this logic, if women are experiencing more barriers at earlier stages of this career ladder, it may take them longer to advance to the deanship than men.

In a study of women deans of law schools, Padilla (2006) found that more men followed a traditional career path – one that began in the faculty ranks and ascended the career ladder identified by Moore et al. (1983) – than women. This difference is thought to come from societal norms and gendered structures, “considering the argument that typical career paths for professionals have been designed largely by men for men, it is not surprising that more male deans surveyed” followed the traditional path (Padilla, 2006, p. 458). Differences in motivation and career aspirations, shaped by societal norms, can serve as a barrier for women in their career advancement. The following section examines the barriers and other factors impacting career advancement for women in the faculty ranks and the deanship.

Factors Impacting Women Faculty’s Career Advancement

Research on the deanship suggests most deans begin their careers in the faculty ranks (Moore et al., 1983; Schwartz, 1996). In reflecting on this transition, Gmelch (2002) shared, “the metamorphosis from professor to academic leaders takes time and dedication from new leaders and commitment and foresight from colleges and universities” (p. 11). In this passage, Gmelch (2002) recognized that the journey from faculty to academic leader, in this case the academic dean, requires a lengthy process and

effort from both the individual pursuing the role and the college or university where the advancement is occurring. Despite the growing number of women in higher education as undergraduate students, graduate students, and assistant professors (Johnson, 2016), women still face barriers to advancement, especially through this “metamorphosis” period from faculty to administration. In examining how senior women faculty decide to pursue the academic deanship, it is important to understand the factors impacting advancement along the career pathway. For purposes of this research, I refer to factors as “supports and barriers to career choice” (Lent et al., 2000, p. 36), recognizing that both positive and negative factors may impact women’s career advancement.

As introduced in Chapter One, several barriers to women’s career advancement in academia exist (Menges & Exum, 1983). Recommendations to overcome these barriers frequently place the responsibility on the individual woman to develop her leadership skills instead of turning to organizational or systemic change. Gmelch (2002) framed these factors, or parts of the “metamorphosis” process, as related to the individual as well as the organization (the colleges and universities). Other scholars and researchers offer similar ways to frame the barriers to advancement. For example, Acker (1990) presented a framework highlighting the gendered nature of organizations, like universities, that privilege men and disadvantage women, thus perpetuating barriers to advancement. Growe and Montgomery (1999) categorized barriers as individual, organizational, and societal. Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) analyzed the gendered variation of power at four different levels: societal, organizational, interpersonal, and individual. No matter how framed, the factors (barriers and supports) that occur or exist in the faculty ranks could impact women’s ability to advance to the role of academic dean. Given the use of related

layers in other studies of faculty (e.g., O’Meara et al., 2008), I use a framing similar to Grove and Montgomery (1999). The following section examines literature on key factors impacting career advancement for women faculty at the societal, organizational, and individual levels.

Societal Factors

Gender Norms. If we are to understand how and why women pursue the academic deanship, it is important to acknowledge the societal forces, like gender norms, that may impact women’s ascension to the role of dean. One of the ways gender norms emerge is through family planning and gender stereotypes about work and home responsibilities (Williams, 1991, 2004). Several researchers document the challenges women faculty face in overcoming expectations for family planning, attempting to pursue career and family, or navigating work life balance as women without children (Culpepper et al., 2020b; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; Sallee et al., 2015; Seltzer, 2015). Armenti (2004) suggested “women are expected to adapt to institutional norms that do not accommodate their differences” (p. 226) and that women have to “[tailor] childbirth decisions to the schedule of the profession” (p. 228). Armenti (2004) further argued “this phenomenon persists because the academic profession does not allow women a significantly different career path than the standard one developed around the male life course” (p. 229). In considering advancement to the academic deanship for women faculty, societal expectations and traditional gender norms are potential barriers, whether related to family planning or attempts at work-life balance.

In response to expectations around family planning and gender norms, several institutions of higher education have adopted or adjusted parental leave policies to be

more equitable (Lundquist et al., 2012; Mason et al., 2013). For example, some institutions provide equal amounts of parental leave for men and women in efforts to disrupt the assumption that women have a greater responsibility for child care than men (Lundquist et al., 2012). Stop-the-tenure-clock policies have also gained traction and popularity in higher education (Manchester et al., 2010). These policies allow individuals to take up to a year's time for family or other emergency reasons without consequences towards tenure (Antecol et al., 2016; Mason et al., 2013). For some women, these changes to existing policies and attempts at equity in family planning could serve as factors to enhance their advancement. However, many women faculty do not take advantage of the policies out of fear that they will be penalized or viewed differently, further perpetuating and highlighting the barriers created by gender norms and bias (Antecol et al., 2016; Lundquist et al., 2012; Manchester et al., 2013; O'Meara & Campbell, 2011).

Leadership Style. Another way societal norms can impact career advancement is through leadership styles and role in/congruence. Norms can originate in the form of doubt that women will pursue or fit into certain careers or leadership roles (Banchefsky et al., 2016; Carli et al., 2016; Leslie et al., 2015), or by holding women to standards for leadership based on traditional models that are more frequently associated with men (Heilman, 2001; Kezar et al., 2006; Ridgeway, 2001).

In a qualitative study by Dominici et al. (2009), researchers conducted focus groups with 27 faculty members, eight of whom were serving in leadership roles connected to the deanship at the time of the study. The authors studied women's experiences with leadership and identified several themes that may inform their choice

process to pursue leadership. For example, Dominici et al. (2009) suggested that women are not asked to pursue administrative roles when opportunities open, but rather gain leadership roles by “directing academic programs, chairing committees, or leading research centers or institutes that they initiate and for which they obtain funding themselves” (p. 1). The individual pursuit of leadership opportunities suggests that the decision for women is not why or when they decide to pursue leadership, but rather how they gain access to opportunities for leadership in the first place. Overall, Dominici et al. (2009) contributed to the literature by suggesting that the current model of leadership still does not fit for many women. The societal barriers to women’s advancement fuel this misalignment as they perpetuate gender role stereotypes and shape different workloads for men and women (Bain & Cummings, 2000; Misra et al., 2010; O’Meara et al., 2017b; O’Meara et al., 2018a).

Although gender stereotypes are still prevalent in academia, leadership styles have shifted to be more collaborative and transformational (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Kezar et al., 2006). The shift suggests:

Leadership has moved from being leader centered, individualistic, hierarchical, focused on universal characteristics, and emphasizing power over followers to a new vision in which leadership is process centered, collective, context-bound, nonhierarchical, and focused on mutual power and influence processes. (Kezar et al., 2006, p. 33)

Researchers highlight elements of transformational and related leadership styles that are more frequently associated with women (Bass, 1999; Martin, 2015). However, women leaders may still be expected to balance elements of all leadership styles (Eddy & Ward, 2015). For example, in a qualitative study by Isaac et al. (2010) examining the leadership styles of women department chairs, each of the women in the study was found to have a

transformational leadership style, and were found to be most “successful when they pair[ed] stereotypic male (agentic) behaviors with stereotypic female (communal) behaviors” (Isaac et al., 2010, p. 533). For example, a woman leader who is decisive in taking a specific action but explains her behavior and justifies why the decision was in the best interest of the organization would fit this mold. The shift away from individualistic, one-size-fits-all leadership toward transformational styles may be a factor impacting women’s decisions to pursue career advancement to academic leadership. However, the expectation that women have to exhibit multiple types of leadership in their roles may not be sustainable – or equitable – in the long run.

Leadership style can also be connected to perceptions of effectiveness. Rosser (2001, 2003) studied perceptions of deans’ effectiveness from the perspective of faculty and staff and found that women rated higher on all levels of leadership effectiveness than men. Rosser (2001) argued, “this finding should reinforce the structural opportunities for the promotion and production of academic women into mid- and senior-level leadership positions” (Rosser, 2001, p. 16). Despite these findings highlighting women’s strength in leadership, research and representation suggest that women are not being promoted and produced as deans and other positional leaders at rates equal to men. The same is true for women of color who typically advance at slower rates than White women (Opp & Gosetti, 2000), despite the unique and valuable contributions they make in higher education (Turner, 2007).

In regard to gender differences in leadership and styles of leading, Grove and Montgomery (1999) asked:

Will time erase the gender gap in leadership that is like a brick wall for so many women? Probably not. Time will help, but more is needed. Yes, we need to

recognize that women leadership styles are different from men but we all must embrace the difference and make room for it in the educational leadership arena. (p. 9-10)

Grove and Montgomery (1999) advocated for a need to not only acknowledge but also accept other forms and styles of leadership as valid in order to overcome the societal barriers that may be preventing women from ascending to the deanship.

Organizational Factors

Gender Bias. Discrimination due to gender bias can be an organizational barrier. Gender bias in higher education organizations is frequently highlighted in literature on faculty through qualitative work (see, for example, Longman & Madsen, 2014) and experiments conducted to test the prevalence of gender bias in faculty careers (see, for example, Steinpreis et al., 1999). Existing research highlights the organizational barriers produced as a result of gender bias in higher education institutions. From the hiring process (Steinpreis et al., 1999), to workload distribution (Winslow, 2010), to policy implementation (O'Meara & Campbell, 2011), gender bias is documented at many points of faculty careers.

Gender bias in hiring is a growing area of research in higher education, with bias documented at every step of the hiring process – from jobs ads (see, for example, Gaucher et al., 2011) to the final hiring decision (O'Meara et al., 2020). Studies examine the impact of gendered language in job ads on women's perceived fit and decision to apply for jobs (see, for example, Born & Taris, 2010). Research corroborates the idea that job ads can perpetuate gender bias and inequity by using masculine language (in both national and international contexts), thus decreasing the likelihood that women will apply for these jobs in the first place (Askehave & Zethsen, 2014; Horvath & Sczesny, 2016;

Sczesny et al., 2016). Once women decide to apply, the evaluation of their materials (CV, personal statement, letters of recommendation) can invite additional gender bias. For example, Moss-Racusin et al. (2012), in a study of science faculty's hiring of a lab manager, found that faculty judged women as less competent than men candidates with equal credentials. Although this example is not directly connected to faculty hiring, it highlights the unconscious gender bias that can infiltrate academic hiring processes. Once invited to campus, women may face additional gender bias. A study by Blair-Loy et al. (2017) showed women faculty candidates are interrupted more in job talks than men candidates, which can negatively affect their hiring process. Overall, gender bias in the hiring process can shape how and when women advance in faculty ranks and may impact their decision to pursue academic leadership roles later in their career. This barrier may be exponentially greater when considering bias that can stem from other identities, particularly for racial minority groups (Williams et al., 2014), in addition to gender.

Differences in workload and type of work for men and women faculty are also well documented in existing literature and research. These differences in workload are frequently fueled by gender bias that places expectations on women to take on more service, care-giving, and emotional labor type work (Babcock et al., 2017; El-Alayli et al., 2018; Hanasono et al., 2019; Winslow, 2010). Several studies show that women are more likely to take on service work than men, taking time away from their research, which is more heavily rewarded in the tenure and promotion process (Barrett & Barrett, 2011; Mirsa et al., 2010; O'Meara, 2016; O'Meara et al., 2017; O'Meara et al., 2017b; Terosky et al., 2014). Thus, the gender inequity and bias that fuels workload differences can impact the rate at which women advance through the faculty ranks. Women faculty's

experiences with workload inequity may impact their decision to pursue the academic deanship, especially given the increased service and administrative responsibilities that come with the role (Gmelch, 2000).

Gender bias is also identified in research specific to the academic deanship. Padilla (2006) studied the career paths and experiences of women law school deans through an initial survey and follow-up interviews, wondering if elements of the pathway to the deanship made it “easier for men than women to become deans” (p. 454). Padilla (2006) went on to speculate that perhaps “treasure maps written in ink decipherable only by those with a Y chromosome” (p. 454) exist, suggesting that intangible, inequitable processes dominate the advancement pathway and disadvantage individuals who do not identify as men.

Despite increasing numbers of women in faculty ranks (Johnson, 2016), Bilensky et al. (2008) suggested gender bias is still at play, identifying “concern that progress is due mainly to greater numbers of women applicants rather than diminishing gender bias” (p. 2). The representation of women may be slowly increasing, but that does not mean that the gender bias fueling organizational barriers has decreased. Rather, it is important to increase awareness of bias and strategies to reduce it.

Role Models and Mentors. Role models and mentors are frequently cited in the higher education literature as important factors for advancement (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Hall & Sandler, 1983; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Seltzer, 2015; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007; Wasburn, 2007). Role models can serve as visible proof that others have achieved certain goals, which can provide validation, confidence, and support to those aspiring to achieve similar results (Carter et al., 2018; Hall & Sandler, 1983). For example, serving as a

faculty member at an institution where the dean of the college is a woman who also came from the faculty ranks may serve as a model for the faculty member who now has increased confidence in her own pursuit of a leadership role. Mentors do not necessarily have to be in the same position that a mentee aspires to, nor serve as a role model in addition to a mentor (Quinlan, 1999). Mentors can provide access to information otherwise unknown, assist mentees in strategically navigating their work environment, and serve as a sounding board when considering career changes (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Hall & Sandler, 1983; Quinlan, 1999; Wasburn, 2007). For example, a senior woman faculty member contemplating the deanship may consult her mentor, her advisor from graduate school who is a man, to garner advice from someone more senior who has made an investment in her career success.

The impact of mentoring for women in higher education has been studied extensively through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Cawyer et al. (2002) examined the role of formal mentoring programs through a case study approach, finding that mentors provided support in a number of areas, including socialization. Schrodt et al. (2003) used a qualitative survey approach to examine the experiences of over 250 faculty members with formal mentors. They found that new faculty self-reported an increased sense of growth and social support in their roles as a result of mentorship. In a more recent quantitative study of women advancing in academic medicine careers, Laver et al. (2018) found that mentoring was one of the most common interventions to support women in retention and advancement in their careers. Hill and Wheat (2017) examined the role of mentoring and role models for “key-line administrators,” including deans and women university presidents and found that women can have multiple mentors and are

often “[resourceful] in seeking career guidance” (p. 2090). In a study of women administrators at research institutions, Searby et al. (2015) found that the majority of women identified their mentors as sponsors, or individuals who “[nominate] the protégé for promotions, lateral moves, and other recognitions such as awards” (p. 99). This role of sponsor goes beyond simply providing guidance to serving as an active participant in the career advancement of the mentee, often using the mentor’s own “connections” (Searby et al., 2015, p. 103).

Peer mentoring is another support that may positively impact women’s decisions to pursue academic leadership. As an example, researchers in economics used a “randomized trial” to examine a program where faculty participated in a peer workshop focused on publications, grant proposals, and requirements for career advancement (Blau et al., 2010; Ginther et al., 2020). Peer mentorship and feedback through this process resulted in greater retention, as well as an increased number of journal publications and accepted grant proposals (Blau et al., 2010) – elements critical for career advancement in higher education (Webber & Canché, 2018; Wright & Vanderford, 2017). Faculty peer networks offer another example of peer mentorship. In these structures designed to provide a safe space for women or historically marginalized groups to discuss challenges and strategies, women have been shown to increase their agency toward career advancement and feel supported by their networks to overcome organizational barriers to their progress (O’Meara et al., 2019; O’Meara & Stromquist, 2015; O’Meara et al., 2018b; Templeton & O’Meara, 2018).

Role models and mentors can also serve as barriers to advancement. For example, Dominici et al. (2009) showed that “experiences of senior women [leaders]... discourage

younger women faculty from...assuming leadership positions” (p. 3) as a result of their own negative experiences. While the overarching goal in academia may be to advance women, and mentors can provide transparency and access to opportunities to aid in this goal, Dominici et al.’s (2009) study extends the idea that advancement should not come at the cost of poor workplace treatment, disadvantage, or dissatisfaction. This example also highlights the important role of the institution in women’s decisions to advance to leadership, as “the perceived lack of support may ... hamper efforts to recruit younger women into leadership roles” (Dominici et al., 2009, p. 3). Based on this literature, women who have taken the leap into leadership may influence the process for senior women faculty pursuing the deanship, depending on whether or not the mentor had a positive experience and received institutional support as an academic leader.

In their work using data from the National Study of Academic Deans, Nies and Wolverton (2000) acknowledged the importance of mentors, as those “in senior level positions can help to remove barriers that currently prevent qualified individuals from these populations moving into the deanship” (p. 13). Despite the importance of mentors, the authors also acknowledged that just over half of the women deans in the study had mentors and “most of these had been White; the majority had been other women” (Nies & Wolverton, 2000, p. 11). The lack of role models in both quantity and diversity that can mentor future generations of academic leadership is another organizational barrier in the path to the deanship.

To combat the lower numbers of women in academic leadership and subsequent lack of role models and mentors, some literature on the pathway to the academic deanship focuses on achieving critical mass. Critical mass theory uses Kanter’s (1976)

approach to organizational hierarchies, recognizing that power and representation could alter the career experiences of men and women, and focuses on increasing the representation of women to a certain point until the group reaches a “critical mass.” Bilen-Green et al. (2008) argued, “attaining a critical mass of women in the leadership structure is especially important to position an institution for change” (p. 4). Dannels et al. (2009) offered similar notes for women deans of dental schools, suggesting that having more women in the deanship can create cultures for other women to address gender bias, foster leadership, and feel supported overall. In considering women deans of law schools, Padilla (2006) shared, “with each new woman appointed, the overall number of female deans increases, making it less of a novelty and more acceptable or common place” (p. 476). Thus achieving “critical mass” may provide support, networks, and normalcy to women in the role of academic dean while increasing the number of mentors and role models who can help with future advancement.

Individual Factors

Agency and Career Aspirations. Some of the primary factors thought to impact women’s advancement focus on individual women’s levels of confidence or agency to pursue leadership roles. While developing confidence and agency is recommended (Kay & Shipman, 2014; O’Meara, 2015; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; Wessel et al., 2015), some research also suggests that exercising “too much” confidence can result in negative perceptions of leadership and effectiveness for women, due in part to the gender norms and bias that exist at the organizational and societal levels (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011). This debate puts women in a challenging position where being agentic is required to move forward yet being too confident lends to other’s

perceptions of women's role incongruence and can negatively impact their ability to advance to leadership anyways (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This balancing act of developing agency may impact women faculty's career aspirations for academic leadership by propelling or inhibiting their attempts at advancement.

Young and McLeod's (2001) work examining "women's decisions to enter educational administration" (p. 462) appears closely related to women faculty's decision to take the leap from faculty to leadership. Though Young and McLeod's (2001) work is focused solely in the K-12 sector, the research questions and findings of the study are directly related to women in higher education and may provide context for understanding the transition to the deanship. The authors noted that existing research on the topic of advancement decisions "locate(s) the problem within women and fail(s) to address larger societal and ideological issues" (p. 465). Thus, while a growing body of literature examines barriers to women's advancement, most of it centers on improving or altering the woman to fit the current mold rather than changing the institution or organizational norms within K-12 (Young & McLeod, 2001). The same can be said of higher education systems.

Young and McLeod's (2001) study narrows in on the 'how and why' process of decision making. The findings of their study state, "women's entrance [into leadership] is contingent on their career aspirations...their experiences with administrative role models, their exposure to transformative leadership styles, and their opportunities to garner support for entering administration" (Young & McLeod, 2001, p. 465). Based on these aspirations and other elements, teachers either decided to enter an educational administration graduate program or continue teaching (i.e., choose not to pursue

leadership) (Young & McLeod, 2001). Career aspirations may be one factor involved in women's decision-making processes when transitioning from faculty to the academic deanship as well.

Leadership Development. Leadership development programs are frequently offered as a solution for women facing barriers in their advancement to academic leadership roles. These programs consist of trainings, workshops, and other planned events at both a national and local level that cover a variety of topics, from networking to negotiation, building a vision, dealing with conflict, and more (Madsen, 2012; McDade, 1987; White, 2005, 2012). As a result, leadership development programs “continue to be a critical element in teaching and supporting women in higher education to prepare for, attain, and maintain positions of influence within their institutions” (Madsen, 2012, p. 1). Although not clearly defined in this example, “positions of influence” may include different roles in academic leadership, like that of the academic dean – a position that has influence over a specific college within a higher education institution (Layne, 2010).

A growing body of literature exists on the purpose, effectiveness, and development of leadership development programs catered to women in higher education (Longman & Madsen, 2014). Two of the most notable programs are the Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Leadership Institute and the Executive Leadership for Academic Medicine (ELAM) Institute. HERS is a nationally recognized leadership program for women that aims to support women's development and advancement in academic careers and subsequently address challenges in organizational culture (White, 2012). In a study on the HERS Institute, participants and researchers analyzed the curriculum, determining that negotiation and conflict management were most central to

developing future women leaders (White, 2012). Several researchers and scholars note the positive impacts of the HERS program on women's advancement, and particularly on their levels of self-confidence (Longman & Madsen, 2014; White, 2005, 2012). In a study of the HERS Institute by Diamond (2004), over 32% of participants reported advancing in the years following their participation. ELAM focuses on similar areas of skill development for women faculty and future leaders in academic medicine, including deans (Dannels et al., 2009). The program saw an increase in the number of fellows holding academic leadership positions from 38% to 80% in the first few years of its operation (Richman et al., 2001), suggesting a programmatic impact on women's ability to advance in their academic medicine careers.

Leadership development can impact women's career advancement by providing the network, knowledge, skills, self-confidence, or experience needed to overcome existing barriers (Baltodano et al., 2012; Bonebright et al., 2012; Hornsby et al., 2012; Madsen, 2012; White, 2012). However, it can also perpetuate some of the existing societal and organizational barriers to women's advancement by placing all responsibility on the individual woman to fit into existing molds of leadership.

Gaps in the Literature

Existing literature briefly highlights the gender gap in the academic deanship, differences in motivation between men and women deans, and the career path from faculty to dean. However, these and other areas remain under-researched, especially when considering the process senior women faculty must navigate when pursuing the academic deanship. For example, the literature on the career path and transition from faculty to dean suggests that no consistent path exists, but the topic has only been

examined within certain institutional types and has not been revisited extensively in recent decades (see, for exception, Gmelch & Wolverton, 2000).

Few studies, like research by Padilla (2006), have examined the process for women in pursuit of the academic deanship. While informative, Padilla's (2006) study only looked at women deans of law schools. Some existing literature in the field of education, particularly in the K-12 sector, examines the decision-making and career processes for women (Eccles, 1994, 2011; Young & McLeod, 2001), but similar studies related to higher education have not been conducted. Additionally, research on dimensions of identity beyond gender for academic deans remains limited. Some research looks at leadership experience and advancement for women of color more broadly (Martin, 2011; Niemann, 2012; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017) but far less focuses specifically on the academic deanship (see, for exception, Hodges & Welch, 2018; Lindsay, 1997). Literature on the academic dean for women with other identity intersections (e.g., sexual orientation, socio-economic status) or those who identify as non-binary is even more limited.

In order to understand the transition to and through the academic deanship, and the reasons for senior women faculty's pursuit of the position, additional research on women's motivation and factors impacting their decision-making process is required. Expanding research on the academic deanship to include more dimensions of identity is also critical to the future of this work.

Methodological Approaches

In addition to the limited amount of literature on the academic deanship and pathway to the role, the breadth of methods employed is also lacking. Dominici et al.

(2009) acknowledged this potential area for growth, sharing, “Few studies have formally probed the experiences of senior women faculty leaders and reported their views of the root causes of the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership positions” (p. 1). Although some research on roles and responsibilities of academic deans has been conducted (see, for example, Gmelch, 2000), less research examines the experiences of women in pursuit of, or choosing to forgo, the role of academic dean.

Most existing research on academic deans is quantitative in nature, with heavy reliance on survey methodology. More detailed and nuanced research on other parts of the career pathway, like the tenure and promotion process for faculty (see, for example, Barrett & Barrett, 2011; López et al., 2018), or the transition to the presidency (see, for example, Birnbaum, 1992; Woollen, 2016) exists, but less research focuses on the deanship alone. In considering women advancing through gendered organizations, Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) stated, “those who get through the obstacle course may be quite atypical” (p. 53). Although quantitative studies tell us about who “gets through” – about the women who do make it to the deanship – less is known about the struggles or experiences met along the way, or what, if anything, makes them “atypical.” More qualitative studies on the decisions of deans to pursue the leadership role, and their experiences once in the role, are needed to understand the depth of the academic deanship. Additionally, more current research on the representation, demographics, and career paths of academic deans is required to truly understand and enhance the current landscape. Thus, this study used a qualitative approach to examine the decision-making process for senior women faculty in pursuit of the academic deanship. The following section outlines the guiding principles and theoretical frameworks employed.

Theoretical Frameworks and Guiding Principles

Theoretical frameworks provide an existing model to apply, dissect, or help understand a phenomenon (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998). Maxwell (2012) suggested that “the conceptual framework for your research study is something that is *constructed*, not found” (p. 35). To understand how and why senior women faculty decide to pursue the academic deanship, I employed Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), elements of choice architecture (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), and March’s (1994) decision-making theories in efforts to construct my own guiding concepts. Similar to existing literature on the deanship, the frameworks selected differ in discipline, content, and focus.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is based in social cognitive psychology which focuses on self-efficacy or an individual’s belief in their ability to achieve a task within a certain environment (Bandura, 1993). In addition to self-efficacy, the theory of social cognitive career development also focuses on goals and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 2000). Goals are considered aspirations that “organize and guide” action whereas outcome expectations are focused less on ability or behavior, and more on the possible consequences (Lent et al., 1994, p. 84). SCCT frames these concepts in the context of career, examining “(1) How basic academic and career interests develop; (2) how educational and career choices are made; (3) How academic and career success is obtained” (Lent et al., 2002, p. 750). SCCT is also framed in a specific context, taking into consideration environmental or organizational factors (Lent et al., 1994, 2000).

Lent et al. (1994) presented a “model of social cognitive influences on career choice behavior” (p. 93) that captures these individual elements – including self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Sometimes self-efficacy can outweigh outcome expectations (according to Bandura, 1993), such that if one does or does not believe in themselves, they may be more likely to pursue or not pursue a path, despite consequences. However, in the case of careers, Lent et al. (1994) suggested that outcome expectations may operate as a separate, perhaps stronger variable, as one may have self-efficacy that they can succeed in a math career, but may not have the support from family and view that lack of support or consequence as a stronger reason to follow a specific path.

The model also takes into account predispositions, identity characteristics, and other background factors. These include gender, race/ethnicity, ability, and previous learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994). In the choice process for senior women faculty pursuing the academic deanship, gender is a primary focus of this study. However, other individual traits and identity markers are also important to consider in this process. The inclusion of external factors in addition to these internal factors and traits makes SCCT particularly applicable for my study, especially given the research on societal, organizational, and individual factors presented in the previous review of the literature.

Lent et al.’s (1994) model also allows for the examination of distal and proximal factors. Distal factors may include prior experiences, relationships, or incidents that shape the career choice process, whereas proximal factors are those directly impacting the interests, goals, and actions of career choice in the current moment (Lent et al., 2000). In the choice process for senior women faculty in pursuit of the academic deanship, distal factors may include parents’ level of education, prior experiences with leadership, or

other elements that could impact current decisions to pursue leadership or previous decisions at earlier stages of career advancement. For example, having a family member in academia may have sparked a level of interest in the career path at a young age, whereas being a first-generation college student could have led to a slower or less likely path to pursue the deanship. Proximal factors may include experiences of gender bias in the hiring stage or supports from a partner during the application process (Lent et al., 2000). For example, women deans in this study could reflect on an experience of bias during their on-campus interview or share that they made the decision to pursue the deanship because they had a very active mentor who guided them through the process from interest to application. Both would qualify as proximal factors. As I consider the factors (barriers and supports) impacting women's decisions to pursue the academic deanship, both proximal and distal factors may apply.

Potential Limitations. I aimed to apply SCCT to senior women faculty pursuing the academic deanship through a qualitative methodological approach, as outlined in Chapter Three. However, most studies that test the SCCT are quantitative in nature. Many studies use SCCT to identify factors and compare statistical models representing career choice processes (Brown & Lent, 2017). The majority of SCCT work also focuses on college students selecting majors or pursuing their first job post-graduate (Brown & Lent, 2017; Inda et al., 2013). More recent studies employ qualitative approaches to understand the choice process of both college students and people later in career through Lent et al.'s (1994) model. For example, Lent et al. (2002) used qualitative interviews to study career supports and barriers for college students in their post-graduate job search. Michel et al. (2015) employed a qualitative content analysis to assess the role of SCCT in

women faculty's behavior toward male graduate students. Most notably, in a study by Whitmarsh et al. (2007), the authors relied on qualitative, structured interviews to examine the career planning and decision process for professional women in a number of fields. Whitmarsh et al. (2007) found six themes related to career choice for women, including career-decision making patterns. Though the results are broad and not specific to the field of higher education, the study serves as an example of a qualitative approach that applied SCCT to women further along in their careers.

Examples and applications of SCCT to later stages of career advancement are still lacking. To address this gap, Lent and Brown (2013) adapted the original SCCT model to focus on career self-efficacy. More specifically, the model looks at career self-management and includes career exploration and advancement processes (Lent & Brown, 2013). Although highly related to my study, little qualitative research using this framework exists. What limited research on career self-efficacy does exist attempts to quantitatively model the factors important to developing career agency (Lent & Brown, 2013). While I did not quantitatively measure self-efficacy through a survey or assessment (as seen in Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2013), I did seek to understand the factors impacting women's decisions to pursue the deanship, and I included the concept of career self-efficacy in my conceptual framing.

SCCT in Higher Education. Within the context of higher education, SCCT has been applied to the choice processes of doctoral students pursuing jobs in academia. Wang et al. (2007) examined the career choice experience of four international doctoral students pursuing positions in academia. The study employed a case study methodology and included several forms of data, including interviews, focus groups, a survey, and

“retrospective techniques” (Wang et al., 2007, p. 578). The focus of the study was to expand SCCT by incorporating self-regulated learning (Wang et al., 2007), but it provided a qualitative example of individuals later in career pursuing roles within higher education, and thus has some applicability to the use of SCCT in my study.

Gibbs Jr. and Griffin (2013) examined the career paths and decisions of recent doctoral graduates in the biomedical sciences oriented around their interest level in faculty positions. The mixed-method approach included a survey with data on demographics, productivity, and advisor relationships, and a qualitative narrative that captured “career-interest formation” (Gibbs Jr. & Griffin, 2013, p. 1). This research focused on the need for diversity in the academic pathway, particularly in STEM fields, and was framed using “Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and the social influence model” (Gibbs Jr. & Griffin, 2013, p. 1). Personal values and the challenges associated with faculty careers (e.g., limited job opportunities, low pay) were noted as factors influencing the career interest formation of participants in the study (Gibbs Jr. & Griffin, 2013). Several of the themes presented in the study resulted in different findings for women and underrepresented minority participants, who reported significant barriers and negative experiences in their career advancement that occurred as a result of their gender or other elements of identity (Gibbs Jr. & Griffin, 2013). This work extends the use of SCCT to understand the career path and decision-points for individuals in academia. It also offers a potential application of SCCT to address the issues in diversity and representation plaguing higher education as a whole – a direct connection to my own research on the gender inequity in the academic deanship.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994) and the related career self-management adaptation (Lent & Brown, 2013) provide a framework through which to examine senior women faculty's decision-making processes in pursuit of the academic deanship. SCCT and its adapted models include gender as a personal factor and consider the individual and "contextual" factors, which could encompass the societal and organizational factors frequently cited in the literature on women faculty. The emphasis on proximal factors is particularly relevant for considering the decision-making process and the point at which senior women faculty take action in deciding to pursue the deanship. Although Lent et al.'s (1994) model highlights "action," the details of this choice are not well documented in related literature. In order to better understand the phenomenon of women's choice to pursue the academic deanship, I used Lent et al.'s (1994) model of SCCT alongside March's (1994) theory on decision-making and Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) work on choice architecture.

Theoretical Approaches to Decision-Making

Organizations can "profit from an understanding of how decisions happen in order to make them happen better" (March, 1994, p. 271). This philosophy is directly applicable to my research questions as I sought to understand how senior women faculty made the decision to pursue the academic deanship, if not to "make [the decision] happen better" so much as to improve the process of making the decision so that more women choose, or have the choice, to pursue the deanship.

Rational Theory of Choice. March (1994) introduced two theoretical approaches to decision making. The first, a rational theory of choice, "pursues a logic of consequence" and considers the following questions: "What actions are possible?" "What

future consequences might follow from each alternative?” “How valuable are the consequences?” “How is a choice to be made among the alternatives in terms of the values of their consequences?” (March, 1994, pp. 2-3). For a woman faculty member considering the decision to pursue the academic deanship – whether she was offered a position, is contemplating applying, or is simply entertaining the thought of leadership as a next step in career – this rational choice model could be applied. For example, she may consider the different possible options for a dean role at her current institution versus another institution. Consequences may include relocating family, navigating existing or new organizational politics, and a changing (and possibly more demanding) workload (Dominici et al., 2009; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2007). Assigning weight and value to each consequence may be the next step in the woman’s process, followed by a decision depending on which alternative has the least valuable consequences. This rational decision-making theory offers a step-by-step process to understand decision-making, but it lacks some information about context and assumes that all decision-makers follow the same “logic of consequence” (March, 1994, p. 2).

Rule-Following Approach. Rule-following decision-making is the second theory introduced by March (1994), and is based on recognition, identity, and rules. When faced with a decision, a rule-following individual asks these questions: What is the context? What position or role am I operating from? What does a person in this position do in this situation? (March, 1994).

In this case, context is the first variable of consideration, followed by acknowledgement of the individual’s current status, and then comparison to other individuals who have faced similar combinations of context and role. For example, a

woman faculty member at a community college may see a posting for a dean role at a nearby public, four-year institution. She considers her current context and potential future work environment, her own status and position as an external candidate for the job with experience at a different institutional type, and wonders whether or not she should pursue the opportunity. Based on March's (1994) rule-following decision-making model, the woman would then consider other women that she knows who have faced similar situations, perhaps a fellow colleague at the community college who decided to apply for a leadership role at another institutional type. If that individual chose to apply for the job, the woman will make the same decision in order to follow the decision rule previously enacted. Thus, this theory may provide insight into the process of how and why women decide to pursue the role of academic dean. Yet, it also assumes that all individuals with shared identities will make decisions in the same way and is therefore not a perfect fit, especially considering the variation in dimensions of identity beyond gender.

Connecting to Higher Education and SCCT. Generally, March (1994) introduced a very scientific approach to understanding decision-making, acknowledging that “understanding any specific decision in a specific situation requires a great deal of concrete contextual knowledge – details about the historical, social, political, and economic worlds surrounding the decisions, and about the individuals, organizations, and institutions involved” (p. vii). Although referenced in higher education research (see, for example, Lounder, 2015) March's (1994) work has not been extensively applied to individual career choice processes in higher education. It does, however, offer an approach grounded in research and logic that may be applicable to understanding how women decide to pursue the deanship in a particular context.

More specifically, March's (1994) consideration of "concrete contextual knowledge" confirms the complement with SCCT. The models of rational and rule-following decision making (March, 1994) provide more concrete steps for the action of making a decision. Using these theories to complement SCCT allows for better understanding of how and why senior women faculty decide to pursue the academic deanship, and offers possible strategies used in their processes. It is important to note that, in this study, elements of both rule-following and rational choice approaches may be employed simultaneously. To further complement use of these concepts, I now turn to choice architecture as a final element of my conceptual framing.

Choice Architecture

Choice architecture and the theory of nudges presented by Thaler and Sunstein (2008) is centered on the philosophy of "libertarian paternalism," where people are free to do what they want but also allow choice architects to "make their lives longer, healthier, and better" (p. 5). Within this theory, Thaler and Sunstein (2008) defined two groups of individuals – humans and econs. While econs may be able to make ideal choices by assessing all possible variables, humans are prone to error and thus follow a series of different "rules of thumb" and other patterns that influence their decision-making (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Choice architecture is viewed as a way to correct for some of these errors, especially when decisions are complex, lack feedback, occur infrequently, or when implicit biases intervene in the decision-making process (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). In considering the decision-making process for senior women faculty pursuing the academic deanship, these categories are all met. The decision is very complex in nature, feedback

on how to make the choice is rarely available, and it is unlikely that an individual will face this decision more than a few times, if at all. Additionally, many aspects of the choice environment in academic hiring and promotion processes have been found to be biased against women more generally and women of color specifically. Gender bias has been found in negotiation processes (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Bowles & Babcock, 2007), attribution of credit (Heilman, 2001; Heilman & Haynes, 2005), perceptions of brilliance (Leslie et al., 2015), and expectations of leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Koenig, 2008), all of which could impact women in pursuit of the academic deanship. Given the nuanced nature of this decision and pervasiveness of bias in higher education processes, acknowledging the choice environment could help to examine women's decision-making processes in pursuit of the academic deanship.

Thaler and Sunstein (2008) introduced the concept of “nudges,” defined by the following acronym, as a core component of choice architecture:

iNcentives
Understand mappings
Defaults
Give feedback
Expect error
Structure complex choices (p. 102)

In considering the decision-making process for senior women faculty pursuing the academic deanship and the factors influencing their decision, several of these nudges could play a role. Incentives are framed by Thaler and Sunstein (2008) as comparable to supply and demand, suggesting that humans make decisions based on cost and reward while recognizing that some incentives are more salient than others. What rewards or incentives might one receive by pursuing the academic deanship? A raise in salary,

potential to influence culture, or the chance to achieve career goals? The incentives identified by women deans could be tangible or more intrinsic in nature.

Understanding mappings is both a nudge that could impact the decision-making process and a strategy that women could employ in their own pursuit of the deanship. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) argued that “a good system of choice architecture helps people to improve their ability to map and hence to select options that will make them better off” (p. 94). They suggest that mapping allows an individual to consider choices and map possible outcomes to their potential benefit. In deciding whether to pursue the deanship – a complex decision – women may categorize the information they have into different forms. For example, they may consider the requirements of the deanship and bracket them into areas or skillsets that overlap with those of which they are more familiar – like faculty responsibilities. A woman may recognize the importance of negotiation in academic leadership and think that she has never had formal negotiation experience. By mapping her experience negotiating the terms of a grant for her research to the negotiation expectations for a dean, she is able to match skills and experiences of her own background to those required to be a dean. Similarly, women may consider how choosing to pursue the deanship would impact their well-being. If their career aspirations include leadership and becoming a decision-maker, they may map the choice to pursue the deanship to their career goals. Alternatively, they may see the increased workload and time away from family as a choice that would not lead to an increase in their welfare and thus not constitute a good mapping.

The default nudge operates under the assumption that “many people will take whatever option requires the least effort, or the path of least resistance” (Thaler &

Sunstein, 2008, p. 85). In considering defaults, I will examine the possible default options for women in pursuit of academic leadership. Is it more common to assume individuals will stay in senior faculty roles? Or is the assumption that once a full professor, faculty will automatically be interested in advancing in administration? What about the default assumptions around women as caregivers or those who should be more nurturing and carry out service work instead of leadership? The default of the traditional career path (Moore et al., 1983) may shape the decisions of women in pursuit of the deanship.

Thaler and Sunstein (2008) shared that “the best way to help humans improve their performance is to provide feedback” (p. 92). Women in pursuit of the deanship may receive feedback from colleagues that dissuades them if administrative roles are referred to as “the dark side.” Other nudges might come from colleagues or mentors nominating them for a leadership position or program or suggesting that they apply for a role because they have potential to lead. They may receive feedback in a role that is positive or negative and thus encourages or discourages them to take a next step. As Thaler and Sunstein (2008) suggested, feedback can be a powerful tool in the pursuit of career advancement.

The nudge ‘expect error’ recognizes that humans are prone to error and puts mechanisms in place to prevent them from happening when possible (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). The authors provided the example of sending an email but forgetting to include an attachment, and recent technological advances that ask if you meant to attach something if certain words are included in the email text. This nudge is more heavily rooted in everyday behaviors and less likely to apply to women in pursuit of the academic

deanship, but examples may exist where women are nudged to act in a certain way instead of falling into a common decision-making trap.

Thaler and Sunstein (2008) introduced the nudge of ‘structure complex choices’ under the assumption that “people adopt different strategies for making choices depending on the size and complexity of the available options” (p. 96). The authors shared common strategies, like filtering choices or using a structured elimination of choices, that can be used when there are a vast number of options or the decision has many layers. For women in pursuit of the deanship, the decision of whether to stay in the faculty ranks or move into administration is complex in the size of the decision and its related impacts but does not have complexity in terms of number of choices – stay as faculty or pursue administration. Thus, it is usually possible for decision-makers to weigh all of the pros and cons and consider each choice in a detailed manner. Alternatively, if a woman decides she wants to be a dean, there could be thousands of positions to consider. Although a number of factors are outside of her control, like whether or not a deanship is open for applicants at an institution, there could still be hundreds of available positions at any time and researching or applying to all of them is not realistic. Employing strategies to structure this choice of where to apply or consider a role can be helpful. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) discussed “compensatory” strategy wherein the weighted value for each attribute varies. So, for example, a woman who wants to pursue a deanship at a research-intensive institution at a top ranked school in the Midwest might decide that geography is most important and therefore rule out open deanships that fit her criteria but are located in other regions. If she weights rank of the institution as low on her list, then she will

consider applying to all institutions that meet her institutional type and geographic requirements regardless of rank.

Connecting to Higher Education and SCCT. It is important to note that many of the nudge concepts and elements of choice architecture are focused on choices related more to everyday behaviors (like selecting health care, food options, or an apartment) than major career changes (see, for exception, Beckman & Phillips, 2005). However, behavioral design is making its way into research on hiring (O’Meara et al., 2020), faculty development (Culpepper et al., 2020a), and student engagement (Castleman & Page, 2016). Applying the theory to the context of higher education leadership, and with qualitative research, poses some unique challenges, but also offers a new opportunity for exploration. This approach to the research may also have implications for practice. If we understand the nudges that positively impact women’s decisions to pursue the academic deanship, we may be able to recreate them (Hodges & Welch, 2018).

