


# Chapter 17

## Leadership Redefined: Navigating Power and Privilege for White Women Administrators in Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

*A persistent gap exists in literature surrounding the inequalities of women in higher education senior administration roles. This study explores how white women in higher education senior administration roles navigate the interplay of power and privilege by examining both how power and privilege have worked in their disadvantage and advantage. Additionally, participants discuss their responsibility in utilizing their power and privilege for the benefit of other women and minoritized populations. Using an intersectional feminist lens in semi-structured interviews, the participants' critical reflections led to the emergence of the following categories of findings: an awareness of self and power structures, leveraging power and privilege for others, and steps towards disruption of current power systems and structures. In this chapter, the word "women" refers to all people who identify as women.*

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*...if I fail to recognize them as other faces of myself, then I am contributing not only to each of their oppressions but also to my own, and the anger which stands between us then must be used for clarity and mutual empowerment, not for evasion by guilt or for further separation. I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. And I am not free as long as one person of Color remains chained. Nor is anyone of you. - Audre Lorde, "The Use of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," (1981)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

While much research has been done focusing on women in educational leadership at the secondary school level (Clark & Johnson, 2017; Schachter, 2017), district school board level (Reis, 2015), superintendent level (Glowacki-Dudka et al., 2016), and higher education administration level (Reis, 2015; Clark & Johnson, 2017), there still remains an identified gap in research surrounding the persistence and endurance needed for women in senior higher education administration roles (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Although the passing of Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 prohibited the discrimination against women in higher education *de jure*, there remains a *de facto* gendered gap between men and women in higher education leadership roles (Chliwniak, 1997). As such, there continues to be significant barriers impacting the progression and persistence of women in higher education administration, resulting in an inequality in the representation of women in these roles (Klenke, 2017).

The goal of this chapter is to highlight ways women navigate power and privilege in order to persist in their leadership roles in higher education administration; and thus, reimagine leadership as an endeavor inclusive to all. To understand how power and privilege are embodied, experienced, and navigated by White women in their career progression in higher education, researchers must create spaces for the voices of women in higher education administration to be heard. While the field of research on women in leadership and higher education is emerging and holding attention in the social sciences, there is more to be done.

Intersectional feminism implores us to ensure research in this vein is moving forward by exploring research with individuals who have diverse and complex identities (Klenke, 2017). Through the lens of intersectionality, even those with shared social identity, such as a shared race, will still have a diversity of experiences due to their own complex identities (Bell et al., 2016). Their unique intersectionality holds insight for other women entering higher education and for those working to create a more equitable field. Additionally, by viewing social practices as a complex web of burdens rather than smaller independent individual burdens, researchers may be able to impact understandings of the weight of these practices, as if examining multiplication rather than addition and work on dismantling them (Hancock, 2007).

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Women in Leaderships Roles**

The barriers for women in leadership have been examined through research over the past 30 years, but continue to only scratch the surface as the prevalence of gender bias continues. Research notes that women moving into formal leadership roles are often hindered by cultural norms and socializing factors,

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