A CHILLY CLIMATE: EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION PRESIDENTS

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The lack of women in elected leadership roles trickles down to student governance at colleges and universities (American Student Government Association, 2016). The researcher sought to understand how women student leaders made meaning of their experiences as a leader and how their understanding influences their actions and motivations. Through the use of narrative inquiry, the researcher explored how participants defined and made meaning of their experiences as women student government association presidents. The data collected through a series of three interviews were then formed into individual narratives focusing on context and meaning-making for each participant. Our work resulted in rich data that was categorized into themes. The prevalent theme of a "chilly climate" was salient for each participant, which is discussed in this article. The article concludes with implications for student government advisors, as well as for future research on women student government association leaders.

THE LACK OF WOMEN IN ELECTED LEADERSHIP ROLES IS A PROBLEM IN LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. On the political front, women could impact both policies and political agendas. However, women make up only 29.3% of elected state legislature positions (Center for American Women in Politics, 2019). Over 40% of women who currently serve in the United States (U.S.) Congress served in their student government in their youth (O'Leary & Shames, 2013). Unfortunately, the gender gap in elected government leaders trickles down to colleges' and universities' student governance (American Student Government Association, 2016).

Women currently outnumber men in colleges and universities in the U.S. about 1.3 to 1, and this gap is expected to continue to widen over the next ten years (United States Department of Education, 2016). While women currently attend college at a higher rate than men, women are not being selected to serve as a student government association president (SGA) at their institutions at a similar rate. About 15% of women serve in this role at four-year colleges and universities nationwide (American Student Government Association, 2016).

The impact of student governance and the SGA president is seen across campus, both defining the student experiences and advocating for all members of the student body (May, 2009). The underrepresentation of women in this elected student leadership role creates missed opportunities for professional development that can lead to a heightened career trajectory in politics or their chosen field (Miles, 2010; Schaper, 2009).

This study focused on women's leadership, particularly presidential leadership within SGA. The purpose was to empower the voices of women SGA presidents and understand their perspectives on leading an SGA. These

narratives provide an understanding of challenges women student leaders face, personal strategies women used to navigate these challenges and contribute to the development of strategies for higher education professionals looking to support women in student leadership roles.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

While several student leadership and critical theories served as conceptual frameworks for this study, the "chilly climate" can best be understood by exploring the intersectionality of gender, racial (particularly for the women of color), and student leadership identity development. Social identities, gender, and race among them describe "that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1982, p. 2). Social identities impact how individuals see themselves and perceived by others. For student leaders, this means an individuals' sense of themselves as Black women may shift depending upon the context in which they are leading. Understanding the intersection of social identity acknowledges roles that privilege and power have on various social categories and roles, such as student leadership (Jones, 2016).

Key to understanding young women's leadership development is understanding the impact of gender social-ization and bias (Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2017). Gender socialization begins early, comes from a variety of sources, and affects women's self-efficacy, and efficacy towards other women. Sadker and Zittleman (2009) not-ed, "girls, especially smart girls, learn to underestimate their ability" (p. 122). Such underestimation can lead to women believing they have to work harder than men to achieve their goals.

Understanding social identity development for women student leaders is made more complex for women in which race is a salient identity. Multiple researchers have found that Black college women experience their race and gender as one, not separate, elements within their sense of self (Banks, 2009; Settles, 2006; Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Winkle-Wagner's (2009) study of Black women college students found that for her participants, "race was gendered, and gender was racialized.... The categories of race and gender... intersect so completely that it was not possible for the women to explore their gendered experiences without linking these to experiences to race" (p. 114). Black college women hold multiple identities in addition to social groups often targeted because of race or gender. Understanding the connection between how identity is framed by larger historical, political, and societal contexts is essential in how Black college women create their sense of self (Strayhorn, 2013).