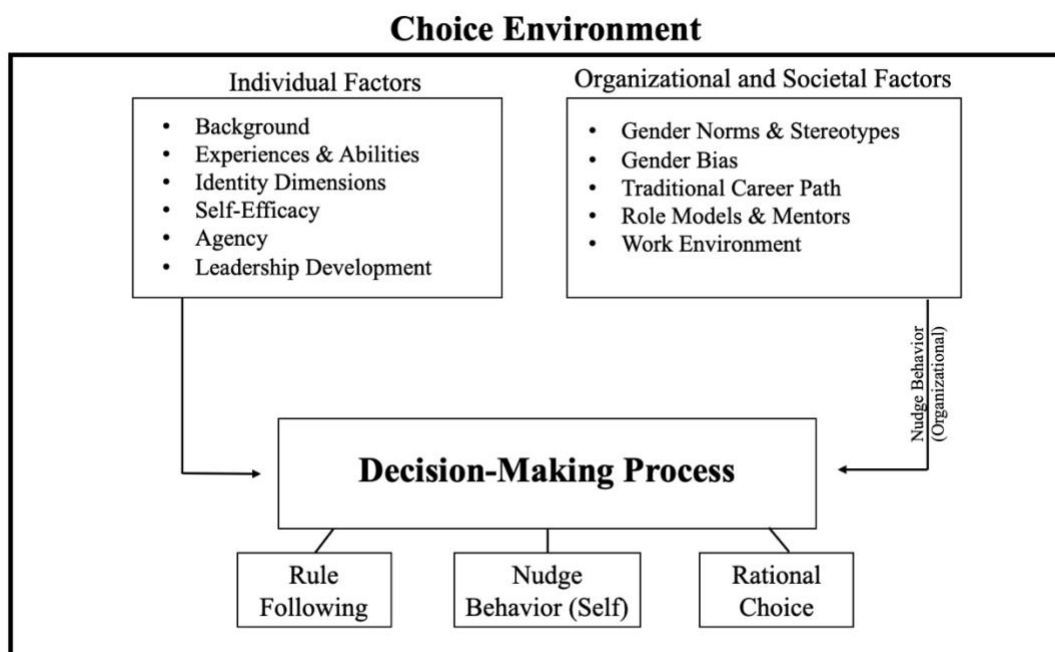
In considering SCCT, I believe the proximal/contextual influences highlighted in the model can be framed as the “choice environment” (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). By examining the choice environment in the context of the social cognitive career model, I can identify factors that are specific to the individual, based on choice architecture in the immediate environment, or due to larger societal norms and experiences (Lent et al., 1994). Combining these theories related to choice and decision-making offers a way to further examine women’s leadership advancement through overlapping, but also distinct and complementary, lenses. To my knowledge, this combination of theories has not been pursued in past research.

Conceptual Model

While I believe cohesion exists between the work of Lent et al. (1994), March (1994), and Thaler and Sunstein (2008), this new approach requires further articulation of the connection between the theories and concepts as applied to women's paths to the deanship. In order to explain these connections, I present a conceptual model that visually depicts the most relevant elements of the three theories and their connections to decision-making processes (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Conceptual Model for Women's Decisions to Pursue the Deanship



Note. Based on frameworks from Lent et al. (1994), March (1994), and Thaler and Sunstein (2008).

In this conceptual model, the decision-making process in pursuit of the deanship, as well as the factors that influence the process, all occur within a choice environment.

As Thaler et al. (2010) noted, “decision makers do not make choices in a vacuum” rather

“they make them in an environment where many features, noticed and unnoticed, can influence their decisions” (p. 1). The decision to pursue the academic deanship is no different. Thus, the conceptual model is framed by the choice environment.

Factors related to the individual, organizational, and societal dimensions, as outlined in both the literature review earlier in this chapter and the distal and proximal factors from SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), are highlighted in the two boxes at the top of the model. Each set of factors can impact a woman’s decision-making process, as shown by the arrows. At the individual level, prior career experiences or participation in a leadership development program might impact the decision-making processes for women in pursuit of the deanship. Organizational and societal factors can also create this direct impact. For example, a work environment that is supportive of women in leadership may positively shape an individual’s choice process, whereas an environment that is not supportive may have a negative impact. More frequently, organizational and societal factors may shape decision-making processes through nudge behaviors (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). As an example, feedback from a mentor may push an individual to make a certain decision, or gender norms around who gets to lead might serve as a default nudge for women to not pursue leadership. These are labeled ‘Nudge Behavior (Organizational)’ in the conceptual model.

The decision-making process is comprised of different strategies, approaches or perspectives women may take as they move toward leadership roles and consider the deanship. The strategies mentioned in the frameworks in this study are illustrated by the three boxes at the bottom of the model labeled ‘Rule Following,’ ‘Nudge Behavior (Self),’ and ‘Rational Choice.’ March’s (1994) rule-following and rational choice

decision-making strategies are connected to the decision-making process as possible strategies, as individuals may rely on weighting consequences and alternatives (Rational Choice) or compare themselves to others in similar roles (Rule Following) when making their career choice.

Although nudges are more commonly viewed as organizational or external forces, some psychology research documents the use of nudge behavior by individuals in their own choice processes (self-nudging) as something that can enhance decision-making processes (Reijula & Hertwig, 2020). For example, an individual may alter their own choice environment by having fewer options for snacks at home to curb their eating habits, or narrowing in on a specific location where they want to live to avoid being overwhelmed by too many options when searching for an apartment. Thus, in addition to the role of organizational nudges from external factors, women in this study could use self-nudge behaviors as a strategy in their decision-making process. Women might employ mapping to match their skills and abilities to those of a dean as they decide whether or not to pursue the role, or structure complex choices – another nudge behavior – when they have several options to consider.

Overall, this model connects the distal and proximal factors, including self-efficacy, that comprise SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2013), the nudge behaviors and choice environment of behavioral economics (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), and possible decision-making theories and strategies from March (1994).

Summary

In reviewing the existing literature on the academic deanship, it remains clear that research on the role, ascension to, and experiences for women in the academic deanship

remains limited and outdated. Some gender differences in motivation to pursue the role are documented (Padilla, 2006; Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000), and data supports the low numbers of women in the deanship overall (Gmelch, 2002; Layne, 2010). Extensive research on the factors impacting women faculty's career advancement exists and this chapter demonstrates that the barriers and supports identified at the societal, organizational, and individual levels may be applicable to women's decisions to pursue the academic deanship in a number of ways.

Research on the academic deanship is particularly limited when it comes to dimensions of identity and methodological approach. The decision to pursue the academic deanship may be impacted by other dimensions of women's identity, but little research focuses in this area. I discuss the role of identity beyond gender in the choice process throughout the findings. Additionally, much of the existing research on the experiences of deans, and on higher education applications of SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), decision-making, and choice architecture, is quantitative in nature. I contributed a qualitative approach using Lent et al.'s (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory to examine why senior women faculty decide to pursue the academic deanship and March's (1994) decision-making theories to understand the decision-making tactics employed. Recognizing that representation of women varies by institutional type and discipline (AACSB, 2018; Bilen-Green et al., 2008; Hargrove, 2015), the choice environment may be distinct and impact women's decisions in different ways. I used Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) theory of choice architecture to identify environmental elements and nudges impacting both the how and the why of the choice process. The following chapter introduces my methodological approach based on this theoretical framing.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine why and how women decide to pursue the academic deanship. To investigate this phenomenon, I focused on the following research questions:

1. **Why** do senior women faculty decide to pursue the academic deanship?
 - a) What aspects of a women's career history, skills, professional knowledge and experience, or aspects of identity, shape the decision?
 - b) What aspects of women's local environment or career experiences act as cues to pursue (or not pursue) the position of academic dean?
2. **How** do women decide to pursue the academic deanship?
 - a) When faced with the opportunity to pursue the academic deanship, what decision-making strategies do women employ to make their choice?
 - b) As women make the decision to apply for the deanship, which factors most shape their decision-making process?

In order to address the questions of how and why senior women faculty pursue the deanship and identify the factors that influence their decision-making process, I employed a qualitative methodological approach. Creswell (2013) defined qualitative research as a process that “begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 44). In my study, I sought to understand the factors that impact women's decisions to advance in the academy – specifically to the role of academic dean.

Less than 40% of academic deans identify as women (Almanac of Higher Education, 2014; Behr & Schneider, 2015) and just over 30% of college and university presidents identify as women (ACE, 2017). Creswell (2013) argued that “we conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored... because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices” (p. 47). I believe the gender inequity in academic leadership is a problem that needs to be further explored. To contribute to this work, I studied former senior women faculty who had made the choice to pursue the academic deanship – a group that is small in number and under researched – and examined variables like choice (and the factors impacting that choice) that are not always easy to identify or measure. Bogdan and Biklen (2016) explained the root of qualitative research as a methodology that “is interested in the meanings, personal narratives, and stories of the internal and experiential life of the actors... It also engages with people’s perceptions and thoughts and examines what they might signify” (p. 4). I examined how and why senior women faculty pursue academic leadership through their own experiences and narratives, thus pursuing a qualitative approach aligned with the goals and purposes of my study.

Guiding Research Perspective

Within the qualitative paradigm, I gravitate towards a social constructivist research perspective. In this approach, “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences ... [and] these meanings are varied and multiple” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). This perspective focuses on relationships, interactions, and contexts of life and work (Creswell, 2013). I approached this qualitative research intending to listen to the voices of women academic

deans to understand how they make meaning of experiences within their career choice context.

However, I also acknowledged elements of postmodernism and critical theory as applicable to this work. Creswell (2013) shared that in postmodernism “knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender and other group affiliations” (p. 27). Postmodern perspectives also lend to multiple realities, with more emphasis on interactions, ambiguity, and meaning making within a particular context (Creswell, 2013; Kezar et al., 2006; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Postmodernism focuses on challenging assumptions around power dynamics and definitions of leadership (Kezar et al., 2006), both of which are critical to understanding women’s leadership advancement in the academy. Feminist and critical approaches to qualitative research were also applicable to this research as they emphasize challenges for women and other historically and institutionally marginalized groups (Kezar et al., 2006). This research recognizes constraints to women’s advancement and takes a critical approach by noting “social structures, freedom and oppression, power and control” (Creswell, 2013, p. 37). More specifically, feminist theory and perspectives were applicable as I considered the gender norms and societal structures that impact women’s experiences with and advancement to positions of leadership (Blackmore, 1999; Kezar et al., 2006). Both postmodernism and critical theory are also integral to understanding how dimensions of identity beyond gender, such as race and ethnicity, may create additional power dynamics and conditions.

Positionality

I come to this research as a White, cisgender woman and doctoral student in higher education with an interest in the academy and particular emphasis on leadership. As highlighted in Chapter One, I have had experiences in leadership that were separated by gender, like attending an institution with a coordinate college system and working for an all-women's organization. I do not have personal experience as a senior faculty member or an academic dean, though I aspire to positions in the faculty ranks and academic leadership later in my career and am actively developing my own leadership experiences as a woman in higher education.

I also come to this work as the daughter of a woman leader in higher education who has traveled a 'non-traditional' path to leadership, never holding a tenured faculty role, and eventually becoming both a dean and a provost. Additionally, I have been mentored almost exclusively by women leaders in my own professional and academic experiences in higher education.

I share these experiences and dimensions of my identity for two reasons. First, to recognize my own privilege and that of the questions in this study that assume all women have the choice to pursue academic leadership. This assumption is likely far from true given the financial, familial, and other constraints, as well as racial and gender bias, women face at this point in the pathway and every step throughout the academic career. Second, I share my positionality to note the lens through which I conceptualized this study, and to acknowledge any potential bias I have in highlighting the importance of advancing women to positions of leadership in higher education. Clandinin (2006) shared

that researchers “cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry” (p. 47) so acknowledging my positionality remains an inevitable and important component of this work.

Research Design

Collective Case Study and Narrative Inquiry

In order to understand the experiences and decision-making processes of senior women faculty who have pursued the academic deanship, I conducted an instrumental, collective case study with elements of narrative inquiry.

According to Merriam (1998), “a qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit (p. 21).”

Merriam (1998) also suggested that “case study is a particularly suitable design if you are interested in process” (p. 33). According to Stake (1995), instrumental case studies are used to understand an issue or research question. I studied a specific instance in women’s career paths in order to understand their decision-making process in pursuit of the deanship and address a series of broader research questions, and therefore found an instrumental case study to be an applicable approach. Additionally, a collective case study focuses on “multiple case studies to illustrate the issue” and “show different perspectives on the issue” (Creswell, 2013, p. 99; Yin, 2018). I examined the decision-making process for several women academic deans in order to add depth to understanding the phenomenon, and to compare across cases.

Conducting an instrumental, collective case study allowed me to take an in-depth approach to studying individual women’s choice processes through multiple avenues. With this rich data from a large sample, I was then able to compare across disciplines, identity dimensions, and career paths. I could also examine the individual, organizational,

and societal factors at play in the decision-making process and understand the key strategies employed by the women in the study.

Narrative inquiry focuses on “the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). The idea that “human beings both live and tell stories about their living” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 44) guides narrative inquiry, and the methodology involves “living, telling, retelling, or reliving” human stories (Clandinin, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). I found telling and retelling of stories to be a powerful tool to understand how and why senior women faculty pursue the academic deanship, one that added depth to this case study.

Scholars of narrative inquiry frame the methodological approach as one rooted in three-dimensions, “place, temporality, and sociality” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 542). Narrative inquiry enhanced my understanding of the decision-making process for senior women faculty who have successfully pursued the academic deanship by examining their social interactions, past and present experiences, and the context of their work and life experiences through stories. Narrative inquiry also fits with the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1984) which emphasizes proximal and distal factors, matching the temporality and sociality of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Lent et al., 1994). The importance of context in narrative inquiry further complements the choice environment of the decision-making process (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Creswell, 2013; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Telling and retelling of stories through narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) allowed for elements of decision-making approaches and strategies, like those presented by March (1994), to be better understood.

Participants

To study the decision-making process for women in pursuit of the academic deanship, I created a detailed sampling procedure. Patton (1990) highlighted the importance of detailed sampling, recommending that the “procedures and decisions be fully described, explained, and justified so that [...] users and peer reviewers have the appropriate context for judging the sample” (p. 186). Additionally, Merriam (1998) argued the importance of setting the boundaries of a case. Since the case in my study is the decision-making process of senior women faculty who successfully pursued the academic deanship, I had to create boundaries to determine who fit that criteria.

To participate in the study, individuals had to identify as women who currently served as an academic dean at a four-year, U.S.-based, public or private, research-intensive institution. By research-intensive institutions, I refer to those either categorized as doctoral universities (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, n.d.) or with some doctoral degree-granting programs. Moreover, participants must have previously served as a full professor and held the role of academic dean for at least six months but no more than two years. These criteria, or the bounds of the case, are based on the rationale outlined below.

First, I focused specifically on the academic dean instead of a dean of students type role, an assistant dean, or an associate dean. Although the role of dean historically traces back to deans of women and deans of men (Schwartz, 1997), a role more similar to deans of students today, I aimed to study academic deans – those who oversee specific academic colleges within institutions of higher education. Academic deans tend to have oversight of faculty (Butin, 2016; Layne, 2010). These deans are also more in line with

the traditional academic career path that moves from faculty to department chair, dean to provost, and finally, president (Moore et al., 1983), and thus are more likely to come from the faculty ranks. In fact, pursuing the deanship without faculty status is seen as limiting, “for individuals not in faculty positions or holding faculty status, the likelihood of advancement to the deanship is significantly less than an individual holding that status” (Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000, p. 3).

The traditional career pathway in academic leadership (from department chair to dean to provost to president) is changing to be less prescriptive (Johnson, 2016; Selingo et al., 2017). Yet, the majority of college presidents still begin their careers in the faculty ranks as well (ACE, 2017). As a result, I recruited deans who had achieved tenure and were at one point employed in the faculty ranks. This decision limited my sample and did not include women who entered the deanship from roles in industry or other paths. However, I chose to focus on individuals who started in the traditional path to leadership (from the faculty ranks) as a foundation for my contribution to existing literature on women’s advancement in higher education leadership and encourage future research to examine other entry points.

Second, I focused on academic deans at research-intensive institutions because cultures at these institutions are documented as being the least friendly to women and faculty of color, and women lack representation at these institutional types more than others (Dominici et al., 2009; Finkel et al., 1994; Hart & Cress, 2008; Johnson, 2016; Manchester et al., 2013; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2017; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; O’Meara et al., 2017b). While the experiences of academic deans likely vary at different institutional types, I believed that examining the experiences of women deans at research-

intensive institutions could illuminate the gaps in the pathway to advancement and be translated to other institutional types as well.

Third, I focused on deans from a variety of academic disciplines. Although some literature has focused on academic deans more broadly, most has examined deans by discipline, including law school deans, deans of nursing, and engineering deans (Hargrove, 2015; Layne, 2010; Padilla, 2006; Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000).

Disciplinary differences in career advancement and experiences for women faculty and leaders are documented in the literature, often highlighting differences between STEM and social sciences (see, for example, Hurtado et al., 2012; Li & Koedel, 2016; O'Meara et al., 2017a). However, STEM fields are not the only disciplines with challenges for women in their career advancement (see, for example, Brown & Samuels, 2018; Hunter & Leahey, 2010; Mitchell & Martin, 2018). I recruited women academic deans from a variety of disciplines recognizing that challenges of varying degrees likely exist in all disciplines. Rather than trying to understand women's decision-making in pursuit of the academic deanship within a specific discipline, I examined how disciplinary differences impacted their career choice contexts.

Fourth, I focused on deans who had been in their role as academic dean for at least six months and no more than two years. This timeframe allowed me to interview women who had time to become familiar with their role and institution. To mirror the "retrospective techniques" employed in Wang et al.'s (2007) study on doctoral student career choice, I capped the time in role so the women in the study were able to reflect on the decision-making process that they went through as senior faculty. The tenure of a dean position varies, but the average time in role is 5.6 years (Nies & Wolverton, 2000),

which ensured most women academic deans in the study were also at a similar point in their career path.

Given the narrow focus and specific recruitment qualifications outlined here, I engaged in purposeful sampling and “[chose] particular subjects to include” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016, p. 67). I created a recruitment video (Appendix A) highlighting the purpose of and criteria for the study to provide a more personal ask. I then reached out through three primary avenues. First, I recruited participants through associations for academic deans and provosts (e.g., American Conference for Academic Deans, ADVANCE Program for Inclusive Excellence, Big Ten Academic Alliance, Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences). In some instances, my recruitment message (Appendix A) was sent through the listserv directly. In others, the association provided me with a list of contact information, and I reached out individually to eligible deans, or individuals associated with the organization shared my recruitment message and video directly. Second, I posted the recruitment video and information on Facebook and the post was shared by peers and colleagues. Lastly, I utilized a snowball sampling technique (Creswell, 2013) through individual recommendations and outreach. I continued these three outreach efforts until I recruited 12 eligible participants.

Creswell (2013) suggested only a few participants are needed for a narrative study and notes that “researchers typically choose no more than four or five cases” in qualitative case study research (p. 101). Guest et al. (2006) recommend at least 12 participants in qualitative research in order to achieve saturation. Most work on narrative inquiry does not specify an exact number or range for a sample, rather suggests it depends on the context and purpose of the study (Guetterman, 2015). I followed the

minimum set by Guest et al. (2006) and included a total of 12 women academic deans in this collective case study because my focus was on a particular transition period within the narrative account, rather than an entire life narrative (Creswell, 2013). Since I did not observe the real-time choice process of pursuing the deanship, but asked participants to recount their decision-making experiences instead (Clandinin, 2006), and given the differences in institutions, identities, and career paths of the participants, a larger sample size was important to achieve data saturation.

After expressing interest, potential participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire before enrolling in the study to ensure they met the qualifications of timing, institutional type, and role (Appendix B). In some cases, individuals reached out with interest but were deemed ineligible because they had been a dean for more than two years, were not employed at a research-intensive institution, or did not meet one of the other case criteria. I used the demographic information reported on the questionnaire to recruit a diverse sample by race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, geography, and religious affiliation when possible. Although recruiting a diverse sample was a goal of the study, I experienced challenge in doing so given the limited number of academic deans at research institutions that identify as women (Behr & Schneider, 2015) which resulted in a lengthened recruitment process. I expand on this challenge and the related limitations later in this chapter.

Procedures and Data Collection

Data collection included three components: a preliminary interview, document collection, and a follow-up interview. “Case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). It does, however, require

multiple forms of evidence (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018). Narrative inquiry also includes multiple forms of data in order to shape the stories of individuals, including observations, interview transcripts, documents, journal entries, autobiographical writing, and others (Clandinin, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Trahar, 2009). Employing a variety of data sources allowed the findings to be complemented and triangulated (Creswell, 2013). Interviews served as the primary method of data collection because they are “used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016, p. 98) and aided in my understanding of the career choice stories for each participant (interview protocol outlined in Appendix C). For document collection, I first collected and analyzed curriculum vitae (CVs) to confirm the participants’ career path to the deanship. These documents highlight the career accomplishments and scholarly achievements of individuals in academia and were used to understand the career trajectory, experiences, and networks of participants.

Autobiographical writing is another form of data commonly used in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Tahar, 2009), and documents or participant-generated information can also add to the rich description and multiple forms of evidence required in a case study (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). I asked all participants to write their own account of their decision-making process to pursue the position of academic dean. There was no minimum page limit required and participants were provided with a prompt to ease the writing process (Appendix D). By giving participants more time for reflection, this written account was intended to provide a rich description of the decision-making process and information perhaps not included in the interview.

Additionally, I asked participants to provide a visual depiction of their decision-making process to pursue the deanship. Drawings or visual representations (termed “participant-generated visual methods” (PGVM; Kortegast et al., 2019) can serve as a way to triangulate qualitative data and provide additional insight into participants’ emotions and thoughts (Austin, 2010; Kearney & Hyle, 2004; Mitchell et al., 2011). For example, Turner (2016) used “career dream drawings as a tool for language arts educators to learn more about” the career aspirations of elementary-aged children (p. 168). Participants in the study were provided a prompt for the visual depiction as well that encouraged them to draw, find, or describe an image that represented their experience deciding to pursue the academic deanship. Though underutilized and potentially difficult to analyze, drawings and visual depictions have the potential to enrich data in a different way than words (Mitchell et al., 2011; Prosser, 1998), and were used to shed light on the career choice process for senior women faculty in pursuit of the academic deanship.

Once participants confirmed interest in the study and were deemed eligible, they were asked to consent to both interviews (and audio-recording) and consent to provide their CV, written narrative, and visual depiction (consent form available in Appendix F). After receiving their consent form, I worked with each participant to schedule their first interview and I asked for their CV in advance. I then conducted a preliminary semi-structured interview through video conferencing that lasted 30 minutes (or less). Despite advances in technology, researchers still recognize challenges to using video and online tools for interviewing (Seitz, 2016; Weller, 2017). To avoid or minimize these challenges, including inability to clearly read body language, potential issues with

technology leading to disconnections or pauses, and “loss of intimacy” (Seitz, 2016, p. 229), I first confirmed a stable internet connection, informed the participant of our plan should we get disconnected, and memoed during and after the interview to take note of any relevant body language (Seitz, 2016). I also reviewed the consent form at the beginning of the interview, clarified any questions, and notified participants when I was starting the audio recording in order to establish trust and maintain the ethical standards of the study.

Narrative inquiry requires building relationships between researchers and participants in order to truly hear voice and both tell and re-tell stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I used this initial interview to further explain the components of the study and ask about participants’ career trajectory, thoughts on academic leadership, and rationale for pursuing the deanship, while also sharing parts of my own story in efforts to build rapport. Doing so allowed me to address the “loss of intimacy” or distance associated with online interviewing (Seitz, 2016, p. 229). Sharing my own positionality and what brought me to this research also allowed me to open the conversation with vulnerability that I hoped participants would mirror. At the end of the first interview, I explained the next steps in the process. I followed up with an email to thank the participant for sharing their time so far and to provide the prompts for the written autobiographical narrative and visual representation.

We scheduled the second interview for at least one day after participants submitted the written narrative to allow for my initial review. The second semi-structured interview (Appendix C) lasted 60-90 minutes and focused more on the decision-making processes employed to pursue the deanship, as informed by their written and visual

accounts. Given the potential challenges that come with analyzing visual or drawing data, some researchers suggest asking participants about their drawings to reduce bias from the researcher during analysis (Mitchell et al., 2011; Posser, 2006). The timing of the second interview allowed me to ask more intentional questions after reviewing participants' drawings and narrative accounts. At the end of the second and final interview, I informed participants that they would receive a \$50 Amazon gift card as compensation for their participation, particularly given the number of elements comprising the data collection process. I also let them know that I would follow up for member checking purposes and that they could reach out to me or the IRB at any point with questions about the study.

Data Analysis

I manually transcribed the audio files for the preliminary (30-minute) interviews, then worked with a transcription service to transcribe the audio files of the second (60-90 minute) interviews. I listened to all recordings for the second interviews against the transcripts for accuracy and to confirm that all identifying information was removed. Before coding a transcript, I re-read and memoed it to capture my initial reactions, a term Saldaña (2016) termed "preliminary jotting" (p. 21).

To code the data, I employed a constant comparative method in which "the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of the study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016, p. 68). I analyzed some of the data as I collected it and used the analysis to inform next steps of data collection. For example, I reviewed memos from the preliminary interview with each participant and used that information to inform my second round of interviews. I also coded the narrative and visual data once received so I could ask more specific questions of follow-up during the second interview.

For coding purposes, I employed an inductive and deductive coding process to analyze all transcripts from both rounds of interviews (Creswell, 2013). I created a codebook (available upon request) of all codes, first listing deductive codes based on the elements of my conceptual framework, research questions, and literature review. This included several different types of codes, including attribute codes focused on demographics; structural coding centered on specific research questions; emotion codes identifying specific feelings around the decision-making processes; and evaluation codes to capture judgements or levels of significance (Saldaña, 2016).

In my initial round of coding, I used these pre-determined deductive codes. In some cases, data from interview transcripts was coded based on research questions and was more categorical, like using the code “roles” when coding data where participants described the roles they held in their life besides dean. In other cases, more detailed examples were coded as related to the theoretical frameworks in the study. For example, when coding transcripts, I tried to understand the factors that impacted women’s choice processes. As participants shared their stories and reflected on their choice to pursue the deanship, some mentioned the impact of a former mentor or family member, which was coded as a distal factor from Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994). In other cases, participants discussed their decision-making process and their consideration of how their skills matched that of an academic dean. In this case, I used elements from Thaler and Sunstein’s (2008) choice architecture and coded this as an example of “mapping.” Elements from other concepts informing this study, including March’s (1994) model of rational decision-making and Lent and Brown’s (2013) focus on career self-

efficacy were also used as I coded transcripts and tried to understand how and why senior women faculty decided to pursue the academic deanship.

While coding, I also used inductive coding methods which allowed codes to be developed from the data without directly connecting with the theoretical framing and concepts (Creswell, 2013). This included in vivo codes that came directly from participants' quotes, like "ready for more" and "seat at the table." After each round of coding, I added the new inductive codes to the codebook.

After completing the initial round of coding and memoing for each participant, I answered a set of questions derived from my research questions to more explicitly understand the how and why of their decision-making process. I then used the codes and responses to draft the individual case story for each participant. Saldaña (2016) suggested "coding is a cyclical act" (p. 9), so following this initial draft and memo process I returned to the transcripts and data for a second round of coding. Through this coding process, I refined and collapsed codes into broader categories as needed (Saldaña, 2016), then identified themes in the data to further address the research questions of this study. Themes are "broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). Developing themes allowed me to synthesize my codes from inductive and deductive coding within the individual cases into larger categories to use in my interpretation and cross-case analysis. The within and cross case analyses were also complemented with data from CVs, visual depictions, and narratives.

To analyze the CVs, I used a rubric (Appendix E) and followed a three-step process for analysis. First, I examined the career path and years in each role by looking at professional experiences outlined on the CV. Recognizing that the path to the academic

deanship varies, especially for women (Johnson, 2016; Wolverton & Gonzales, 2000), I could better understand the positions held and possible nuances in the decision-making process through this analysis of CVs. Second, I categorized accomplishments on the CV including number of peer-reviewed publications, conference presentations, grants, and awards, since these criteria are frequently used in the tenure and promotion process (Barrett & Barrett, 2011; Jones et al., 2014). Understanding these accomplishments shed light on the barriers or supports women had to consider in their choice process. Third, I made note of the social network of the academic deans by analyzing their co-authorship, co-presenters, and mentorship activities outlined on their CV, since role models, mentors, and peer networks are frequently highlighted as factors for advancement in the literature (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Hall & Sandler, 1983; O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015; Seltzer, 2015; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007; Wasburn, 2007). More specifically, I examined the number of times they collaborated with others by counting any publications that were authored with others.

I used an iterative document analysis process (Bowen, 2009) to analyze the written narrative accounts and visual depictions. For the narratives, I first employed a similar deductive and inductive coding method as with interview transcripts. Then, I reviewed and memoed about the approach the participant took to writing the narrative. For example, I noted whether they focused on the emotions they felt throughout the process, or if they made sense of their decision-making process by considering the chronological steps they took to get there.

For the visual depictions, I memoed my initial thoughts and potential codes (Saldaña, 2016) in advance of the second interview. Kortegast et al. (2019) suggested that

participant-generated data, particularly visual data, “catalyze[s] disruption of power dynamics by providing opportunities for participants to take additional ownership over the data” (p. 500). While I provided a prompt for participants’ consideration, I relied more on their explanation of the image for analysis than my own interpretation. Thus, following the second interview, I reviewed the interview transcript where the visual depiction was discussed and revised or added to my memo and initial coding scheme. In case study analysis, creating a “chain of evidence” is a defining component used to create a rich description (Yin, 2018). Analyzing these participant-generated documents and the subsequent conversation about their experience answering the prompts or describing their responses provided multiple sources of evidence to confirm codes and possible themes.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) highlighted the process employed by the researcher in the analysis and writing stages of narrative inquiry:

We are, in narrative inquiry, constructing narratives at several levels. At one level it is the personal narratives and the jointly shared and constructed narratives that are told in the research writing, but narrative researchers are compelled to move beyond the telling of the lived story to tell the research story. (p. 10)

I used each of the data points collected, and the themes developed as a result, to shape the “research story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10), or case narrative (Stake, 1995), examining how and why senior women faculty pursue the academic deanship and the factors impacting their choice.

Limitations

I recognize several limitations to this research study related to the eligibility requirements for participants and the methodological approach. First, I recruited and interviewed women who had successfully pursued positions of leadership and currently served as academic deans. I asked these women to reflect on their decision-making

process instead of recruiting and studying senior women faculty who were going through the decision-making process in real time. According to Creswell (2013), “typically, case study researchers study current, real-life cases that are in progress so that they can gather accurate information not lost by time” (p. 98). Narrative inquiry focuses on past, present, and future, recognizing benefit in each of these elements (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). However, it also requires an ongoing process of telling and retelling, recognizing that meaning making is occurring and changing the ways stories are retold over time (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I recognize that by asking women deans to reflect on their decision-making process rather than examining it in real-time, I learned about their decision-making process as they remembered and interpreted it. However, given the lack of representation of women in the academic deanship, I sought to study those who had successfully achieved the role, especially knowing that many women come to administration unexpectedly (Bilen-Green, et al., 2009) and therefore may be difficult to identify. Future research focused on the decision-making processes of senior women faculty considering leadership and administrative roles would be an important and complementary addition to this work.

I chose to focus my study on current academic deans who have served in senior faculty roles, suggesting some alignment with the traditional career path identified by Moore et al. (1983). This criterion limited my study by focusing on a career path designed for men and did not allow for recruitment of women deans with different career trajectories, such as women who became deans through administrative paths or entered academia directly from a professional field (Armenti, 2004; Padilla, 2006). Given the lack of research on the academic deanship and career trajectory to the role, I focused on

the traditional path to understand what aspects can or should be changed. Future iterations of this work should focus on understanding the complexity of the changing career pathway for women academic deans beyond those that begin in the faculty.

I also sought to examine the choice processes of senior women faculty and women academic deans – emphasizing gender as the key marker in this study. However, I recognize that individuals have multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and gender is rarely, if ever, the only piece of identity at play when making choices in career advancement. This is especially true given the increased barriers and bias women of color face throughout the academic career (Ong et al., 2011; Settles et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2014). I focused primarily on gender given the extant literature on barriers in career advancement due to gender (Bain & Cummings, 2000; Dominici et al., 2009; Johnson, 2016; Longman & Madsen, 2014; Menges & Exum, 1983) but addressed and examined other elements of identity that impacted senior women faculty's pursuit of the academic deanship throughout the study.

It is important to note that another limitation comes from the diversity of the sample in this study. Current statistics on women deans do not distinguish by race/ethnicity. However, the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) found that less than 2% of full professors identified as Black females, Hispanic females, American Indian/Alaska Native females, or females of two or more races. The number of women of color only increases to 4% of the total population when considering associate professorships. Based on the traditional path to the deanship, achieving associate or full professor status is required to advance to the role of dean. Thus, the sample in my study, which included 42% women of color, is likely over representative of the current

demographics of women deans. Despite this sampling, recognizing the differences in experiences, opportunities, and decision-making processes for women from various racial and ethnic groups is critical to advancing this work. I recognize that this study offers stories from some backgrounds, but that there are other stories that are still left untold. Additional studies that look more specifically at the intersection of race and gender, or the experiences for women from a specific racial group in their pursuit of the academic deanship, are critical to the future expansion of this research area.

I selected a population that is anecdotally known to be very busy. As a result, scheduling presented itself as a limitation at times. While I was able to establish rapport and ask initial questions in the first interview, in the instances where the second interview had to be rescheduled due to a calendar conflict, several weeks may have passed between the first and second interview. This led to repeating of stories at times, but my constant comparative analysis and memoing allowed me to prompt with further questions when this occurred. This rescheduling also pushed two of the second interviews into the beginning stages of the Covid-19 pandemic when institutions were beginning to operate remotely. I recognize that the tone of these interviews varied as participants' role as dean and urgent priorities were very different than when we met for the first interview. I allowed the conversation to address these differences at the beginning, and then reoriented back to the interview topic. Since the women deans were reflecting on a decision-making process, not what was happening in real time, the current realities of the pandemic did not seem to significantly alter their reflections of their choice to pursue the deanship.

Lastly, while I intended to collect multiple forms of rich data from each participant, some participants spent more time on the autobiographical writing and visual prompts than others. One participant even completed the prompts during the second interview. I was still able to collect the information from all participants but do note that future iterations of this research should reconsider the best way to collect alternate forms of data. Additionally, several participants chose to find an image for their visual response rather than drawing their own. As a result, some of these images are not included in this text for copyright purposes and a description is offered instead.

A frequent criticism of narrative inquiry is the tendency to “smooth” narratives in order to make them fit a certain mold or read better (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Similarly, without multiple forms of data, claims in a case study can fall flat (Yin, 2018). To avoid these limitations, I tried to remain diligent in my efforts to maintain the accuracy of the stories while developing my own interpretations and retellings. I engaged in peer debriefing with my advisor and peer colleagues (Creswell, 2013) to address these risks. In this process, I discussed my methodology in great detail, shared drafts of within-case analysis for feedback, discussed my codebook and coding process, and shared parts of an interview transcript with and without codes to allow for alternate interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2013; Janesick, 2015). I received feedback from peers to revisit my memos more often to ensure I was capturing and bracketing out my own bias when possible. Most of the feedback from peer review was related to codes for the theoretical frameworks or additional information of interest. I discussed and refined possible examples of the theoretical frameworks in the data in order to clarify and make sure I was not forcing the data to fit a deductive code. When prompted with questions from my peer

reviewers for additional data that I did not collect during the interview process, I made note in the case analysis rather than trying to extrapolate the data to enhance the story.

Trustworthiness

In light of these limitations, it is important to recognize efforts to establish rigor and validation of my research, a process frequently referred to as establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To establish trustworthiness, I placed emphasis on ethics, reliability, and validity. Ethics were upheld throughout the study's consent process by reminding participants of the voluntary nature of their participation and the minimal risks they may encounter in retelling their stories. Ethical standards were maintained at every point thereafter by reminding participants of their rights to stop the study at any time, revisiting my protocol and consent forms, notifying participants of audio recordings in progress, and checking in with participants throughout the process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016; Creswell, 2013).

I provided extensive detail of all procedures for reliability purposes so the research design can be reproduced by others (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). I enhanced validity of the study through triangulation and by using multiple sources of data to examine this topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016; Creswell, 2013). I also engaged in peer debriefing after the initial round of analysis to provide an "external check" of my own findings (Creswell, 2013, p. 251) as previously discussed. I conducted member checks with participants by providing an individualized, one-page summary of key findings to see if the themes identified resonated with them (Creswell, 2013). Seven of the study participants responded and shared their agreement with, or acceptance of, the themes shared; five of the study participants did not respond (Table 1). Lastly, I displayed my

own positionality and potential bias throughout the study by memoing, discussing with my peer reviewers, and sharing my own experiences with participants (Creswell, 2013).

Table 1

Participants' Responses to Member Check Process

Pseudonym	Reviewed Memo	Response and Feedback
Anne	No	N/A
Beverly	No	N/A
Colleen	Yes	Approved, no revisions
Eleanor	No	N/A
Isabel	No	N/A
Joy	Yes	Approved, no revisions
Kate	Yes	Approved, no revisions
Lynn	No	N/A
Maria	Yes	Approved, no revisions
Natalie	Yes	Approved, no revisions
Tia	Yes	Approved, no revisions
Virginia	Yes	Approved, no revisions

Summary

In Chapter Three, I outlined my methodological background, framing, and design. I approached this research from a qualitative lens and a social constructivist perspective to examine the choice process for senior women faculty who have successfully pursued the academic deanship. I conducted a collective case study with elements of narrative inquiry using a series of data points to tell the “research story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) of 12 current academic deans at research-intensive institutions who identify as women. In Chapter Four, I introduce the individual within-case findings from my research, and in Chapter Five, I offer a cross-case analysis. In Chapter Six, I discuss the key findings and provide implications for practice and research.

Chapter Four: Findings and Individual Case Narratives

To address the research questions of this study, I examined the decision-making processes of 12 women academic deans in different disciplines at research-intensive institutions across the country. Each dean in this study identified as a woman, served as an academic dean for at least six months but no more than two years at the time of their participation, and ascended to the deanship through the faculty ranks. While these elements of each case were the same, the dimensions of identity, decision-making strategies, and choice environments of each dean were distinct. Of the 12 deans, five identified as women of color and seven identified as White. Half of the deans were hired internally at the institution where they worked at the time of their application, and the other half were external hires who moved institutions in order to become the dean. Several came from professional disciplines (i.e. nursing, business, law) and social sciences (i.e. psychology, education, sociology). One woman was a faculty member in a humanities field, and two women rose through the faculty ranks in STEM disciplines. The women in this study held a number of other roles in their lives aside from being the dean, including volunteer, mother, mentor, mentee, spouse, partner, daughter, caretaker, dog mom, teacher, researcher and many more. Each woman came from a different family background, some with controlling academic parents, others as first-generation students. Many of the decision-making strategies and factors outlined in the conceptual framework in Chapter Two were highlighted by the participants, but often in different ways and to different degrees.

This chapter includes individual case descriptions for each participant. Each case begins with an introduction of the participant, then chronologically details their path to

administration and decision-making process in pursuit of the academic deanship. Each case also includes data from CVs, narrative, and visual depictions provided by each dean. Cases for deans who pursued the role as external candidates are presented first, followed by the cases of internal candidates.

Maria

“I'm making a difference here. There's a lot of things that need to be fixed. There's a lot of people who've lost hope...I mean, technically, I could have stayed as a regular professor, taught a couple of courses overload, taught some executive sessions and possibly got my salary pretty darn close to where it is now. It's not about the money. It's about enjoying what you do.”

Maria, a Latina woman in her 50s, served as a faculty member in a professional field at the same institution for over 20 years before taking on an administrative role. She was appointed to associate dean at this same institution before applying for and becoming the external dean at a new institution. Maria identified as a mother, supportive sibling, partner, researcher, and good colleague. She initially seemed hesitant to talk about her experience in pursuit of the deanship, but by the second interview, she was voluntarily sharing stories, laughing, and talking through current challenges she was facing very candidly.

Entering Administration

Maria never expected to be a dean. As a faculty member, her career aspirations were “to do [her] research and be left alone.” Her CV documents a ‘traditional’ path through the faculty ranks to the deanship. When reflecting on her CV and career path, she agreed that it was linear in nature, “I went through the standard way of getting a PhD, getting an assistant professorship, associate, full, associate dean, dean...If you look at it,

it might look like this was the plan all along, but I don't know who considers a PhD thinking they're gonna be a dean someday."

As a full professor who had spent the majority of her career at the same institution, Maria was comfortable in her role and not considering administration. So, when she was asked to serve as associate dean at the institution, her response was "Are you kidding me? Why would anybody do this?" Despite her hesitation, Maria considered her role as a full professor in the college. She shared, "It [the associate deanship] was a rotating appointment... I left and agreed to do it, somewhat begrudgingly, but I knew I wanted to support the college. They had supported me, so it was more it's my time, it's time to take a turn." She felt a sense of obligation to assume the role and wanted to support the college but told her department chair to keep her office because she would be back to the faculty in three years' time.

When asked to describe her decision to pursue the deanship through an image, she shared an image of a cartoon individual being pushed by another toward the edge of a cliff. Maria noted that she "was very reluctant and had to be pushed into administration" when she became the associate dean. She received mixed feedback when considering administration which contributed to her hesitation. Some colleagues "were wondering what the hell [she] was doing" and said they didn't know whether "to congratulate... or console." Yet, she also remembered receiving positive feedback from colleagues, "I had lots of support among other colleagues, especially those who were considering the same role, so I had a whole bunch of people cheering me on -- former deans, current deans, and other associate deans." The picture she shared illustrates her hesitation and the assistance required for her to make the leap from faculty to administration.

Maria did not initially see herself as a leader. In reflecting on her career path, she shared several times that “everybody else had figured out I was going to be a dean before I did.” She participated in an inaugural leadership development program at her institution and remembered telling the facilitator, “I don't know why I'm here, I'm never gonna be a leader.” While Maria did not share why she signed up for the program in the first place, she did acknowledge that the program allowed her to reexamine her career interests and passions. In reflecting on her career path, Maria noticed herself following a predetermined career path somewhat unconsciously, “I had spent the early part of my career just getting a PhD, getting tenure, getting full, and all of a sudden I was at a place where I didn't know what was next.” In reflecting on the facilitator's question about her career goals and passions, she “burst into tears” because she did not know what she wanted to do next or what her career passions were. That moment really allowed her to reevaluate and consciously make a decision about her next steps.

Maria frequently emphasized the experiences that she gained as associate dean that prepared her to pursue the deanship. She acknowledged that she “hadn't really done anything administratively,” so attending conferences and workshops, learning about accreditation, and getting comfortable in the role helped with her transition. She gained extensive experience with university-wide strategic planning during her associate deanship, and also found opportunities to shadow the dean to learn more about development and fundraising. In thinking about her time as associate dean Maria shared, “I really gained the confidence that I had some abilities that other people didn't have... at the end of that time I remember thinking not that being associate dean was beneath me or anything, but it felt small. It felt like I was ready for more.” Her ability to map her

knowledge and experiences as associate dean to the requirements of the deanship contributed to the confidence and self-efficacy she needed to advance further.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

When asked what factors impacted her decision to make the leap to the deanship, Maria first noted her ability, “I was ready to do it.” She acknowledged that her research and her experiences as associate dean in her specific field adequately prepared her for the deanship. She said, “I am absolutely certain now, if someone says they want to be a dean someday to tell them to be the associate dean of the school – [it] was the best preparation I could get.” Maria then shared another picture of a child standing on a diving board, looking down without a sense of the distance to the body of water below. She used this image to describe her decision to pursue the deanship, noting that “this time it was my choice, but I was still timid to jump in.” The idea of standing on a diving board, having taken many steps to get to that point, yet still feeling hesitant with lots of anticipation over what comes next, resonated with Maria.