Coupling gender and racial identity development with leadership identity development provide a further frame-work for this study. Leadership identity is a social identity that college students develop through interactions with peers in various settings. Organizational involvement is one of many ways students develop leadership identity; development can also occur through academic coursework, employment, and volunteerism, among others. Leadership identity development is made more meaningful when the intersection of it with one's other social identities are considered (Komives, 2014). Thus, understanding how one's sense of self as not only as a leader, but also a woman, and for some, a Black woman was an essential framework for this research.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

The "Chilly Climate"

In a recent article, Sweet-Cushman (2016) argued that the gender gap in political leadership positions might relate to gendered differences in risk perception and risk aversion. Women focus on the potential risk involved in being a candidate for an elected leadership role (Sweet-Cushman, 2016). The "chilly climate" concept can be described as women are less tolerant to mistakes, men have an inherent bias against women, women receive more questions from others concerning their credibility, and women have to work harder than men to be taken seriously by their colleagues and potential voters (Fox & Lawless, 2004; Pew Research Center, 2016; Pew Re-search Center, 2018; Swers, 2013). The Pew Research Center (2018) conducted 2,250 telephone interviews with a representative sample of adults in the U.S. From these telephone interviews, 54% believed discrimination

against women is a somewhat serious or serious problem in society. The "chilly climate" for women in terms of the "twice as hard; half as far" mentality also encompasses gender discrimination (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Meaning Making and Student Development

Exploring how college students make meaning of their experiences and how they move through their environment involves a holistic perspective focusing on the context that plays a role in the actual construct of meaning (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Kegan, 1982). An advanced approach to meaning-making involves understanding the relationship between the context, be it in the past or present, and one's emotions and thoughts (Kegan, 1982). Through this holistic approach of looking at the world around us and how emotions and thoughts work together, one can make meaning of his or her experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2009; Kegan, 1982). Baxter Magolda's (2008) longitudinal study on women in adulthood provided context to what she called *self-authorship*, or their capacity to define their beliefs, identity, and relationships. She found that these participants, when "trusting their internal voices," took responsibility for how they interpreted reality and how they reacted to that interpretation (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Once participants built this internal trust, they organized their choices into an "internal foundation" that guided them on how to navigate their reactions to reality (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

When creating meaning of their experiences, women rely on narratives and storytelling to help navigate the meaning-making process. Self-authorship is a way for women to make meaning of their realities (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Transformational learning is a way one can make meaning of experiences as "learning that leads to some type of fundamental change in the learners' sense of themselves, their worldviews, their understanding of their pasts, and their orientation to the future" (Brooks, 2000, p. 140). According to Brooks (2000), transformational learning for women occurs when women share their stories and claim their own voices. While the participants in this study may have found their voices and make meaning of their experiences, understanding the possible learning through the sharing of stories is relevant to recognizing how these women make meaning of their lived experiences as student government presidents.

College Student Leaders and Gender Differences

Researchers discovered specific challenges college women leaders face (Haber-Curran, 2013; Montgomery & Newman, 2010). Haber-Curran (2013) performed a qualitative study with in-depth interviews with four women at one institution. Her study found participants' leadership role created challenges related to balancing their time and relationships with others as a leader and student. In addition, their leadership role challenged them to learn how to navigate the large organization and environment context. The navigation involved learning to adapt their leadership approach and behavior to lead their organization effectively. While this study was limited to four college women leaders, the different contexts provided some interesting perspectives. Each participant was involved as a leader in a different organization type comprising some of the more common leader roles across a typical campus community: Greek, student government, athletic, and cultural.

In addition, Montgomery and Newman's (2010) research on gender differences in leadership focused on how student leaders perceived their leadership ability. There was a significant difference in the high self-ratings men showcased when reflecting on their leadership ability compared to the lower self-ratings women shared (Montgomery & Newman, 2010). Our study allows for women SGA presidents to make meaning of the experiences that showcase their abilities as a leader.

Student Government History and Impact

Student governance has been a part of higher education institutions in the U.S. since the late 1700s, with the role of students in governing higher education institutions substantially increasing over the years (Cohen, 1998; Janc, 2004). Student governance in the present form evolved from student activism that flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, colliding with the student struggles to resolve frustrations with higher education administration and policies (Cohen, 1998; Davis, 2006; Klopf, 1960). Student governance became the tool to establish change

and ensure students' concerns were expressed to administrators (Cohen, 1998; Klopf, 1960). Student government was created to serve as the "official voice" of the student body to higher education administrators, alumni, and other institution constituents (Cuyjet, 1994, p. 74). In addition, student government associations oversaw many of the administrative duties for the institution, including allocation of student fees, oversight of student organizations, and programming efforts as well as advocating for students' interests and policy changes (Cuyjet, 1994; May, 2009).

Higher education traditions and founding values were developed with only men in mind (Solomon, 1985). Women were not part of higher education institutions until the twentieth century, although women attending colleges and universities began to steadily increase in the 1940s (Nash & Romero, 2012). Not until 1980 was there an equal number of women and men enrolled in colleges in the United States (Horany, 2002). Women served as SGA presidents at large public institutions beginning in the 1960s with no consistency in the number of women serving in these roles at large public institutions (Cuyjet, 1994; Johnson, 2011). A historical understanding of the patriarchal environment of higher education and student governance may serve as one factor related to the gender gap in leadership (Johnson, 2011).

Women's Participation in Student Government

Miller and Kraus (2004) surveyed student government association leaders at 21 comprehensive Midwestern universities about the gender demographics of current leaders, previous leaders, and current participants. An analysis of the data showed while women held 47.9% of SGA positions, the majority or 71.4% of SGA presidents and vice presidents were male. This research illustrated women's interest in SGA and illustrated the gap between their interest and leadership representation. Miller and Kraus, when looking at the previous five years, found women served as student government association presidents only 25.7% percent of the time. This data provided another example of women not serving in the presidential role of their student government organization.

Spencer (2004), looking specifically at the 12 Big XII Conference schools over a fourteen-year period, found only 18.83% of student body presidents were women. However, in Erwin's (2005) quantitative study on gender differences in student government association leaders, 41.7% of the 115 students who identified themselves as leaders within SGA were women. In this same study, only 25% of the presidential positions were women. They were involved in student government and served in leadership positions, just not the highest leadership position as the president (Erwin, 2005).

Miles (2010) discovered benefits in serving as SGA leaders in this organization. These benefits included improving leadership skills, building confidence, and gaining networking opportunities that help women grow personally and professionally that set them apart for success in future endeavors. Women who do not serve in these leadership opportunities miss out on personal and professional growth that could support leadership opportunities in their future work.

Women student government association presidents were involved in student government at their institution early in their college career. Through personal interviews with participants, Spencer (2004) reported that women student leaders experienced gender bias, including developing fewer personal relationships than their male counterparts with college administrators who were also predominately male. Miller and Kraus (2004) suggested that the underrepresentation of women in student government may be due to women not wanting to become involved if these organizations were not addressing concerns of women.

Using a qualitative phenomenological framework, Damell (2013) interviewed 14 former women student government leaders from universities on the east coast. In the findings, Damell noted that these women were motivated to get involved on their college campuses and had prior involvement in student government. According to her results, the primary motivation these women had for running for president focused on their passion for connecting with students.

Students of Color in Student Government

While this study focused on women's leadership in SGA, a review of literature on Students of Color in student government is important as the study included multiple Women of Color. Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) examined the involvement of Students of Color in college student organizations, specifically in Southern universities. The 989 students surveyed classified themselves as student leaders, with only 17% stating that their leadership role was in the student government association.

In a study using in-depth interviews, six undergraduate and six graduate students shared their experiences with being Black student leaders on a predominantly White college campus (Domingue, 2015). The challenges student leaders faced involved difficulty interrupting stereotypes and microaggressions, creating an environment that sharpened their awareness of their racial and gender identities. The Black women college student leaders reported feeling misunderstood, silenced, and disregarded, leading to challenges when working through conflict and collaboration.

A study on how leadership experiences affected the self-ratings of leadership ability in terms of African-American women's self-ratings found that these women believed that being elected to the presidential role was the most reliable indicator of their leadership ability (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000). Black women college student leaders were motivated to lead to foster Black community on their campus and address their feelings of marginalization (Domingue, 2015).