In addition to her own ability, other factors including identity, colleagues, family, and environment also impacted Maria’s decision to pursue the academic deanship. As a woman of color, Maria recognized a lack of diverse representation in academia, especially in leadership positions. In some ways, she seemed hesitant to consider identity as something that impacted her decision to pursue the deanship. She shared a story about a conversation she had with her spouse who “felt that women and underrepresented minorities...have a responsibility to continue on, if they can, to be the role model” and Maria shared, “I don’t know if I believe that.” She continued to think about her identities

and ways that she could make a difference, and eventually saw it as an opportunity to serve as a role model:

I'm not the kind of person that complains about things; I want to get something done. And I had a chance. I had a strong research record. There's a limited number of us [women of color] and a limited number of us who have achieved the research levels I have achieved. So, it felt like it would be important for me to take that step and be that role model.

Maria could have followed a rule-following approach to decision-making and not pursued leadership because other women with similar dimensions of identity had not done the same. Instead, she made a decision that was more rational in approach. She weighed the potential consequences and, deciding that modeling leadership for other women of color outweighed the negative aspects or challenges of taking on the role, she decided to pursue the deanship.

Maria's faculty identity was also a factor. In her narrative, she shared, "I was ready to take the next step as dean. However, I was still nervous. I wasn't sure if it was what I really wanted. I knew that once I made that step, there was no going back." For Maria, deciding to pursue the deanship meant leaving behind her identity as a faculty member as well. If she had followed the default option, she likely would have continued in her role as a faculty member instead of deciding to pursue the deanship because it was the easy and logical choice. However, she carefully considered the consequences and decided to make a choice for herself instead of following a predetermined path.

Maria also mentioned on multiple occasions that she consulted with her spouse when making her decision. He seemed to be her sounding board at several points in the process. When she first started her role as associate dean and felt like she "wasn't using [her] PhD anymore," he assured her it gave her credibility in administrative roles. She

doubted her decision to leave her professional field as a faculty member, and he reassured her that it was worth it. They spoke about the potential change in salary when moving to administration, and her identity as a woman of color in leadership, showing his role in her decision-making process and highlighting the overall sense of support she felt from him. Once Maria considered applying to dean roles, family influenced her decision once again. The decision would impact her spouse and two school-aged children. They were hoping to move to a certain area in order to be closer to family, an area her spouse “desperately want[ed] to get back to,” which limited her search for positions.

Choice environment also played a role in Maria’s decision-making process. She described her previous work environments as “this perfect balance of people who are good at teaching, good at research. It was a kind culture.” She mentioned colleagues who supported and encouraged her, but also some signals in her choice environment that suggested she might not fit the traditional model of dean. For example, she shared a story of a conversation in which an older donor noted “you don’t look like a dean.” Maria shared that she had experienced surprise when stating that she was a dean on other occasions as well, but simply acknowledged that women of color deans are limited in number and visibility, and in this case, used the age of the donor as an excuse.

Despite the mostly positive feedback from colleagues, support from family, and own self-efficacy to pursue the role of dean, Maria initially doubted her ability to apply for deanships at top-ranked programs and research-intensive institutions. Maria knew she only wanted to pursue positions at research universities. However, when dean positions opened at two top-ranked, research universities in her preferred geographic location – one of which was her alma mater – she “immediately dismissed it” and decided not to apply.

When asked why not, she noted their prestige and said they were “too top of school[s], I can’t go that high.” Despite recognizing that she had tangible skills and “abilities that other people didn’t have,” she also noted that she was not “mentally ready” to pursue a top institution. Her responses highlighted a lack of confidence in her abilities, and a potential struggle with mapping her experiences to norms and perceptions of what was required to be dean.

This lack of confidence came through in the way she approached her narrative account of her decision to pursue the academic deanship as well. In the narrative, Maria focused on her feelings and lack of knowledge, noting that she felt hesitant and nervous to pursue the role and focusing on areas of knowledge that she lacked. However, she later shared that she was ready and did have some skills and abilities that had prepared her. This pattern of initial hesitance followed by a realization and surge of confidence mirrors what happened in her pursuit of the deanship. While discussing her career path with a colleague, a dean at her current institution, he asked her why she was not applying to these jobs. When Maria could not provide an answer, he “took it upon himself, just contacted both schools and said ‘you need to invite her.’” After his recommendation, she was entered into the search pool and became a finalist for the deanship at a top tier program. Though she did not end up being selected, she was surprised and grateful to make it that far in the process. In reflecting on the experience, Maria shared: “It was great practice and it really boosted my confidence, and then I realized that I can do this.”

This active encouragement from a colleague and participation in an application process at another institution marked a critical moment where Maria knew she was ready to pursue the deanship. Another position meeting her requirements (top program,

research university) and falling within her family's preferred geographic region opened up and Maria knew she could not wait to apply, "When it came up my thought was, 'well, better apply now because they had the last dean for 16 years, I don't know that I want to wait another 16 years for this role'." She applied for the position, noting that, "even as I was applying [I was] not 100% sure this is what I wanted." Maria shared that "just sitting back and pondering wasn't going to help... I had to kind of go through this process. And by the time I got the offer, I wanted to talk." During the interview process, she had arrived at a place personally where she felt confident in her abilities and prepared to make the transition. When offered the academic deanship, she readily accepted.

Anne

"I wanted to leverage all that I have gained from the profession and now make a difference. Build the next generation of the workforce and do public good. Being a dean and pursuing academic administration, I am in the position to be influential locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. It's been a huge learning curve, but I am finding my footing."

Anne, a White woman in her 60s, moved from her professional field to academia after spending the beginning of her career in the military. She pursued an assistant professorship following completion of her doctoral degree and held various roles in the faculty ranks and as a program director at the same institution over the course of nearly 30 years. Anne was full of energy and eager to share the leadership lessons she had learned throughout her career, as well as her gratitude for the opportunities she had been afforded. She identified as a parent, spouse, and godmother; a peer, community activist, and researcher; and both passionate and compassionate as a leader. Much of Anne's decision-making process occurred while applying for positions and working with a search firm. As someone who had been involved and engaged with leadership from a young age,

Anne seemed to know she would pursue leadership; it was rather a matter of when and how she would take on her next opportunity.

Entering Administration

When discussing her CV, Anne described her career path as “a tapestry” saying “it’s a little bit more eclectic.” She began her career after college in the military and spoke very highly of the experience and its impact on her leadership path and style, “I knew it was an awesome responsibility, but I didn’t really understand its impact.” In looking back, Anne shared:

Those first early years were very instrumental in my whole person, growing as an individual in terms of individual autonomy and self-efficacy... being in a structure like the military, very top down, but through that it gave me security because I was able to understand what it means to be a leader...I learned those skills very early on in my career and I’ve never forgotten them.

Anne’s involvement in a hierarchical organization like the military influenced her perception of leadership and who was granted power or authority, but also allowed her to develop a sense of self-efficacy and belief that she could lead others.

After several years working in the military and advancing in rank, Anne decided to move into academia. As an expecting mother, she and her partner thought moving to a public field like academia may be beneficial, especially with the academic calendar schedule. She became an assistant professor and worked her way through the faculty ranks. Throughout her career as a faculty member, Anne held various service and administrative roles. Most notable to her were roles coordinating and directing graduate programs. She shared, “I became a program director very early and so I felt very comfortable in holding both the traditional teaching role at the same time that I was being positioned in a leadership role within the school.” In reflecting on her administration and

leadership roles, Anne noted that, while her role was not called a department chair technically, there were similar structures, and “from that experience it cemented that I was very comfortable and could lead in a larger framework.” She also highlighted her experience serving for many years on a committee that dealt with hiring and budgets. She shared, “that really prepared me to understand the politics of how this happens...So I think that work has prepared me, and I'm not intimidated by it and I'm informed.” Through this account, Anne acknowledged that she felt prepared to participate in leadership positions and situations.

Anne also discussed many distal factors about her upbringing and tendency toward leadership and involvement. She shared, “I came from a family where work was an important ethic, family was an important value, and my father always said whatever you wanted to become you could, so the potential drive was always there.” She reflected on her background as a child and her tendency to get involved in “advocacy and action” early in her educational and professional pursuits. For Anne, having the support from family to pursue her own goals may have impacted her career choice process earlier in her life, or served as a default – once she had pursued leadership, she was always going to follow that path. Anne elaborated by noting that she had always seen herself as someone with the potential to create impact through leadership:

I always knew early that I wanted to be both a scholar and be able to influence my scholarship not only in the traditional peer review, podium traditional academic route, but I wanted to be able to have a broader influence on policy, process, and procedures and because of that, I think it led me very naturally to feel comfortable in my early career accepting positions of leadership whether they were formal or informal.

Anne mentioned her identity as an extrovert on more than one occasion but did not mention race or gender as a White woman as a direct influence on her decision to

pursue the deanship. She did mention gender when thinking about the hierarchies and fields she was trained in, noting that being a woman often meant being “subservient.” At times, it frustrated her, until she “decided to take it on and learn more about it... I liked the whole notion of power sharing, not power grabbing.” The experiences Anne had as a woman in the military and in her professional field informed her approach to leadership and left her feeling prepared to pursue future leadership roles or positions of power.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

Anne was content with her role as a faculty member, noting in her narrative account that “life was good, faculty and students were very satisfied with the program.” But she also realized “I was restless... I needed something more – to grow, develop, and continue.” She approached her narrative response in a very chronological way, thinking through each experience that led her to the deanship. She placed heavy emphasis on her experience with a search firm.

The first impetus for Anne’s decision to pursue the deanship came from search firm interest. She shared, “two or three search firms came to me saying that people have recognized me.” She followed their lead and was a finalist in the first position to which she applied but ultimately did not become the dean. Anne noted, “I was not selected and that was okay because I was still kind of doing what I was doing very comfortably.” She was still enjoying teaching and directing a program but continued to participate in dean searches. She was a finalist and did not receive the position a second time, at which point she felt that the process was too vigorous and chose to take a break from applying.

A few months later, the search firm played a role once again when they believed they had found the right fit for her at a specific institution and urged her to apply. “The

search firm called me out of the blue and they said, 'We'd like to invite you into another search. We think we have the school,' and I said, 'I'm not interested' because I was so burned." Anne felt "embarrassed" and did not want to ask for references again.

Eventually, she reconsidered. In her narrative, Anne shared:

After much encouragement from the headhunter, I carefully considered my options. I was ready to trust my instincts and move forward with the search. The headhunter was instrumental in prompting me to consider the position. Without her strong guidance, advice, and belief that I was the right candidate, I am not sure I would have moved forward.

Anne recalled weighing the potential consequences and benefits of entering another dean search, both trusting herself and the search firm. The proximal factors involved in her decision-making process, like the support from the search firm, impacted her decision to apply and move forward in pursuit of the deanship. Anne described the support the firm offered her, noting that they "took the time and effort to really prepare the candidate...I was so engaged in the process with her [the headhunter]. She was a really great coach, an executive coach." Anne's account and frequent mention of the search firm throughout her decision-making process highlights its impact.

In addition to encouragement from the search firm representatives, self-efficacy appeared to be a primary factor in Anne's decision to pursue the deanship. In her narrative about her decision to pursue the deanship, Anne shared, "I was ready – it may not have been top of mind, mostly because I was so busy being an academic. The timing was right, I was at the top of my game in my current role. I had every reason to stay. I didn't have to leave but the opportunity knock[ed] and I opened the door." She knew it was the right next step and that it was ultimately a choice that she had to make for herself. In hearing her responses to other interview questions, it was clear Anne felt

ready, had personal support and professional experience, and that her belief in herself drove her decision-making process. Anne was also self-aware of these factors, as noted when asked what impacted her decision to pursue the deanship:

Readiness, mostly the ability to work with others and to execute. I knew I could make decisions at a higher level. I knew that personally my family would support me, meaning my spouse and my children on wherever that position might take me. I knew I wanted to be [in a certain geographical area]. So, I just have to say internally I had the belief, I had the confidence, I had the resiliency and I had the support both personally and professionally.

While Anne may have been content in her role as a faculty member and program director, the invitation from the search firm sparked her interest, leading her to consider the possible consequences and benefits, and ultimately decide that it was the right time to pursue the deanship.

The theme of self-efficacy was further highlighted when asked to visually depict her decision to pursue the deanship. Anne shared an image of red shoes from the Wizard of Oz with the caption “You’ve always had the power my dear, you just had to learn it for yourself.” She related to the image and believed it illustrated “that I always had the power to lead, to be a dean, but I was not ready or at least I thought I was not ready. I had to learn that I had the power within me.” Anne mentioned the support from family and colleagues, and her own experiences that prepared her to take on leadership, from childhood through various professional experiences. However, it was ultimately this sense of internal power and readiness that pushed her to apply to the deanship and follow the opportunity when the search firm prompted it.

Anne’s faculty role also influenced her decision. She noted that the timing was right on a few occasions, and when prompted further, recalled that she was working with her last doctoral advisee. Once she finished chairing that student’s dissertation, her

formal responsibilities as a student advisor would be completed and she felt ready and able to move to a new chapter. Despite the sense of readiness, Anne clutched tightly to her identity as a faculty member, “I still see myself as a faculty, I’m never gonna give that role up, I will not. I’ll go kicking and screaming and I think after my years of teaching that is one role that I miss most – to have access to students.” In weighing the pros and cons of pursuing the deanship, Anne’s faculty role contributed to both consequences and benefits of moving forward in administration.

Anne believed she had the support from her family growing up, and in the current moment. She recalled that her partner told her, “if you want to do this, go ahead and do it. I’m there for you.” The support from her spouse influenced her decision-making process in pursuit of the deanship as it was happening. She also recalled consulting with other women who had been deans and connecting with women in her professional association who were also considering the deanship or other leadership roles. She believed connecting with others who understood the role helped in the process, but she also did not want to share her decision to apply with too many people in case she did not get it. She shared, “I didn’t tell a whole lot of people, but those that I did tell were very supportive, [saying] “You’re ready. This is it. Absolutely. There’s no doubt that you shouldn’t do this.”” Anne received ample encouragement and felt supported in her decision to pursue the deanship.

Institutional type also informed Anne’s decision to pursue the deanship. The values of this particular institution aligned with her military background, and the status as a research-intensive institution seemed important to her as well. When asked how colleagues responded to Anne’s decision-making process, she believed that they were

supportive especially because she was going to be the dean at a prestigious “R1 institution” that was “a brand... a top 10 school.” She felt that if she had accepted a deanship at a different institutional type, her colleagues may have questioned her decision and said something like, “Okay, so, that's good. Congratulations. Are you sure you really want to do that?” The impact of both her colleagues’ feedback and the type and values of the particular institution appeared to be secondary factors in Anne’s decision-making process.

Anne spoke frequently about instinct, faith, and alignment. While she felt prepared and her narrative and interview accounts suggest several distal and proximal factors impacting her decision-making process and desire to be dean, it was this sense or intuition that ultimately made her feel ready. In reflecting on her on-campus interview at the institution she shared:

Once I got in the space and I walked in and everything was red...I was in a red suit, I had red glasses on, I had red shoes on, and I just knew that this was the place and I was going to be there. I mean, I just knew it. All I had to do was go through the interview, but do you see what I talk about that alignment? When you are open God puts you where he needs you to serve, whether you think you're ready or not. And it's at that moment I knew I was ready.

Anne repeated on several occasions that things “happen for a reason” and had no doubts about the alignment at this particular institution. After a successful interview process, she gratefully and enthusiastically accepted the role of dean.

Virginia

“This a big damn job, and I spend a lot of time thinking, damn, this is a big damn job. So, I think that that's been an awakening. But I'm pretty happy with it, even though I'm still getting used to it. I'm curious to see, in a year, if I feel more like, oh yeah, this is how it is. And I've sort of settled into it, I've made my decisions about how I handle everything. Because right now, I'm still making it up.”

Virginia, a White woman in her 50's, always knew she wanted to be a dean. She identified her interest in the deanship as early as graduate school and carried that interest throughout her career in her professional discipline – despite discouragement from faculty and fellow colleagues along the way. Virginia held faculty and administrative roles, including program director, at a number of institutions before becoming a dean. She identified as a caretaker, wife, dog mom, sister, friend, mentor, and mentee. She was incredibly candid about her experiences and about who she is as a person. Virginia expressed a deep level of self-awareness and ability to map her skills and interests to the deanship throughout her decision-making process.

Entering Administration

Virginia's entrance into higher education was not seamless. As a first-generation student, she faced challenges in her undergraduate career. Despite transferring and family emergencies, she persisted and pursued a graduate degree. Once again, she faced challenges as she tried to navigate a new discipline and type of schooling. Eventually, she discovered her professional field and started a new graduate program. After making this change, she noted, "I switched over and that's when I think I started to thrive and started to really see myself as an academic." Though she had confidence in her own abilities, Virginia was told that she did not fit in to her graduate program, "You're a square peg in a round hole. You don't fit, and we're not sure you should stay in the program." She chose to persist anyways and immediately became engrossed in the inner workings of her college and department, "I started getting involved in every committee. I was in the first cohort of doctoral students and they didn't have anything worked out... I was like we need a committee, and we need to advocate...I started a doctoral student organization and

just became a pain in the ass basically.” Early in her career, Virginia was very aware that these interests translated to a career as a dean:

I think all of that is the kind of stuff that led me into being a dean. I wanted to talk about how students were being taken care of, what kind of housing opportunities were there, what issues with writing were there that we could address, and then what did teachers need to teach their classes well and how do we help student athletes with their classes and training teachers to help the students and all this kind of stuff, so I spent a lot of time doing that work and it just made sense to me.

Virginia’s path through higher education as a student was rocky, but she found ways to make the most of the experiences and build skills that matched her interests.

As a graduate student, Virginia attended a conference for her professional field. In reflecting on the experience, she shared:

It’s a little embarrassing, I was the only [graduate student] at the conference at the ‘so you want to be a dean’ session. When they went around and everyone was introducing themselves, they were like, ‘what do you mean you’re in grad school?’ and I was like really early in grad school, too, I wasn’t in my last year or anything. So, I always kind of knew I liked administration, it was a draw for me.

Virginia was very self-aware of her professional interests and skills and saw the deanship as a place where she could put these things into practice. Despite the confidence in her own interests and career path, she did feel different from the other session attendees – and not just because she was a graduate student. Virginia remembered that most of the other women had stumbled into administration in one way or another rather than intentionally pursuing it, “Almost all of them said that they fell into it, they were drafted into it, they didn’t want it and so it was really weird to be somebody who wanted it. You never saw that.” She was trying to find others like her in this group, and yet they saw her differently than she saw herself, “And then everybody else would be like ‘oh she’s so ambitious.’ And I was like I don’t feel that ambitious, I just feel like that’s a better fit for my skill set.” While the other women Virginia met were asked to lead or found themselves in

positions of leadership later in their career, she knew very early in her career that the deanship had the potential to be a good fit for her aspirations. “I liked what the dean did. It seemed like they were the decision maker, and they could make things happen if they wanted, and they could fix things, and make things run well. And those were all the things that I wanted to do.” Her self-awareness and self-efficacy pushed her to follow this path because she believed it would allow her to achieve her career goals.

Virginia became a faculty member in her professional field. She acknowledged that she “like[d] research okay” but knew she was more interested in the service and administrative components of her faculty role, so she continued to serve on many committees, much like she did as a graduate student. This emphasis on service over research was likely made possible because of the practice-oriented nature of her field. Virginia credited this involvement to the dean of her college who encouraged her, “I led committees there, and I did other things that assistant professors wouldn't normally do.” She gained experience with budgets, community engagement, and strategic planning. Eventually, she had the realization that she could do some of this work and receive more credit for it, “what if I got paid to go to all of these meetings? What if it was part of my job and I had reduced expectations in research? Wouldn't that be great.” She became a program director and immediately felt a better fit to the position. She continued to see overlaps to her interests, growing skills, and experiences, and her decision to pursue the deanship persisted. However, she felt like she had to pursue a ‘traditional path’ to the deanship. “My plan was, I mean you know, I'm very first gen and so I was like, I have to be a program director and then I'll be an associate dean and then I'll be a dean and then I'll be a provost and then I'll be a chancellor if I decide to go there.” The assumptions

about following a specific path stuck with Virginia, so she continued to pursue other roles and eventually became the director of a school in her professional field at a new institution.

Virginia saw her role as director akin to that of a dean since she oversaw a school in its entirety, but recognized that, without the title, others would not necessarily see her as having the dean experience. She also believed “some people would think that I needed to be an associate dean before I became a dean.” She found a mentor in her new dean and hoped to be appointed associate dean. She believed she was being groomed for the role, but it was then offered to someone else. Virginia then doubted whether this dean saw her as a leader at all but decided to persist anyway. She was eventually offered a role in the Provost’s office and chose to move on to this new opportunity.

At one point, Virginia thought she might enjoy working in a provost’s office or even pursuing the role of provost one day, but she did not have a positive experience in this position. In her narrative account, she shared that it “had turned into a bit of a nightmare.” She believed it was not a good fit and she clashed with those who were supposed to be her mentors. In discussing her CV, Virginia noted that these negative experiences are stories that are not documented on paper, “So your bad experiences don’t show, it’s always your best self that shows, it’s always the good things that happen.” This experience was a driving factor in Virginia’s decision to pursue the deanship, because she believed the environment was toxic for her and she needed to move on, “I had to get out of there. I did not have a decent job, and it was such a bad atmosphere. I just had to go.”

In addition to her assumptions about the traditional career path and serving as associate dean before dean, she believed she needed to have more experience at a

research-intensive institution if she wanted to pursue a deanship at that institutional type, “So when I moved from an R1 to a regional, I was very concerned that I was never going to be able to break in R1s again, even though I spent all my career in them.” In order to address this fear, she used her time in the provost’s office to pursue a leadership program. Once again being self-aware, Virginia used the opportunity to focus on her areas for improvement, “I tend to err on the side of being overly strong and overly intense. And so, it's been very helpful for me to learn things like, ask questions, and listen, and you don't have to be in charge of everything, and let other people lead, and delegate.” She also valued the network that she built during the program, and the opportunities she was granted to shadow other leaders at research-intensive institutions, attend conferences, and learn varying perspectives from folks in different positions. She paid particular attention to the deans in her new network, “trying to learn as much as [she] could about the job.” This experience gave her the extra boost of confidence, and supportive network, needed to apply for dean positions.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

When asked to describe her decision to pursue the deanship through an image, Virginia produced an entire collage of images to depict her journey. She reflected on a previous experience doing a similar activity and decided it was an effective way to capture the various stages and emotions that comprised her decision-making process. Family was an important factor in Virginia’s decision-making process. She spoke at length about her wife and the important role that she played throughout Virginia’s career. Virginia included an image in the center of her collage of two women holding hands to describe this relationship:

I had the two women, because that was my wife and I trying to make this decision together, and we're kind of at the center of everything. I felt like it was definitely a team forged. And she read my cover letters, and she gave me feedback on stuff, and I would talk through ideas with her, and talk through the different places, and what I was thinking, and what she was thinking, and all of that.

Having support from her partner was critically important to Virginia, and her extended family was also a significant part of her life. As a result, geography also became a large factor in deciding where to pursue a dean role. Both Virginia and her partner had family members to care for, so they created a map of possible locations they could move to while still being close to family. Finances and salary were also a consideration in the decision-making process knowing the expenses that they might encounter in being caregivers and needing to travel.

In addition to her partner, Virginia was grateful for the support network she had built throughout her career. She shared an image of many hands overlapping, “The people with all the hands together were sort of all my people who wrote letters for me, and gave me advice, and helped me out. I would say I had a pretty big cohort of people who I had to talk things through with, and also read things for me, and gave me ideas about how I might approach things.” When asked about the climate for leadership in her various professional settings, Virginia noted the stark contrast she experienced. Having been employed at several institutions in various roles, she worked under a number of deans, some of whom were encouraging, “I had a lot of support from my dean. He was very encouraging, and he treated me like a colleague... He was very supportive and very encouraging to be my own person;” others who were quite the opposite, “And she was not encouraging of me at all. She did not see potential in me in that way, I don't think;” and still some that fell in the middle, “She saw me as a leader, but not that much.” She

also spoke of a woman dean who “was pretty encouraging. I liked her style in some ways but also knew I could never be like her.” Virginia received mixed messages about who could be a dean and whether or not she was viewed as a leader. She received some encouragement and some discouragement in her pursuit but made it a point to find mentors and support networks along the way. When she faced negativity or doubt, she pushed through, “there's a little bit of me that's a little bit of a rebel and a little bit of an oppositional. And so, if you're going to tell me I can't do it, I'm going to do it better than you think I will, and you're going to have to just eat it.” This sense of resilience, present in her undergraduate and graduate student experiences as well, continued as she pursued academic leadership roles.

In addition to some of these external challenges to her pursuit of leadership, Virginia shared health challenges that occurred during her transition to the deanship. While they did not prevent her from moving forward or applying for positions, they did cloud some of her experiences interviewing and added an additional layer of stress and challenge to the process. She highlighted these challenges in the collage of images depicting her decision to pursue the deanship, sharing a picture of an individual in a wheelchair climbing a mountain, “So I felt like this person in the wheelchair climbing the thing, because I was like, I'm doing this thing, but I feel handicapped in a variety of ways.” The health issues Virginia faced could have been proximal factors preventing her from moving forward, but instead, she took them in stride and continued in her pursuit of leadership roles.

One of the most consistent themes in Virginia’s pursuit of the deanship was her self-efficacy and confidence in who she was, despite negative feedback or experiences.

She shared, “I think that I'm not your typical...I look different than the other deans. I'm a little more casual. I'm much more open and confrontational in some ways. So, I think that some people who expect me to look a certain way get very uncomfortable with me and feel like I'm not the right kind of person in that way.” She discussed her leadership style, candid nature and tendency to curse, and other characteristics that she recognized rubbed some people the wrong way:

But people get hung up about stuff like that. And so, I just made a decision that I'm not going to sweat that stuff. I mean, I'm just going to be who I am, and it'll work out well. I'd rather be comfortable with who I am and get the job that fits me, than try to fit myself into something and be perfect. I'm [a certain body type], I'm [religious], I'm a lesbian. I don't fit in so many ways, that I just have to not worry about that.

Throughout her academic career, Virginia received messages about who could lead and what a dean was “supposed to look like” and realized that many of her own identities and behaviors were counter to those models but chose to advance despite them.

Virginia's assumptions were often reinforced by supervisors who doubted her ability or administrators who told her she did not belong. She discussed the bias that she faced very casually, recognizing that it happened but knowing that she had to keep moving forward:

There's been along the way, a series of men, particularly, who don't like outspoken women, and who have not seen me as a leader because of that, and because I didn't look a certain way, and I didn't act a certain way, and I wasn't nice to them, and I wasn't [a certain body type], I wasn't wearing a cute skirt.

She shared a specific story where she was giving a presentation to her boss, a man, who had clearly doubted her ability to be a leader based on his response, “he said to the provost, “Well, she's competent.” Like he was surprised or something.” Virginia faced this doubt about her looks, her personality, and her competence throughout her leadership

trajectory. She did not sugar-coat her experience or her reaction, acknowledging that these instances hurt her, “I don't take that stuff very much. I get pretty pissed, and then when I get pissed, I get driven. And when I get driven, I'm going to do the thing that I want to do. So, I might cry a little bit, but then I'm going to be like, oh yeah, watch this.” This theme was apparent in her visual depiction of her decision as well. As part of her collage, she shared a picture of a flower growing through a crack in a block of concrete. In reflecting on the image Virginia noted, “I think that sort of appealed to me in a lot of ways, because I thought about sort of not quite fitting in, and my last job being such a bad situation, and sort of wanting to bloom somewhere else, but having to try and do it where I was, against the odds.” Her own desire to be a dean, self-awareness, and confidence in her unique value gave her agency to persist – and bloom – despite the bias, hurt, and discouragement that she faced.

Virginia's ability to reconcile these experiences and emotions in pursuit of the deanship showed an exercise in matching her skills and career interests to a choice that she believed would improve her well-being. Her decision-making process, as outlined in her narrative, also showed elements that challenged rule-following behavior. Whereas some may find people with similar experiences or identities to themselves and follow their decision-making process, Virginia was faced with many examples of deans who did not look like her, or people who would have made different decisions had they been in her shoes. Instead of exhibiting that decision-making strategy, she clung to her self-efficacy and sense of agency to pursue the deanship – something she had wanted in her career for a long time – anyway.

Virginia applied to several dean positions and a few provost roles. She realized that the provost role was not the right fit for the time being but was offered a deanship at one institution. The offer was for a position at a comprehensive institution, similar to where she was currently working, and she realized, “it just wasn’t what I wanted.” She anticipated challenges as the school faced a leadership transition and realized she did not want to be at a small school or in a small town. When turning down the offer, she was still waiting to hear back from another position at a research-intensive institution. She had a very positive interview experience and felt drawn to the institution, “I really believed in my heart that this was the right place.” In addition to her gut feeling, she valued the diversity among the other deans and senior leadership, sharing in her narrative account that she was “thrilled to find out that another academic dean was also a lesbian. It made me feel more confident and excited about the idea of moving into the role.” When she accepted the role, she felt gratitude and a sense of success – much like the image in her collage of a cartoon person on top of a mountain holding a flag and smiling in celebration.

Virginia, someone who had aspirations of being a dean very early in her academic journey, faced many challenges personally and professionally in her pursuit of the role. She exhibited a level of self-awareness that allowed her to map her own interests, skills, and abilities onto those required of the dean, found support in family and mentors, and stayed true to who she was throughout the process. When asked to provide advice for other women deciding to pursue the deanship, Virginia shared:

I think that it's head work and it's heart work, and you have to do both of those in preparing. You have to know what kind of leader you are, and where your blind spots are, and where you're weak. And then you either have to hire people around you who are good at those things, who can help balance you, and redirect you,

and point things out, or you have to do the work on yourself to just start beefing up those places.

Throughout her reflection on her decision-making process, it became clear that Virginia exhibited and acted on her own advice throughout her career and took that philosophy with her as she embarked, finally, on her new role as the academic dean.

Natalie

“It’s funny because just because you’re a good professor doesn’t necessarily mean you’re going to be a good dean... I think it’s just a much more holistic view of an institution rather than necessarily being a subject matter expert.”

Natalie, an American Indian and White woman in her 40s, credited great mentors for her leadership roles throughout her career. She served as a professor, director of a center, associate dean, and interim dean before pursuing the deanship in her professional field. Natalie identified as a wife, mother, daughter, and daughter-in-law and spoke frequently about the importance of family support in her decision to pursue the deanship. Her decision-making process focused heavily on validation from others and her experience as interim dean, as well as her own self-efficacy to overcome imposter syndrome. Once she decided to apply for deanships, family, geography, and institution type shaped her decision. Natalie described herself as an extravert, and both her poise and candid nature were evident throughout the interview process.

Entering Administration

Natalie’s first administrative position was as director of a center related to her professional expertise. Looking back, she felt like she had landed her dream job, but still felt a sense of imposter syndrome when moving to a new institution, “I found that institution really intimidating because it was a higher ranked school and the idea of taking over the directorship there was really intimidating like ‘oh, was I good enough?’” She

took the job despite the fear and credited a woman mentor at the institution for helping her to realize her potential. She shared, “Obviously I walked the path and I did the work, but having people along the path that supported me and encouraged me and let me know that no, you do have the skills, you can go to the next level was really important.”

Throughout her career, Natalie appreciated the support and encouragement from mentors while recognizing that her own self-efficacy and hard work was also a factor in her advancement.

A few years after moving to the institution to assume the director role, Natalie was asked by the dean to serve as associate dean of her college. She had recently become a full professor and agreed to take on the administrative position. She believed the dean – her mentor – was truly the reason she pursued academic leadership, starting with this appointment, “I mean to be honest I think the reason I’m a dean is really because of a man who believed in me and mentored me.” When asked to share or describe an image depicting her decision to pursue the deanship, Natalie shared a photograph of herself standing with her mentor and two other women that he had “mentored up” the ranks of academic leadership. When reflecting on the picture, she shared, “I love what it signifies, both in terms of him mentoring us up and, and leading the way. But also, it takes a village. These are hard jobs and they can be lonely jobs at times...so it's really nice to know that we've got each other to lean on.” From the very beginning of her leadership journey, having a support network and mentorship was critical.

During her time as associate dean, Natalie learned more about the “holistic view of [the] institution,” something she had not been able to do as a faculty member but felt enhanced her role as a leader. In reflecting on how the role differed from her faculty

position, she shared, “So it’s a little too dismissive to say that none of these skills transfer over but it’s not a lot of the same skills because in an administration role you’re managing people, you’re doing the work environment piece, you’re doing the external fundraising piece...you have the budgeting piece.” While she had learned a great deal in the role, from budgets to personnel, she was still hesitant to move forward. Once again, she believed she had found her “dream job” in the associate dean role, and she still had some fears about certain aspects of the deanship, “I think the impediment, the fear around becoming a dean, was really around the fundraising piece and around the kind of the public engagement piece and that was really quite intimidating for me.” Though she had built her repertoire of skills, there were specific parts of the deanship that made her question her ability to move forward.

Natalie recalled that other people believed she was going to pursue a deanship before she did, “the people around me started to presume that I was going to become a dean before I was interested in applying for a deanship.” While she candidly discredited her own abilities by saying “I feel like if you're a competent woman, then the bar is relatively low, right? Like, if you're not messing things up, and you're in administration, people just naturally start to say that you need to move to the next level,” she also appreciated the support and had a sense of self-confidence that propelled her forward. She noted, “that was definitely a motivator, because people you trust start to think that you have the capacity to move on to the next level. That's definitely motivational...I really appreciated their competence in my capacity.” In some ways, Natalie felt like moving up in administration was the presumed next step as a woman who had already moved into administration. Though she was aware of her own abilities, having the

external validation from her peers solidified her sense of confidence. When her dean announced a sabbatical, he asked her to serve as acting dean for a brief period, and she readily accepted.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

For Natalie, serving as the interim dean marked a significant point in her decision-making process. In reflecting on the experience, she shared:

Because I had a chance to serve as an acting dean, [for a short period] that was relatively not as scary I guess you could say, I had the chance to do that fundraising work and that outreach work and discovered that I really love it. Having a chance to be an acting dean gave me the confidence that I could be dean and then of course my new aspiration was to become dean.

Natalie's experience as interim dean – a temporary position that, by its interim nature, removed some of the risk of a more permanent role – helped to dispel her fears and provided her with tangible experience in certain aspects of the job. More specifically, she was able to focus on the areas that had scared her away from the position in the past. She shared, “because he made me acting Dean, I had had the opportunity to do a lot of the real work. So, the fundraising, the working with alumni and donors and stakeholders. I think those are the pieces that oftentimes scare people away.” Gaining the skills and practice as both the associate dean and the interim dean primed Natalie to pursue the academic deanship.

After serving as interim dean, Natalie developed stronger motivations to pursue the deanship. She noted, “I think first and foremost, after being associate dean for [several] years, I felt like I was really ready to be the decision maker.” She had developed a sense of confidence in her abilities and now had her own topic areas that she wanted to focus on as a leader. “One of the things that's very important to me is diversity, equity

and inclusion. And obviously, if you are the decision maker, you have a lot more ability to effectuate change within the space of diversity, equity and inclusion. So that was very closely connected - those two ideas.” Natalie made the connection between being a dean, being a decision-maker, and having the opportunity to impact diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, all of which made her eager to pursue the role. In addition to these career-oriented goals, Natalie’s family was looking to move closer to their extended family and saw this potential career change as an opportunity to act on that goal.

Recognizing the competing demands associated with the deanship, family was a critical consideration for Natalie in her decision-making process. Not only were they looking to relocate to be closer to family, but Natalie felt that she was able to consider a deanship because of the support her family provided, “I don't think you can be successful in this type of job without supportive family. It's just not possible.” She also highlighted the importance of finding the right “life partner” in order to find balance between work and home life, “I wouldn't be doing what I am doing now, if my partner wasn't willing to take on that burden.”

Identity played a large role in Natalie’s decision to pursue the academic deanship. She felt a strong connection to both her race and her gender, but shared, “I carry my racial identity before I carry my gender identity.” Both dimensions of her identity made her wary of pursuing the deanship. When asked about her choice process, she noted:

It was scary, right? Because like, anytime you put yourself out there, I have seen women and people of color not do a good job either for their own bad decisions, or for things that were beyond their control...If you fail, they blame your race and gender. And so that is something that still to this day weighs heavily...this fear that if I muck it up somehow, I'm going to make things worse for the generation coming behind me.

Natalie pointed out that she was not familiar with instances where a leader who identified as a woman, a person of color, or both was removed from their position for any reason and then replaced by someone with similar identities. She articulated a fear of having the opportunity to lead, but then ruining that chance for others with shared identities if anything were to go wrong, “I take that very seriously, and actually, that made becoming a dean scarier.” This possibility was something Natalie mentioned multiple times and connected to imposter syndrome. She recalled feeling out of place or like she was not enough at various points of her career, which may have been connected to her identities or the fact that she did not see many other leaders like her in academia.

Despite these feelings of fear and imposter syndrome, Natalie applied for three dean positions while serving as interim dean. She recalled a level of confidence that she had as a younger professional:

When I was younger, I think I was lacking humility...I could have totally seen myself as a younger woman like, ‘Oh, yeah, totally. I’m awesome. I’m going to be Dean.’ And not suffering from the imposter syndrome like I do now. I kind of chuckle, it’s like the older you get, the more uncertain at least I get.

Though different from how she was feeling now, this distal level of confidence may have provided her with the agency needed to apply despite the fears.

Natalie also recalled a conversation with a mentor who shared that it was normal to not feel ready, especially as a woman. Instead, this mentor encouraged her to apply “when you are ready to learn, not when you think you have the experience that you need, because if you wait for that, you may never get that...because you’ll never have it until you do it.” Acknowledging this reality was helpful in her decision-making process.

Natalie also felt prepared thanks to her mentor who had originally appointed her as associate and interim dean, “He played a really important role in terms of giving me the

confidence and giving me the skills that I needed to feel perfectly comfortable in applying to deanships.” Natalie referenced her mentors at several points in her decision-making process through her interview responses, narrative reflection, and visual depiction, highlighting their important role in her choice process. In some ways, Natalie exhibited elements of rule following decision-making by following the paths that were modeled by her mentors.

Much of Natalie’s decision-making process occurred during her application process and when deciding whether or not to accept offers. She only applied to schools within a certain regional area, and she prioritized public universities because she and her partner valued public education. Natalie received two job offers to become a dean. She gathered information and learned as much as she could about the institutions in order to inform her decision, “[I] tried to do as much research as I possibly could on [the schools] so that included everything...looking at the overall enrollment, looking at the financial situation, asking for more data from the hiring team, just to make sure that I really felt like I was well situated.” She took this part of the process seriously, in part because she believed accepting a deanship was “a marriage” and said, “you want to make sure before you jump into something like being dean that it's a good decision.”

Ultimately, Natalie chose to turn down one of the offers for financial reasons. In reflecting on whether or not financial opportunities played a role in her decision-making process, she shared:

I would actually say it played more of a role in my turning down an offer... you're spending so much more time away from the family that that [salary] didn't really make sense. So I guess you could say I wasn't gonna make the jump for just a minimal increase, because I obviously turned that down.

Natalie wanted to be compensated more than she had been at her previous institution given the increase in workload and hours away from family that she would spend in a dean role. While she understood the rationale of the institution for the proposed salary, she decided not to pursue this particular deanship as a result.

The second offer Natalie received met her requirements in terms of geography, family needs, salary, and institutional type. After doing her research and consulting with her mentors and partner, she decided she was “ready to learn.” Natalie accepted her second offer and pursued the academic deanship at a new institution.

Tia

“I became a dean when I was not only pregnant, but... crazy young. And I had expected this would be my path in my late fifties, like this was not where I expected to be now.”

Tia, a White woman in her 40's, described her career path in the STEM fields as “linear on speed.” She achieved full professor in record time and was simultaneously asked to serve as an associate dean. Soon thereafter, she served as interim dean of her college, and within a year was applying for deanships at other institutions, becoming dean before some of her graduate school colleagues had become full professors. Tia considered alternate career paths at each step of her decision-making process but knew from early in her career that she planned to pursue administrative and leadership roles of some kind. She identified as a mother, wife, faculty member, and volunteer. Her decision-making process was driven by her own agency, family support, and a desire to be “the first.” She was intentional about her career decisions, knowledgeable about the field of higher education, and both self-aware and genuine in her reflections.

Entering Administration

As a “third generation academic,” Tia’s faculty career was somewhat predestined. She grew up with academic parents and recognized the impact of her upbringing on her aspirations, “that’s the family business and so even as a kid I knew I’d get a PhD, I knew I wanted to be a professor, I just didn’t know in what.” As a result of her background, she was also attracted to administration early in her career and did not have the same view as many other faculty members, “I always knew that academic administration was not something to be frightened of...And because I came from a family where there was academic leadership, I knew it wasn’t a dark side. I knew it was a highly rewarding and meaningful side.” Tia believed that this gravitation toward administration “set [her] up for being engaged in administrative type service from the very start” such that she had gained experience with department, college, and university-wide committees and other service activities by the time she was an associate professor.

Tia’s plan was to become a full professor and then continue moving up the traditional path of academic leadership. She shared, “I kind of presumed I’d become a full professor and I presumed I’d be the next department chair” given the rotation within her department. Before she could entertain that role, or even acclimate to the role of full professor, she was asked to take on a leadership role within the graduate school:

I really didn’t even have any time as a full professor to say ‘hmm, what do I wanna do now administratively?’ Like, I was already on that path, I was already well integrated at my university, already planning to do the training, and I never really was a full professor, I think I was a full professor for like a week before I became an administrator.

After serving in the role for nearly a year, Tia believed she had accomplished what she was selected to do – and then some – and felt it was time to move on, thinking, "well, this was fun. I wonder what I'm going to do [next]."

Tia had been attending leadership programs at the local and national level, preparing for whatever administrative opportunities came up. In reflecting on her experiences leading up to the deanship, she shared, "I already knew that there was something administrative that I wanted to do and I wanted to be sort of well prepped and have the skill set to do whatever that looked like." When the dean of her college asked her to serve as an associate dean, she was ready. Though the associate dean's portfolio of projects was not exactly what she had in mind, she welcomed the learning experience:

I wanted to have all the things I knew that I needed to learn to be a dean. I really want[ed] research and obviously research dollars and the staff that went with that... but I decided at that point that I wanted to get back into leading in [my discipline] as opposed to with a graduate school. And so, that's why I took the portfolio of activities that I was less excited about.

Tia also realized that she was ready to return to her own discipline after working in the graduate school, so she accepted the role of associate dean.

Though it was originally Tia's plan to become a department chair, she realized during her time as associate dean that she may not need to follow that path. She reflected on her assumptions about the path to academic leadership and the skills she had gained in administration so far, realizing that perhaps she had gained more by being associate dean instead. She shared:

I wasn't sure if I would be a chair. I actually think that as much as everybody says you need to be a chair first, that you understand faculty, promotions and teaching mission [that way] -- and in some ways a chair is like a mini dean -- however, I personally think that having been an associate dean...I mean who knows which is the better path, but it was a very helpful path...I really think not having been a department chair but rather having been this sort of more broad leader has

allowed me to be a better, inclusive, and collaborative leader.

Tia continued to serve as associate dean but once again was starting to feel too big for the role, “I think those years as an associate dean helped me understand that I couldn't be happy in an associate role for my career. I definitely had to get up to the next level.”

The chance to advance came sooner than she anticipated. The dean of the college stepped down, and Tia was asked by the provost to serve as interim dean. She was very surprised by how quickly the opportunity came up but was ready for the challenge. In her narrative, she shared, “in serving as an interim dean I discovered that my people and management skills, that had been honed [through previous positions] and as a generally extraverted person, served me very well.” She was only supposed to serve in the interim role for a few months, but due to leadership changes at the institution, suddenly found herself serving as interim dean for longer than anticipated.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

Serving as interim dean made Tia realize that she was ready to pursue a deanship. Though she had planned to do so later in her career, she was aware of her own career aspirations and need for more, “I learned as interim dean, I was like damnit, I can do this job, I'm good at it, and I'm ready for it, there's no reason I have to wait until I have more gray hair, right?” Aside from having the self-efficacy to pursue the role, she felt as though serving as interim had prepared her even further. She reflected on this realization in her narrative sharing, “I had the opportunity to “practice” being a dean, which allowed me to make an informed decision that I was ready to apply for a formal deanship.” In many ways, Tia believed this was the logical trajectory for her career, “coming from an academic background, deanship just sort of seemed the next obvious step.”

While serving as interim dean, she decided to apply for deanships to determine her “market value.” She did not necessarily plan to leave her interim post, but applied to schools that she was interested in, “I didn’t try to be disingenuous. I applied for schools that if they chose to really work hard to recruit me, I would take it seriously. But I probably wouldn’t take it.” Through this process, Tia was able to narrow in on the type of institution at which she wanted to pursue a dean role. She elaborated on this in her narrative description:

When I applied for formal dean positions, my experience as an interim allowed me to articulate what sort of institution I wanted to be at and what were the metrics to judge a potential college, institution, and opportunity. I am very grateful I had that insight, as it allowed me to narrow down where I wanted to apply – and to know when to walk away from opportunities that might otherwise appear ideal.

Tia knew that she wanted to work at a research university at this point in her career and was not particularly interested in leaving her current institution but continued to field inquiries from search firms. She discussed each potential opportunity with her husband to decide whether or not it was worth pursuing for their family.

While Tia was serving as interim dean, she was also asked to apply to be the dean of the graduate school. Like with other offers, she discussed the opportunity with her husband. While it would offer them stability at the same institution it did not align with her career goals, “we both realized if I did that, I would be putting myself on a very narrow trajectory. You rarely hear of grad deans becoming provost.” Additionally, Tia recognized that the graduate school was not where she felt she could make the biggest impact in higher education, comparing it to working on the edge of the puzzle when she really wanted to be at the center, “it was not a platform for the kinds of bigger things that I wanted to achieve.” Tia did not believe returning to the faculty was an option for her at

this point either, “that's the other thing I could go back to, just being on the faculty. I think I would feel like this massive hole, like I didn't have enough to do.”

As Tia continued to serve as interim dean, she was gaining experience and thought there was potential to be appointed as the dean of the college. Unfortunately, the climate within her college prevented that from becoming a reality. She described the gender bias present in her college, sharing “that same group of men who worked really hard to push back against the underrepresented candidates [in the initial search for dean] pushed back against me, because to be honest, I was doing a damn good job.” As a woman in STEM, Tia was used to facing gender bias and being underestimated but had learned to use it as fuel to excel and prove people wrong. She did not want to leave the institution, but felt as though she had no choice if she wanted to advance, “[it] made me realize, which was so painful, that the university that I grew up in that I loved, that I had hoped to spend most of my career at...like I wasn't looking to move but it became clear to me that I probably wouldn't get the job.” She was not surprised when the college eventually hired a dean who fit a more traditional mold:

They hired a late 50's, White male nondescript, milk toast, uninteresting, uninspired, and unexperienced [man]. I had way more experience than him. Maybe not in life years, but in leadership years...to them [the search committee], being distinguished meant White, old, male, not being a scholar, not being a leader, not being experienced. Unfortunately, that's the reality of the political forces of the college I was in.

Tia found allies at the institution who had faced similar issues, “we [all] struggled with the fact the institution wasn't giving us permanent roles” and was able to discuss alternatives with these women, but still felt frustrated by the reality of the situation.

Despite this disappointment, Tia was ready to be a dean and started applying to research universities, “once I realized I could be a dean, I was ready to be a dean, and I

realized the writing was on the wall at [my institution] I just had to be proactive.” The reality of this decision was not easy for her. In her narrative, she shared, “When I did make the decision to pursue a deanship, I also realized that I was choosing to leave my current institution. It was a place that almost never hired from within, and I knew that **to lead I had to leave**. This was a very difficult thing to wrap my head around.” She realized the weight of her choice, “I wasn’t just choosing to be a dean, I was choosing to relocate my career, my family, and my entire life.”

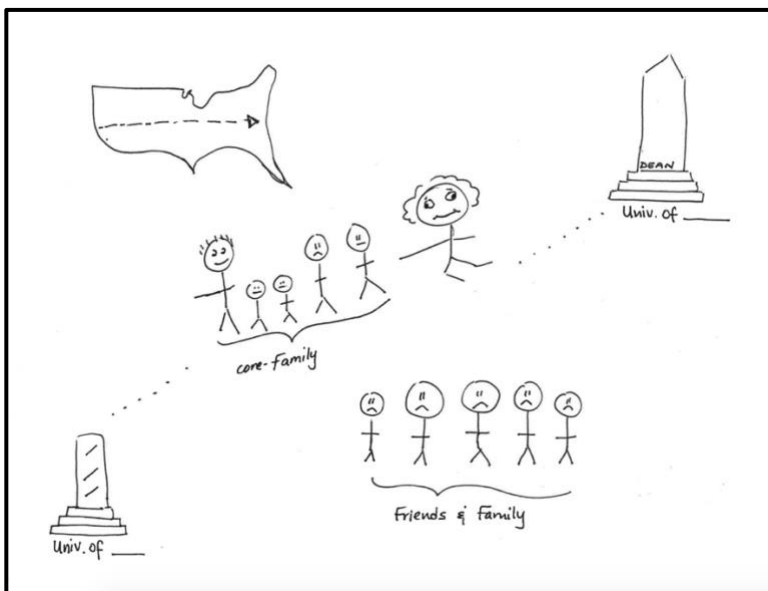
Family was a significant factor in Tia’s decision-making process. As a mother and wife, she understood that her decision impacted many people and felt additional responsibility to make the right decision for their financial stability, “I am the breadwinner for my family which is another sort of role, expectation, pressure in its own way, so a lot of my decisions I’m very pragmatic and calculated because I don’t want to be too high risk.” Her decision to pursue the deanship was guided by her ambitious career goals and agency, but these other roles required her to consider the consequences of her choice at each step.

When asked to describe her decision to pursue the deanship, Tia drew a picture that focused on her family (Figure 2). She was ready to become a dean and wanted to make an impact, but also knew that, while proud, some of her family and friends would be sad to see them move, as illustrated by the faces on the people in her drawing. Both Tia and her husband knew that change was a possibility as she advanced in her career, “I mean, I think we knew this was the way we were going to go. And we knew we would be doing it for a while, I think it’s more of an issue of timing. I didn’t expect to be dean quite so early with little children, for example.” For Tia, the activity of drawing the image was

“highly emotional” as she recalled the difficult decisions and transitions she had to face in order to pursue the deanship.

Figure 2

Tia's Visual Depiction of Decision to Pursue the Deanship



Note. Image drawn by participant.

Tia applied to research institutions in specific geographic areas with highly ranked schools in her discipline and received offers to interview at several. Given the inconsistent timing with each search, she ended up dropping out of other search processes once she received her first offer since it met all of her criteria. The opportunity to pursue the deanship happened years before Tia had expected it to and required leaving a place that she loved in order to start a new chapter. She accepted the role of dean and realized:

I wouldn't go backwards, so I think that's an important point... You can't go home again, do you know that expression? I think it applies, right? Because as much as I love my previous institution and my life there, once you climb that ladder, there's no going back down it 1) without shame and 2) without regrets. So, I don't think there's any reversal here.

With support from her family, belief in her own abilities, and a desire to impact the future of higher education, Tia became the first woman dean at her new institution.

Colleen

“I think [the deanship] was the right decision for me to make. I think this is a good role for me to be in. I think the job, that I'm suited to it and it was a good job for me to do. I would like to share that. I think if you don't feel that way, you shouldn't take a job like this because it's too demanding, right. It just takes too much time.”

Colleen, a White woman in the sciences, served as a full professor and associate provost before realizing that in order to advance to her dream career of provost, she needed experience as a dean and likely at another institution. Colleen identified as a spouse and volunteer in her professional field. She was reserved throughout the interview and at times negative about the reasons why she pursued the deanship or the things she gave up by pursuing the role. However, she was very clear that she loved her job, it was the right fit for her, and she felt like she was making a difference. Colleen's focus on her role as dean throughout the interview provided insight on how her decision-making process was made – quickly, based on information from others, and without as much care for consequences to her personal life.

Entering Administration

Colleen described her career path as a “random walk.” She had finished several degrees in a different field before finding her disciplinary passion, pursuing her PhD, and becoming a faculty member, so she felt that her path was unique in that way. In her professional career, Colleen's goals were heavily focused on excelling in her disciplinary field. When asked about her career aspirations, she shared, “I wanted to publish a ton of papers and be nationally and internationally renowned in my research area, have graduate

students, that's what I wanted to do. Research. I wanted to be a scientist." After achieving those goals, settling into her role as a full professor, and acknowledging that her grant-funded research would soon come to an end, she felt like she had two options – take on more teaching, or move into administration. The dean position in the graduate school opened, and she decided to apply, despite “knowing that it was a set up, they were already going to pick somebody, and it was done, they had to just do the show of doing a search.” While Colleen believed the institution already had someone else in mind for the role, she saw it as beneficial experience, “they let me interview and it was a good experience, so that's why I did it.”

This participation in the graduate school dean search may have signaled to the institution that Colleen was interested in leadership. Seemingly out of the blue, she was asked to meet with the provost who appointed Colleen as the vice provost for academic affairs. Colleen's response to the appointment was, “I think you got the wrong person cause I got absolutely zero experience at this.” When the provost said “nope, I've been asking people about you, you've got the qualities that it takes. Just do it, you'll figure it out,” Colleen did exactly that. She loved her new role and entry into administration.

In reflecting on her past experiences, Colleen realized that while this was her first leadership position with an official title, she had experience leading in different capacities at the institution. For example, she had created a coalition of people across campus who had similar, informal roles in their respective departments. She recalled, “I never recognized it or thought about it as leadership at the time, but it was.” It was not until later that Colleen realized she had experience leading, but this subconscious recognition may have impacted the confidence she felt to take on the role as vice provost.

Colleen believed that serving as vice provost provided her with increased knowledge on academic administration and leadership:

I had a much better insight into how the university works. I saw how the provost and the chancellor work with the senate. I saw how the deans worked with one another. I just felt like I had seen a lot of what it is, the structure of it. I knew something about finance and how budgets work on campus.

She recognized that she did not have formal training to be a dean, nor did she have a formal plan to pursue the role, but that by “watching and trying and doing, observing other people’s successes and failures” she was ready to take on additional leadership responsibilities.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

At first, Colleen could not pinpoint whether or not she had really considered the deanship while serving as the vice provost, stating, “I hadn't thought really about it. Well, had I thought about it?” Upon further reflection, she realized that after spending a number of years in the provost’s office she believed she could take on the role of dean, “I watched the provost working with the deans. And I worked with the deans and I saw the deans working together. And I thought, I can do that job, right? I can do that job.” This experience made Colleen confident in her own ability to pursue a leadership role instead of only doing what someone else had asked her to do, “So I guess I just thought I could do that, which I guess made me feel empowered to try to do a job that had more leadership in it, rather than just working for the provost...I could be in the captain's seat and help.” More than just believing she could take on the role of dean successfully, Colleen felt strongly that in order to pursue a position as provost, she needed to serve as a dean first. She stated:

I went from being faculty to vice provost. So I needed to go back. I needed to go either be a department chair, which I definitely didn't want to do, or take another leadership position. That was the only way I could do that. If I wanted to do leadership, I had to do a lateral move and get a deanship. Because I eventually would like to be a provost, and so this is required.

Colleen believed that in order to advance, she had to follow the 'traditional path' to academic leadership – a belief that motivated her to pursue the role of dean.

During this transition to leadership and consideration of a deanship, Colleen attended a national leadership program for women. She distinctly remembered “a couple of things they said right up front, ‘To move up, you got to move out. You got to be willing to move. You will lose friends, and it's a very lonely job.’” Colleen also remembered her own reaction to hearing these takeaways, “and you think, ‘Oh, yeah. No, that's not true.’ They were right. They were right.” These parables of academic leadership were the most salient part of the program for Colleen, and as she continued in her pursuit of the deanship, she found them to be true.

After a few years serving as vice provost, the deanship in Colleen's college opened up and she knew that position was what she both wanted and was ready to do next. Colleen felt very connected to the school and thought, “well, I'll apply because I'd love to do that. I could do that.” Looking back, Colleen realized her dean stepping down and the dean role opening was the catalyst that pushed her to pursue the deanship at that time:

I kind of knew at that point that I wanted to do [administration] and that I think I'm good at it. I wasn't ready to go back to the faculty. But if my then dean had not been pushed out and that job hadn't come open, I wouldn't have... That was the thing that started it. If that hadn't happened, I wouldn't have looked at all yet.

She approached several mentors to discuss her decision and heard the messages from the leadership program all over again as they encouraged her to apply elsewhere. Colleen

recalled her mentors saying, “you have to go someplace else and get your chops before you can come back here and apply. You have to come in from the outside.” Colleen applied for the role anyways and was interviewed but ultimately the committee selected an external candidate.

After this process, Colleen questioned whether she received an interview because she was truly qualified or if there were other motives, “did I get an interview because I'm internal and they had to interview people because they're going to hire somebody external anyway? Or did I get an interview because I am interview-able?” This internal dialogue was one of the factors that led her to apply for other deanships. The advice from Colleen's mentors also pushed her to apply elsewhere. She recalled their words of caution, “If I wanted to be a leader on that campus I had to go elsewhere to ‘prove myself.’ That is why I applied for other deanships – to get the experience I need to someday be a leader on my home campus.” Now believing that the only way she could become the dean of her own college was to become a dean elsewhere and eventually return as an external candidate, Colleen applied to deanships at two other institutions. One position was well-publicized in her field and the other was recommended to her by a mentor.

Colleen received offers for both positions and was not convinced she was ready to accept, but also felt like she had to follow through after telling people she was applying. She shared, “So I tried and was successful, and by then you're like, ‘These people have invested all of this time and I've told people that I'm looking to do this.’ And I kind of had to do it, right? So it was really more like, which place do I now decide to go to?” Colleen felt tied to pursuing a deanship since she had asked for recommendations from

mentors and colleagues, even though she questioned whether it was truly what she wanted. For her, the default option was to keep moving forward on this path.

In addition to following the default and deciding to advance because she believed she had to, Colleen felt like she was now being pushed out of her current institution. She vividly remembered a meeting of several institution leaders during which the chancellor announced that Colleen was looking for a new opportunity at another institution. Though it was true and not said in a malicious way, Colleen was shocked, “I felt like I had just gotten thrown off a cliff.” Colleen had two offers to be a dean and believed she was ready to take on the role, but it seemed as though she had rushed into applying so fast that she had not really come to terms with the consequences of that decision. In reflecting on that moment in the meeting and her decision-making process, she shared, “I think I had both offers then, so I was sort of on the fence about what to do. But when he [the chancellor] said that... that was really hard. Talk about feeling shoved out of the nest.” It was as if the chancellor said aloud what Colleen was considering doing, and she realized the weight of it for the first time, which in turn made her feel betrayed.

When asked to describe her decision to pursue the academic deanship using an image, Colleen shared a picture of a dirt path in a lush, green wooded area and said “Deciding was naively easy. A fun and exciting adventure, right?” She knew she was ready to take on the dean role, and after the comment from her chancellor suggesting she had already decided to leave, the decision to officially pursue a deanship was easy, like a walk in the park.

Family was not a factor in Colleen’s decision to pursue the deanship. She shared, “I just have a husband, so it doesn't really matter. I mean, I don't have a family.” She did

consult with her partner and her sister but felt that not having children allowed her to make the decision without family in mind. When asked if financial opportunities were a factor, she said, “No. That's not why I did it. It's nice to have a better salary, but that's not why I did it.”

Institution type and work environment were important factors in Colleen’s choice process. She had received two offers but felt that the local population of students and young age of one institution was more appealing than the other, “I decided to come here because of the demographic that we serve at this institution. The other institution is a fine, top 25 wonderful institution but it’s really about White, middle class kids and it’s not about what we’re doing here on our campus.” Colleen was strategic about collecting information on the institutions to which she applied, “you read everything you can about the institution.” For her, assessing the climate of the work environment during the interview process was also critical to her decision-making process. She shared:

When you go on the interview, you try to pay attention to all that subtext to figure out what's really going on. So, for example, at the other place that I interviewed, it was really clear that the deans were extremely competitive with one another and not collaborative at all and, in fact, would try to do things to trip each other up.

Colleen had described her previous work environments as a faculty member as “pretty dog eat dog.” She had experienced discrimination, like people telling her she didn’t look like a full professor, and was used to a negative climate to some extent. However, when it came to administration, she believed “people treat you more formally,” so seeing these combative interactions during her interview was not appealing.

When asked about the extent to which geography shaped her decision, Colleen shared, “less than it should have.” In fact, she shared a second picture of deep red flames, lava, and smoke to depict her decision to pursue the deanship and noted, “the reality of

the choice set in almost immediately. It felt (and still feels) more like this.” When asked when the decision changed from the easy, green path in her first image to the second one covered in flames, she said, “Well, I guess I thought about, what is [deciding to pursue the deanship] like? And it's just sort of like jumping into something that's really dangerous and difficult. I was looking for pictures of Mordor. But I couldn't find that, so I picked something else that was close.” Colleen had not considered geography heavily in her decision-making process, but looking back, realized that changing her personal life to such a large degree on somewhat of a whim was actually a very difficult decision, and one with which she was still wrestling. In her narrative she further expressed the moments of disbelief she felt, “Was I really leaving a beautiful place that I loved to get experience that might allow me to return?” She continued to follow the default path and moved forward with the deanship but seemed to do so halfheartedly. Colleen’s husband still traveled back and forth between their previous home and their new location and both seemed to view her appointment as a temporary gig. “Essentially, we decided that I'm going to be camping out here for five years and doing this,” Colleen said.

Colleen reflected on all that she gave up in order to pursue the deanship, “I had a nice life in a beautiful place and a lot of good friends and really good intellectual colleagues. Relatively, looking at it, it was pretty privileged and pretty nice, and I might not ever have that again. But, I gave it up.” She reiterated her feelings of loss in her narrative, stating, “The new job is great and I'm learning a lot, but years later am still in deep mourning over the loss of my former life...I'm not sure it will have been worth it in the long run.” These comments about the consequences of the decisions she made suggest

that Colleen's decision-making process did not include a full look at the possible outcomes.

When asked to what extent, if any, Colleen's identity impacted her decision to pursue the deanship, it became clear that, in addition to leaving her former life behind physically, her fear of losing her faculty identity was part of her process. When she initially made the leap to administration as vice provost, Colleen feared the repercussions in her professional field. She reflected on her first year in the role:

I remember that when I first [took the job in] the provost's office, the next time I went to a scientific meeting after I joined, I almost didn't leave, barely left my room. I was so anxious about talking to people and telling them that I'd done that. I expected them to just cut me out of that loop, right, being part of the science community. And they don't. They didn't. I'm still working and doing it, but my identity is definitely different now.

At the beginning of her academic career, Colleen's goal was to do research and publish papers. She was highly involved in her professional field, and she feared that moving to administration would ostracize her from those people, in part because of the advice she had received about losing friends – something that had happened to her when she took on her first leadership roles.

In moving to the deanship, this loss of identity as a faculty member weighed on Colleen again. She felt as though she had given it up but not fully assumed the deanship as part of her identity, "My identity used to just be a natural part of who I am. And now in the morning I get up and I put on a dean costume, and I go to work... So, I've lost a lot of identity. I feel in many ways very identity-less." Not only did the decision to pursue the deanship lead Colleen to lose her faculty identity, but she felt it had left her feeling identity-less altogether. While this reflection came after she had accepted the deanship and served in the role for over a year, it suggests that her decision-making process once

again did not include considerations for such consequences. Colleen appeared to take a rule-following approach in which she saw others in similar position to herself who had left their home institution, become external candidates, and advanced in the traditional path to academic leadership instead of a rational choice model in which she would have weighed these pros and cons. Colleen also shared that her identity as a woman did not impact her decision-making process at all and instead said, “I mean, I’m a woman in science. I’m used to crap.”

Despite the challenges Colleen faced in wanting to follow a path at her home institution where she had been for over a decade, and the doubt she shared throughout her interview and narrative, Colleen ultimately felt as though her decision to pursue an external role was the right choice. She preferred her previous location, but pursued the role of dean at a new institution where she believed she could make a difference and was surprised to find that she valued the job:

The job is great. The job is fantastic. I love the job. It's exhausting, but it's fantastic...I think I'm going to look back at it as an incredible learning experience and an opportunity that just was... I'm going to be glad I had the job. I'm going to be glad I had the job.

Colleen still seemed hesitant in thinking about all that she had given up in order to advance in leadership, but almost as if trying to convince herself, Colleen believed she would be glad she had the job – someday.

Joy

“The thing that surprised me the most was how much there was to learn, and I feel like I’m still learning, which is why when these search firms are contacting me now, I’m like, ‘Dude, it’s been a year and a half.’”

Joy, a Black woman in her 50s, served as a faculty member for nearly 20 years at two different institutions before becoming a dean. She held several administrative roles

over the course of her faculty career, including associate chair, chair, program director, and a role in the provost's office. Joy identified as a mother, spouse, family member, teacher, and educator. Joy was a very animated conversationalist throughout the study and discussed her decision to pursue the deanship with several anecdotes and hand gestures. Most of her decision-making process occurred when she was deciding whether or not to accept a dean position and centered on pushing back against doubts and deviating from the "default option."

Entering Administration

Joy, an academic dean in the social sciences, identified herself as an "accidental administrator." She shared, "I kind of accidentally did this administrative role that I thought would be interesting, but I wasn't thinking 'oh yes, I'll be an administrator,' it was just to get this new program going." Joy moved institutions as associate professor with plans to help direct a program, and shortly thereafter was asked to serve as assistant chair. It was a rotating role in the department and Joy accepted it as part of taking her turn. A few years later, she became the chair of the department, but she admitted that she had not planned for a career in administration, "I do remember when I was an assistant professor having a friend who was saying 'I'm trying to decide if I want to go the administrative route,' and I really didn't understand what that meant exactly [so] no I certainly, no I wasn't thinking that."

Joy gained more information as she continued in her role as chair, and observing the dean made her "much more comfortable and familiar with what an administrative trajectory would look like." Joy also spoke about a "lens widening" effect that happens as you advance in career from faculty to various administrative roles. She used her hands to

show how the lens expands as you move up in rank and responsibility. This “widening” seemed to give her more knowledge and comfort as she advanced in leadership and administrative roles as well.

Joy described the career path outlined on her CV as “pretty linear,” especially after serving as a program director, associate chair, and chair. In reflecting on her career path, she spoke about the differing expectations for women and men:

I remember hearing a talk by someone who was looking at women in higher ed leadership positions and saying that women can't skip a step. Men can go from being dean to a president - like our president previously was dean somewhere - but women it's like you have to be department chair, then dean, then a provost, then a president.

Joy's analysis of the traditional career path for women aligns with following default options. She believed that in order to advance in leadership, she had to do so very sequentially and not “skip a step.” For her, being dean “felt like it was a continuation of the opportunity to serve the school in a different way,” and perhaps represented the next logical step in her career process.

As a result, when contacted by a search firm she decided to answer the call and keep moving forward on this career path. She noted, “as chair you start getting firms, probably particularly as a woman of color, contacting you.” She later shared that she felt the some of the outreach was “ridiculous” given her minimal time in leadership roles. “I'm not ridiculous, I'm sure some of that has to do with being a Black woman in a leadership role...cause some of it was ridiculous, I'd been associate chair for 15 minutes.” Despite having doubts about the intentions of the search firm at varying stages of her career path, Joy decided to pursue their inquiries in an attempt to gain practice in applying and interviewing for senior leadership roles.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

Joy applied to two external deanships at the recommendation of a search firm and, after being a finalist in one of the searches, was offered the job of dean. Joy did not know if she was truly ready to move institutions and advance in leadership. She reflected on the idea of “readiness:”

I have read the literature that shows that women never feel ready. That was true when I went up for tenure. That was true when I went up for full. It was true when I became chair. Whereas men [out] of 10 criteria, they have three, and they're like, "Ah, I'm ready." You know that intellectually, so you kind of can push it aside intellectually.

Joy remembered feeling unsure at other points in her career path. She was able to “push it aside” and overcome her concerns about not being ready in order to go through the interview process, but when the decision to accept the role came, she hesitated.

Joy ultimately declined the offer for the deanship and cited a few reasons for her decision. First, she shared that family was a factor knowing that they were not eager to relocate. Second, she referenced geography as a factor in her decision-making process. When asked to share a picture that represented her decision, Joy described being on campus for her final visit, “I roll up the blind. The whole campus was covered in snow, white snow...I knew from that moment there is no way in hell.” Her visceral reaction signaled to her that, not only did she not want to trade a warm climate for snow, but she was also not prepared to make such a big life change for this job. Third, she described feeling a lack of fit among the other senior leaders at the institution. In thinking about her interview process, she said, “I just remember at one point looking around and just being like, ‘I don't see myself in any of you.’ I just wasn't fitting in, to me.”

Joy was convinced that her gut reaction to decline the role was due to these external factors of family, geography, and fit. Yet by our second interview, she came to the realization that, while these factors were important to her, deciding to decline the position was more likely due to her ties to her current institution and a sense of “unfinished business” in her role there. Joy shared:

When it came down to it, I just felt like there was unfinished business here and ways in which [the new institution was] already kind of what we want to be and so when I turned it down I remember the Provost saying, ‘well we can’t make you dean,’ and I said ‘no, I’m not looking to be dean.’ It probably further solidified that I really wanted to do the work that I felt we had started here.

At this point, Joy was not even convinced she wanted to be a dean. It seemed as though she followed the default path, advancing in roles when asked, answering the calls of search firms, until she found herself faced with a significant and complex decision. She used strategies to structure her choice and allowed herself to get to the root of what she really wanted for her family and her career. As a result, she declined the role, and returned to her home institution to continue work that she found purposeful.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship, Again

Making this decision gave Joy time to consider her next career steps and helped her prepare to assume the deanship when the next opportunity came. She participated in a local leadership program that she was recommended for by her dean, “they did a leadership program here so I had done that. And my dean... nominated me for it, so that may have been part of that growing recognition that maybe this was something I could do.” She also took on a role in the Provost’s office that gave her more exposure to university-wide committees, novel diversity and inclusion work, student-affairs and residential experience, and other elements of administrative roles. Within a few years’

time, the dean announced his departure and the role opened up. Joy considered applying. While she did not mention much explicit encouragement to pursue the deanship, even noting “it’s not like people were like ‘you should apply!’” the nudge from her supervisor, the previous dean, to pursue the leadership program, and the experiences she had in the provost’s office, resonated with her.

Despite these experiences and mentorship, Joy faced some discouragement in her pursuit of the role. She shared, “I feel like there was a small contingent of faculty who were actively not wanting me to get the job and felt like maybe there was some kind of insider machination to get me the job.” She noted that “one person even wrote a letter to the provost” voicing concerns against her. Some of this discouragement led Joy to consider who gets to be a dean. In thinking about why someone might feel strongly enough to write a letter against her, she shared, “I think people have all kind of ideas of what this role should be - someone with huge stature, that can bring funding and fundraising.” Joy was hesitant about not having experience in fundraising and related areas, so this discouragement could have derailed her process toward the deanship.

Instead, Joy mentioned pushing through and deciding to pursue the deanship despite discouragement or setbacks on several occasions. When thinking about the colleagues who doubted her as the internal candidate, she shared, “that influenced me in the negative almost, like despite some of that I plowed forward just because I felt like I could see how much potential there was here.” She was determined to work on the “unfinished business” that had led her to decline the offer at another institution. She believed that determination, “influenced me almost to the point where I had to push through what I sensed was some, not outright hostility but more people not thinking it

would be a good idea to have an internal candidate, or me as internal candidate.” The feedback from peers fueled Joy’s sense of self-efficacy and agency to pursue the deanship in spite of their doubts, but also created a tense choice environment.

Identity was another factor that came up for Joy several times when reflecting on her decision-making process, particularly her identity as a Black woman. She remembered someone saying that she would be “the first Black female dean” if she got the job. She knew another Black colleague had already served as dean at the university, but the statement still caused her to reflect on the disconnect she felt between her own identity and how others perceived her:

Although my identity is of a Black woman strongly – since I was a little kid like all my life, I’ve always been Black – but for whatever reason people don’t necessarily know what I am, my life has been a giant identity projection test for people. So I did feel some uncertainty about ‘I’m the first Black, female dean!’ because some people would be like, ‘I didn’t know she was Black’ - it’s happened to me my whole life.

She also believed that it was not necessarily something to celebrate, “it’s sad, it’s not a thing to tout necessarily if it takes until [the current year] to have the first Black dean, that’s not a joyful thing. So on the other hand I have seen... that it’s just important to have a diversity of perspectives around the table.” Joy was intimately aware of her racial identity during her decision-making process and how she might be perceived by others. Yet she pursued the deanship more as a way to contribute to diversity of voice – recognizing the unique opinion she brought to the role – than to be “the first.”

Joy also spoke about having mentors and colleagues at this and other institutions who were of the same and different identities, or that she “shared or didn’t share identities with.” She had previously been in environments where there were “women and people of color in leadership roles” and she had made decisions in her career based on the

representation within departments or colleges where she would work. She had seen leaders with similar identities to herself which may have contributed to her own self-efficacy to pursue the role of dean.

In thinking about her decision-making process, Joy came to the realization that so much of her decision to become a dean occurred when she was deciding to turn down a job offer for the deanship. While challenging, it forced her to question the “default option” and traditional career path where serving as dean was the logical next step. She also realized that her experience applying for and turning down a deanship elsewhere gave her legitimacy and agency to move forward for the internal role, despite pushback:

I think actually what I would say is what made me feel legitimate - which was good because I had to fight through some skepticism on my peers - is that I had been offered a deanship at another university, a school of [social sciences] that's higher ranked, bigger. That actually, probably more than anything else, that made me feel like I can legitimately pursue this.

This experience gave her the confidence to overcome any doubt from herself or others, especially knowing that she had been offered the deanship at what she believed was a more prestigious institution and had decided to stay at her home institution instead.

Once Joy applied for this dean position, she felt more prepared to take on the role as the internal candidate, “I knew this place so maybe I felt more comfortable that I could assume this role given that I knew the players.” Just a few years after moving to this new institution as a program director, she became the dean of the college.

Isabel

“If you're reluctant to pursue [the deanship] because you don't think you have developed leadership skills, you're wrong. There are so many things that transpire in a faculty member's career, including in your own personal life outside of the academy, that prepare you...I would say if there's any bit of you that is curious, you should continue to ask questions and think about possibly pursuing that path.”

Isabel, a White woman in her 50's, was asked to lead early in her faculty career. She became a department chair while associate professor and continued on the administrative path serving as an associate dean of the graduate school before becoming the dean. Isabel identified as a sister, daughter, friend, and mentor. She was very matter of fact when discussing her decision-making process and candid about her comfortability with academia and leadership more broadly. Isabel focused heavily on mapping her skills and experiences to the role of dean while considering the potential losses in making the choice to pursue the deanship.

Entering Administration

When Isabel became a faculty member, she was intent on pursuing her research agenda. After earning tenure, she noted, "I saw my professional role solely as a faculty member." She was working on a longitudinal research project and had not considered administration at that point. She laughed as she shared, "I didn't grow up thinking 'oh yes, I am going to be dean or department chair.'" Yet as she continued in her role as professor, she was consistently told by colleagues and mentors, "you should apply for this, or you should consider this, I think you would be a good leader." When asked to describe her decision to pursue the deanship in a narrative, she started by sharing that she was "encouraged by colleagues." This encouragement marked the beginning of a career in academic administration for Isabel.

Isabel had a strong interest in graduate education and was considering applying for a position in the graduate school when she was asked to serve as chair within her own college. She accepted the role since she was the most senior person in the department – despite only being an associate professor – and knew that other leaders in the college

believed she had the necessary skills. While Isabel believed that the career path on her CV was linear, she felt that this advancement to department chair as an associate professor was premature and considered it a “divergence” from the traditional path. She shared, “I had in my head like ‘oh, I’m going to be department chair one day when I’m full’ but that just wasn’t the reality of it.” Despite her early advancement to administration, she gained experience managing staff and budgets that prepared her for future roles.

While serving as department chair, Isabel’s interest in graduate education persisted, “In the back of my mind there was always this [idea] if I wanted to be in any kind of academic leadership position outside of my academic home, it would be in a graduate school.” When a position for associate dean opened in the graduate school, she was asked to apply. It became clear to her that whoever was selected to pursue this role would have the opportunity to become the dean since the current dean was due to retire. In fact, when Isabel was hired as the associate dean, she learned, “the plan [is] for you to move into this role” of dean. It was really the decision to pursue the associate deanship that set Isabel on the path to the deanship. As a result, she spent much of her time reflecting first on the decision to pursue the associate deanship.

Deciding to Pursue the (Associate) Deanship

In some ways, Isabel was fast-tracked to an administrative path. In her narrative, she shared that “deciding to apply [to the Associate Dean role] was a relatively easy decision because I was already in an administrative role as department chair.” She discussed the factors and experiences that impacted her decision to accept the associate dean role, and by extension, the role of dean.

Isabel felt comfortable moving to the associate deanship based on her experiences as a department chair and even as a faculty member. On multiple occasions, she was able to break down the roles and responsibilities of a dean and map them to her own skills and abilities, as well as to those of faculty members more generally:

You get those experiences by serving on committees, chairing committees. You do get it in research, especially if you manage a grant. And I don't think that gets translated often enough. I think there's a sense that when you're running a grant, that people don't translate that into leadership, and you're managing a team and you're managing a budget, and all of that stuff plays right into what you can do in an administrative role... having Co PIs and grants gave me some grounding in terms of leadership.

Isabel was quick and candid to note that she did not go to “dean school” but that she had her own experiences that prepared her instead. She especially relied on her disciplinary background, “My discipline, that helps me too, because I know the research around these issues. I know the context ... all of that stuff really prepared me as well.”

Isabel also received intentional training and shadowing experiences from her predecessor, noting that “she very intensely spent that year that we were together, invited me to meetings that I would normally have not gone to, spent a lot of time talking with me about processes.” On top of that specific training for the role, she acknowledged that many of the skills required to be dean can be learned in everyday life:

I think life in general prepares you for these roles... you negotiate in your everyday life. You're negotiating with a partner about what you should have for dinner. You're negotiating with a car salesperson about how much you should pay for that car. So you do develop those skills, external, from your day to day life that have significant implications in preparation for other roles that you take on in your career.

Whether considering her experiences as a faculty member, disciplinary expertise, or life skills more broadly, Isabel intentionally mapped her skills and abilities to those required

of dean, and actively encouraged other women considering leadership roles to do the same.

In addition to these experiences, being an internal candidate for dean influenced Isabel's feeling of confidence and preparation. She shared, "understanding a particular institution's budget and structure was very helpful. My learning curve was much shorter than it would have been otherwise. I felt like I had built good relationships across campus. And so, I felt like there were people I could reach out to who could help me be successful." Being the internal candidate also allowed a level of familiarity with the staff Isabel would work with if she took on the position, "I also knew that the people who worked in the graduate school were outstanding professionals and so I knew I would be coming into a place where people stayed. They liked their job. They were really professional. They did great work." She felt very positive about the staff and the work environment within the school, which presumably made the decision easier.

When asked what factors impacted her decision to pursue leadership, Isabel noted not having to do a lot of fundraising, and encouragement from colleagues, "getting that validation that this was something other people thought I could do. You know, I thought I could do it, but to know that other people were like this job is a really good fit for you – having those kinds of conversations was valuable and helpful and kind of leading me toward that." While she had confidence in her own abilities, the external validation from colleagues was a driving factor in her decision to advance in administration. Isabel did not face any outward discouragement in her pursuit of leadership positions but did recall learning that one of her letters of recommendation suggested that she was not ready for leadership. Upon reflection, she believed the recommender – a man senior to her – did

not want to lose her as a team member on his projects and selfishly wrote the letter. It did not dissuade her from advancing but did remind her of the power and gender dynamics in the academy.

Isabel consulted with colleagues, her partner, and mentors in her professional field as she made the decision to pursue the associate dean and dean roles. She noted talking with a group of friends who were also leaders in the college, “I was lucky to have that, because these jobs are really isolating, and there aren't a lot of people who understand what you're going through or are willing to talk with you about it.” She did not talk to any other deans, in part because she felt the dean of a graduate school was different in some ways than that of an academic college. Isabel also consulted two mentors. One was a woman from another institution who Isabel regarded highly, “She was definitely somebody who had made some of those administrative transitions already who I felt could understand my perspective, would understand what it meant at that point in my career in terms of where I was in the profession.” She garnered advice on what it was like to make an administrative decision at certain stages in life from this mentor, while consulting with her academic mentor for more research-related reasons. Her academic mentor helped her identify benefits she could gain from taking on administrative roles, reminding her “this is your opportunity to really do something.” She shared, “he was always trying to help me think through where I would find some excitement, where I would still feel some connection to being an academic, being a faculty member.” Consulting with others helped Isabel garner information and process her choices.

While Isabel seriously weighed the pros and cons of taking on the associate dean role and committing to academic leadership, some factors did not impact her decision. She shared that finances were not a factor, “that part was always nice, but not really a primary motivating factor.” She also noted that family was “not at all” a factor since her partner’s job was flexible and she did not have children. Interestingly, when asked about possible roles in her future career, Isabel stated that she would likely have to move institutions because she was not sure if she would want to advance beyond the dean at an institution of this size. In thinking about this she realized “I would really have to weigh a lot” in order to do so. As a parental caretaker, she noted, “that makes a difference, too, in terms of how quickly I would want to move to a new location if I was to pursue this job somewhere else.” Though not a consideration in her decision to pursue the associate deanship and deanship, family and geography may have impacted her decision if she was not the internal candidate and was actively seeking leadership positions elsewhere.

When thinking about her decision to pursue the deanship, Isabel mentioned various leadership programs that she attended. She voiced qualms with some programs that she believed to be too outdated, “it really was like let’s train you to act like a man in order to be successful in your career as a woman and that’s not what I want out of a leadership program.” But she also mentioned intentionally using these experiences to allow herself to reflect on what she really wanted in her career:

I didn't pursue them because I needed to learn more about leadership – although one could always learn more about leadership. I did it because it made me have a finite period of time, where all I needed to concentrate on was whether or not this was the decision I wanted to make. So that was really important to me, because I don't feel like there's a lot of time, nor do we give ourselves a lot of permission to be really self-reflective about some of these things. Things just happen, and we let them happen to us kind of, so I think that piece is really important.

Part of this reflection stemmed from whether Isabel wanted to let “things just happen” and continue in administration or actively decide to return to her faculty role. Her narrative focused on this tension between faculty and administration.

This crossroads was also present when asked to describe her decision-making process through an image. Isabel described an image of a “hand accepting an object – maybe a key” and shared that it was “easier to move forward in leadership” or to accept the key than decline the opportunity for leadership. As a result, she felt that she was choosing to accept the loss of certain aspects of her previous role. She shared that “to accept the responsibilities that came along with moving into a higher level administrative role, [I was] choosing to accept not having the same kinds of relationships with students that I've had in the past.”

In the description of her visual depiction, Isabel also stated that the image was “a little blurry.” She admitted that she still identified as a faculty member, but she was worried about losing her perceived identity as a faculty member to others, “I was choosing to accept that my primary identity to other people was not as a faculty member anymore.” She further emphasized this feeling and the impact of her external identity as a faculty member on her decision to pursue the deanship, “it was really trying to decide whether I was okay with not being perceived as a faculty member by my colleagues.”

Isabel seemed to care about this identity so much because she enjoyed being a resource and expert, and being recognized for her scholarly contributions:

I was seen as a resource, and people would come to me with questions about what should I do in this scenario...And I really enjoyed that part. It was also representative of somebody acknowledging my disciplinary expertise, and that really feels good. I don't get that anymore, or I don't get it to the same extent. So that part is a difficult piece. I would say that's primarily the big thing.

Although her decision-making process made her face these questions about which path to choose head on, Isabel had been considering some of these questions long before pursuing the deanship. She remembered having conversations with colleagues, “those were the kinds of things that I was worried about, kind of goes back to this whole identity piece, like, helping me to think through what I had to give up and when I had to do it. At what point was it appropriate? At what point was it no longer appropriate?” She wrestled with when and to what extent she had to “give up” her faculty identity, and this caused her to pause before jumping headfirst into accepting the key in her image and becoming the associate dean.

In addition to her identity as a faculty member, Isabel believed that her identity as a woman impacted her decision to pursue the deanship. When asked if elements of her identity impacted her decision, she shared:

I think the fact that I identify as a woman did. We have too few women who are leaders. That's one of the reasons why I wanted to become a full professor, too...I know how important it is to have more women in leadership because that fosters even more women to pursue leadership. And so that part of my identity absolutely did.

She also noted that one of her earliest experiences recognizing academic leadership as a career came in graduate school when she read a book authored by a woman, “she was writing about what it meant to be an academic dean as a woman. So in some ways, I feel like that was kind of some grounding. It gave me some insight into what a position like that could be like. It gave me insight into what that position could be like as a woman.” This distal factor provided Isabel with the belief that being a leader as a woman was possible. She did note, however, that her path could have been different, “if I were a man, I think it would be different. I probably would have been told to go up for full sooner

than I did. I think there's some of those sorts of things that would have created my path differently or [I] would have been told to advocate for myself in different ways." Isabel recognized the dynamics at play due to her gender and believed they shaped her career trajectory.

When the current dean retired, the graduate school was simultaneously undergoing a transition. Isabel, still the associate dean, was advocating on behalf of the students and what she believed was best for the institution during this time. As a result, she humbly understood if she needed to take on an interim dean role or if they had someone else in mind, "I could have been interim, they could have done a search for a dean." Though Isabel had previously shared, "When I was chair, if anybody has asked me if I wanted to move up into other administrative positions, I always said the only one I would want is to be dean of the graduate school," her values to support the best outcome for the students and the school outweighed her aspirations to become the dean. Despite this willingness to acquiesce, the senior leadership believed that Isabel was what was best for the students and the school. They officially appointed her as the dean of the graduate school, and she accepted her desired administrative role.