Salas (2010) interviewed 38 women student leaders from the California State University System (with 76.3% of participants describing themselves as Students of Color) on their student government association presidential ambitions. In this study, most Students of Color who decided not to run for president did not feel knowledgeable enough to serve in this role. Students of Color who chose to run wanted to represent other students' viewpoints, needs, and concerns (Salas, 2010). Salas' (2010) study also determined the presence of role models and mentors who were African-American was a positive influence on the desire leading to African-American women running for student government election. With Women of Color participants in our study, the existing literature relating to women's experiences and personal perceptions of their ability to lead in student government sheds light on the findings.

METHODS

The results reported are based on one theme derived from a more extensive study on how women student body presidents make meaning of their experiences. The larger study addressed women's experiences prior to and during their terms. While several themes emerged from the larger study, experiencing "a chilly climate" was the most prevalent and required attention. The researchers used a narrative inquiry approach and a three-interview series (Seidman, 2006) to construct meaning of women's experiences that shaped their role as a leader while in office and impact of their leadership role in the future.

Participants
Participants included women serving as presidents of SGAs at higher education institutions. Criteria for study participation were as follows: (1) self-identify as a woman, (2) enrolled in a public research institution in the Southeastern states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, or Tennessee, and (3) elected to serve as student body president during the 2018-2019 academic year. Fifteen women met the criteria, and seven were self-selected to participate. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants, including pseudonyms and personal identity descriptors.

Table 1. *Participating Women and Self-Described Demographics*

Pseudonym	Personal Identity Descriptors
Esther	First Generation Haitian American, First-Generation College Student, Black Woman
Madison	First-Generation College Student, Married, Independent from parents, works part-time, Woman
Sarah	Single-Parent Home, First-Generation College Student, Pell Eligible, Christian, Black Woman
Grace	Military Family, Catholic, Sorority Sister, Woman
Olivia	Single-Parent Home, From a Small Town, Strong Woman
Chloe	From a "higher tax bracket," Sister, Daughter, Woman, Feminist
Hanna	First Generation Liberian American, From a City, Black Woman

Data Collection

To capture the personal narratives, three interviews were conducted with each woman before and during their tenure as presidents (Seidman, 2006). In-depth, semi-structured interviews took place that lasted around 90-minutes each. According to Seidman (2006), "Understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9) was the foundation of in-depth interviews. He further added that "given that the purpose of this approach is to have the participants reconstruct their experiences, put it in context of their lives, and reflect on the meaning, anything shorter than 90 minutes for each interview seems too short" (p. 20). Semi-structured interviews allowed for a more fluid interview process where the participant drove the interview. The first interview took place in the early part of the fall semester, early in their leadership role, and focused on their previous leadership experiences and their experiences through the election process. Later in the fall semester, the second interview took place and focused on their current experiences as a student government president. The third interview took place near the end of their term as president.

Data was collected through the series of interviews later transcribed, coded, and formed into individual narratives focusing on context and meaning for each participant. An approach described by Saldaña (2016) had been used to help construct each narrative. Daiute's (2014) approach to analyze data through a linguistic method was also used. These approaches allowed the researchers to focus on both the use of language and structure of the narrative to make meaning of the experiences. Themes were discovered from participants' individual meaning-making and context that focused on both the experiences leading up to serving as student government president and their experiences during their one-year term.

RESULTS

For all seven women, there were challenges in terms of student government traditions and the foundational organization culture described by one of the participants, Chloe, as a "boys' club" that led to a "chilly climate" for these women in the SGA environment. According to the research, the "chilly climate" for women in the political realm could be described as less tolerant to mistakes, an inherent bias against women, more questions from others concerning their credibility, and having to work harder than men to be taken seriously by their colleagues and potential voters (Fox & Lawless, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2018; Swers, 2013). The seven women described the "chilly climate" in terms of the overall organizational culture, the presence of inherent bias against women, and the challenges with both the election and transition process.

Organizational Culture

Three women specifically mentioned how the organizational culture of student government impacted their experiences. The traditional male-dominated SGA environment effected how they could lead or change the culture of student government to become more inclusive. Esther discussed how the struggle for power within the organization was, at times, a "pseudo world of power" where one may have power in terms of being the leader; still, someone else in the organization was making decisions. Esther was elected vice president prior to

becoming president, however serving as vice president played into the organizational culture that was already established. To her, she was a leader as vice president, but to others, she was the "token" as she played into the narrative of not taking the leading role in the organization and saving that role for a White male. Esther broke that narrative the following year when she was elected president.