Beverly

"I love collaborating with people to solve problems, and that excites me, that inspires me. And when we can tackle something big and do something better than the way we've been doing it to positive ends, that's worthwhile, that's worth getting up every day at 6:00 to get up and do the 8-6pm long days for. It's worth it."

Beverly, a Black woman in her 40's, advanced in leadership very early in her career. She served as a program director before pursuing the deanship, all while still serving as a newly appointed associate professor. She identified as a volunteer, advocate,

and scholar in her humanities discipline as well as a person of faith. Beverly had established a detailed career plan – one that would have included a deanship in several years' time – based on her socialization to academia and belief in the importance of administrative and leadership roles. However, after being encouraged to apply for an open dean position by colleagues at her current institution, she reconsidered, oftentimes citing her belief in taking advantage of opportunities when the timing was right.

Entering Administration

Beverly came from a family with careers in education, leadership, and ministry. She had always wanted to pursue a career in education, and by the time she entered college, she aspired to be a professor. Once in graduate school, she realized there were other options for careers in academia. Beverly's mentor, "a very accomplished administrator as well as a scholar" allowed Beverly to see what a career in academic leadership looked like and to believe that it could be a rewarding profession:

I never really gave much thought to the workings of the university as an enterprise or as an industry until I met her and took courses with her. She chaired the department, eventually ended up chairing three different departments in her career, and then moving into senior administrative leadership positions and seemed to do it all just with so much love and zest and zeal.

This mentor served as a role model in many ways but was not Beverly's only access to administrative careers and models of leadership.

In reflecting on her graduate school experience, Beverly was quick to share that the institution had "a very solid, affirmative climate with respect to leadership." She was a graduate student in a department where "people want to be chair. People want to lead. People want to be a dean. It's a competitive process." However, she also recognized that this climate was more rewarding for those who rose in the faculty ranks prior to assuming

leadership roles. She was socialized to believe that the “right way” to advance was to achieve tenure and then pursue administration, as opposed to those faculty who “don’t quite get tenure so they move you over into administration full time.” Beverly was aware that this socialization was happening, “as a graduate student it wasn't really talked about and discussed overtly that okay, this is a path, but do you really want to go that way? You didn't get tenure, so now you're doing this admin work that nobody really wants to do? Or do you want to reach your pinnacle? It was clear but implicit.” Despite this implicit push toward one path over another, Beverly did feel supported by and appreciative of the climate within her department and the institution more broadly during graduate school. She identified role models, all of whom had pursued administrative leadership after faculty ranks and modeled her own career after theirs.

When Beverly entered the professoriate and heard administration referred to as “the dark side,” she could not relate. She shared, “discussions of leadership have always been a part of what we talk about as a family, so the idea of leading was never something that was particularly anathema. I know many faculty look at administration as the dark side and I didn’t really have that negative relationship to it.” In addition to her background and previous academic socialization, Beverly believed in the importance of leadership stating, “you need good leadership if you want an organization to thrive.” Her beliefs about leadership, referenced many times throughout her interview and narrative accounts, seemed critical to her career decisions.

Based on Beverly’s graduate and faculty experiences, she had a very strict understanding of the traditional path to academic leadership. She shared:

There's a very clear sequence of trajectory for people who come up through the faculty ranks. You're supposed to chair a department first, and then you can

qualify ostensibly to become a dean. And you might in the interim... If a deanship doesn't come up, you might direct a center. That's kind of the trajectory.

Having been socialized to first pursue tenure, then academic leadership, Beverly established a ten-year plan to do just that. She immediately began thinking about the experiences and training that she would need, “because the assumption was that I would become full professor and then I would enter into the senior administrative roles like dean and provost and such.” As an associate professor, Beverly created and directed an academic program. She was proud of the experience but realized it would not be viewed in the same way as chairing a department in this “traditional path.” She found herself at odds with her socialization and her own experiences. First, she recognized that simply having the title of chair on one’s CV did not make someone an effective leader, “just because you’ve had the experience doesn’t mean you’re good at it. To me there’s a distinction between having done something and having done something well.” Second, she had started to question whether serving as a department chair was in fact an adequate or necessary step before the deanship, “I don't think chairing really is a very good kind of preparation for the deanship.” This questioning paired with a general desire to lead in her career may have allowed Beverly to consider academic leadership far before she, or her ten-year plan, expected.

As program director, Beverly recognized that she had aptitude for leadership, but also that graduate programs and faculty roles were not designed to train people for administration, and she would have to “seek out [her] own development opportunities.” She asked the provost for support that allowed her to participate in a year-long leadership program for people of color. She was able to connect with future leaders across industries and spend time assessing and learning about her own leadership style. While she

recognized no one could “ever feel truly prepared” for leadership, she was intentional about seeking out opportunities to help her in her preparation and advancement. She also took it upon herself to look up job descriptions and read higher education literature on academic leadership to prepare her for future interviews and job possibilities. When the opportunity for leadership presented itself, Beverly was ready.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

While serving as program director and associate professor, an internal dean position opened that caught Beverly’s attention. The role aligned with her own interests related to faculty development, but she had not yet been promoted to full professor, so she wrote it off. Several colleagues reached out to Beverly, encouraging her to apply for the position. She reconsidered:

I rethought it. I thought about the opportunity to lead and the opportunity to do some innovative things and to be in a position to make institutional changes that I felt were needed. And support faculty in ways that I felt was needed. I'm an ideas person as well as an implementer, so I like to have a big idea and then execute on it. And it's hard to do when you're not in a position of power to actually be at the table to propose ideas and to see them through. So I saw it as an opportunity.

The support of colleagues initially sparked Beverly’s decision to consider pursuing the academic deanship well before she had planned. Looking back, she shared, “despite my kind of long-term plans of maybe even doing this 10 years down the road as opposed to doing it now...It goes a long way to have the support of your colleagues and I had overwhelming support from my colleagues to do it.”

In addition to support from colleagues, Beverly discussed her possible career advancement with her spouse, mentors, and other deans. She and her partner were discussing having children, and how taking on the deanship might impact their family planning. Ultimately, they made the decision together, but having his support and input

was important to her. She also consulted with her mentors about what taking this position might mean for her future career path and how her current experience would be viewed by search committees, “I wanted to know... how my trajectory, how my CV would be viewed with me not having chaired and gone this kind of very traditional stepping-stone way... What it would mean for my future positionality and competitiveness for other jobs?” She also wanted confirmation that she could apply for this role while still associate professor and received feedback that it would be a “nonissue.” Beverly consulted friends and peers in other areas of the institution to learn about salary ranges, components of the dean role specific to this institution, and the “pulse on the ground.” Overall, she reported very helpful information and overwhelmingly positive feedback from everyone, with the exception of one friend. Beverly could not understand why this person was not outwardly supportive of her decision to apply, but she realized she had support elsewhere and could not focus her energy on one dissenting opinion. As she moved through her decision-making process, she was intentional about consulting with others and gathering information as she “talked to different people to elicit different information for different purposes.” She weighed the potential consequences of advancing earlier as well as the benefits of taking on the role.

Beverly had interest in pursuing the deanship because of the potential impact she believed she could make. She also believed that she had the strengths and abilities required to be a successful dean, noting that she would not have applied if she did not think she could do it. First and foremost, she argued that the deanship was about, “relationships. It's about understanding what motivates different people and different constituencies. And it's about having some empathy. It's about the human dimension.”

She reflected on the nature of academia and how many faculty work in silos with expertise only in their specific disciplines. She knew that she lacked some of the tenure and experience in academia compared to other deans and leaders, but she was confident in her ability to learn the core functions of the role while relying on the unique skills she already possessed:

If you're going to lead, you got to have social skills. You have to have people skills. You have to have relationship skills. You have to have listening skills. ...People are really smart in their academic fields, but they lack emotional intelligence at times. And I felt very confident that that piece could carry me pretty far while I learned the other stuff – the nuts and bolt skills.

In addition to having some of the core interpersonal skills, she acknowledged that she did not doubt her ability because, “We're researchers. You can figure out just about anything if you do enough research.” Beverly had learned throughout her career that believing in oneself and advocating for oneself were also critical to success. When asked to share advice for other women in pursuit of the deanship, she said, “don't let other people underestimate you.” She considered her own process in pursuit of the deanship and the self-efficacy required to get there, “I know how good I am. I know what I bring to the table. I'm unapologetic about it. I'm not a jerk about it. I'm not going to apologize and I'm not going to shrink for anybody.” Despite being young and not yet following the traditional path to the deanship, Beverly knew she was ready and was not going to shy away from the opportunity or downplay her skills and abilities.

Some factors were less influential in Beverly's decision-making process. For example, finances did not play a large role in her choice to pursue the deanship. She was aware of the pay raise, but noted, “that (finances) was probably the last thing that was the motivating factor.” Additionally, Beverly recognized that more diversity was needed in

leadership ranks at her institution, but that did not drive her to pursue the deanship as a Black woman. Instead, she noted:

I feel like my voice at the table is a valuable one, and I do speak up and speak my mind as a person of color and as a Black person. And I think about that constantly...But I can't say honestly that I decided to do it because they needed Black people at the table. I decided to do it because I felt like I could do a great job. And it's a bonus that I bring that diverse representation that I do.

Beverly's self-efficacy drove her decision to pursue the role more than her identity, though she acknowledged that it was an important part of her contributions to the institution.

Beverly's decision-making process was very logical and systematic. She consulted with others, collected information to inform her decision, considered her potential impact, interests, and skills, and revisited her career plan. She weighed the consequences of how this might affect her future career path and plans and described her decision-making process as a pro-con list. When asked to share an image of her decision-making process, Beverly selected one that visually depicted this intentionality. She shared an image of a woman with a pen in her hand, looking at a wall covered with notes and paper. When reflecting on her process of selecting the image, she shared, "So it's a lady literally making a [pros and cons list]. I enjoyed looking for a picture that represents me as a woman of color, and [one] that just shows that I am actually pretty systematic."

Beverly had planned on pursuing leadership at some point in her career given her family background and thought she would follow the traditional path through the faculty ranks to full professor, and then to academic leadership. However, timing played a significant role in her decision to pursue the deanship when she did. She felt compelled by colleagues but also identified this particular position as one that aligned with her

career interests and passions, “Out of all the dean positions that we have available at this institution, this was the one that I felt most suited my interests and my strengths and my skill set. It was, I felt, the right time, even though it wasn’t something that I had planned to do right away.” Beverly was not actively in pursuit of the deanship, but when this position opened at her institution, the timing seemed right. When asked to describe her career path on her CV, Beverly focused on timing again. She shared, “I would describe it as pretty fast-paced...I had planned on a much more traditional trajectory for myself but when an opportunity presents itself and it seems like it’s just sort of there waiting for you like ‘hey, come and get me’ you can’t pass it up.” She still recognized elements of her career path that did not align with the traditional path but decided to pursue the deanship anyways because it felt like the right time and opportunity for her. This recognition and confidence in her decision to deviate from tradition was evident as Beverly noted:

Traditional trajectory notwithstanding, not having chaired notwithstanding...at this particular moment in time, for me where I am right now, where this institution is right now, I have no doubt - and I can tell you my boss has no doubt - that I was the right person at the right time for this job. So I don’t worry too much about this idea ‘oh she hasn’t done this, she hasn’t done that, she hasn’t chaired’. I know it’s fast paced, I’m aware of that, it’s not like I don’t know what “the rules” are, unwritten and unstated kind of perspectives of how you’re supposed to approach things... but I also believe in seizing opportunity when it presents itself and going with the flow and this was in the flow for me.

She continued to acknowledge how one was “supposed to” pursue the deanship but justified her decision to pursue the role earlier in her career by focusing on opportunity, self-efficacy, and support from others.

Beverly approached her narrative response by describing her pursuit of the deanship in a chronological manner and focused on timing throughout. Her planful nature coincided with her belief in taking advantage of opportunities. She believed “in the power

of good leadership,” and in her own ability to be a good leader and felt that the timing was right to take on the opportunity in front of her, even though she was still at the associate professor rank. With support from colleagues, mentors, and her partner, she found that the pros outweighed the cons. She ditched her ten-year plan, applied as the internal candidate, and successfully pursued the deanship.

Eleanor

“I really could articulate facets of the [deanship] that my predecessor did well and didn't do well, and how my skill set and attitude and leadership style would plug into those elements. And I really haven't been terribly surprised by a lot of things this first year or felt in over my head, other than just the general sort of, it's all overwhelming the first year as you get used to the timeline.”

Eleanor, a White woman in her 50s, served as a faculty member in the social sciences for over 20 years before pursuing the deanship. She followed what she termed a “pretty linear” path, serving as a department chair for several years, associate dean, senior associate dean, and interim dean before becoming the dean at the same institution.

Eleanor identified as a daughter, professional, and volunteer. She was very self-assured and matter of fact. She weighed her decisions carefully and felt suited to leadership but was hesitant to leave her identity as a faculty member.

Entering Administration

Eleanor had not set out to be a dean but had been attracted to leadership from a young age. She recalled:

I've always been the kind of person who took on leadership roles, I mean I was president of the senior class in high school and I always seemed to have to be president or secretary or something of every organization I'm in. I can't just do the job; I have to fix something or create a handbook or whatever.

These traits and tendencies led Eleanor to be involved in professional organizations, volunteer roles, and other service within her department during her time as an associate

professor. She oftentimes found herself leading from her faculty role in an attempt to make change, “I had to learn how to make things happen from both a management and a leadership perspective without getting in trouble for overstepping my bounds. So, I kind of had to manage up with my boss and protect faculty and students and staff and whatnot.” Though she recognized that she enjoyed contributing her skills to the department, she also felt very comfortable in her role, “I really did see myself as a good teacher and a good researcher and someone who would be perfectly content to be good in those roles.”

Eleanor gained experience at the university level through various roles with the senate. She had exposure to the inner workings of the institution and networked with other administrators across campus. She believed this experience gave her knowledge and experience relevant to academic leadership well before she was considering any type of formal leadership role, “that experience gave me both insight into policies and procedures and the way decisions get made at the university. But it also gave me exposure to lots of upper level senior administrators... I think that was really beneficial to me in every administrative role I've been in.” Similarly, she had experiences in volunteer organizations learning about policy development and working with a diverse group of people which she believed “gave me lots of opportunities to think about whose voices get heard and that sort of thing.”

When the chair position in her department opened, Eleanor considered applying. She struggled with the idea of deviating from her research agenda and professor role, “one of the things I've struggled with my decision to go into administration is that I'm not ready to say goodbye to my academic area.” She realized that the position was only part-

time and would allow her to maintain her work with graduate students, research teams, and other elements of her faculty life and decided to apply. She received significant encouragement from her colleagues, but ultimately was not selected for the role for what she called “purely political” reasons. When the role was vacated again, Eleanor applied and was uncontested in her pursuit.

Eleanor gained significant experience as department chair that informed her perception of academic leadership. She attended an internal leadership training at the institution that allowed her to engage with people in similar roles, sharing that “it was helpful to see what data people looked at, what perspectives people brought to the table, and then how some of those ideas eventually percolated up into changes at the institution.” She also attended a state-wide leadership training where she learned about the many intricacies of a university and how the various pieces work together:

It was useful in thinking about the business side of the university and how academia fits within a university. That University is not just academia, there's athletics, there's a bookstore, there's food service, there's transportation, there's housing, there's roads and buildings and all these other things that go together. So that was useful in a lot of ways for understanding how different types of institutions work.

Though she was focused on her specific department in this leadership role as chair, she had other experiences that broadened her perspective and gave her insight on the larger picture of academic leadership. Her day-to-day experience also gave her new knowledge related to finance that she did not get from her faculty role, “As a department head I also saw the business side...signing off on check requests and travel expense statements and spending down at the end of the year and fundraising and all of that sort of thing.”

On several occasions while she was serving as department chair, Eleanor was asked to lead within the dean’s office. Despite her belief in the traditional career path, as

evident by her statements that pursuing academic leadership from the faculty ranks was the most credible way to do so, this was not something she had considered or planned. She shared, “I never thought after my first term, or even the second one, that what I was doing was preparing myself to move into an associate deanship.” She turned down the opportunity multiple times, either because she felt that she did not align with the current dean’s leadership, the specific role she was offered was not a good fit for her, or that she was not ready to leave her role as professor. She struggled to make the decision to move to a more time-consuming leadership role:

The most frustrating to me is that I feel like I was approaching the top of my game as teacher, as I transitioned from the role of department head to being an associate dean. And I know that I’m not keeping up with the literature, I know that I don’t have time to go to all of the conferences I would like to go to, I’m not keeping up with professional contacts...So it was very much a consideration and moving to that next level, and it was a very hard decision.

Eleanor was hesitant to give up on her hard work and success as a faculty member, which she felt she would have to do more permanently in moving from the department chair to associate dean role. After several asks, she was offered a role as associate dean and decided to accept, “I eventually decided to make the jump to being the associate dean for faculty after the dean had been here for a while, I got to know his leadership style a little bit, and I was really convinced that I could make a difference in that position.” She also felt prepared to make the transition to administration, “I felt like there was a lot of opportunity and I felt like I had the expertise from my time as department head to jump in and start doing things in that role.”

As associate dean, Eleanor quickly found her footing. Over time, she gained more responsibilities from the dean and “was involved in a lot more of the high-level decision-making in the college.” She came to value the position of associate dean and at times

found herself having to set boundaries with people within the college who often came to her for help instead of the actual dean. All of these experiences strengthened Eleanor's belief in her own abilities, as well as the credibility she had built within the college and university at large. Thus, when the next dean announced his departure, the provost asked Eleanor to serve as interim dean.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

As interim dean, Eleanor felt she had "a long time to think about it and decide whether I wanted to be the dean or not." She felt comfortable in her role as associate dean and confident that a new dean would keep her in the role for the time being, so staying on her current path was an option. She also still felt conflicted about leaving her "academic career behind." In her narrative, she shared, "although I had managed to keep up my teaching, scholarship, and service in my administrative roles, I knew that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to do so as a dean." Eleanor felt very tied to her disciplinary and professional identity and hesitated at every decision point about giving it up as she moved into administration. She did not, however, feel any impact of her gender or other dimensions of her identity on her choice process.

When asked to describe her decision to pursue the deanship through an image, Eleanor shared a picture of a scenic lake and sunset grounded by two paths representing a fork in the road. In describing her process, she noted, "I'm definitely a person who makes lists and pros and con checklists and that kind of stuff, but I really decided that it felt like a fork in the road. Because it felt like I'm leaving [my discipline] for sure and possibly forever." Once again, she felt torn between her role as a faculty member and the potential opportunity of administration. She was intentional in selecting an image "where the one

road clearly goes kind of over the hill and you can't tell where it's going and the other one you don't have a clear sense of where it's going, but it seems like a much more known path.” She felt as though she was choosing between a very concrete, known path of remaining a faculty member – either by returning to the faculty or holding part-time administrative roles – and the unknown of the deanship. To Eleanor, the image represented the stark choice she felt she had to make, saying it was “very much a choice. It wasn't like I was going to be able to keep running both of these paths.”

Eleanor recognized that there wasn't a particular moment when she decided to pursue the deanship, but rather, “it was sort of a gradual process of deciding if this was the way I wanted to go or not.” She believed her colleagues played a big part in her decision to ultimately say yes to the deanship, “that was a significant impact.” Two colleagues she had worked with for a number of years brought up the application process and were surprised to hear that Eleanor was not completely sure she was going to apply. She recalled them saying, “we just assumed you would apply. We really want you to apply, we think you'd be good. We've watched the previous dean who wasn't all that popular. We think you know exactly what this institution needs at this time.” Eleanor was swayed by these opinions and shared that “knowing that people thought that I could do a good job and people whose views I valued and trusted, and it wasn't just people saying the thing they thought they were supposed to say, did make a difference.” She received incredible support throughout her career to pursue leadership roles. However, Eleanor did face some discouragement and what felt like resentment from select senior faculty within her department who viewed administration as “the dark side” and wanted her to stay as a full-time faculty member.

At this point, Eleanor had decided to apply to the deanship, but still had more decisions to navigate, “I had decided I was pursuing the deanship. I just hadn't figured out to how many institutions and where.” In her narrative, Eleanor shared that she decided to apply for the role at her home institution, but also applied for positions at two other institutions. Her reason for doing so was two-fold. First, she felt confident, “probably more confident than was warranted” in her chances of being offered the internal role, noting “the provost and president were sending me all the signals that they wanted me to be the dean.” With this in mind, she applied to two other positions at similarly ranked institutions to ensure she had “some negotiating leverage.” Second, Eleanor wanted to assure herself that she was capable of pursuing the deanship at another institution. She recalled, “part of it was also the ‘I need to know that I’m not just getting this job because they don’t want to do a real search, they like the known, I need to see if I can actually cut it somewhere else’... I needed to know that I could have competed on that level I guess.” She felt eager to stay at her current institution, “it was the place I wanted to be. It was the place I had built my career...I was really reluctant to leave in general,” but also wanted to have some sense of security if it did not work out. Eleanor was very intentional and strategic about selecting the other institutions, “I also considered which deanships I wanted to apply for, given what I perceived to be my skill set and my perceptions of the needs of different institutions.” Institutional type and prestige were critical factors in Eleanor’s choice process. She valued public education and research institutions and wanted to be in a college with a highly ranked program in her discipline so she could return to the faculty after the deanship.

Family was not a factor in Eleanor's decision-making process. When asked about this factor's potential influence, she said, "Not at all. I'm single, I don't have kids. I'm not married to somebody who has a job here." Beyond the ability to negotiate, financial opportunities were also not significant to her decision-making process. Eleanor did consult a few people as she was making her decision, including her current dean and "three deans at other institutions in particular who had been interim deans before they applied for and became dean," but most of her process was individual in nature.

Eleanor spent a significant amount of effort collecting information about the other two institutions to which she applied, particularly digging into the issues that she would be facing as dean. In both working with headhunters and in asking questions of the search committees during her interviews, she wanted to know, "What are the current challenges? What are the current opportunities at this institution?" She also wanted to understand the current makeup at the institution. As she gathered information, she said:

I honestly, I did go on the webpages of the other institutions and look and see who their presidents and provost were and how long they've been there. I did have conversations with the search firm about the provost who would be my immediate boss, what they seem to be looking for. I did look at the gender composition of deans at those institutions.

She structured her choice process by trying to gain insight similar to what she already had from her current institution as an internal candidate.

Eleanor was a finalist for both positions at the other institutions and was offered the role of dean at her home institution as the internal candidate. Even as she neared the end of her decision-making process, she was methodical and rational in her thinking, weighing the possible consequences, "I also spent a lot of time thinking about the pros and cons (for both myself and the institution) of becoming dean at the institution at which

I had spent my entire academic career.” She decided to move on from her faculty career but stay at the institution where she had built it, now as the dean of the college.

Lynn

“I do feel like in some ways that I'm an accidental dean in terms of the way I fell into this position. But then at the same time, I do feel like now I have the skills. I'm super confident in my skills... I don't know how to say it, but I feel both fortunate and then also confident. I feel both privileged as well as secure.”

Lynn, an Asian woman in her 40s, did not see administration in her future.

Despite being content as a faculty member in the social sciences, she was asked to lead on many occasions and became a director, associate dean and interim dean before pursuing the deanship. Each time Lynn took on a new role, she told herself she would try it for a year but ended up finding enjoyment and the potential for impact, frequently staying beyond her initial time frame. Once in administration, Lynn continued to advance because it felt “natural” but argued that her career path was not planned intentionally. Different elements of her identity and the stereotypes around who gets to lead impacted her decision to advance, as did advice from her mentors, considerations for her health and well-being, and the unique mission of her institution. Lynn was initially reserved but grew more comfortable throughout the study, expressing vulnerable and honest self-reflection about her decision-making process.

Entering Administration

When Lynn entered administration, her career aspirations were “just to be faculty.” She shared, “I didn't really think about being an administrator at all, I just wanted to teach and write, pretty basic.” When the university went through a leadership change, she was suddenly the most senior person in her program and was appointed as the director while an assistant professor. Thrown into administration, Lynn ended up

serving in that role for several years. Her department eventually became a college with a dean, and he asked Lynn to serve as associate dean. She had two weeks to decide whether or not she wanted to accept the appointment. Lynn's initial reaction was, "I didn't think I ever wanted to do it," but in reflecting on her decision-making process, she recalled "I do distinctly remember when I took the associate dean position there was a specific moment that made me take it." Around that time, Lynn heard an inspirational speech from a political leader who said, "we needed more women in leadership positions and that if leadership came knocking at our door, we should say yes and accept it even without, even if it felt like it wasn't something that we wanted to do, that we should say yes." Hearing these words convinced Lynn that she needed to say yes, so she accepted the appointment to associate dean.

As associate dean, Lynn was exposed to many intricacies of the deanship. The current dean made it a point to mentor her, "grooming her" to be prepared for a deanship in the future, even if Lynn did not know if that was the path she wanted to pursue. At times, she felt overwhelmed by the information the dean shared with her, as he often vented about the role to her. At other points, she was confused as to why she was in meetings about personnel that did not apply to her role. Reflecting on these experiences, she realized that they were all very intentional and prepared her to move into a dean role, "I feel like being an associate dean has allowed me to kind of try out the role for [several] years, to be trained pretty well, like rigorously." This role and the related training gave Lynn more confidence in her own abilities to pursue an administrative career, and she thought it gave her credibility across campus because the training from her dean was so blatant:

It's pretty universal that people think that I got really good training, and there's no doubt about it. I own up to the fact that part of it of course is me, and my demeanor, and skills that I've developed, but I wouldn't have known what skills to develop, how to develop them if it weren't for him.

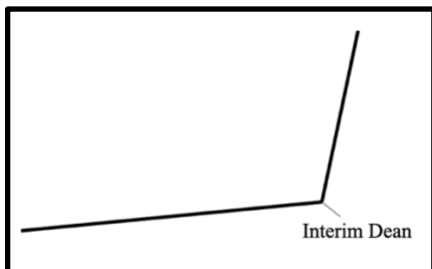
Lynn credited her dean with helping her to hone her skills and garner information relevant to leadership, but also grew to recognize that she had her own style that allowed her to excel in the role.

After a few years serving as associate dean, the dean of the college resigned, and Lynn was appointed interim dean by the provost. This moment in Lynn's career path felt the most unexpected to her. She described it as "just totally...that was nuts" noting that "it was pretty sudden. That's totally when I didn't feel prepared. I didn't realize that I was prepared. He [the outgoing dean] thought that I was prepared, but I didn't feel that I was." Despite feeling this way, Lynn felt as though she had to say yes:

I mean, it was a no-brainer. I felt like it was an obligation and I had to fulfill it. If [the provost] asked me to be interim dean, there was no way that I could say no. I just felt that way just because who else would do it?... It didn't make any sense to me for me not to take it if it was offered.

In this decision-making process, Lynn felt like she could not say no both because she was the best-suited for the role, and because she was being offered a chance to advance.

When asked to describe her decision to pursue the deanship with an image, this moment influenced Lynn's visual depiction. She described an image of a "straight horizontal line tilted ever so slightly upwards at five degrees and then a sharp tilt up at 70 degrees at the end of the line when I became Interim Dean" (Figure 3). Lynn felt as though her decision-making process was "slow going but steady" throughout her career until the moment she became interim dean, at which point there was a sudden spike.

Figure 3*Lynn's Visual Depiction of Decision to Pursue the Deanship*

Note. Image created by author based on description (Appendix G) provided by Lynn.

Though Lynn did not feel her decision to pursue the associate deanship was “deliberate” in her larger career path, she had actively made the choice to accept the role. The move to interim dean felt equally fast but this time Lynn felt a “sharp kind of elevation” and as though she had become an “accidental administrator.”

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

Lynn was in her first year of the interim deanship when the college began a search for the dean. While she “was deeply ambivalent about administration generally,” Lynn began to find her role interesting and felt as though she was getting better at it over time. Yet she was still not sure whether this was the path she wanted to pursue. She initially employed a rule-following approach when deciding to apply for the deanship, stating, “I feel like of course I should apply, right? I'm interim so of course I'm going to apply.” Then, she adopted a mentality in which she appeared to be following the default path set out for her. She believed applying to the deanship “seemed natural.” She shared, “I felt like I was on this track where it was natural to apply. If I didn't, it seemed like I was making a conscious decision to not be dean, and I didn't want to do that. I just wanted to kind of see where things went.” It appeared as though choosing to deviate from the

default and not apply for the deanship was not what Lynn wanted, but she also struggled to actively say that she was choosing to apply. Her partner noticed this, saying to Lynn, “I think you already made your decision that you're going to do the administration track even though you're not actually able to verbalize it.” Her partner served in a similar role to Lynn at another institution and was one of Lynn’s biggest supporters throughout her decision-making process.

This tension between wanting to maintain the possibility of being dean and yet not wanting to actively choose administration was present throughout Lynn’s interviews. She used a metaphor of a carnival ride to describe her feeling, “it was like when you go to the carnival and you're in a car and ... this thing takes you around. I felt like I was on one of those. So, it just [felt] like I should apply, and I wasn't really thinking too much about it.” Once again, Lynn felt as though she “should apply” and follow this pre-determined path. Now that she was interim dean, she should continue in administration. This hesitancy to actively pursue the deanship may have stemmed from Lynn’s perceptions about administration. She shared:

In part, faculty, we don't go into academia thinking, "Oh, we're going to become administrators."... We don't because we like to do this one thing that we're really crazy about. So there's a way in which becoming a dean is not desirable for us when we first start out. Then also, I think that most faculty think that administration is evil, so we don't want to aspire to be something evil.

In addition to having to deviate from one’s disciplinary field and passion, Lynn was socialized to believe that moving to administration was moving to the ‘evil’ side of the field. As a result, she said, “for all those reasons, I knew that this was not going to be an easy road.” It may also have been due to her attachment to her role as a faculty member.

Lynn considered returning to the faculty as an alternate path in her decision-making process, but ultimately felt like she was making a broader impact in administration:

I decided not to go back to faculty right now because I think that my life as an administrator...is better than my life was as a faculty member. I'm not saying like quality of life, per se, but I think that my contributions are to the world. So, I do feel like I'm able to affect more structural change and get more resources to the college.

Even though Lynn felt that she had the potential to make a greater impact in administration, she still held tight to the possibility of returning to faculty someday, "I think feeling like you can go back to faculty is also a way to endure the really hard days as an administrator, like psychologically." Perhaps committing to actively pursuing the deanship made Lynn feel as though she was abandoning this possibility of returning to the faculty and thus complicated her choice process.

Health and financial equity also factored into Lynn's decision to pursue the deanship. She had watched her predecessor deal with the stress of the deanship, and she experienced some of it on her own as associate and interim dean. Knowing that she had pre-existing health conditions, Lynn believed her health was something she considered in her choice process, "I think that at least unconsciously I was thinking very seriously about my health." In her narrative, Lynn realized that her confidence in the training she had received outweighed her fears about the potential impact on her health, "I had trepidations about the job in terms of the emotional and physical toll it would have on my body. I had a good enough [term] as interim dean that I thought I could do the job as dean and do it well."

Similarly, she felt that financial equity played a small factor in her choice process. As an associate dean, Lynn had been paid less than her counterparts across campus by a

significant margin. After years of navigating the issue with the senior administration, they increased her pay to lessen the gap. Though she was still paid marginally less, she said, “that's the way the world works. Of course, I'm going to get paid less than the White person, but it's fine as long as it's [small]. If it's [significant], then it's not okay. So it's never been about the money. It's always been about equity.” For Lynn, pursuing the deanship was not about the increased salary, but rather about being able to advocate for equity and structural change. After all, she believed no money was commensurate with the time and effort required of a dean to make it the primary motivating factor, “the day-to-day salary is not really ... It's not enough. It's not worth it. There's no amount of money that's worth the harder the job.”

Lynn's mentors played a significant role in her decision-making process. In addition to her predecessor who intentionally trained her for the role of dean, Lynn was connected with mentors through a leadership program for people of color. Lynn consulted with both the mentors from her home institution and the leadership program for advice on pursuing the deanship, “for sure my mentors did shape whether I should apply or not. There's no doubt about it. They're the ones who encouraged me to go on the carnival ride and then inspired me to ... kept me going in a way that I didn't jump off the carnival ride.” Lynn's mentors also encouraged her to apply to other institutions and to “only apply to jobs that you think you'll take.” Lynn followed the feedback nudge from her mentors, stating, “I did apply to other dean positions because I always felt like I was on that carnival ride.”

Institution type was one of the most important factors in Lynn's decision to pursue the academic deanship. She valued the mission of her institution as one that

served a diverse population of students with an equally diverse faculty and wanted to continue to work toward those goals. In reflecting on her process of finding other deanships to which to apply, she shared, “there were a couple of schools that invited me to apply, and I would look at their faculty and they had no faculty of color... or I would [find a] department that was nine out of the 10 faculty were White guys. I was like, ‘I can’t be here.’” Alternatively, Lynn did decide to apply to two other institutions located in places where she thought she could live, where the leadership or colleagues reflected some elements of her own identity, and where educational equity was valued.

When considering her decision-making process in pursuit of the deanship, Lynn discussed different dimensions of her identity on multiple occasions. She believed she held identities that were not considered ‘traditional’ for a dean, “being gender queer and non-binary we’re not necessarily seen as an appropriate dean so to speak or even associate dean for that matter.” She referenced stereotypes about Asian American women that she had encountered throughout her career and how they impacted what her trajectory could have been:

Asian Americans in higher ed typically do not, they’re not seen as natural leaders. So I just feel like there’s all these reasons why people wouldn’t ask me to take on responsibility, wouldn’t ask me, wouldn’t vote me in as a department chair, wouldn’t trust that I was being a good leader as an associate dean and wouldn’t think that I could lead a college.

She remembered hearing from colleagues about the comments made during a search in which an Asian woman was a candidate for a leadership role, “A number of them would say things like, ‘An Asian woman as dean? How ridiculous.’” Lynn believed that she was able to lead despite these stereotypes because of the environment in her college and at her institution, “I feel like my campus has been able to overlook all the kind of stereotypes

that are placed on me.” She recognized that her identity was part of who she was as a leader, and felt that it was accepted:

On one hand, [my identity] shapes the way I am daily. Both inhibits and also allows me to use the strengths of the kind of person I am culturally... And when I say culturally, I'm saying sort of as a gendered female person as well. Then also, it makes me feel grateful. I think who I am makes me feel grateful for where I am because I know that I couldn't be here at just any institution.

Several individuals who identified as queer had served as deans at the institution before Lynn, which also made her more comfortable stepping into leadership in that environment, “I just feel like it's been a great place for me to be who I want to be without having to worry about how people perceive me.”

Lynn embraced her own leadership style, believed she had the skills to advance to the role of dean, and realized she wanted to do just that at her current institution. She initially applied to two other institutions at the recommendation of her mentors and viewed it as an opportunity for professional development. She still believed that her choice process “wasn't an active or conscious decision of where I wanted to be, but it was like, ‘Okay, if I were to be dean, because I feel like I have good skills now, where could I do it? And who did I want to serve?’” Lynn was offered the job at her current institution and was invited to interview for one of the external positions. She consulted her mentors once again. They asked if she would consider moving institutions, and she realized she wanted to stay where she was “I don't think I could've ... I don't know if I would've been happy being a dean at another college.” She did not feel a need to continue with the search process for negotiation leverage, and instead shared, “I felt like in order to have integrity with myself that I need[ed] to just take my application out.” Lynn decided to

continue on the carnival ride at her current institution and became the academic dean of her college.

Kate

“I didn’t really have this planned out. It turned out to be great and changed my life dramatically, and it changed my identity, it changed all kinds of things.”

Kate, a White woman in her 40s, spent her entire academic career in the social sciences at the same institution. She moved from the faculty, where she was overloaded with service, to roles as associate dean and interim dean before the deanship. Kate identified as a mother, wife, daughter, and friend, and the potential impact of a career change on her family was a large consideration for her. She credited a mentor and sponsor with her introduction to administration and encouragement to pursue the deanship, a position she applied for years before she actually became the dean. Kate was magnetic and energizing during the interviews, eager to candidly share about and reflect on her time as an academic leader.

Entering Administration

As a faculty member, Kate’s aspiration was to become a full professor. She had witnessed several women in her department who had “stalled careers as associate [professors]” so her ambition “was to get full, that was pretty much it.” She was frequently tapped for service work within her department which made her fearful that she was falling into a similar trap:

I knew enough from being in those kinds of networks about women at the associate rank who get bogged down with a ton of service which was happening to me. So I just tried to stay the course and tried to tell people - I’m not doing that, I have to get full, I have to get full, I have to get full.

She was coordinating a program within her department and had so many service commitments that she was frequently responsible for the majority of the items on the faculty meeting agenda. She also believed her chair to be “incompetent” and that she “was kind of co-running the department without the money.”

While she was motivated to become full professor, Kate realized that all of the service work was taking a toll on her, “I was getting grumpy like a lot of women associate professors I know.” Kate had steered clear of the dean’s office during her career but got to know the associate dean through participation on a college-wide committee. Over time, the two became friends and when he was promoted elsewhere within the university, he encouraged her to apply for his role within the college. Kate had never considered administration and was shocked by his recommendation, “I was like, what?! Me? You’re insane. No way...I never thought about this, this is not even in my brain that I would do this.” She was simultaneously asked to apply for another associate dean type role on campus and decided to apply for both since she was well into the process of becoming full professor – her primary career aspiration. She was offered the role of associate dean within her college but hesitated about the decision to move from faculty to an administrative role, “then I anguished for like two weeks about whether or not I would really do this, and then I was like I’m gonna do it, I’m gonna try it.”

Kate was hesitant to move on because, while she felt prepared as someone who was doing “pseudo administrative work” in a small department, she did not think her experiences necessarily translated to those of the associate dean. Her first thought was that she could not move to a role in the dean’s office because of her career path, “I was never department chair, which is more of a typical trajectory to go to the dean’s office...

not always - but a lot of people end up going through department chair...I didn't have that and I didn't really understand anything." Despite this concern and the fact that she had never considered administration as part of her career path, stating "I had not thought about administration, didn't even occur to me like at all," she recognized the potential opportunity ahead of her. She reflected on her reasons for pursuing the role and realized her colleagues were a factor:

My colleagues had a lot to do with it. I was sick of my colleagues and then I felt unsupported by several of my women colleagues actually and it was part of what propelled me to do it. It was like this is a change, I'm being offered a change, I should take this change.

Kate believed she was growing miserable in her department and needed to make a change for herself, so she said yes to the associate deanship.

Deciding to Pursue the Deanship

After Kate had served as associate dean for several years, the dean of the college retired. The college announced a national search and Kate debated whether or not to apply. She feared that she lacked adequate experience, "I had to decide if I would actually put my name in the hat. I knew I didn't have much administrative experience under my belt yet--especially compared with people who I assumed would apply for a national search." She weighed the decision heavily, considered reasons to apply or not apply, discussed with her husband, and reflected on her own career path and aspirations.

Kate considered her alternatives and the possibility of returning to the faculty. She valued her time as a faculty member, "I still very much identified as a faculty member...I kind of missed teaching and the energy of being in the classroom. I still valued doing my own research." However, she also recognized that she was growing miserable in her department before moving to administration, "I didn't want to go back to [my

department] because I was like, well shit, I'm not ready to go back and deal with those people.”

At this point, Kate was interested in continuing in administrative and leadership roles. She believed that applying for the deanship was a way to show the college that “I am in this.” In her narrative, she shared, “I thought it would be good for me, however, to signal to the college and to the upper administration that I was interested in this work, ambitious, and engaged in the work of the college in a very serious way.” After working with the previous dean and seeing the needs of the college, she also felt that she had the potential to make an impact. In writing about her decision-making process, she shared:

My concerns about gender and climate and inequality among faculty and the dean's lack of engagement in those issues was really on my mind. So all those things were in my administrative mindset but I didn't feel like we were doing a good job in the dean's office supporting those things or making changes...I wanted to expand the mission of the dean's office, it's purview, and staff.

Though she knew she was young, Kate also believed she had the potential to make these changes, “I'm already doing it, who else should do it? I should do it.”

Kate also thought applying for the deanship would be a beneficial experience for her professional development. In her narrative, she shared:

I dreaded it for sure, but also thought it would be good for me. I hadn't been on a job interview since I was a grad student applying for assistant professor jobs. And I hated that experience. I found it stressful and scary and didn't relish returning to that experience. But I dared myself to do it.

There was an element of self-efficacy and personal growth in her decision-making process. Though she came across as confident, Kate shared in her narrative just how difficult this decision was, “I won't say that this came easily to me. Not at all. Really, it was painful. Big time imposter syndrome.” By choosing to apply for the deanship, she

was stepping out of her comfort zone, saying “even if I don’t get it, I’m gonna show face and try to challenge myself to do this.”

In addition to her own self-efficacy, professional development, and desire to signal an interest in leadership, family was a factor in Kate’s decision to pursue the deanship. She recognized that making this kind of career change would “put a lot of pressure on [her] husband” since she would have “no flexibility and lots of time constraints and a different kind of stress.” She weighed the pros and cons of being a mother and a dean, recognizing that she may not be the one “driving [the kids] to and from school” anymore. Kate’s husband was very supportive in the decision-making process, arguing that if she was invited to serve as dean, they were “gonna really do it” and take advantage of the opportunity. Kate was very clear that “family is a big, big part of this.” She mentioned her identity as a mother several times, highlighting that the possible change to her family’s routines and lifestyle was an important consideration in her choice process.

Kate also recognized the trade-off she was considering when deciding whether or not to pursue the deanship, “I gave up the awesome job of a regular faculty member with unbelievable amounts of flexibility and traded that for money basically and no flexibility.” Though she did not explicitly list financial opportunities as a factor in her decision-making process, she recognized it as a benefit in exchange for her time. In reflecting on her time as dean, she also shared, “the job is so hard that the money has to be high because why else would you do this? It’s really too hard. It’s not a good idea – it’s not an altruistic thing – but it’s also, money has to be good and there had to be a

couple of perks.” Kate was realistic in her decision-making process and did find incentives in certain aspects of the role that seemed to influence her decision to apply.

Kate ultimately decided to apply for the deanship at her home institution and was selected as a finalist. When asked to describe an image depicting her decision-making process in pursuit of the deanship, Kate landed on a memory from the weeks leading up to her on-campus interview. She had spent a significant amount of time preparing but was nervous and “very concerned about what I should wear for the interview.” She spoke at length about the differences in expectations related to appearance for men and women and debated the question, “what does a dean look like?” This question struck her as she was preparing for her interview and also inspired the image she selected to describe her decision-making process - a woman’s business suit.

For Kate, the first hurdle was deciding what to wear for the interview, but in her description of the image, she also asked whether she “could pull it off.” It became clear that the real hurdle was deciding whether or not she believed she had the “maturity, gravitas, status” to be the dean, and whether or not others would see that as well. Kate was grappling with the choice to pursue the deanship while simultaneously dealing with her own sense of imposter syndrome as a younger, woman candidate for the deanship.

While this image was salient in her decision-making process, Kate did not believe her identity as a woman directly impacted her choice to pursue the deanship. She shared, “I don’t think about being a woman dean leader, whatever. I should. I do feel privileged in that way, that I get to do this, but I don’t walk around going ‘I am a role model for younger women academics.’ I don’t think like that.” She did, however, believe that her

identity as a mother impacted her choice, as did her identity as a scholar in her particular field. She realized that her disciplinary expertise helped prepare her for the role:

Every single day, these are super hard decisions and I try to make, I try to think about race, class, gender, and sexuality and I think about inequality constantly and people's perceptions versus reality. I mean I use my [expertise] all the time in my job and so I try to remember that that's part of my identity, it's my training, it's where I come from.

As Kate reflected on her time as dean thus far, considerations from her decision-making process came through, too.

Kate challenged herself in applying for the role, but ultimately was not selected to be the dean. Instead, her former colleague, the same person she had replaced as the associate dean, was appointed and asked her to continue serving as a senior associate dean. She believed in his leadership style and platform and was happy to continue in the role. In reflecting through narrative, she shared:

I am actually really grateful that I didn't get the job at that time. I learned so much from working with him as dean. We were very much on the same page about the goals and priorities of the college, but he knew a lot more about how to get things actually done. And I learned from that and from watching him.

Going through the application process was valuable to Kate, and she became even more prepared by working with and watching her colleague serve as dean. In reflecting on her career path, Kate credited this man with much of her administrative success, "I owe him a lot. I really owe him a lot. I would not have done any of this without him." She believed he was both a mentor and sponsor to her, and that he was "the most encouraging person" throughout her decision-making process, so she was happy to continue working for him.

Though enjoying her role as senior associate dean, Kate had not given up on the idea of a deanship, so when she was contacted by search firms, she pursued the leads. She saw it as another opportunity for professional development and chance to hone her vision,

“I was like, ‘why not’...what is my vision and how can I talk about this and who am I ... I can’t answer those questions in my head, instead it’s the exercise of saying them out loud and trying to talk about it.” She participated in several phone interviews and was offered a campus interview, but ultimately did not advance further. She was frequently told by the search firms “you’re a little young on the administrative experience.” Kate agreed with this assessment but continued to consider the deanship.

Through this process, Kate also wrestled with whether she was willing to relocate or wanted to move institutions. She recognized that she was averse to change and not eager to move to a new place for a deanship, “I don’t want to pick up and start over again. I’ve lived here for almost 20 years. I have my little tiny group of friends and those are the people I like, and I’m not dying to, I’m not that ambitious. I’m just not that ambitious.” She also recognized the benefits of being an internal dean and knowing the institution, “I think some of [moving institutions] is like fear, like at least I know what the hell is wrong here, I know what I’m dealing with.”

While Kate was debating her potential alternatives, the newly hired dean was offered another role and he planned to appoint her as the interim dean. Kate was shocked, “I was like holy shit, you’ve gotta be kidding me, terrified. Terrified.” While Kate had applied for the dean position previously, she felt far less prepared to take on the deanship now with such short notice. Once again, she dared herself to take on the opportunity for a change and she served as the interim dean for nearly a year. Since she had already gone through the application process, the college voted to appoint her as dean without opening another search. Though it took some time after her initial decision to pursue the deanship, Kate eventually ended up wearing her business suit as the dean of the college.

Summary

This chapter highlights the stories of 12 women serving as academic deans as they recounted their career paths and decisions to pursue the deanship. Whether an internal or external candidate; someone who came to leadership accidentally or intentionally; or a mother, partner, or mentor, each woman navigated existing norms, structures, and choice environments to make the choice to pursue the deanship. Chapter Five builds on these individual cases and focuses on cross-case themes.

Chapter Five: Cross-Case Analysis

In this study, I set out to understand why and how women decide to pursue the academic deanship. More specifically, the research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. **Why** do senior women faculty decide to pursue the academic deanship?
 - a. What aspects of a women's career history, skills, professional knowledge and experience, or aspects of identity, shape the decision?
 - b. What aspects of women's local environment or career experiences act as cues to pursue (or not pursue) the position of academic dean?
2. **How** do women decide to pursue the academic deanship?
 - c) When faced with the opportunity to pursue the academic deanship, what decision-making strategies do women employ to make their choice?
 - d) As women make the decision to apply for the deanship, which factors most shape their decision-making process?

This chapter highlights the cross-case findings comparing the career paths of the 12 academic deans in this study, why and how they chose to pursue the academic deanship, and the assumptions involved in their processes.

Each woman in this study had distinct demographics, identity characteristics, and career paths to the deanship (Table 2). Of the 12 participants, six were hired internally from their institution and six entered the role of dean as external candidates. The disciplines of the deans varied, with the majority from professional (i.e., nursing, law, business, graduate education) or social science fields, two serving as deans in STEM fields, and one in the humanities. Nearly half gained experience as interim or acting dean

first, and four of the 12 served as department chair prior to becoming dean. One participant identified as Asian, one participant identified as American Indian/White, two participants identified as Black or African American, one participant identified as Hispanic, and seven participants identified as White (Table 2). Each woman highlighted different reasons for pursuing the deanship, factors that impacted their choices, and strategies that shaped their decision-making processes.

Table 2

Participants' Demographics, Disciplines, and Previous Positions

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Internal/ External	Discipline	Dept. Chair	Interim Dean
Anne	White	External	Professional	Yes	No
Beverly	Black/African American	Internal	Humanities	No	No
Colleen	White	External	STEM	No	No
Eleanor	White	Internal	Social Sciences	Yes	Yes
Isabel	White	Internal	Professional	Yes	No
Joy	African American	Internal	Social Sciences	No	No
Kate	White	Internal	Social Sciences	No	Yes
Lynn	Asian	Internal	Social Sciences	Yes	Yes
Maria	Hispanic	External	Professional	No	No
Natalie	American Indian/White	External	Professional	No	Yes
Tia	White	External	STEM	No	Yes
Virginia	White	External	Professional	No	No

Note. Race/ethnicity is reported from participants' self-identification on eligibility

questionnaire.

Research Question One: Why Pursue the Academic Deanship?

Women in this study were asked about their motivations to pursue the role of dean. From this data, the reasons fueling their decision to pursue the deanship, or their 'why,' was ascertained. Interestingly, only three of the deans in this study expressed clear ambition in pursuit of the deanship. Virginia noted that she had attended conference sessions on becoming a dean as a graduate student; Anne shared a natural inclination

toward leadership roles that began during her time in the military; and Tia, a “third generation academic,” knew early in her career that she planned to follow a path in academic leadership. All of these women identified as White, and they all became external candidates for the deanship.

The other nine women in this study were surprised by their career path and made it clear that becoming a dean was not initially on their radar while serving as faculty members. Isabel shared, “I certainly didn’t have aspirations to be an academic administrator.” Maria “couldn’t understand why on earth anyone would want to do this [academic leadership],” and did not “know anyone who considers a PhD thinking they’re gonna be a dean someday.” Lynn and Kate discussed being “accidental administrators.” Eleanor believed serving as department chair was a way to pull her weight in her department, not a way to prepare herself to “move into an associate deanship.” When Colleen was asked to take on her first leadership role, her initial response was to tell the provost she had picked the wrong person, saying “that was shocking.”

While some were shocked or not planning to pursue these roles, Lynn suggested that perhaps aspiring to academic leadership was “not desirable” for faculty members, since “faculty think that administration is evil, so we don’t want to aspire to be something evil.” Virginia echoed this sentiment, reflecting on the conference sessions for deans she used to attend, “almost all of [the academic leaders] said that they fell into it, that they were drafted into it, they didn’t want it and so it was really weird to be somebody who wanted it. You never saw that.” Though all three women who had ambition to become the dean exhibited strong self-efficacy and confidence in their ability, they were not the only deans in this study who did. This common presence of self-efficacy but difference in

ambitions toward leadership suggests other forces – whether a belief that it was “undesirable” to aspire to the deanship, or a genuine question of interest – were at play.

Based on my research questions, I sought to understand what elements of career history, professional skills and experiences, or aspects of identity – what Lent et al., (1994) term ‘distal factors’ – impacted women’s interest in the deanship. I also asked whether cues from participants’ local environments and career experiences, also known as proximal factors (Lent et al., 1994), shaped why they decided to pursue the role of dean. The data (Table 3) suggests that cues in the local environment were the most salient factor, followed by career history and skills and experiences, with few women specifically citing an aspect of their identity as a motivating reason to pursue the deanship.

Table 3

Key Factors Impacting Women’s Motivation to Pursue Deanship

Pseudonym	Primary Factor	Secondary Factor
Anne	Career History	Local Environment
Beverly	Local Environment	Local Environment
Colleen	Local Environment	Skills/Experiences
Eleanor	Local Environment	Skills/Experiences
Isabel	Local Environment	Local Environment
Joy	Local Environment	Local Environment
Kate	Local Environment	Local Environment
Lynn	Local Environment	Local Environment
Maria	Local Environment	Skills/Experiences
Natalie	Local Environment	Career History
Tia	Career History	Identity
Virginia	Career History	Local Environment

Recognizing that the cues in one’s local environment or elements of career history varied for each participant, Table 4 further divides these factors into subcategories. For example, for some participants, the initial leap to leadership roles was sparked by a

mentor or colleague, as was the case for Maria, Natalie, Lynn, and Kate. For others, like Beverly and Colleen, the opening of a position at their institution got them thinking about the potential to pursue the deanship. Beverly described this as “a combination of opportunity and desire in terms of [her] own personal, professional career goals and plans.” Some women chose to pursue the deanship as a way to leave a work environment, like Virginia who felt as though her workplace was toxic, and Kate who did not want to work with her former coworkers. Tia was influenced by her family role and identity, recognizing that she was the “breadwinner” and likely needed to follow an administrative path for financial reasons. Anne’s interest in the deanship was sparked and sustained by support from a search firm. Most notably, every one of the 12 women deans in this study cited the potential for impact as one of the key factors that motivated them to pursue the deanship, whether through their own ability, career ambition, or desire to make an impact at a specific institution. The following section outlines and provides additional examples of these factors impacting why women decided to pursue the role of academic dean.

Table 4

Specific Factors Impacting Women’s Motivation to Pursue Deanship

Pseudonym	Primary Factor	Secondary Factor
Anne	Impact, Aspiration	Search Firm
Beverly	Institutional Opening	Impact, Institution
Colleen	Impact, Ability	Institutional Opening
Eleanor	Encouragement	Impact, Ability
Isabel	Encouragement	Impact, Institution
Joy	Impact, Institution	Mentor
Kate	Impact, Institution	Colleagues
Lynn	Impact, Institution	Mentor
Maria	Colleague	Impact, Ability
Natalie	Mentor	Impact, Aspiration
Tia	Impact, Aspiration	Family
Virginia	Impact, Aspiration	Work Environment

Local Environment

Cues in women's local environments to pursue or not pursue the deanship took three primary forms: feedback nudges from others (i.e., mentors, colleagues, headhunters, family, sponsors), signals from home institutions, and the possibility of making an impact at the institution. In most cases, the cues were encouraging for women to pursue leadership roles, but in others, women were discouraged in their pursuit of the deanship or received signals that deterred them from advancing at their home institution.

Several women in this study credited their advancement and decision to pursue leadership to a mentor, sponsor, or colleague. Natalie and Lynn were very direct in sharing that they would not be a dean if it were not for their mentors. Maria and Kate both had colleagues who asked them to lead and supported them as they considered future leadership roles. In each of these examples, the mentor or colleague – a man – sparked an interest in leadership by suggesting that these women should be leading or were capable of doing more. As a result of these nudges, Natalie, Lynn, Maria, and Kate each took on their first leadership roles and discussed the possibility of the deanship with these mentors and colleagues during their subsequent advancement.

Other participants cited support of and encouragement from colleagues as a motivating reason to pursue the deanship. Beverly, Isabel, and Eleanor all felt that they had skills to lead but did not know whether or not they were ready to leave their faculty careers behind. Each of these three women noted that having the support from colleagues – people who believed they were best suited for the role – and being asked to lead inspired their decision to pursue the deanship. Eleanor shared, “knowing that people thought that I could do a good job, people whose views I valued and trusted – and it

wasn't just people saying the thing they thought they were supposed to say – did make a difference.” Isabel reflected on being asked to be the department chair and recalled a senior leader saying, “I think you really have skills.” She acknowledged that she was influenced by the “encouragement by other people” in her career advancement. Beverly also spoke about the importance of encouragement, “It goes a long way to have the support of your colleagues.”

Feedback in the local environment also came from search firms for some women deans. Four of the 12 participants in this study referenced interactions with search firms at some point in their decision-making process. For some women, like Joy and Kate, brief interactions with search firms sparked the idea of advancing in leadership, though both questioned the motives behind the search firms given that they were so early in their leadership careers. Tia worked with a search firm early in her process before deciding which institution type most aligned with her career goals, but it did not have a notable impact. For Anne, however, working with a headhunter was a significant factor in why she decided to pursue the deanship. Anne noted in her narrative that “the headhunter was instrumental in prompting me to consider the position. Without her strong guidance, advice, and belief that I was the right candidate, I am not sure I would have moved forward.” This account highlights the important role feedback from search firm personnel played in her process.

The other primary way in which the local environment provided cues for women to pursue or not pursue the deanship came from their home institutions. In some cases, the opening of a leadership position at the institution where the woman was currently employed sparked an interest in pursuing leadership. This was true for Beverly who had

not been considering leadership this early in her career (while still an associate professor), but when the opportunity to serve as dean opened, she believed the timing was right and took the cue to apply. Similarly, Colleen credited her desire to pursue the deanship with the opening of the position at her home institution. When Lynn, Kate, Natalie, Eleanor, and Tia were asked to take on the role of interim dean, they took these cues as an opportunity to advance. As Lynn noted, “it was a no-brainer.” She went on to share, “I felt like it was obligation and I had to fulfill it.” For many of these women, the opportunity to advance when asked was not one they could decline.

While institutional cues may have influenced interest in leadership, and in the deanship specifically, some women in this study highlighted cues from their environment that deterred them from pursuing the deanship at their home institution. Both Colleen and Tia were interested in building their careers at their current institutions but faced barriers in doing so. Colleen was explicitly told that in order to advance, she needed to get experience at another institution first. This instruction directly impacted her career choice process, “that is why I applied for other deanships – to get the experience I need to someday be a leader on my home campus.” Tia was not directed to apply elsewhere, but after serving as interim dean for an extended term believed she was ready to become the dean and had proven that she was the right candidate for the job. However, after negative interactions with a group of colleagues within the college, she realized that her STEM college was more invested in advancing men and that if she wanted to advance, she had to leave the institution where she had built her career. Though both women were interested in the deanship, signals in their local environments made them question whether they wanted to be a dean more broadly or wanted to lead at a specific institution.

The opportunity to make an impact at a specific institution was a reason cited by many of the women in pursuit of the deanship. After serving as associate dean, Kate believed there were issues related to “gender and climate and inequality among faculty” that she wanted to work on. Beverly saw potential to create change through a role like the deanship at her current institution, “I thought about the opportunity to do some innovative things and to be in a position to make institutional changes that I felt were needed.” Similarly, Lynn realized she wanted to lead most at her current institution, “I don’t know if I would have been happy being a dean at another college... I’m committed to the value of the college and I really do love my faculty.” She was dedicated to the mission and eager to make an impact within that realm. Joy felt so committed to making an impact at her home institution that she turned down an offer to be a dean elsewhere. She believed there was “unfinished business” and was eager to “have more impact, do things better.” Isabel realized that if she was going to leave her faculty role, it would be to make a difference in graduate education, “I think underlying all of it was wanting to improve conditions for graduate education for students, for students to have the best experience possible.” The desire to make an impact within the local environment pushed many women in this study to pursue the academic deanship.

Career History, Skills, and Experiences

As illustrated in the individual cases in Chapter Four, women in this study exhibited differences in the timing of their decision to pursue the deanship. As they reflected on their decision-making process, most women referenced a pivotal moment when they made the first transition from their faculty role to an administrative position. For many, these roles were part-time, like serving as a program director or department

chair, but required a significant commitment to transition from their full-time faculty roles. For example, Maria described her foray into administration by sharing an image of someone being pushed off of a cliff. For her, taking this first step into the role of associate dean was far more challenging than deciding to pursue the deanship.

Alternatively, Beverly was encouraged to apply to the deanship while she was still an associate professor, after only having served as a program director, and thus made the decision to pursue administration and the deanship simultaneously. It is important to recognize that, for many women, the decision to pursue the deanship was only made possible because of their decisions to say yes to other leadership roles earlier in their career. When asked about why they chose to pursue the deanship, many women in this study discussed other positions held, noteworthy experiences in their careers, or skills they had gained that inspired an interest in the role of dean or prepared them to take on the position.

Ambitions for future career were one reason women chose to pursue the deanship. Based on their career history and related interests, Anne, Virginia, and Tia all had ambition to pursue academic leadership, and specifically the deanship. As an over-involved graduate student, Virginia realized that her career interests and aspirations aligned with what the dean does, “I think from the time that I was a grad student, I just knew that that would be something that seemed interesting. I liked what the dean did.” Colleen expressed aspirations to become provost and believed the deanship was a necessary step to get there, “It’s really kind of just something to get in. I want to be a provost I think, and you need to get a deanship under your belt.”

This tendency to follow the “traditional path” to academic leadership was a reason for several other women to pursue the deanship, too, but in a less explicit way. Lynn, Joy, Maria, and Isabel all suggested that their decision to pursue the deanship was shaped by the administrative path that they were on, and that it seemed like the logical next step in their career. For example, Joy shared, “I think to be dean it felt like it was a continuation of the opportunity to serve the school in a different way.” Lynn noted, “it seemed natural. I felt like I was on this track where it was natural to apply.” Maria acknowledged that “I just kind of kept doing the next thing,” and that pursuing the deanship was the first time she intentionally decided to pursue a new leadership role.

Serving in another leadership role was one of the most common factors women in this study cited when reflecting on why they decided to pursue the deanship. Colleen garnered new insight on the institution through her previous leadership role that inspired her to pursue the deanship, “I enjoyed seeing the campus from the perspective of the Provost’s office and wanted to have more of a leadership role.” Isabel reflected on the skills and experiences she had gained in other professional roles that prepared her for the deanship, noting that they “gave me some grounding in terms of leadership.” After serving as associate dean, both Maria and Tia knew that they wanted to become deans. Tia shared, “I wanted to be a dean, which I really figured out partway through my first year as an associate dean.” She noted that “those two years as an associate dean helped me understand that I couldn't be happy in an associate role for my career.” They both felt prepared to take on the deanship thanks to these roles, but even more so, as Maria stated, they were “ready for more.” Similarly, Natalie was eager to be the decision-maker after her time serving as interim dean. Kate argued that she was motivated to apply for the

deanship because she was already in the role of interim dean and felt as though she should continue, saying, “well I’m already doing it, who else should do it? I should do it.”

Like Kate, half of the women in this study served as interim or acting dean before becoming the academic dean. This role provided them an opportunity to garner skills in areas they felt they were lacking. For example, Natalie shared, “the fundraising, the working with alumni and donors and stakeholders, I think those are the pieces that oftentimes scare people away. I had the chance to actually do it [as interim dean] so that didn’t necessarily scare me.” She acknowledged that this experience gave her the boost she needed to advance, “having a chance to be an acting dean gave me the confidence that I could be dean.” Lynn believed that serving as interim dean had a direct impact on her decision to pursue the deanship, “I realized that I was pretty good at the job and that’s why I thought maybe I should pursue other dean jobs at other institutions.” While serving as interim dean, others realized they had relevant skills, talents, and professional knowledge, like Kate and Isabel, who reflected on their expertise in their respective disciplines. Serving in this temporary role was a significant factor that shaped why women decided to pursue the academic deanship.

Beyond serving as associate and interim deans, many women in this study cited professional experiences on campus that impacted their sense of self-efficacy or made them feel more prepared to become a dean. Tia reflected on her time serving as director of a graduate program and various search committees. Eleanor and Anne spoke about their time serving on the university senate, dealing with issues of budgets and finance, and interacting with senior administrators. In reflecting on the experience, Eleanor shared,

“I felt like that experience gave me both insight into policies and procedures and the way decisions get made at the university. It also gave me exposure to lots of upper-level senior administrators.” Lynn received training from the dean before her and gained experience with HR meetings and other personnel issues. Virginia spent so much time focused on service that she barely discussed her role as a full professor but believed that these experiences gave her insight into “all of the pieces you need to be a good dean.” Kate felt overloaded with her service responsibilities but argued that it prepared her immensely for the deanship. She believed, “I am qualified to be dean because I’m doing this pseudo administrative work and I’m in a very small department.”

Through this reflection process, Colleen recognized that positions and projects she had taken on as a program director and faculty member were actually opportunities to develop her leadership skills, stating, “I never recognized it or thought about it as leadership at the time, but it was.” Working on strategic planning efforts for the university gave Maria confidence that “I had some abilities that other people didn’t have.” Isabel believed that serving as department chair prepared her in many ways to pursue the deanship. She spoke about the skills and responsibilities that she gained through the role, “I felt prepared because I had been a chair, so I managed staff. I understand how faculty work. I had to manage a budget, so I already knew how to do that.”

Another reason why women in this study decided to pursue the deanship was because they wanted to make an impact and felt – thanks to their career history, experiences, and skills – that they had the ability to do so. As a result, impact was frequently paired with a sense of self-efficacy and confidence. For example, Eleanor

shared, “I felt like there was a lot of opportunity and I felt like I had the expertise from my time as department head to jump in and start doing things.” She recognized that her skills drove her decision to pursue the deanship in some ways, “it wasn't necessarily about how far up the ladder could I get, it was just that there was something to do that I could do that I was reasonably certain I would be good at.” Colleen felt prepared to take on a more dominant role in academic leadership, “I could be in the captain's seat and help.” Beverly “saw it as an opportunity to do something and marry [her] different interests and different background experiences.” Maria was “ready to do it” and realized that she could “have a big impact.”

Others recognized that they had ambition to make an impact as an academic leader but were not able to do so in their current roles. Virginia felt early on that the dean “could make things happen if they wanted, and they could fix things and make things run well,” all of which she wanted to do. She was looking for an institution where she could “come in and make a contribution.” Tia was focused on ambition and saw the deanship as an opportunity to channel her career goals. Natalie shared similar sentiments in her narrative:

I was anxious to be the decision maker. I also saw becoming the dean as an opportunity to promote my diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, as well as talk openly about wellness and mental health. I therefore chose to apply for deanships to allow me to become the decision maker.

Anne was also ready to become a decision-maker, “the only way that I was gonna get to make the kinds of decisions and raise a level of influence that I wanted to be, I legitimately needed to be in the role of a dean.” While many factors played a role, the potential for impact – and belief that they had the skills and ability to create that impact – consistently influenced the women in this study to pursue the academic deanship.

Aspects of Identity

When considering whether or not to apply for and pursue the role of dean, the women in this study highlighted several aspects of identity that impacted their decisions. For example, Maria spoke to her identity as a “double first-generation student” as something that inspired her to advance. As young leaders, both Tia and Beverly discussed age in their decision-making processes. Beverly was still an associate professor considering family planning, and Tia was “notably younger” than the interim dean and her predecessor. Kate mentioned that “the mother thing really matters” as her identity as a mom influenced her decision to pursue the deanship greatly. The same was true for Tia and Joy. Virginia worried that her religious affiliation and sexual orientation were parts of her identity that may be questioned or not welcomed at certain institution types or in some geographic locations and thus considered both when pursuing the deanship. Isabel, Eleanor, and Colleen worried about leaving their faculty identity behind when choosing to advance to leadership roles. Many women spoke about their personality traits and characteristics that pushed them to pursue the deanship, like Maria self-identifying as “highly competitive” and Tia as someone who has “always been motivated to do the best I can do and then be rewarded for that.” While dimensions of identity were mentioned in many ways, the most salient aspects of identity for women in this study included gender and race.

The 12 deans expressed differing views as to whether or not their identity as a woman impacted their decision to pursue the academic deanship. For White women, gender was mentioned by some, but race was not mentioned by any as it related to their choice process. Some of the opinions on the role of gender in their choice processes were

field dependent. For example, when Colleen, a White woman in a STEM discipline, was prompted further as to why her gender did not impact her pursuit of the deanship, she shared, “I mean, I'm a woman in science. I'm used to crap.” Alternatively, Isabel, a White woman in a professional field, believed that her pathway “would be different” if she were a man. Her own research and disciplinary interests led her to believe that “I probably would have been told to go up for full sooner than I did ... or would have been told to advocate for myself in different ways.” She not only believed that her gender shaped her path in terms of available opportunities and external forces, but that it impacted the way she viewed her advancement as well. When reflecting on her decision to pursue the academic deanship, Isabel noted, “I know how important it is to have more women in leadership because that fosters even more women to pursue leadership. And so that part of my identity [as a woman] absolutely did [impact my career choices].” Isabel was acutely aware of the impact of her gender on her decision to pursue the deanship, whereas Colleen had come to accept gender dynamics in her field and, as a result, did not connect her gender to her desire to pursue the deanship.

For other White women, gender was a salient factor in their career advancement, though it may not have had a direct or causal link to their decision-making process. For example, experience in the military shaped the role of gender for Anne. She shared, “certainly the military was very male-dominated, even being a woman officer, and so I've always tried to look at equity as an important issue and I wanna be surrounded with other women who are in leadership roles.” Anne knew that gender equity in leadership was important to her, but like many others in this study, did not explicitly state that her identity as a woman impacted her choice process. Similarly, Kate recognized that serving

in her role as dean and identifying as a woman was important, but did not believe it was something that she was cognizant of all of the time:

I don't think about being a woman dean leader, whatever, I should, I do feel privileged in that way, that I get to do this, but I don't walk around going 'I am a role model for younger women academics.' I don't think like that.

While all participants in this study identified as women, many of whom faced barriers to their advancement due to their gender, they were more likely to simply acknowledge these dynamics than credit their decision to advance to their awareness of gender equity issues.

The five women of color in this study were aware of their intersecting identities, the possible challenges to their career trajectory posed as a result, and the potential impact of serving as dean while holding these identities. Yet they expressed their assessment of impact in different ways. Beverly, Maria, and Joy all acknowledged that they brought a unique and diverse perspective to their institutions by becoming the dean while also noting that doing so was not the driving factor for their decision to advance. For example, Beverly shared, "we've never had a Black person in senior leadership. And yeah, interestingly I feel like it's important to have that representation, but it wasn't a motivator for me doing it." Joy felt similarly as a fellow Black woman while recognizing that addressing representation alone would not address the issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, "I don't kid myself that having a Black dean, or a Black female dean, or three [Black female deans] changes the institutional structure and system of academia to make it a more inclusive or less White supremacist place but it's at least a step." Maria did not believe that her identity as a Latina woman directly impacted her decision-making process, but once in the role of dean, she did fight to make sure her

name was accented appropriately in campus settings in order to serve as a role model and visible possibility for others who shared her identity.

As someone who identified as American Indian and White, Natalie was more cognizant of her racial identity than her gender identity but felt that being a woman of color and pursuing the deanship was “scary” because of the possible failure and resultant backlash for others who identify like her. She noted, “If you fail, they blame your race and gender.” Lynn was also aware of the added pressure placed on women of color. She believed that her identity as an Asian woman impacted how she prepared herself to advance and navigated stereotypes and norms in order to do so:

I think that as folks of color we're always told that if you want to succeed in the White world that you have to be way better than the White person next to you... I do think that we all need to kind of remember that we live in this world that's unequal... Some people say that it's unfair that we have to have mad skills to be able to be at this same level, but I think having that mad skill and making an effort to be better than all the other deans around you are really important for your success.

Participants in this study who identified as women of color seemed to acknowledge that their identity was integral to their choice process and was something that they were aware of all of the time, but the degree to which it weighed in their decision to pursue the deanship varied.

Summary of Research Question One: Why Pursue the Academic Deanship?

Women in this study chose to pursue the deanship for a number of reasons. The majority highlighted the impact of their local environment on their decision to advance. Both their choice environment and proximal factors, like their most recent positions, served as catalysts in their decision-making processes in pursuit of the deanship. The only women who did not exhibit local environment as the primary factor motivating their

interest in the deanship were Anne, Virginia, and Tia – the same three women who had ambition and interest in pursuing the deanship earlier in their careers. In addition to cues from the local environment, these women and others were motivated by more distal factors, including career history and developed skills. Having served as an associate or interim dean was a motivating factor for many of the women in this study. Feeling as though their skills and experiences had prepared them to assume the deanship also shaped women's desire to pursue the role. There was often more than one factor, including aspects of identity and timing of position openings, that sparked the interest in the deanship for women in this study.

Research Question Two: How Do Women Decide to Pursue the Deanship?

In reflecting on how they decide to pursue the deanship, some women in this study focused directly on the decision to apply to the deanship, some focused on deciding to make the initial leap to an administrative role before pursuing the deanship, and others focused on specific considerations, like salary or geography, once they knew they wanted to be a dean. Based on the research questions of this study, I sought to understand the strategies women employed in their decision-making processes and the factors they considered in their decision to pursue the deanship.

Decision-Making Strategies

When making the decision to pursue the deanship, many women in this study took very concrete steps, asking their partners, family members, friends, mentors, and colleagues for advice; researching information about specific institutions; or gathering information from leadership development programs. More specifically, women in this

study exhibited certain decision-making strategies, including rational choice and rule-following choice processes (Table 5).

Table 5

Primary Decision-Making Strategies and Nudge Behavior Employed

Pseudonym	Primary Strategies	Primary Nudge(s)
Anne	Self-efficacy	Feedback
Beverly	Rational Choice	Structure
Colleen	Rule-Following	Default, Feedback
Eleanor	Rational Choice, Rule-Following	Structure
Isabel	Rational Choice, Rule-Following	Default
Joy	Rational Choice, Rule-Following	Default
Kate	Rational Choice, Rule-Following	Default
Lynn	Rule-Following	Default
Maria	Rational Choice	Feedback, Structure
Natalie	Rational Choice, Rule-Following	Feedback, Structure
Tia	Self-efficacy, Rational Choice	Structure
Virginia	Self-efficacy, Rational Choice	Structure

Note. The Primary Nudges listed are abbreviated from the following: Giving Feedback, Structuring Complex Choices (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Additionally, all 12 women illustrated nudges that occurred during their choice process, either from others or through their own practice (Table 5). For some, these decision-making strategies were disrupted by self-efficacy, whereas others were fueled by self-efficacy. This section highlights examples of three decision-making strategies, then synthesizes key factors and related trends.

Strategy One: Structure and Rationalize. Reliance on structure to navigate the choice process and using rational approaches by weighing consequences was a common strategy employed by women in this study. March (1994) defines rational choice theory as one that individuals “pursue as a logic of consequence” (p. 2). Decision-makers who follow a rational choice approach ask the following questions: “What actions are

possible?” “What future consequences might follow from each alternative?” “How valuable are the consequences?” (March, 1994, p. 2-3).

In thinking about ‘what actions are possible,’ some women considered alternate career paths when deciding whether or not to pursue the deanship. Eleanor was interested in being the dean but also believed that she could likely remain an associate dean if she chose to forgo the opportunity to apply for the deanship. Similarly, Virginia recognized that if she did not become a dean, she could see herself moving into a role with faculty senate in the interim. For Lynn, having the fallback option of a faculty role was comforting. She shared:

I mean, I still dream about it...If some fancy research university came and asked me to apply for an endowed chair or something, I would totally apply...I think feeling like you can go back to faculty is also a way to endure the really hard days as an administrator.

Joy and Natalie both considered roles in faculty development as alternatives to the deanship. Tia weighed whether to stay in administration in the graduate school, or if moving back to leadership within her STEM discipline would provide her with more opportunities for advancement in the future.

In addition to considering alternate career paths and consequences of pursuing the deanship versus staying as faculty, women considered consequences related to their quality of life. Kate weighed the potential impact on her schedule and how pursuing the deanship could change her time and routine with her kids; Beverly considered the impact on her family planning timeline; Maria relished her flexibility as a faculty member and saw the strict and busy calendar of a dean as a potential consequence. In this sense, the way that women deans in this study considered different factors, like family, geography,

and institutional type outlined below, was most often done by following a rational choice strategy and comparing values to consequences.

Nearly all women in this study employed some level of rational choice by weighing the potential consequences and benefits of pursuing the deanship. For some, this weighting process became a key strategy more reminiscent of the nudge ‘structuring complex choices.’ Thaler and Sunstein (2008) introduce the concept of ‘structure complex choices’ under the assumption that “people adopt different strategies for making choices depending on the size and complexity of the available options” (p. 96). In choice architecture, choices are frequently structured by others, like the way products are arranged in a grocery store, or in a higher education example, when nudges for time management are introduced by facilitators in a faculty development workshop (Culpepper et al., 2020a). In this case, the participants created the structure themselves to manage the complex decision-making process. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) describe this idea as a “compensatory” strategy wherein individuals assign weight to different attributes. Many women in this study discussed their strategies to assess the consequences and benefits of pursuing the deanship, whether related to family, salary, or professional development. Though the decision typically only included two options – apply for the deanship or do not apply – the complexity of the decision was significant and required structure for many of the women in this study.

Eleanor had been at the same institution for her entire career and had been asked to advance to roles in the dean’s office on several occasions. To describe her decision to pursue the deanship, she chose an image of two paths “where the one road clearly goes kind of over the hill and you can't tell where it's going.” Eleanor liked having information

to guide her decisions. She shared, “I did think about the pros and cons of all of that, and what I knew the challenges would be.” Eleanor weighed the potential consequences each time she was asked to lead, eventually choosing to apply for the deanship at her home institution as well as other institutions. She further structured her choice by ensuring that the other institutions to which she applied were places she would want to be a faculty member following her role as dean. Eleanor made her decision by gathering information and adding structure so the roads in her image were more certain.

Tia structured her choice process by weighing consequences and considering competing factors. When she realized she would be unlikely to pursue the deanship at the institution where she had spent her faculty career, she applied to deanships elsewhere and was offered a role on the other side of the country. Tia drew a detailed image that highlighted the factors she considered in her decision-making process, including geography, institutional prestige, and her family (Figure 2). She paid particular attention to the facial expressions in her drawing, recognizing that she was excited but torn between two places, and that her family members had mixed emotions. Tia used structure and a rational approach to help her decide whether or not to pursue this life change that would impact not only her career, but her family, too.

Beverly explicitly shared that her choice process was guided by a pro-con list. She shared an image of a woman staring at a wall covered in notes, representing the structured approach that she took in making the decision to advance. As someone who was not yet a full professor and was considering starting a family, Beverly weighed the timing of the opportunity against her career aspirations. She was very strategic in making

her decision to pursue the role of dean, and through her structured process, realized that she was willing to make compromises in other parts of her life in order to advance.

Strategy Two: Follow Rules and Defaults. Reliance on pre-established paths paired with consideration of context and identity was another strategy employed by women in this study. Rule-following approaches to decision-making are rooted in recognition, identity, and rules (March, 1994). Decision-makers identify a particular context and compare their situation to someone else in a similar role and situation (March, 1994). For women in this study, looking to other deans or mentors of similar identities who had successfully advanced was a common way in which rule-following behavior was observed. For example, Natalie referenced a conversation she had with a woman mentor who encouraged her to apply not when she felt ready – knowing that for many women, that time would never come – but rather when she was “ready to learn.” Natalie used this rule for herself to begin applying for deanships.

Lynn recalled hearing a graduation speech where the keynote shared that “we needed more women in leadership positions and that if leadership came knocking at our door, we should say yes and accept it.” As someone who identified as a woman, Lynn recognized that she was in a context where she had the opportunity to lead, and thus should follow that rule and take advantage. The strength of the rule-following strategy for Lynn was evident by the fact that she believed hearing this speech was “how [she] went into administration.” This approach came through again when she was serving as interim dean and the college opened a search for the dean. Based on her identity in this context, she asked what someone in her role would do in this situation and her response was clear, “I’m interim so of course I’m going to apply.”

Colleen's decision-making process was heavily rooted in rule-following approaches as she followed the advice provided by mentors and senior leaders at her home institution who believed she had to leave the institution in order to advance. For example, when she was presented with two offers to pursue the deanship, she started to second guess her decision, "I was still like, do I do this? Do I not do this? I think I had both offers then, so I was sort of on the fence about what to do." Then she recalled going to a meeting where the president of her institution announced that Colleen was planning to leave. In response, Colleen shared, "but when he said that -- it wasn't even like she's thinking about it. It's like, she's going to be moving on to other things." She then felt like she had no choice but to move into the deanship. As someone with multiple job offers, in that particular context, the rule-following strategy was to say yes and move forward.

For others, rule-following behavior was merely an initial strategy. Eleanor spoke about the 'normal' path for many department chairs to take on the role for a term and then return to the faculty:

There are plenty of department heads that do a three-year term or two three-year terms, or even three three-year terms and then resume their faculty roles and don't move further into administration. So, I never thought after my first four-year term, or even the second one, that what I was doing was preparing myself to move into an [assistant deanship].

She intended to follow that rule when accepting the role of department chair, and instead found herself pursuing the assistant deanship after her term was complete, thus deviating from rule-following behavior. Similarly, Joy found herself in a position where she was recruited by a search firm and applied to a deanship because it seemed like the natural progression and that it would be "good practice." However, when she was offered the position, she realized she wanted to stay at her home institution. Declining the role was

not the rule-following approach others likely would have taken. Instead, Joy followed her self-efficacy and own inclinations to stay rooted to a place where she believed she could make an impact, and where her family was more comfortable.

In several cases, like with Eleanor and Joy, acknowledging rule-following behavior and then going against it was a common strategy. Though these women chose not to follow the prescribed path and rules associated with it in that context, they still felt the need to acknowledge what they were ‘supposed to do,’ highlighting their tendency to rely on rule-following decision-making strategies. However, they were ultimately persuaded in a different way, either by weighing the consequences and simultaneously employing a rational choice approach, or by following their own self-efficacy instead.

Nudge behavior in the form of defaults was also a common way in which rule-following behavior – or deviation from it – was exhibited. Defaults in decision-making are viewed as the standard option, something set in place to create ease for decision-makers (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). For example, when starting a computer program, many individuals select the default settings, trusting the format chosen for them. The default for many women was to continue in their faculty roles after overcoming several barriers to get there. As a result, they described their decision to pursue the deanship not just as a choice to move forward, but also to leave behind their default identity as a faculty member.

For Isabel, a dean in a professional field, this was particularly salient. She described an image of a hand holding a key and argued that the image was blurry because the decision to pursue the deanship was not clear. She explained, “The idea of accepting [the key] also reflects a certain sadness due to the loss of my faculty identity.” For Isabel,

making the choice to pursue the deanship was a deviation from the default path of a faculty career and thus made her pause in her decision-making process. However, as she continued to say yes to administrative roles, she felt like her default path changed, “the door was still open to return to my life as a professor with no administrative responsibilities, but it was easier to move forward in leadership because I had already served in administration.” The image that Isabel shared highlighted the weight she felt from the default career path during her decision-making process to become dean, and her tendency to employ a rule-following approach by considering her role and context.

Lynn also felt that her default path was to continue following administrative opportunities. She had been asked to lead early in her career and felt like she could not say no when asked to serve in different capacities, like interim dean. Though Lynn eventually became interested in serving as dean, she compared deciding to apply for the position to being on a carnival ride, “I felt like I was on one of those [rides]. So, it just [felt] like I should apply.” For Lynn, the default nudge was to continue to move forward in administration. While she made the choice to pursue the deanship, she realized that she did not think “much about it,” as is often the case when selecting the default option.

Kate wrestled with the idea that a man was the default option for dean and dealt with imposter syndrome as a result. She described her decision to pursue the deanship with the image of a woman’s business suit. Kate explained that the image sparked “a whole bunch of issues related to whether I could really do it or if I was/am an imposter.” Gendered assumptions about who gets to lead and what a dean “looks like” were frequently discussed by women deans as they reflected on their decision to pursue the role. For Kate, being socialized to believe the default option for dean was a man made her

second-guess her own ability to pursue the deanship. She decided to apply for the role despite these doubts fueled by the nudges in her choice environment, whereas the rule-following approach would have been to see others like her, not in dean roles, and choose to follow that path instead.

Strategy Three: Lead with Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy was another strategy employed by women in pursuit of the deanship. Several women exhibited a clear belief in their self and their abilities that drove their decision-making process, but self-efficacy was also frequently tied to other strategies. For example, Joy had been following the default path to the deanship but relied on her own self-efficacy to turn down an offer and stay at her home institution.

One of the strongest examples of self-efficacy as a primary strategy came from Virginia. Virginia knew that she wanted to be a dean as early as graduate school. She had self-efficacy to pursue academic leadership early in her career but faced many barriers along the way. She highlighted these elements in her visual depiction of her decision to pursue the deanship – a collage representing her journey to the role. While some elements of choice architecture, like feedback from mentors and her wife, were present in Virginia’s collage, her emphasis on her own resilience made it clear that she was guided by self-efficacy. She anchored the collage with an image of a flower growing through concrete. Virginia shared, “I think that [image of the flower] appealed to me in a lot of ways, because I thought about not quite fitting in, and my last job being such a bad situation, and wanting to bloom somewhere else, but having to try and do it where I was, against the odds.” Her own desire to be a dean, self-efficacy, and confidence in her

unique value allowed her to base her decision-making process on persistence to the deanship despite the bias and discouragement that she faced along the way.

After working with a search firm and participating in a few unsuccessful searches, Anne found herself burned out and no longer wanting to pursue the role of dean. When the search firm reached out with a position at an institution that met Anne's qualifications, she agreed to apply once again. This time, Anne felt the role and institution were a perfect fit. She shared an image of red shoes from the Wizard of Oz. The image resonated with her and she believed it illustrated "that I always had the power to lead, to be a dean, but I was not ready or at least I thought I was not ready. I had to learn that I had the power within me." She credited her success to her mentors, family, and supportive colleagues, but ultimately believed that the guiding perspective in her decision-making process was her own self-efficacy.

All of the women deans in this study (in addition to Virginia and Anne who used it as their primary strategy) were guided by some sense of self-efficacy. While the default option to continue in administration may have nudged Lynn and Isabel to remain in administrative roles at their home institutions, they both grew interested in leadership and thus exhibited self-efficacy by pursuing these goals. Tia, Beverly, and Eleanor structured their choice processes through a rational approach, but ultimately did so in order to clarify their career goals and weight those aspirations against other factors. Maria noted that while she was nudged to pursue the role of academic dean by a colleague, she ultimately had to make the decision herself based on her own career goals. If the women in this study were not working toward becoming a dean in any way or did not have a

sense of self-efficacy, it is unlikely that the nudge or decision-making strategy alone would have propelled them forward.

Summary of Strategies. While the three strategies introduced in this section were the most common approaches highlighted, women deans often employed more than one strategy in their decision-making process in pursuit of the deanship. In some cases, both rational and rule-following decision-making strategies were used in different ways. For example, Eleanor considered the traditional trajectory for individuals in the role of department chair and weighed the consequences of remaining a faculty member or pursuing the deanship. She decided to deviate from the rule-following approach in favor of following the benefits expected from advancing in leadership. In other cases, nudges were the primary strategy employed, as was the case for Kate who wrestled with the default assumption that the dean was a man and Lynn who compared her decision-making process to a carnival ride.

Rational choice approaches were employed by nearly all participants, though some more diligently structured their choice process than others. Employing the self-nudge of structuring complex choices was more common among external deans, likely because they had more choices and factors to consider when applying to other institutions. With the exception of Colleen, rule-following approaches and reliance on or consideration of the ‘default’ were more common among internal deans. Self-efficacy served as a stand-alone strategy for some, like Virginia, whose determination to advance to the deanship outweighed any potential consequences, and who did not see herself in other leaders. Self-efficacy also served as a catalyst for overcoming or acting upon nudges, motivating women to pursue the deanship after receiving feedback or considering

their own skills and abilities. In some cases, women in this study were very aware of how they decided to pursue the deanship. In others, the ways in which they reflected on their decision-making processes highlighted the approaches that were most salient.

Factors Considered in Decision-Making Process

Women deans mentioned several factors that impacted their decision-making process, from the diversity of future colleagues to the impact on their health to their potential fit at a particular institution. The primary factors considered in the decision-making processes of women in this study included family, geography, finances, and institution type (Table 6).

Table 6

Women's Consideration of Key Factors in Decision-Making Process

Pseudonym	Institution Type	Family	Geography	Finances
Anne	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Beverly	Yes	Yes	No	No
Colleen	Yes	No	No	No
Eleanor	Yes	No	No	No
Isabel	Yes	No	No	No
Joy	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Kate	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lynn	Yes	No	No	Yes
Maria	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Natalie	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Virginia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note. 'Yes' indicates consideration of this factor in the decision-making process. 'No' indicates that the factor was not influential in the decision-making process.

Different from factors that motivated women to pursue the deanship or constituted their 'why,' these factors were elements that they considered as they were debating whether or not to advance. For example, while the potential to make an impact was a

reason to pursue the deanship, considering whether or not that impact would be more significant as a faculty member or dean, as was the case for Eleanor, was a factor in how she decided to pursue the deanship.

Institution Type. Institution type was a factor mentioned by many women deans as they considered whether and where they wanted to lead. Some women felt connected to a particular institution and wanted to become the dean there if possible. For example, Beverly acknowledged that she only considered pursuing the deanship when she did because of the opportunity to lead at her home institution. Eleanor noted that her home institution was “the place I wanted to be. It was the place I had built my career. So, I was really reluctant to leave in general.” Joy declined the offer to serve as dean at another institution because she felt called to finish the work she had started at her home institution. Similarly, Lynn applied to other institutions, but once offered the role of dean at her home college, withdrew her other applications. She realized that she “didn’t really wanna go anywhere else.” Lynn felt both connected to and accepted by the faculty population in her particular college and at her home institution and felt that may not be the case elsewhere. She shared:

I didn’t think that a) I could be a dean anywhere else and b) I didn't think I wanted to be a dean anywhere else just because I really like the specific circumstance of this college – and serving faculty of color at [this institution]. That’s super appealing to me.

This preference may have also been shaped by Lynn’s belief that her institution was unique in that the mission aligned more closely with a masters’ comprehensive institution than a doctoral university.

Colleen and Tia also felt connected to the populations at their home institutions and had spent many years there. They expressed an interest to lead at these institutions

but did not have the opportunity to advance and chose to leave as a result. In selecting other institutions to which to apply, Colleen realized that she was looking for an institution that served a particular student population. When Tia realized that she would have to apply elsewhere, she acknowledged that she was also interested in a particular population and institution type, “I didn’t want to be at a school that was primarily undergraduates, I really wanted to be at a research university.” Isabel was also focused on a specific population, recognizing that she wanted to work with graduate students as she advanced in leadership. Natalie only applied to public institutions since she and her husband had a strong belief in public education.

While some considered population served by a particular institution, or felt affinity to their home institution, prestige was another reason women focused on institution type in their decision-making processes. Many women in this study exhibited a preference for research-intensive, or what they termed, “Research One” universities. Maria shared that she was only looking at institutions of this type because she wanted to be at a “quality institution.” Similarly, Eleanor stressed that she was interested in institutions where she would be comfortable returning to the faculty ranks after a leadership role if needed. She only applied to places with “strong” programs in her discipline, all of which were research-intensive institutions. Tia acknowledged that she could advance beyond the deanship at other institutional types, “I’m already being asked to apply for presidencies and provostships, but at the next tier down.” She knew that she wanted to stay at a research-intensive institution and shared, “I want to stay as best I can in the top tier as long as I can, as far as I can, and as high as I can.” This ambition was due in part to the lack of women in her discipline, STEM, serving in leadership roles at

research-intensive institutions and a competitive desire to always be “the first.” Anne highlighted the importance of institutional prestige in defining success by sharing the reaction of her peers to her new role as dean. She said, “the feedback was mostly positive because I was coming to an R1 institution. If I had gone to a community college, or if I went to a small, private university, I don't know that the accolades would have been strong.” In this case, Anne received external validation that her move to a research-intensive institution was a true accomplishment.

Virginia had accepted a position at a regional comprehensive institution in order to continue to advance in leadership and expressed real concern about whether this move to what could be considered a ‘less prestigious institution’ would impact her career path for the long term. She noted, “I moved from an R1 to a regional. I was very concerned that I was never going to be able to break in R1s again.” Though she had significant experience working at research-intensive institutions, Virginia feared that by deviating from that institutional type for part of her career, she would struggle to have the credibility necessary to become a dean at a research-intensive in the future. In this way, the prestige of the institutional type was a consideration shaping her decision-making process.

Though serving as dean at a research-intensive institution was a requirement to participate in this study, women expressed different reasons for why they chose this institution type, ranging from population to prestige. Women in this study realized that part of deciding to pursue the deanship meant narrowing in on where they wanted to lead and for what type of population. Institutional type therefore became a significant factor for all participants in their decision-making process in pursuit of the academic deanship.

Family. Family was, in some ways, a differentiating factor for women in this study. For some, like Eleanor, Colleen, and Isabel, family was not a factor in their decision. Eleanor, who was single without kids, shared, “If there'd been a position in California or New York or Florida, I would have applied for it.” She did not feel restricted from applying to dean roles because of family responsibilities. Similarly, Isabel noted that she was partnered to someone who had flexibility to move wherever her job took them. While parental care might be a concern in the future, at the time that she was pursuing the deanship, it was not an immediate consideration. Colleen was married without children and also said that family was not a consideration in her decision-making process, going so far as to say, “I just have a husband, so it doesn't really matter,” though she did consult with her partner when making the decision to advance. Having the support from family was a motivating factor to pursue the deanship for Anne but was not something that she considered heavily in making the decision since her husband was retired and children grown.

Alternatively, for other women in this study, family played a critical factor in how they made their decision. Tia knew that she would be uprooting her large family and moving away from extended family, so she weighed the emotions of her family members heavily in her decision-making process. Virginia and her wife considered the location of their parents in their decision-making process, knowing that they would be their parents' caregivers and needed to be within a certain distance. Virginia shared, “We had drawn a little circle over where we could actually get to... [where] we were drivable or had a direct flight.” Virginia's wife was a critical support in her career journey and finding a position that fit both of their needs was a key consideration in her process. Maria and

Natalie found themselves in a similar position where they wanted to move closer to extended family to help with childcare or just to consider the well-being of their partners and children.

Family was also a considerable factor and a “big deal” in Kate’s decision-making process. She identified strongly as a mother and acknowledged that pursuing the deanship would change her normal schedule and routine with her kids, “I am still super-involved, I see my kids every day, I hang out with my kids, I’m just not the one necessarily driving them to and from school. It was a big deal to do that.” Kate also acknowledged the added responsibilities that her serving as dean might place on her husband, “it put a lot of pressure on my husband because I don’t have the flexibility that I had.” She realized that she was in a position to take on the deanship because she had the support from her partner, and that without him, she would have to find alternate methods for childcare. Through this, Kate implied that being single would not have deterred her from becoming the dean, but her family dynamics and situation were a significant factor that she considered when deciding to pursue the deanship. Similarly, Natalie noted, “I don’t think you can be successful in this type of job without supportive family... if I didn't have a supportive spouse that was willing to take on those additional roles and duties, the brunt of the domestic side of things, then it just wouldn't work.” Tia also acknowledged that having a supportive partner was critical in feeling as though she could pursue the deanship:

My husband understands that I have to stay at work for certain functions. And there'll be oftentimes I call him and I'm like, "Oh, I really want to come home." He's like, "You know you need to go. So and so is there and that person's really important for development or whatever." He gets it. And sometimes, he's my best coach.

Lynn gave her partner credit as well for helping her realize she was ready to be the dean. Her partner once said to Lynn, “I think you already made your decision that you're going to do the administration track even though you're not actually able to verbalize it.” Lynn acknowledged that her decision-making process was impacted by the support and honesty from her partner.

For Joy, family played a significant role in her turning down the deanship at one institution and waiting to advance at her home institution. She shared, “family reasons were a really big reason why I did not do that and then probably on the flip side why, when an opportunity came up here, I was like okay this is a good possibility.” Beverly also considered family planning and the potential impact on her partner:

I had a conversation with my husband about what this would mean for us and some of our family plans. We had talked about frankly having a child, what that might mean for that. We had to talk about what the timing of it would mean. And he was fully supportive about all of that. He was the main consideration.

The women in this study with partners and young children cited family as an important factor in their decision-making process, whether they were internal or external candidates.

Geography. Geography was a frequently mentioned factor in the decision-making process for women in this study. The primary reference to geography arose when discussing family needs – either being geographically bound because of children, parents, and partners or wanting to move to a location that was closer to extended family. Other reasons included a preference for a particular location. Kate had built a life where she was and was not eager to leave it, “I don’t want to pick up and start over again. I’ve lived here for almost 20 years. I have my little, tiny group of friends and those are the people I like, and I’m not dying to [leave].” Though Kate equated moving to pursue a leadership

role with ambition, geography was simply a factor that would impact how she decided what opportunities to consider. Thus, when presented with the opportunity to advance at her home institution, she readily accepted. Joy also felt connected to a specific geographic location. Having worked most recently in a warmer climate, when presented with the opportunity to move to a campus in a more northern place, she declined. Though there were other reasons for her decision to return to her home campus, geography – and the resultant weather – was a deciding factor. When Joy described her decision to pursue the deanship, she recalled looking out the window during her interview process, seeing snow, and having “a visceral gut reaction” that it was not the place for her and her family.

The role of geography varied for other participants. Colleen did not consider geography, other than feeling like she had to move out of her current institution in order to advance. However, when asked to what extent geography impacted her decision-making process, she said, “less than it should have...I took a position on the other side of the continent and instantly panicked. Was I really leaving a beautiful place that I loved to get experience that might allow me to return?” Geography was not a heavily weighted factor in Colleen’s initial decision-making process, but in later reflection, living in a certain geographic area was something that did matter to her. Alternatively, Anne did know that she preferred the culture in a particular part of the country, so she limited her search for dean positions. However, she also believed that she may be more amenable to moving outside of that region in the future. Virginia considered geography as it related to her identity. She questioned whether she would be hired in a particular geographic area given her sexual orientation and religious background. Other women in this study did not

connect their identity with geography when deciding whether or not to pursue the academic deanship.

Finances. Like family, finances were a somewhat polarizing factor for women in this study. For some, it was a critical consideration in their decision-making process, whereas for others, like Beverly, it was the “last thing that was the motivating factor.” Similarly, those who did not consider finances in their decision-making process more frequently associated it with their ‘why,’ stating, like Colleen did, that “it’s nice to have a better salary, but that’s not why I did it.” This was also the case for Joy, who prided herself on being “the dean with the crappiest vehicle,” Maria who said, “money’s nice, but it’s certainly not everything,” and Isabel who agreed that it was “always nice, but not really a primary motivating factor.”

Alternatively, for those who cited finances as being influential in some way, they talked about salary and financial opportunities in relation to their decision-making process, or their ‘how.’ An increase in salary was a valid consideration for Anne who said, “I don’t have to tell you the difference between compensation for a faculty – even a senior faculty – and the dean...the financial compensation was a factor.” She believed she “earned every penny” but “making the jump” to the deanship was incentivized by an increase in salary. Lynn said she “wasn’t thinking about financial opportunities” and was “pretty happy being just middle class.” However, when debating whether or not to pursue the deanship, she knew that serving as dean for one year would increase her pension amount. She told herself that she could handle the role for a year in order to reap that benefit. Though Lynn ended up loving her role as dean, this financial incentive helped her make the original decision to pursue it.

Other women felt that the compensation was necessary in order to take on the additional workload that came with being the dean. Kate said, “the job is so hard that the money has to be high because why else would you do this? It’s really too hard. It’s not an altruistic thing.” While she felt motivated to make a difference within her college, she also recognized the trade-offs she was making in her personal life. She considered the significant increase in compensation and financial support when deciding to pursue the role. Natalie argued that finances “actually played more of a role in [her] turning down an offer.” She noted that:

[Finances] didn't hurt the decision to become a dean because I knew that deans should make more money than I was making in my last job. So of course, that didn't hurt the decision, but on the other side, you are getting paid more because you have more responsibility and you're working more. So the two things kind of balanced.

Thus, when she was offered a salary that was only “a slight increase” from her previous position, she felt that “it didn’t make sense because you’re doing so much more work and you’re spending so much more time away from the family... I wasn’t gonna make the jump for just a minimal increase.” For Natalie, a specific salary threshold became a consideration in her choice process.

Tia identified as the “breadwinner” for her family and acknowledged that role and the associated pressure impacted the decisions that she made in her career trajectory, “I’m very pragmatic and calculated because I don’t want to be too high risk.” Virginia also said that financial opportunities were “definitely something I weighed.” She considered the potential costs associated with caring for her aging parent and believed that the salary range of the deanship would allow her to do so comfortably. She also acknowledged that moving institutions several times throughout her career gave her the flexibility to

negotiate a new salary every time she entered a new place, which was another factor she weighed in her decision-making process. Eleanor did not consider salary in her pursuit of the deanship because she knew advancing would inevitably increase her salary. However, like Virginia, she recognized the tendency for higher salaries to come to individuals who were hired externally. Eleanor chose to apply to two other deanships in part to give her “negotiation room with [her] current institution” and to make sure she was treated equitably. Lynn faced a similar scenario as an internal candidate. She learned that she was making significantly less than her White, male counterparts when serving as associate dean and focused on an increased salary as a point of equity. In thinking about salary and financial opportunities, she shared, “As long as you’re paying me the same as the White guy next to me, I’m happy.” In this way, financial equity and salary were considerations in Lynn’s choice process.

Summary of Factors. Women deans mentioned many factors throughout their reflections of their decisions to pursue the deanship, but family, geography, finances, and institutional type were the most common across participants. Family was a consideration that frequently impacted geographic consideration as well. For Eleanor, a single woman without children, Colleen, Lynn, and Isabel who were partnered without children, and Anne who had adult children and a retired partner, family was not a significant consideration. Alternatively, for Kate, Natalie, and Tia who had young children, having supportive and flexible partners was a key factor in their decision to pursue the deanship. Isabel and Virginia considered the geographic locations of aging parents, and Joy, Maria, and Natalie discussed dean positions in locations that would benefit their families. Finances were a differentiating factor in the decision-making process for some, while not

a factor at all for others. Perhaps most notably, the women in this study, all of whom were employed at research-intensive institutions, knew that they wanted to lead at specific institution types. They may have had opportunities to pursue leadership at earlier points in their career but were stringent in pursuing the deanship at an institution that aligned with their values and career goals.

Assumptions in Pursuit of the Deanship

In addition to these factors, many women in this study mentioned assumptions about the deanship that they believed to be true or were socialized to understand as the norm. Each of the following assumptions were mentioned by at least one third of the participants in this study: department chair is a prerequisite for deans; you must move out to move up; and the dean must hold a specific identity. In some cases, these assumptions directly influenced the decision-making processes of women in this study. In others, the women in this study found ways to dispel or overcome these assumptions in order to advance to the role of dean. There were no notable differences by intersectional identity in these assumptions.

Assumption One: Department Chair is a Prerequisite for Deans. Ten of the 12 women in this study referenced the ‘traditional career path’ in academic leadership when reflecting on their decision to pursue the deanship. The two who did not mention this path, Natalie and Anne, served in professional fields where they received terminal degrees and worked in their industry before pursuing a career in the academy. The assumption regarding the traditional career path centered heavily on the idea that in order to be dean, one had to serve as department chair first. Some of the women described this

requirement when considering the validation they received for their own path. Lynn was encouraged to apply for the deanship by someone who believed she was “on track”:

Basically, she was telling me that I had served in all the roles that I was supposed to serve in, so I was extremely well prepared, and I hadn't made any shortcuts. I had sat in each position for an appropriate amount of time. She would tell me all the time that I had an ideal CV for a position as a dean.

Lynn had not technically served as department chair but did serve as program director before her program had departmental status. She received feedback that her path was the ‘correct’ one because she had not taken “any shortcuts.”

Joy had also been conditioned to believe that department chair was a critical role, especially for women, so she followed that path exactly. She recalled, “I remember hearing a talk by someone who was looking at women in higher ed leadership positions and saying that women can't skip a step. Men can go from being dean to a president... but women have to be department chair then dean then a provost then a president.” Like Lynn, Joy was socialized to believe that women could not “skip a step” or take a shortcut.

Isabel also followed this path through the department chair but acknowledged that her trajectory was not perfectly aligned with the ‘traditional path’ since she served as chair while she was an associate professor. She noted, “I had in my head...I'm going to be department chair one day when I'm a full [professor]. But that just wasn't the reality of it. I think that part is a bit of a divergence, but I think it's probably a fairly typical story.” Isabel recognized that, while she assumed a leadership role earlier than she had planned, she still followed a “fairly typical” path by taking on the role of department chair before dean.

Alternatively, Kate, Tia, Beverly, and Colleen believed you were “supposed to be” department chair first but did not follow that path themselves. Kate shared, “I was

never department chair, which is more of a typical trajectory to go to the dean's office" but also described this idea as "a lore" and that she did not know if it was "empirically the path." Still, she defended her own path, saying that she did not "really view [not serving as department chair] as a deficit." Tia had decided that she wanted to pursue the deanship, but "everybody said you had to be chair first." She recognized that a chair position was less common for women and faculty of color and felt lucky that her institution had a rotating chair position that made it a more likely possibility for her. She was asked to serve as associate dean before her turn came for the department chair role, and she believed it prepared her in a different way, "I understand how the college works at the grad and undergrad level in a holistic way without the sort of fiefdom of a department." Though her path was ultimately not dictated by the department chair role, she still felt pressured by the expectation and needed to share why it was okay that she had not served in that capacity.

Beverly believed that "traditionally there's a very clear sequence of trajectory for people who come up through the faculty ranks. You're supposed to chair a department first, and then you can qualify ostensibly to become a dean...If a deanship doesn't come up, you might direct a center." She traced her understanding of the traditional – or preferred – path through the faculty ranks to academic leadership back to her graduate education:

There were those who rose through the professoriate and achieved full professor, then chair. They went on to dean and then went on to VP. And they're very respected and loved...regarded as very competent and brilliant and a great leader. There was another track where if you come in as a pre-tenure person, and you don't quite get tenure, they move you over into administration full-time...As a graduate student it wasn't really talked about and discussed overtly that this is a path, but do you really want to go that way?

Beverly was socialized to believe that pursuing the traditional path to leadership through the faculty ranks and role of department chair was the “respected” and “brilliant” way to be viewed as a “great leader.” She became a dean far earlier in her career than she anticipated, moving into the role after serving as a program director and before becoming a full professor. In many ways, Beverly surpassed the preferred path that she was socialized to work toward as a graduate student but did acknowledge that she had “planned on a much more traditional trajectory.”

Colleen was less tied to the department chair role specifically, and more to the idea that in order to serve as a provost – her ultimate career ambition – she needed to serve in a role that was “lower level, in the trenches [of] leadership” before she could advance. In reflecting on her choice process, she shared:

I went from being faculty to assistant provost, so I needed to go back. I needed to go either be a department chair, which I definitely didn't want to do, or take another leadership position...If I wanted to do leadership, I had to do a lateral move and get a deanship. Because I eventually would like to be a provost, and so this is required.

Colleen believed her path deviated from the norm and that she was “required” to meet some of those standards if she wanted to continue to advance.

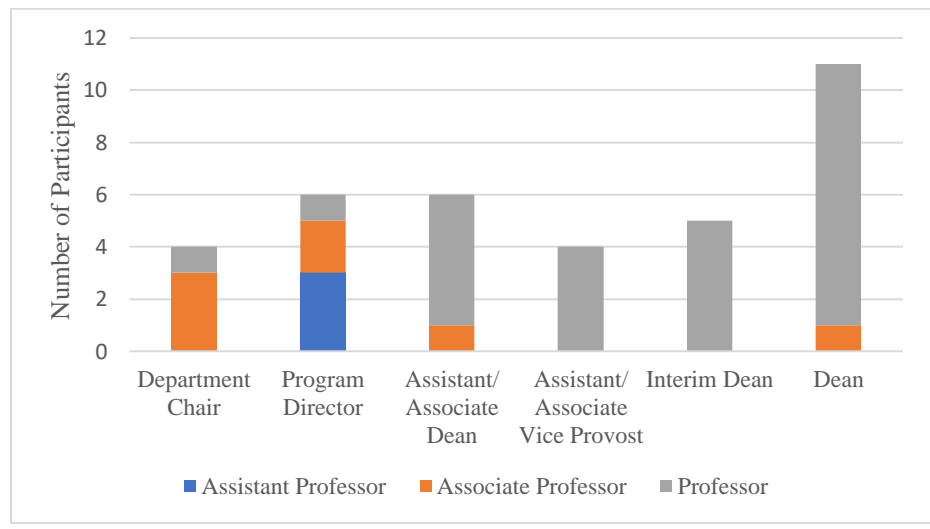
The assumption about serving as department chair frequently came up when discussing participants’ CVs. When asked to describe their career path, many stated that it was “linear” to some degree because they had followed certain steps and held certain roles before becoming a dean. For example, Eleanor noted, “I would say it’s pretty linear. I went from faculty member to department chair to associate dean to senior associate dean to dean. That’s kind of what somebody would expect I think.” She also credited her success in administration to her more traditional career path:

I feel like it exposed me to issues and where things are situated within the college and within the university...I felt like it was definitely to my advantage to have come up to the ranks that way. I feel like I have a lot more self-confidence and a lot more credibility having done that rather than having lateraled in from somewhere like Student Affairs.

Serving as department chair in order to gain this sense of credibility seemed more important than using the role to gain experience for the deanship. Interestingly, CV data showed it was more common for women in this study to serve as assistant, associate, or interim dean than department chair (Figure 4). Half of the women in this study served as assistant or associate dean prior to becoming the dean, five served as interim dean, and only four served as department chair. Only three of the 12 women (Virginia, Maria, Beverly) did not serve in any of these roles. Though the career paths and previous positions of the women varied, all of the women felt prepared in some capacity by their prior experience, whether or not they served as department chair first. In this way, many challenged the assumption that serving as department chair was required for the deanship, despite the impact of the assumption on their decision-making process.

Figure 4

Previous Leadership Positions for Women in the Academic Deanship



Assumption Two: Move Out to Move Up. Half of the women in this study were external deans who had to move from their home institution in order to advance in leadership. Alternatively, six women had the opportunity to advance internally. Of those who became external candidates, two wanted to lead at their home institutions but felt pushed out. Others recognized the reality of their situation – that there were no open positions for them – and actively searched elsewhere. One woman (Anne) wanted to advance to a role at a different institutional type and did not discuss her opportunities, if any, at her home institution. The assumption that in order to move up one had to move out, or move institutions, was true for at least five of the six external candidates, but the internal advancement of six women in this study challenges this assumption.

Colleen and Tia, both deans in STEM fields, wanted to become the dean of the college where they had become faculty members. Both had been at their institutions for the majority of their academic careers and felt committed to leading there. The deanship at Colleen's home institution had just opened when she started to consider leadership whereas Tia had been leading within her college for several years in associate and interim roles. While Colleen was explicitly told by mentors and colleagues, and in a leadership program, that she would have to go somewhere else and get experience before coming back to lead at her home institution, Tia was serving as interim dean in her home college and believed she would become the dean. Though Colleen received advice she did not want to hear, her colleagues and mentors were supportive of her decision to advance. Alternatively, Tia faced pushback from a group of White men in her college and realized that her home institution was not an environment that would be supportive for a leader who did not identify as a White man. Tia was not told that she had to 'move out to move

up' but quickly found herself in a position where she realized that in order to follow her career ambitions, she would have to leave her home institution. Similar to Tia, Virginia found herself in a work environment that she described as "toxic." She had attempted to advance into a role in the provost's office and found that it was not a good fit, but still believed she was ready to advance in leadership. Virginia learned through her own experience that if she wanted to move up, she, too would have to 'move out.' She acknowledged that doing so is "really common" and that "sometimes people can move up, but you have to wait a long time for that, and it has to be the right fit and right connection and whatever." The women in all three of these cases knew that they were ready to advance to the role of dean. Signals and feedback that they received from their choice environments, rooted in the assumption that one must 'move out to move up,' at least in the near future, impacted their decision to pursue the deanship elsewhere.

Maria and Natalie knew that the deans at their home institutions, both men, were not planning to leave in the near future. Thus, as they were considering leadership, leading at their home institutions was never considered a viable option. Maria shared, "I couldn't stay at [the institution] given that the dean just started. So, if I wanted to be the dean, it wasn't going to be there." Though Natalie was serving as interim dean, she knew that the previous dean was on sabbatical and would return. Maria and Natalie took pragmatic approaches and expressed less emotional attachment, likely because their timing was not such that leading at their home institutions was a possible option. Alternatively, Joy decided that she was willing to wait for an opportunity in order to stay at her home institution, rather than advancing to the deanship elsewhere.

While the assumption of having to move out to move up proved true for several women in this study, six women were offered the chance to advance without having to leave their home institutions. Four of these six – Isabel, Kate, Lynn, and Eleanor – moved from an interim position into the deanship. Joy and Beverly chose to advance at their home institution because of the timing of the open dean positions, but both shared that they were not interested in becoming the dean at other institutions. For some women, being bound to a particular institution may limit their chances of pursuing leadership roles. However, many women in this study chose to pursue leadership roles because of the timing of open roles at their home institution, challenging the assumption that moving out is required in order to move up.

Assumption Three: The Prescribed Identity of the Dean. Data shows that the majority of academic leaders identify as White men (Johnson, 2016). It is therefore not surprising that many women in this study referenced the assumption that the dean is a man, or that the deanship is designed for someone who identifies as a man. Many of the women in this study talked openly about these assumptions and the challenges that they faced by not fitting into the prescribed mold for an academic leader. Though several of these women chose to ignore these stereotypes or found ways to overcome them, their reference to the identity of the dean highlights the salience of this assumption in their decision-making processes.

Kate discussed the assumption of the dean as a White man most frequently. When describing her decision to pursue the deanship, she asked the question “what does a dean look like?” She acknowledged that her models for deans – her predecessors – were both “super tall White men” and recalled having a conversation with herself where she

realized, “I will never be that. I won’t be that.” From that realization came a next step, “I had to give myself permission to be like, no, no, no, you don’t have to be dean the way he was dean, and I don’t have to be dean the way the previous guy was dean.” Kate questioned what a dean looked like because she was trying to chart her own path forward even though she did not identify in the same way as those who came before her.

Several women deans discussed bias or discrimination that they faced throughout their career because of their gender identity and appearance. Colleen reflected on her time as a faculty member, noting, “you encounter a lot of discriminatory things, like asking to go to full professor and the chair of the Personnel Committee saying, ‘Well, you don’t look like a full professor.’” Virginia also recalled stories where she was underestimated and discriminated against because of her looks. She shared an example of her boss, a man, being surprised by her competence. Virginia realized that he did not believe she looked like a leader, “he honestly looked at me and he thought, ‘she’s fat, and she doesn’t look like she’s supposed to look,’ and I think it bothered him.” She elaborated on this assumption by saying:

I think there’s been along the way, a series of men, particularly, who don’t like outspoken women, and who have not seen me as a leader because of that, and because I didn’t look a certain way, and I didn’t act a certain way, and I wasn’t nice to them, and I wasn’t thin, I wasn’t wearing a cute skirt.

Kate’s question of ‘what does a dean look like’ came up for other women as well when their leadership status and potential was questioned by colleagues who did not think they looked “right.” Tia did not provide examples of this outward discrimination but acknowledged more subtle gender and racial dynamics in her discipline. Despite serving as interim dean and being considered successful in her role, she faced pushback from the White men in her department and knew she would not be selected to serve as dean. In

reflecting on that experience, she said, “And you know what they hired? They hired a late 50’s, White [man]... to them being distinguished meant White, old, male.” Again, Tia did not fit the mold of “what a dean should look like” and felt limited in her advancement as a result.

For some of the women of color in this study, both gender and race posed challenges to their advancement. Natalie shared her fears about being the first American Indian and woman dean, believing that if she failed, others who shared her identities would not be given the chance to lead in the future. She recognized that she was a deviation from the normal identity and profile of the academic dean, and believed that if she did not succeed, the role would be given back to the default demographics in the future. Lynn acknowledged stereotypes about Asian individuals who are “typically...not seen as natural leaders” and that “being gender queer and non-binary” was “not necessarily seen as an appropriate dean.” She feared that people would not see her as a leader or think that she “could lead a college” because she did not fit norms of what a leader should look like, or the identities a leader typically holds.

Several women in this study discussed norms and stereotypes about women that ran counter to what was expected of a leader. Both Beverly and Joy discussed these norms, acknowledging that women “resist sounding too cocky” and “never feel ready.” Joy also shared that leaders are supposed to have a “huge stature” and Virginia talked about being “outspoken and a little edgy.” This acknowledgement about what a dean is or is not supposed to do, and how women’s tendencies run counter to the role of the dean, reinforced this assumption. Although the women in this study persisted despite

challenges to their appearance, credibility, competence, and leadership ability, this assumption about the identity of a dean still impacted their decision-making processes.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to understand why and how women decide to pursue the academic deanship. Though all 12 academic deans who participated in this study identified as women and were leaders at research-intensive institutions, they had different motivations for pursuing the role of dean and varying strategies for making the decision to advance in leadership. This cross-case analysis highlights both the similarities and differences in the decision-making processes for 12 women who successfully pursued the academic deanship. All women expressed more than one reason for pursuing the deanship and exhibited more than one decision-making strategy in their process. A desire to make an impact was consistent across all 12 cases, as was the presence of self-efficacy, and the consideration of institution type as a factor in decision-making. In some cases, motivations and strategies differed depending on the race and ethnicity of the dean or their status as an internal or external candidate. In other cases, the variation could not be attributed to specific demographic groups or characteristics. The following chapter discusses these findings in more depth and provides implications to address the assumptions experienced or challenged by the 12 deans in this study.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Implications

Fewer women than men serve in academic leadership roles, including the critical role of academic dean (Johnson, 2016). This gender inequity is fueled by gender bias and norms that can impact advancement for women at every step of academic careers. The purpose of this research was to understand how and why, despite and amidst gender inequity and barriers to advancement, women decide to pursue the academic deanship. This research was framed by Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1984), decision-making theory (March, 1994), and choice architecture (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). The problem was examined through a collective case study of 12 women who had successfully pursued the academic deanship and reflected on their choice processes. Individual case and cross-case analysis resulted in several findings. In this final chapter, I further discuss key findings as compared to existing literature and offer implications for practice and future research on gender inequity in the academic deanship.

Discussion of Key Findings

Women in this study pursued the deanship in a number of different ways. Motivating factors to consider academic leadership varied and strategies employed in pursuit of the deanship ranged from being “pushed” to “taking the leap.” The how and why of pursuing the deanship was centered on more than one factor and included both individual interest and external cues. In terms of key findings and takeaways from this work, I found that women in pursuit of the academic deanship experienced barriers to their advancement; were motivated by the potential to make an impact, local cues from their environments, and leadership experiences; and employed three primary decision-making strategies while navigating norms and assumptions around academic leadership.

Barriers to Advancement

Women in pursuit of the deanship experienced many of the barriers to career advancement documented in the literature. For example, gender bias was highlighted by several women in this study at different points in their career. Similar to experiences documented in existing literature, Virginia was presumed to be incompetent by her male superiors (Eaton et al., 2019; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Heilman et al., 1992); Colleen experienced negativity as a woman in a STEM field (Hart, 2016; Miner et al., 2019), and Lynn was aware of challenges that she faced as an Asian woman in leadership due to social role expectations that she be accommodating rather than a decisive leader (Eagly & Koenig, 2008; Sy et al., 2010).

Women in this study experienced inequities in academic workload. Some women, like Kate, recalled doing an inordinate amount of service, at times feeling overburdened by the responsibilities. This finding is consistent with the idea that women are “asked more often” (O’Meara et al., 2017a) and tend to take on more relational service work that is less visible and valued (Hanasono et al., 2019). Although taking on more service roles was beneficial for the career advancement of some women in this study, like Virginia, it can also cause women to fall behind their male peers who are advancing in research, and their careers, at a faster pace (Babcock et al., 2017; Barrett & Barrett, 2011; Misra et al., 2010; O’Meara et al., 2017a). This inequity in academic workload is frequently observed at research-intensive institutions (Link et al., 2008; O’Meara et al., 2017b), as was the case for the women in this study.

Lack of mentors and role models is another frequently cited barrier to advancement for women in academia (Cullen & Luna, 1993; Seltzer, 2015). Nearly all

women in this study acknowledged the role of mentors when reflecting on their decision to pursue the deanship and, more broadly, their career path. Seven women in this study were guided to the deanship by male mentors, yet only two women (Beverly and Natalie) specifically mentioned being mentored by another woman in leadership. This tendency for aspiring women deans to be mentored by men suggests that role models and mentors from marginalized groups are still limited. Some research suggests that having shared identities with mentors may be beneficial to or desired by women (Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016). Either way, having mentors and sponsors is a critical component to advancement (Ginther et al., 2020; Hill & Wheat, 2017) and many women in this study credited their ability to pursue the deanship to their mentors, regardless of the gender of their mentor.

Many of the barriers discussed in the literature on women's advancement, and introduced by the women in this study, are rooted in the reality of masculine defaults (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). Cheryan and Markus (2020) defined masculine defaults as “a form of bias in which characteristics and behaviors associated with the male gender role are valued, rewarded, or regarded as standard, normal, neutral, or necessary aspects of a given cultural context” (p. 3). The question of ‘what does a dean look like’ (e.g., White and male) and assumptions that deans were more likely to be men were raised by multiple participants throughout this study. When comparing themselves to the role of dean, the women in this study always used a White man as their reference point. For example, Kate compared herself to her predecessors, both White men. Tia described the person hired for the deanship at her home institution as “White male, non-descript.” Lynn argued that people of color were always compared to the “White person” next to them.

This assumption around leadership and masculinity showed that the male gender was “regarded as standard” when it came to deans (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 3). Thus, women in this study were also facing a masculine default in their advancement to the academic deanship, and the added assumption related to race presented an additional default for women of color to navigate.

Defaults are distinct from differential treatment, wherein women are disadvantaged more than men in the same situation. Rather, masculine defaults, which can be subtler, are pervasive elements of culture (Cheryan & Marcus, 2020). Both differential treatment and masculine defaults were present in this study. For example, Isabel believed she would have been told to advance sooner if she were a man, suggesting that colleagues who identified as men received differential treatment in their promotion processes. Alternatively, Tia recognized that the culture within her college was a “pervasive element” that respected only leaders who identified as White men. Thus, she faced a masculine default when trying to pursue the deanship at that institution.

Although some women do face disadvantage throughout their career that may make them less likely or able to pursue the deanship, the women in this study were successful in their advancement despite barriers. However, the emphasis on the default option for the dean to be a man, or the focus on what a leader looks like, supports the presence of a masculine default. As Cheryan and Markus (2020) explained, the door to advance was open for these women, but the culture that they stepped into when opening the door still prioritized and favored White men. Thus, this study aligns with literature on barriers to advancement for women in academia and furthers the concept of masculine defaults.

Core Motivations to Pursue the Deanship

Both individual aspiration and cues from the local environment shaped women's reasons for pursuing the deanship. Nearly all participants identified a desire to make an impact, either by putting their unique skills and abilities to work, influencing their specific institution, or using the role of dean to create impact in a particular area (e.g., diversity, equity, and inclusion work), consistent with previous research (Gmelch & Wolverton, 2003). Similar to findings from Isaac et al.'s (2009) study on academic deans, not all of the women in this study initially aspired to be a dean. However, they expressed a belief that in order to make the kind of impact and change that they desired, they needed to be in key decision-making roles like the academic deanship. Their decision to advance was also aligned with a desire to create change rather than gain power, similar to work by Gino et al. (2015) showing that women are less likely to pursue advanced roles than men because of the power and conflict associated with them. Keohane (2010) also argued that women are more drawn to "behind the scenes" leadership "where they [can] make a difference in a cause they care about" (p. 47). While the deanship is far from "behind the scenes," the motivations women shared in this study often aligned with advancing a particular cause and finding meaning in the work.

Additionally, the desire to create impact aligns with the concept of transformational leadership. Though research on gendered leadership styles is mixed, women have been shown to be more transformational in their leadership approach (Eagly et al., 2003; Martin, 2015). Transformational leadership is centered on the idea that "effective leaders inspire their followers and nurture their ability to contribute to the organization" (Eagly et al., 2003, p. 570). The findings from the current study,

particularly women's desire to impact their departments and colleges, reinforce some elements of transformational leadership.

Cues from the local environment, often in the form of nudges, also shaped women's decision-making processes. Women mentioned feedback from mentors as well as input and support from colleagues when reflecting on why they decided to pursue the deanship. Peer networks and learning communities are shown to support and enhance women's career advancement (Ginther et al., 2020; O'Meara et al., 2019; Templeton & O'Meara, 2018). Though informal, the peer groups and collegial support that women mentioned in this study are consistent with literature on these interventions.

More specifically, involvement in leadership programs cued many women to pursue the deanship. For some, like Joy, this cue came when a mentor nominated them for a program, thus signaling their belief in the woman's ability to lead. For others, like Isabel and Beverly, these programs provided a space to reflect on what they wanted in their future career. Some women, like Maria, learned about their own potential for leadership through local or national programs. Eleanor garnered information about how universities operate, and Tia made connections with others in similar roles and disciplines. These experiences are consistent with literature on leadership development programs (Dannels et al., 2009; White, 2012) and peer networks (O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015). These groups are often termed "third spaces" where individuals can "face and transgress the most damaging aspects of organizational culture" outside of home and work (O'Meara et al., 2019, p. 1). These programs were more influential for some of the women in this study than others but were mentioned by 11 of the 12 participants in their reflection on their decision-making processes.

Career history and opportunities to serve in leadership roles were also critical to women's decisions to advance to the deanship. This was particularly true for those who served as interim or associate dean before pursuing the deanship. The five women in this study who held the role of interim dean acknowledged that doing so allowed them a chance to test out the role with less risk. Serving as interim dean alleviated fears about areas in which they did not have prior experience (e.g., fundraising) and gave them the confidence to pursue the deanship. Research suggests women can be more risk-averse than men in some contexts, or at least perceived as such (Huston, 2016; Nelson, 2015). In the context of career advancement, women are less likely than men to apply for a position if they do not believe they meet all of the criteria and thus are "likely to fail" (Mohr, 2014, p. 1). Having the opportunity to gain experience and try out the role of dean, perhaps with less risk of failure, made a significant difference in the decision to pursue the deanship for women in this study. For those who did not serve as interim dean, gaining experience as associate dean or in a provost's office also allowed them to observe and demystify leadership roles. Gaining information on the roles and responsibilities of academic leaders and having the chance to practice took some of the risk out of the equation, which contributed to women's decisions to advance.

Despite my focus on gender via women's decision-making processes, identity was not a key motivating factor in women's reflections. In this study, I focused on dimensions of identity but did not explicitly use intersectionality as a theoretical lens (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw, 2017). Using an intersectional framework may have allowed for a more thorough examination of the role of identity beyond gender. Though identity was not a core motivating factor for most women in this study, it did play a role in their

decision-making processes, and certain women were more aware of that impact than others. For example, some women believed their gender dictated their speed of advancement (Isabel) while others did not consider gender bias or related impacts at all because they were “used to crap” in their discipline (Colleen).

Consideration of identity was more pronounced for the women of color in this study (Beverly, Joy, Lynn, Maria, Natalie) and the women who identified as gender queer (Lynn) or lesbian (Virginia). The experiences of women of color, particularly Black women in the academy, have been characterized as the “double bind” (Malcom et al., 1976; Malcom & Malcom, 2011) or “double jeopardy” (Williams, 2014) based on “multiple marginality” (Turner, 2002) wherein women of color face multiple layers of bias for both their gender and race/ethnicity. Although women in this study did not explicitly state these terms, Beverly and Joy’s acknowledgement of their race and gender, often times as the only Black woman in their leadership spaces, highlights these concepts. Their reflections also emphasize the tendency for women of color to experience tokenism (Turner et al., 2011). Natalie spoke about her identity as American Indian and White, believing that she identified more strongly with her race than her gender. Her decision to pursue the deanship was impacted by a fear that if she failed, she would damage the chances for others with shared identities to advance. Natalie’s fear was not off-base considering failure is viewed more critically for women than men, especially when social roles are incongruent (Brescoll et al., 2010) as is often the case for women of color in the academic deanship.

Lynn identified as a gender queer woman and believed she was in a supportive environment that saw her for who she was and accepted her as a leader. However, she

was hesitant to apply to other institutions because she did not think she could go elsewhere and be seen as a leader, reinforcing concerns that can be common for women who do not identify as heterosexual (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2015). Virginia spoke about her appearance and sexual orientation as elements of her identity that may not fit a ‘traditional’ or stereotypical mold of a leader or a woman. This is consistent with research on “intersectional invisibility” that lesbians may face when they do not fit into heterosexual norms of what women “should” look like (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2015). Although aspects of identity did not necessarily motivate women to advance, they did shape how women, particularly those from historically marginalized racial groups or sexual orientations, decided to advance.

Primary Decision-Making Strategies

Women in this study employed several decision-making strategies in their pursuit of the academic deanship. Three primary strategies emerged: structure and rationalize; follow rules and defaults; and lead by self-efficacy. Women were not siloed to one decision-making strategy, but exhibited primary strategies or employed different elements of each at various points in their process. These data suggest that the decision-making process for women in pursuit of the deanship is fluid rather than static, as supported by the numerous individual and external factors women mentioned when considering the deanship and the different strategies employed by each participant. This fluidity is somewhat consistent with March’s (1994) theories on decision-making, as the author suggests, “for theorists of rule following, consequential [rational] choice is simply one of many possible rules that may be evoked and followed when deemed appropriate” (p. 102).

Several women employed a structure and rationalize approach wherein they gathered and organized information, weighed the benefits and consequences of all possible options, and used data to drive their decision-making process. This approach aligns with the research on women being more risk-averse and preferring to have more information and confidence before making a decision (March, 1994; Huston, 2016), as outlined in the previous section. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) suggested that structuring complex choices is an appropriate nudge behavior when choices increase in number or complexity. Women who applied to external deanships were more likely to be structured and rationalized in their process, likely because they had more factors to consider, including geography, institution type, and potential impact on family. For example, Tia drew an image (Figure 2) depicting all of these factors as she weighed whether or not to move her family across the country in order to pursue the deanship. The image she shared illustrated her attempt to structure the complex choice she faced in pursuit of the deanship.

Internal candidates for the deanship were more likely to exhibit rule-following decision-making tendencies and defaults. Many of the women who advanced internally were asked to lead or were already serving in an interim capacity where it made sense to them to say yes, accept the default, and pursue the deanship. For many women in this study, once they were in a leadership role they wanted to continue. This study highlights the critical moment of being asked to lead or internally advance, consistent with previous research. For example, Saylor et al. (2017) found that “the majority of associate deans were appointed to their position internally, rising through the faculty ranks” (p. 1). Hinck and colleagues (2017) also found that one of the most important factors for women

administrators' career choice processes was being encouraged to apply. Women are less likely to be asked to take on roles with formal leadership capacity (Barrett & Barrett, 2011) which may prevent them from having the opportunity to enter this default path in the first place. And yet, for Eleanor, Kate, Lynn, Natalie, and Tia, it was the concrete experience of serving as interim dean that was pivotal in their decision to follow the default option and advance to the deanship.

Self-efficacy was another strategy employed, particularly by participants who knew they wanted to pursue academic leadership despite challenges, barriers, or consequences. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994) "assumes that people are more likely to attempt and sustain behaviors when they believe that they have the necessary capabilities to perform them and that the effort will produce desired consequences" (Lent & Brown, 2013, p. 562). Several women in this study employed self-efficacy by deciding to persist despite setbacks, pushing forward to the role of dean even when positions were not open by moving institutions, and making decisions that weighted career advancement above other factors (e.g., family, geography). They believed they had the "necessary capabilities to perform" and be the dean but did not always know that their effort would "produce desired consequences." This was the case for Tia, who believed she was excelling as interim dean and yet still was not offered the role of dean at her home institution. In this way, self-efficacy and SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) align with aspects of the choice processes and experiences of women deans. However, these data suggest agency may be another applicable concept for understanding women's decisions to pursue the academic deanship.

As it relates to faculty and academic careers, agency is defined as “taking strategic and intentional actions or perspectives toward goals that matter to oneself” (Campbell & O’Meara, 2014, p. 50). As Terosky et al. (2014) shared, “agency is...especially relevant in contexts where (a) a group is known to face disadvantages based on representation, structure or culture, and (b) the onus is on the individual to advance.” (p. 61). Women in pursuit of the academic deanship lack representation, face structural and cultural barriers, and are often responsible for their own advancement, as was the case for several women in this study.

Agency can also be constrained by one’s environment if barriers are in place or necessary resources are not available (Kezar & Lester, 2011; Marshall, 2000; O’Meara, 2011; Templeton & O’Meara, 2018). Thus, the constraints placed on the women in this study by a lack of opportunity for advancement or gender bias at their home institutions limited their agency to advance at times. Agentic perspectives, or “way[s] of viewing a situation and one’s role in it to advance goals,” (O’Meara, 2015, p. 333) were employed by many women in this study despite potential constraints. For example, Beverly was hesitant to pursue the deanship while still an associate professor but decided to consider the opportunity in order to fulfill her leadership goals. Tia had hoped to become the dean at her home institution but felt that the biased culture in her department prevented her from advancing. She reflected on her situation and took it upon herself to consider new possibilities for leadership at other institutions. Overall, women in this study appeared to be guided by self-efficacy and agentic perspectives in their pursuit of the academic deanship, allowing them to overcome any setbacks.

Consideration of Key Factors

The four key factors women highlighted when reflecting on their decision to pursue the deanship included institution type, family, geography, and finances. The findings from this study extend some existing research and deviate from other literature on these factors.

Women in this study had a preference for research-intensive institutions, viewing them as “high quality.” This is ironic in some ways given the extensive work showing women are more likely to face gender discrimination and underrepresentation at research universities (Hart & Cress, 2008; Johnson, 2016; Manchester et al., 2013; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2017; O’Meara et al., 2017). The preference for research-intensive institutions in this study does not negate the research on adverse experiences for women in these types of institutions. However, since most faculty are trained in research institutions, they can often act as an indicator for prestige (Clauset et al., 2015; Gardner, 2013), which aligns with the preferences shared by many women in this study. Institution type was also of interest to some women in this study who valued working in public education or with specific populations of students. Women are more likely to lead public institutions and to be presidents at associate degree granting institutions (ACE, 2017). The women in this study were deans at doctoral degree granting institutions, but the emphasis on community or population-serving missions aligns somewhat with this tendency for women to lead at specific institution types.

An extensive body of literature documents the connections between career advancement, family, work-life balance, and academic motherhood (see, for example, Armenti, 2004; Moors et al., 2014; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2007; Winslow, 2011). In

academic leadership more broadly, “32% of women college presidents have altered their career progression to care for a dependent, spouse or partner, or parent” (ACE, 2017, p. 1). Thus, consideration of family as a key factor in the decision-making processes for women deans was not a surprise. However, it was interesting to see how women without young children perceived their movability and definition of family. Eleanor, Anne, and Isabel believed they could move anywhere, even if they did not want to, and Colleen went so far as to say she “didn’t have a family” despite being partnered. The norms around who gets to claim work-life balance for family reasons were exacerbated by some of these remarks, similar to research on single faculty members (Culpepper et al., 2020b). Several of the women in this study with children believed they needed a supportive partner in order to pursue the deanship and that advancing would not have been possible without support at home. This aligns with research suggesting that partners can impact women’s ability to balance work and parenting (Abroms & Goldscheider, 2002; Comer & Stites-Doe, 2006).

Geography was also a consideration in the decision-making process, often because of family. All of the women in this study expressed some sort of geographical boundary, whether that was staying at their home institution or limiting their search to an area near aging parents. Research on women faculty suggests that women tend to be more geographically bound, and that limitation can “be more harmful to women’s careers than men’s” (Kulis & Sicotte, 2002, p. 1). Despite these potential challenges presented by family and geography, neither were explicitly perceived as barriers to advancement for women in this study, but were instead considered potential factors as they chose to pursue the academic deanship. This choice to balance other aspects of life with a career, even if

it meant a prolonged path to leadership, was another agentic perspective exhibited by many women in this study.

Lastly, salary and financial opportunities were critical to some and unimportant to others. Women in this study were aware of the gender pay gap (AAUW, 2020) and expressed a desire for fair pay that was both equal to their peers and commensurate with their workload. Others believed it was not about the money – a privileged but noted perspective. This is somewhat consistent with literature showing that women are less likely to be motivated by financial gains than men (Hinck et al., 2017). However, without comparing these findings to those of academic deans who identify as men, or having unanimous data about salary, the only conclusive finding about financial opportunities for women in this study was that the significance of the factor varied.

Assumptions, Narratives, and Norms

In addition to these strategies and factors, women in this study mentioned several assumptions, narratives, and norms that shaped their decision-making processes. One of the most salient assumptions was that one had to “move out to move up,” particularly for the external deans in this study. Some women heard this narrative from mentors or colleagues (Colleen) or experienced it first-hand (Tia). For others, the reality of the academic hierarchy and lack of leadership opportunities meant that they had to leave if they wanted to lead (Natalie, Maria).

The mobility or movability of women in academia has been studied for decades, with earlier literature focused on “the requirements of two-career households” and how women navigated their careers when immovable due to family responsibilities (Marwell et al., 1979, p. 1225). A more recent study of women in academic medicine found that

“movers” – those able to change geographic locations for their career – were more likely to be promoted and advance in their careers than those who were less mobile (McLean et al., 2013). Other researchers in economics suggest men are more likely to move for a job than women (Chamberlain, 2018), and thus women may be disadvantaged by their inability to “move out” in order to “move up.” This study does challenge the assumption that an individual has to leave in order to pursue leadership since half of the participants were able to advance at their home institutions. However, it also highlights the narratives and cultural norms that exist at some institutions where internal hiring is not a common practice. If women are, in fact, less movable than men, this culture and narrative may disadvantage women by limiting their opportunities for advancement. This issue and assumption may be further exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic with more women taking on the brunt of household work, childcare, home schooling, and elder care (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020; Malisch et al., 2020), and thus less likely to move for a job.

Another narrative that developed for several women in this study was related to ambition – whether it was socially desirable to be ambitious and to what extent they were “ambitious enough.” When asked to draw or share an image that described their decision to pursue the academic deanship (Appendix G), many women shared images that were negative or represented loss in some way. For example, Maria shared an image of being pushed off a cliff to represent being pushed into administration. Isabel described an image of a hand accepting a key but also believed that this acceptance meant losing her faculty identity. Lynn and others discussed the idea of administration as the ‘dark side’ and feeling like one was not supposed to aspire to roles outside of the faculty ranks. For women in this study, the decision to become a dean was often associated with negative

experiences. This negativity toward leadership could be due to the reality of leadership roles being associated with politics and conflict – something that women are less interested in pursuing than men (Gino et al., 2017).

Alternatively, women could be protecting themselves from backlash for being viewed as too agentic or ambitious (Rudman & Glick, 2001) and instead providing socially desirable responses (Paulhus, 2002) about their interest in academic leadership. Said another way, women in this study may have repeated dominant narratives around career advancement in response to interview questions, despite many of their stories of pursuing the deanship being positive, in order to protect themselves from seeming too ambitious. For example, Eleanor spoke about her hesitance to pursue leadership roles at the expense of her faculty career. She expressed several times that she wished to excel in her discipline and maintain respect as a faculty member, and yet her advancement through the academic ranks was rather seamless. Similarly, Anne shared that she felt prepared to pursue the deanship the entire time and was quite positive throughout her research interview. Yet, she faced setbacks when working with a search committee and was less upfront about those challenges and more likely to sugarcoat the experience. The tendency to share the socially desirable response, even in the research interviews for this study, reinforces the narratives around agency and ambition for women pursuing leadership.

Although some women were unapologetic about their ambition in pursuit of the deanship (Virginia, Tia, Anne), others questioned their level of ambition. For example, Kate suggested that she was not ambitious enough to leave her home institution, whereas Colleen was perhaps too ambitious, choosing to leave a place and life that she loved in

order to pursue the deanship. Of the 12 women in this study, nine would have preferred to stay at their home institution given the choice. Some women, like Joy and Lynn, were even willing to pass up opportunities to lead elsewhere in order to stay at the same institution. Others, like Colleen and Tia, wanted to stay at their home institutions but left because their desire to pursue leadership was stronger. The experiences outlined here lead one to ask what requires more ambition – leaving one’s home institution or being grounded in and adhering to one’s values and preferences? Research suggests women may not be equally represented in leadership roles because they lack ambition (Keohane, 2010), when in reality, there may be other narratives and assumptions guiding their own understanding and application of ambition toward academic leadership.

Implications for Practice

The context of higher education must be acknowledged as we consider the key findings and related implications of this research. Academia is a hierarchical, gendered (Acker, 1990) and racialized (Ray, 2019) field, and that context impacts the choice environment wherein women decide whether or not to advance to the deanship. Many women in this study acknowledged the gendered nature of higher education. Some perpetuated the racialized nature by not acknowledging their privilege as White women. Others knew the academy was flawed in this way and believed they could create change in their local environment by serving in the academic deanship. In considering implications for practice, there is a need to systemically address the gendered and racialized norms perpetuated in the academy while providing knowledge, support, and space for women navigating existing structures now.

Recommendations for Systemic Change

Challenge Assumptions and Norms about Leadership. Increasing the representation of women in academic leadership roles, like the deanship, is an important goal, but doing so requires changing assumptions and norms around who gets to lead. The assumptions highlighted in this study, including those about the identity of a dean, the requirements of the traditional career path, and the need to leave an institution in order to lead, all disadvantage women. The mold of a leader as a White man has been perpetuated, and we continue to operate “with models of leadership designed primarily by and for men, models passed down for millennia” (Keohane, 2010, p. 54). These narratives actively shaped the decision-making paths of women in this study. Although many women were able to see past these norms and decide to advance despite them, these narratives may be deterring other women from moving forward in leadership roles.

Challenging dominant narratives, like the dichotomy of ‘traditional’ versus ‘non-traditional’ when describing paths to leadership, is another recommendation. Several women in this study compared themselves to the ‘traditional path,’ as evident by the pervasive assumption that department chair was a pre-requisite for the deanship. This dominant narrative made several women, like Tia, Kate, and Beverly, justify their deviation from the ‘traditional’ path. It ultimately did not deter them from advancing, but “dominant discourses around power, gender, leadership, and academe” can impact leadership and career experiences (Acker, 2012, p. 424). The emphasis on the ‘traditional’ narrative perpetuates a leadership path and career trajectory built by and for men, and thus should be challenged by showcasing and valuing alternate paths to academic leadership.

In considering women's ambition for leadership, Keohane (2010) shared, "visionary strategic thinking and clear definitions of success are essential to the accomplishment of any major goal. Yet we should also avoid impoverishing the future by prematurely closing off diverse options for development" (p. 54). Recognizing different paths to leadership and different definitions of success, rather than relying on a single mold, is critical to reaching the goal of diverse leadership. Challenging existing norms around who gets to lead, what is considered 'traditional,' and how we define and reward leadership more broadly, will need to be addressed in order for systemic change to occur.

Share Responsibility for Equity. In order to create systemic change, sharing responsibility is imperative. Changing the norms and assumptions about who gets to lead is not going to happen if historically marginalized groups are the only ones trying to change the process, especially if they have to fit into an existing mold in order to gain decision-making power. The American Council on Education's (ACE) Moving the Needle campaign is one example of existing change at a national level. The mission of this campaign is to "increase the number of women in senior leadership positions in higher education through programs, research, and resources," (ACE, 2021, p. 1). The campaign aims to both increase urgency for the importance of diversified leadership and provide support for women and institutions to enhance gender equity in academic leadership (ACE, 2021). One of the campaign elements is a pledge for individuals to commit to advancing women through sponsorship, empowerment, education, and training opportunities.

Though Moving the Needle (ACE, 2021) is focused on chief executives or presidents, this type of campaign, and the extensive data to support it, is a model for

addressing gender inequity in academic leadership that could also be applied to the deanship. For many of the women in this study, like Kate, Lynn, and Maria, having the support from senior leaders at their institution was critical to their decision to advance. Maria's mentor went so far as to call a search committee at another institution to recommend her, even though their process was already underway. The shared responsibility for advancing capable, qualified, and impactful women into leadership roles was a deciding factor in many of the cases presented here. McNair et al. (2020) argue for "a shared starting point" stating that "people drive change, lead change, and sustain change. Lasting change happens when educators understand both the meaning of equity and that meaning is represented through personal values, beliefs, and actions" (p. 1). A campaign aimed at taking individual actions toward leadership equity in academia could benefit individual women and nudge the leaders at their institutions who have the power to create space for academic leadership.

It is likely that these approaches and attempts at systemic change will be met with pushback. The research on the value of diversity on leadership teams and in organizations is clear (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Hurtado, 2001), but systemic change is not always welcomed. Knowing that this type of change is necessary for long-term sustainability, focusing on shared responsibility and gaining buy-in from individuals other than women is a recommendation stemming from this work.

Recommendations for Individuals and Organizations

Systemic change is imperative but change at other levels is also important to advance gender equity in the academic deanship. Cheryan and Markus (2020) acknowledge that "successfully addressing masculine defaults requires simultaneous and

aligned changes on multiple levels of culture” (p. 2). Additionally, they acknowledge that there is some need for women to fit current molds in order to advance now, but caution against making this the norm – one that perpetuates masculine defaults as the standard. Without placing full responsibility on women to advance, it is important to provide supports and structures to help them navigate the current labyrinth of leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2015) in higher education. Similarly, we should also acknowledge organizational strategies and solutions that can be pursued to support women in their advancement. Though not exhaustive, this section provides recommendations for both individuals and organizations to create space for women to lead, increase transparency about advancement processes and opportunities, and continue to persist in their pursuit of academic leadership.

Create Space for Women in Leadership. Consistent with previous research (Dominici et al., 2009), having space and opportunity to lead, whether as an assistant dean, interim dean, faculty senate chair, department chair, program director, or other role, was critical to the advancement of women in this study. Several women expressed an interest to pursue leadership at their home institution, whether because they wanted to create an impact there or felt tied to a geographic location or institutional community. However, in many cases, the opportunity to lead was not available. Institutions may both consider their interim advancement process and identify other ways in which individuals can receive training or opportunities to engage in practices of leadership (e.g., chairing a committee). This is especially important knowing that interim positions are limited, and other leadership roles may not be frequently vacated. For example, in some institutions the same individual can serve as department chair for decades. Instituting a rotating chair

position may be one way to increase the chances for women to serve in this role. Sharing other opportunities for leadership, whether through assistant or associate positions, directorships, programmatic roles, senate positions, or other service work is another way for institutions to expand leadership opportunities for women.

For women who do not have geographic career mobility, this lack of opportunities at home institutions could lead to stalled careers or lack of leadership experience altogether. Creating space for leadership may occur at any level in an institution but requires support and initiative from current institutional leaders. In many cases in this study, individuals within the institution saw potential in these women and found ways to advance them in leadership, whether by asking them to serve in associate or interim roles (Colleen, Eleanor, Kate, Isabel, Natalie, Tia), training them through a shadowing process (Lynn), nominating them for leadership development programs (Joy), or recommending them to search committees at other institutions (Anne, Maria). In institutions where formal leadership positions and opportunities to advance do not exist, it is critical for institutions, sponsors, mentors, and allies to consider other ways to create space for women in leadership. This might include a format similar to many ADVANCE programs, wherein leadership positions are created artificially to provide responsibility and visibility to women (O'Meara & Terosky, 2010; Templeton & O'Meara, 2018). Serving in senate leadership roles, chairing an executive level search committee, or heading a university-wide task force are other, less traditional ways for women to gain experience and create impact. Doing so may not only help women gain critical experience, as outlined in this study, but also start to challenge the traditional path to academic leadership by creating alternate entry points.

In addition to sharing and creating spaces for leadership outside of the traditional and formal roles, space needs to be made for different types of leadership in job descriptions and hiring processes. If these processes continue to prioritize formal roles that women are less likely to hold without valuing and recognizing leadership in other capacities, they are only perpetuating the traditional career path, and thus perpetuating gender inequity in academic leadership.

Increase Transparency of Processes and Opportunities. In considering recommendations for individuals and organizations stemming from this study, the concept of increased transparency can serve as a grounding force. Bohnet (2016) recommended increasing transparency through information disclosure as a solution for mitigating bias and improving gender equity. For example, many of the women in this study were asked to lead by colleagues, mentors, and peers. Serving as interim dean was a particularly important factor in their decision to advance, yet the process for being asked to serve in this capacity was ambiguous. In some cases, the predecessor asked; in others, women were asked by the provost. It is possible that a more formal process was in place at some institutions, but the women in this study only knew that they had been asked and chose to accept. If advancing requires this sort of recommendation or tap from an individual in power, to what extent is the opportunity equitable? Many of the women in this study had not expressed explicit interest in leadership. Is it possible that women are disadvantaged and less likely to be asked to lead because they are less likely to self-promote (Cheryan & Markus, 2020)? In this study, women were advantaged by these seemingly informal processes. However, when transparency of information is not present, women and faculty of color are typically at a greater disadvantage, as is the case with a

lack of transparency around academic workloads (Barrett & Barrett, 2011). One way to enhance gender equity in academic leadership may be to provide more transparency and information on processes for selecting internal candidates for interim roles or other positions in which a formal application process is not required. Institutions should evaluate their internal processes for this type of advancement and ensure an equitable way to encourage leadership, recognizing the powerful role that having the chance to lead in an interim capacity can provide.

Another way to increase transparency is through information and data related to leadership at the institution level. Several women in this study mentioned their experiences in leadership programs and the influential role that having information from colleagues or about leadership more broadly played in their choice process. Providing information about institutional operations and advancement processes through formal leadership programs is one approach institutions may consider.

Data is another type of information that can be used to both increase transparency and enhance equity (McNair et al., 2020). Many of the women in this study believed that serving as department chair was a requirement for the deanship, when even Moore et al. (1983), who outlined the traditional path to the presidency, argued that many deans come straight from the faculty, not the role of department chair. Providing data on how many individuals actually take that route may help women dispel existing assumptions about paths to leadership. For example, if Colleen had known that other individuals in her field had advanced to the role of provost without being a dean first, she may have had data to support her decision to stay at her home institution, instead of leaving abruptly in order to advance. Data examining leadership experiences by race and gender across an institution

may also help institutional leaders understand if they are perpetuating or addressing the gender gap in academic leadership. Recent research on the use of dashboards to document academic workloads and service work has helped to increase equity (O'Meara et al., 2020). The dashboard intervention may prove helpful for identifying who has access to leadership opportunities. This type of transparency could be used to more equitably distribute internal advancement or leadership opportunities.

Reflect and Persist Toward the Deanship. Self-efficacy and agency were highlighted by all participants in this study at different points in their choice processes. Though women continue to face obstacles in their pursuit of academic leadership, one of the most salient messages from this study was to keep moving forward if leadership is a career goal. When asked what advice they would give to other women considering the academic deanship, the deans in this study overwhelmingly provided encouragement to “say yes” to the opportunity. Anne, Lynn, Maria, and Isabel urged women to “consider it,” “give it a try,” and get started earlier than when you think you are ready. Beverly echoed sentiments of self-efficacy and agency with a reminder to share and celebrate accomplishments. Joy suggested accepting failure as routine and moving on, while both Eleanor and Virginia believed that advancement requires clarity on motivations to pursue the role and self as leader. Colleen and Tia cautioned to consider how the deanship will impact your life. Kate suggested talking to others who have served as dean, and Natalie recommended finding a good mentor and support system.

This advice aligns with agentic perspectives by encouraging women to consider leadership as a possible career, and agentic actions by nudging women to apply, even if they do not feel ready. As O'Meara (2015) shared:

Agentic perspectives play an important role in career advancement and toward gender equity...However, neither individual career advancement or organizational change will be successful unless agentic perspectives lead to agentic actions, and unless gendered organizational practices are systemically and continuously diagnosed and addressed by actors within an organization. (p. 351).

Systemic and organizational change is necessary to achieving gender equity in the academic deanship, but women may not have the luxury of waiting until that happens. Challenging norms and processes when possible, reflecting on personal values, and continuing to persist with belief in one's abilities are all recommendations for individuals to consider in their pursuit of the academic deanship.

Implications for Future Research

This study provides a unique qualitative depth to the problem of gender inequity in the academic deanship. In particular, the visual data collected adds a depth that is not common in research on women in academic leadership. The images shared by participants highlighted emotions, factors, and considerations in their choice processes that may have otherwise gone unsaid. The use of a visual and narrative prompt also provided an opportunity for participant reflection outside the context of an interview.

That said, this study is not without its limitations, many of which connect to areas for future research. As Acker (2012) stated, "looking through a series of lenses will add to the depth of our comprehension of women and academic leadership, as long as we acknowledge that each individual perspective is necessarily imperfect" (p. 424). In addition to the lenses used in this work and a call for more research using visual data, there are other continuations of and complementary research paths to this study. For example, four of the 12 women described images rather than providing or drawing their own because they could not find an image that accurately represented their decision-

making process. Although such instances in this study did not appear to be related to aspects of identity, research does suggest that when searching for an image, the algorithms of search engines and their tendency to “reinforce oppressive social relationships,” and racism in particular, (Noble, 2018, p. 1) may impact an individual’s search process (Turner & Griffin, 2020). Recognizing this potential disadvantage in the data collection process for women of color or from other marginalized identities is an area for continued focus in future research using visual data. The following section outlines some of the other possibilities for future research, including understanding the intersectional experiences of women deans, challenging the perpetuation of the ‘traditional path’ to academic leadership, acknowledging who does not advance, and examining the experiences of women once in leadership roles.

Intersectionality and Alternate Paths

Given the gendered and racialized nature of higher education, intersectionality is a key layer of understanding toward achieving equity in academic leadership. Cheryan and Markus (2020) eloquently acknowledged that impacts of masculine defaults are most well-studied for heterosexual White women, and that these defaults – and the interventions or solutions to address them – may vary for women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds or sexual orientations. They also caution against implementing a solution that enhances the culture for White women but further disadvantages women of color (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). The same can be said of the work presented in this study. Although the women in this study shared many dimensions of identity beyond heterosexual and White (five identified as women of color, two as lesbian or gender queer), this work did not specifically set out to interrogate experiences based on

intersectionality and layers of power and oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw, 2017). That said, aspects of identity and intersectionality did surface for some of the women in this study, like Natalie, who felt as though she was responsible for the future of her entire race and gender when pursuing the deanship. Therefore, this work does highlight some intersectional components related to individual experiences, but future work should ideally include both individual intersections of identity and a more systematic approach to examining intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw, 2017).

Advancing to academic leadership roles from outside the faculty path, and in many cases, outside of academia, is becoming increasingly common (Johnson, 2016), but this study did not examine the experiences of those who enter the deanship from alternate pathways. Future research may examine why women from ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds choose to pursue the deanship and what barriers they face along the way. Many of the women in this study were socialized to believe the ‘traditional path,’ similar to that outlined by Moore et al. (1983), was the ‘right’ one that would lead to respect. Understanding the experiences of women who pursue the deanship in other ways is an area for future research that may help disrupt the long-standing assumptions about the traditional path to academic leadership.

Those Who Do Not Advance

Another noteworthy limitation of this study stems from the emphasis on women who had already successfully advanced to the role of dean rather than studying women who were actively deciding to advance. As a result, this study does not tell the story of those who do not become academic deans. The women in this study faced barriers at

various points in their career but found ways to persist despite them. They shared images of a flower growing through concrete, selecting between paths, mentors and colleagues, a woman's business suit, and more. What about the women who choose not to advance? What about women who wanted to advance but did not have the opportunity to do so, and why? What images might they share to describe their experiences?

Further research is needed to understand if specific factors or pivotal moments exist that deter women from pursuing the academic deanship. For example, is the decision to not advance shaped more by internal ambition or external cues? To what extent does lack of space or opportunity for leadership at home institutions impact the career decisions of those who do not pursue the academic deanship? What about women who have potential to lead and make a difference, but do not see academic leadership roles as an avenue for change?

Many women in this study spoke about the negative perceptions of administration, but ultimately found meaning in their work and viewed the deanship as a way to make an impact. There may be other women who have no interest in pursuing academic leadership because they do not believe such work has the potential to be meaningful for them. Without the nudge from a mentor, invitation to serve in an interim role, transparency about the real work of academic leaders, or some other cue from their local environment to spark self-efficacy toward advancement, they may never choose to do so. That is not to say that all women should aspire to leadership, rather they should be aware of and able to access the opportunity to lead if it is of interest. Studying the experiences of women who are interested in academic leadership or creating systemic change, but do not advance, may provide more insight for research and practical

implications for institutions trying to retain and promote women in leadership roles.

Though identifying women who are interested in advancing may prove challenging for purposes of a research study, partnering with leadership programs or national associations aimed at supporting women in academia may alleviate some of the possible barriers to recruitment.

Challenges of Leadership

This work primarily examines access and entry to the academic deanship but does not examine the experiences of women once in the role. Some existing literature does analyze the experiences of women leaders at different ranks including deans, provosts, and presidents (Bornstein, 2003; Diehl, 2014; Layne, 2010; Lennartz, 2020; Padilla, 2006). For example, Ngunjiri and Hernandez (2017) discussed the challenges for women of color and immigrants in leading authentically once in leadership roles at predominately White institutions (PWIs).

Retention and time in role are other metrics to consider in future research. ACE's Annual College Presidents Study provides an average tenure for presidents of 6.7 years for men and 5.8 years for women (ACE, 2017). Less comprehensive data on retention for deans is available, but for many deans, the average tenure is five to six years (Wolverton, 2017). To what extent does gender impact the likelihood that a dean receives a contract extension, chooses to step down, or decides to advance to another leadership position? Examining why deans choose to leave their post may provide more information on the experiences of women deans and whether or not the culture perpetuates masculine defaults or allows women to lead authentically.

Concluding Thoughts

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg once shared, “Women belong in all places where decisions are being made” (Biskupic, 2009). Decades ago, Moore et al. (1983) acknowledged the critical role of dean in academic decision-making. This importance still holds today, but we need to focus on altering perceptions of this traditional pathway so women in pursuit of a decision-making and leadership role are not compared to the traditional ‘male standard.’ With all of the challenges ahead for higher education in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and increased calls for long overdue racial justice, we need diverse, ambitious, bold, and informed leaders. The women in this study showed persistence, perseverance, collaboration, and many other skills that made them impactful leaders in higher education. Imagine how many other women might be sitting in seats where key higher education decisions are made if we addressed the inequities and barriers present from the beginning of their career paths?

This study highlights success stories of women in pursuit of the academic deanship, while acknowledging that even those who are successful face barriers in their advancement. The women in this study were motivated to pursue the deanship by both individual and environmental cues. Among these motivations was the desire to make an impact, particularly at one’s home institution. Women chose to pursue the deanship in several different ways, but the emphasis on prior leadership opportunities in many of their decision-making processes highlights an important contribution of this work. This finding signals the importance of creating space for women to lead beyond the “traditional path.” The motivations and key factors considered in women’s choice processes were further illustrated by the in-depth qualitative analysis of participants’

visual representations and narrative samples unique to this study. This research also extends the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter Two by providing an application of Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) nudge behaviors to a career choice process (self-nudge) and higher education (organizational nudge) context.

I hope this research contributes to the increased representation of women in the academic deanship, but also – and perhaps more importantly – addresses the broader challenges to gender and leadership equity in the academy. We recently saw this hope at a national level with the election and inauguration of the first woman vice president of the United States, Kamala Harris. I believe my research on the academic deanship extends this sense of hope to the field of higher education by uncovering the decision-making processes for women who successfully pursued the academic deanship. With continued emphasis on systemic change, understanding of women's career decisions and experiences, and support to help women navigate existing structures, we will see more women as decision-makers, key leaders, and academic deans, and we will benefit from their pursuit of leadership.

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Materials

Do you currently serve as an academic dean at a research institution? Have you been in the role for less than two years? Do you identify as a woman? If so, please consider participating in this dissertation research.

My name is Lindsey Templeton and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at the University of Maryland, College Park, under the direction of Dr. KerryAnn O'Meara. I am passionate about leadership equity in higher education and am conducting my dissertation research on how women academic deans made the decision to pursue the academic deanship. If you currently serve as an academic dean at a research institution, previously served as a full professor, identify as a woman, and would be interested in sharing your career story (and valuable time), please email me at [EMAIL].

All eligible participants will be asked to participate in an introductory interview (30 minutes) and follow-up interview (60-90 minutes). They will also be asked to submit their CV, a brief narrative, and a visual representation of their decision-making experience (in response to provided prompts). All steps in the process will be scheduled over the summer months at times convenient to participants. All eligible participants who complete the study will receive a \$50 Amazon gift card.

Thank you for the leadership that you are contributing to the field of higher education, and for considering participation in my study. Please send any questions about the research, consent process, or other aspects of the study to [EMAIL ADDRESS].

This dissertation research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. All eligible participants will be provided pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

(Video: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1bQcHZMBNuoE8K_05lpLasL0aT2my3kFD)

**Recruitment for
Dissertation Study on
Women Leaders in Academia**

- Identify as a woman?
- Currently serve as an academic dean?
- In the role of dean for 6 months - 2 years?
- Working at a research intensive institution?

If you (or someone you know) meet the above criteria and are interested in participating in this research, please email Lindsey Templeton at ltemplet@umd.edu.

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Appendix B Eligibility Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to confirm your eligibility for participation in this study.

Name: _____

Preferred Email Address: _____

Current Title: _____

Current Institution: _____

How long have you been in your current role? _____

Please list the titles of the two roles held prior to your current role.

1.

2.

Have you served as a full professor?

Yes

No

What is your primary academic discipline? _____

Do you identify as a woman?

Yes

No

Prefer Not to Answer

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Sexual Orientation: _____

Appendix C Interview Protocols

First Semi-Structured Interview Questions (30 minutes)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I will start by reviewing the consent form and then ask a series of questions over the next 30 minutes. This first interview will focus on your career aspirations and a review of your CV. Through this interview and the next, we will work chronologically through your decision-making process to pursue the academic deanship.

Career Questions

- To start, what were your career aspirations as a senior faculty member? How, if at all, have they changed?
- What motivates you in your career?
- What other roles do you hold in your life (i.e. partner, mother, friend, leader, volunteer)?
- What kind of legacy do you hope to leave in your career?

Career Path and CV

- The next set of questions is focused more on your career path. How did you become the academic dean?
- When did you know you wanted to pursue the academic deanship?
- In what ways does your role as dean differ from your faculty role? Were there any parts of the job that were a surprise to you?
- Tell me more about your CV. Specifically, how well does it reflect key milestones in your career since graduate school?
 - o Do you consider your path relatively linear or more varied?
 - o *Include other questions specific to the individual's CV here.*

Second Semi-Structured Interview Questions (60-90 minutes)

This interview will also be informed by the autobiographical narrative and drawing exercises.

For this second interview, I plan to ask a series of questions about the factors impacting your choice to pursue the academic deanship, discuss the drawing and writing prompts you completed, and go more in depth on each step of your decision-making process.

Reflecting on Career Choices ('Why')

- What motivated you to pursue the role of academic dean?
- What factors impacted your decision to apply for the academic deanship? (*Prompt with the questions below as needed*)
 - o To what extent did family influence your decision?
 - o To what extent did financial opportunities influence your decision?

- To what extent did this specific institution influence your decision? Would you have pursued the role of academic dean elsewhere (based on geographic location, rank, institutional type, alma mater, etc.)?
- To what extent did your colleagues impact your decision?
- How, if at all, did your identity impact your decision to pursue the academic deanship?
- How, if at all, were you encouraged in your pursuit of leadership roles? Discouraged?
- In what ways did you feel prepared to pursue the role of academic dean, if at all?
 - What kind of training did you receive?
 - What professional accomplishments, experiences, or knowledge have you drawn upon in your role?
- How did you feel about your ability to pursue the role of academic dean?
 - How confident, if at all, were you in your ability to pursue the role? Did you doubt your ability for any reason?

Reviewing the Drawing

- I asked you to find or draw a picture that illustrates your experience deciding to pursue the academic deanship. Walk me through your thought process when drawing or selecting this picture. What did you consider? Was the activity challenging in any way?
- *Ask specific follow-up questions based on the picture provided.*

Making the Choice ('How')

- Now let's discuss your decision-making process in more depth. What experiences did you have as a faculty member that made you consider the academic deanship?
 - How would you describe the climate for leadership in your previous work environments (i.e. the department(s) you worked in as a faculty member; your graduate program)?
- With whom did you discuss your decision to pursue the academic deanship?
 - Did you have a mentor, or multiple mentors, that influenced your decision in any way?
- What information, if any, did you gather or consult to make your decision?
 - Did you consider benefits, consequences, or incentives?
- What alternate paths or choices did you consider when deciding to pursue the academic deanship?
- What kind of feedback did you receive on your decision to apply for the role of academic dean?

Reviewing the Narrative

- I enjoyed reading your narrative regarding [career choice], and I would like to ask a few follow-up questions to it.
 - *Ask questions specific to narrative for each participant*

Appendix D

Narrative Writing and Drawing Prompts

Please spend no more than 15-30 minutes on each of the prompts below.
Final products can be emailed in whatever format you prefer.

Writing Prompt:

Think back to the months before you became academic dean. As a senior faculty member, what prompted you to consider applying for the role of academic dean? If you were to tell the story of your choice to pursue the academic deanship, what would you share?

Please share your thoughts in a written narrative, bulleted list, or record yourself sharing the story. The final product can be emailed to the researcher.

Drawing/Visual Representation Prompt:

Find, draw, or describe a picture that illustrates your experience deciding to pursue the academic deanship. What did you consider? How did it feel to decide to pursue the role of academic dean?

For example, was the decision-making process like an obstacle course, or more of a pro-con list? Did you feel torn between research and administrative roles, or like you had to juggle a number of priorities? Perhaps you felt confused about how to move forward or, alternatively, were very clear in your decision and saw yourself sitting in the dean's office. Reflect on your experience deciding to pursue the role of academic dean and find, draw, or describe a picture that depicts it to the best of your ability. The final product can be emailed to the researcher.

Appendix E
Curriculum Vitae Analysis Rubric

Participant ID/Pseudonym	
First Step	
Chronological list of roles held prior to academic deanship	
Second Step	
# of peer-reviewed publications	
# of conference presentations	
# of grants (research, teaching, or other; differentiate serving as PI versus team member)	
# of awards (research, teaching, service, other)	
Third Step	
# of co-authorships (count number of articles with which one or more co-authors were included)	
# of co-presenters (count number of presentations with which one or more co-presenters were included)	
Details from mentorship activities (i.e. number of students mentored, participation in mentorship programs as mentor or mentee)	
Dissertation Advisor (include gender of advisor if available)	

Appendix F
Consent Form

Project Title	In Pursuit of the Academic Deanship: Women's Considerations, Choice Environments, and Career Paths
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Lindsey Templeton at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you currently serve as an academic dean at a research institution; identify as a woman; previously served as a full professor; and have been in the role of dean or at least 6 months and no more than 2 years. The purpose of this research project is to understand how and why senior women faculty choose to pursue the academic deanship by identifying the factors that influence their decision-making process.
Procedures	By participating in this study, you agree to complete two semi-structured interviews, submit your Curriculum Vitae, and submit a narrative response and visual representation of your decision to pursue the role of dean. The first interview will last 30 minutes and the second interview, which will take place after submitting the CV, narrative, and drawing, will last 60-90 minutes. All interviews will take place in person or via video conferencing and will be audio-recorded with your permission. During the interviews, you will be asked to respond to a series of questions about your decision to pursue the academic deanship and other career aspirations. The narrative response and drawing activity will include prompts and take 15-30 minutes each. These activities will also focus on your career choice process in pursuit of the academic deanship.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There are little to no risks involved in participating in this research study. You may experience some discomfort in sharing your career path and experiences, but may choose to stop the interview or other study elements at any time with no penalty.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, possible benefits include contributing to the field of higher education and feeling satisfaction from sharing your own career story.

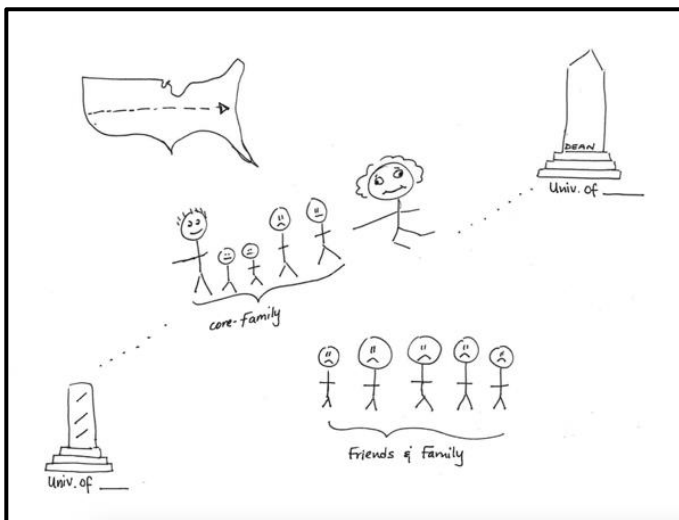
Confidentiality	<p>Pseudonyms will be used throughout the process and no participant names or institutional affiliations will be used in any writing that comes from this research. Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by maintaining one set of records electronically that includes no personally identifiable information. All identifiable information will be linked to IDs or pseudonyms for each participant and stored in a password-protected file to which only the PI has access.</p> <p>If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p>
Compensation	<p>You will receive a \$50 Amazon gift card as a result of participating in all parts of this study. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. Your name and address will be collected to receive compensation.</p>
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lindsey Templeton University of Maryland, College of Education [EMAIL] [PHONE]</p>
Participant Rights	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742</p>

	<p>E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p>For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>	
Statement of Consent	<p>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p> <p>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>	
Signature and Date	<p>NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]</p>	
	<p>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</p>	
	<p>DATE</p>	
Statement of Consent	<p>Your signature below indicates that you agree to have your interviews audio-recorded.</p>	
Consent for Audio Recording: Signature and Date	<p>NAME OF PARTICIPANT [Please Print]</p>	
	<p>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</p>	
	<p>DATE</p>	

Appendix G Participants' Visual Representation Data

Participants were asked to find, draw, or describe an image depicting their decision to pursue the academic deanship. Only images that were drawn or described by participants are included in this document. All figures are numbered based on their placement in the text.

Figure 2. Tia's Visual Depiction of Decision to Pursue the Deanship



Isabel's Visual Depiction (description)

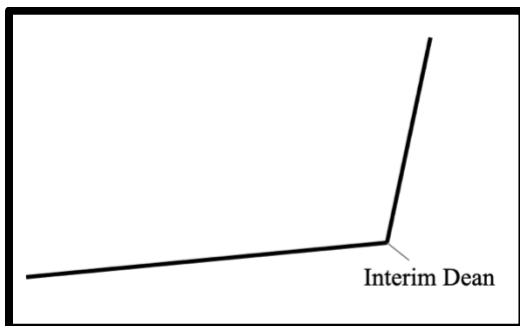
I would draw an image of a hand accepting an object—maybe a key. I had to come to fully accept that my research and teaching responsibilities were no longer a priority. I would not say that the decision was crystal clear, so maybe the image would be a little blurry, but I had already begun the process of having to accept that my academic life changed when I became department chair. The door was still open to return to my life as a professor with no administrative responsibilities, but it was easier to move forward in leadership because I had already served in administration.

The idea of acceptance also reflects a certain degree of sadness due to the loss of my faculty identity. As I move into more advanced leadership roles, each means that my faculty identity becomes more fragile. Although I still identify as faculty, others (faculty, staff, students) no longer see me as a faculty member.

Lynn's Visual Depiction (description)

I would draw a straight horizontal line tilted ever so slightly upwards at 5 degrees and then a sharp tilt up at 70 degrees at the end of the line when I became Interim Dean. I would say that the decision-making process has been slow going but steady.

Figure 3. Lynn's Visual Depiction of Decision to Pursue the Deanship



Note. This image was created by the author based on the description provided by Lynn.

Kate's Visual Depiction (description)

When I think back to my mindset when I was considering the deanship the main image that comes to mind is a woman's business suit. I was very concerned about what I should wear for the interview (and for the job, if I were appointed) but also whether I could pull it off. The image is not only what the expected uniform was in my mind, but also brought up a whole bunch of issues related to whether I could really do it or if I was/am an imposter. The suit says something about maturity, gravitas, status, masculinity and femininity, and all of those things were swirling in doubt in my mind during that time.

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