In addition to Esther, Hanna, as a Black woman, also felt she was working in a hostile environment being so different than the norm. She wanted to evolve the organizational culture but felt the actions of others, specifically white men, in the organization showed they did not value women and minority voices. Hanna described how she was trying to share with them [White men] that the environment was hostile to minorities and women, but "because of the identities of the people… they didn't want to hear it."

Chloe, before she was president, entered the "chilly climate" in SGA. Her initial experiences with the toxic organizational culture led her to run for president so she could change the culture from within. Working with men in the organization as part of the executive branch was difficult. After Chloe reported the toxic culture of the "boys' rule" environment, working with men of the executive branch became even more difficult. Chloe believed executive members found other ways to "make it hard to work with them." Chloe described she was hated within the executive cabinet as:

> I was seen as like a bitch or someone who wasn't there to have fun and who was too serious. It made it really hard for me to get things done. It came out in different ways [like], "Oh, sorry. I forgot to put your resolution on the agenda," or, "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't respond to your email in time for me to get your request in," so he had set that tone before I even walked into the exec board of discouraging women, disliking women, discrediting anything I could say before I was even there.

Inherent Bias

For all seven women, their identities were outside the norm of leadership within student government. Four women described the "chilly climate" in terms of inherent bias they worked against to be seen as a leader with a valued perspective. Hanna specified being outside of the norm in words of her mentor as "my existence to the space is already resistant," and added, "me being in this space is already causing a conversation." The inherent bias and the "chilly climate" came from being outside the norm.

Esther faced this bias when she ran for president. She said, "when I was running a lot of people were against me running for student body president… no one said I wasn't qualified; they just didn't want me in this role." She felt her peers did not want her to run because she did not "look the part." Madison also faced this inherent bias during the campaign process as her, and her vice president's leadership ability was called into question because they both were married women. Madison and her vice president were asked questions from the other candidates during a debate that called their abilities into question, "[They were asked] will they have time to commit? Do they need to be at home? They'll also be trying to build a family at the same time, can they do these things?" For Madison, the inherent bias displayed through these questions from peers resonated when she was making decisions. These experiences also served as a lens from which she would view and create her meaning-making of her term as president, her experiences, her successes, and her obstacles.

Sarah saw the student government environment as "chilly" and experienced inherent bias throughout her time in student government. The "little remarks," as she described them, took a toll on her personally. When thinking back, Sarah said, "things like that are just exhausting and hurtful when you see how others or the world views not only minority students…but they view me." For her, being a Black woman brought the inherent biases from others. Sarah did not see these struggles as being a Black woman, but something attributed to the student government environment. She credited this to "that's just how the world works." Sarah went on to describe this "really hard pill to swallow" as:

> That was hurtful to realize how the world sees me. And of course, not the entire world, and I'm not saying, "woe is me." But, I think I just got a reality check of how the world works and how my race and my gender are going to reflect how I'm treated and how hard I have to work.

Elections and Transitions

Five women focused on demands within the election process or the transition process. Five of these women decided to run despite the unfavorable circumstances described in Kanthak and Woon (2015) surrounding elections and transitions, thus creating this "chilly climate" for the women. The experiences during these traditional elements of the political process to become student government president set the tone for the rest of the year and played a role in how the women experienced their term as president.

Madison at first did not want to run for student government president as she already experienced a difficult campaign process for her leadership role in the judicial branch. She knew the campaign process for the president would be more challenging. When discussing the challenges and stresses that came with the campaign process, Madison said, "[it left] almost no time for academics."

During Chloe and Sarah's campaigns, both women mentioned feeling disadvantaged because of their identities. Each woman experienced the other candidate receiving preferential treatment. For Chloe, when she reported the other candidate for a campaign infraction, she was told she was "overreacting." According to Chloe, nothing was done to the other candidate because "he could get away with stuff." Sarah had a similar experience. During her campaign process, the other candidate went on trial for campaign violations and did not receive any repercussions for his actions. Sarah believed that if she had to face a trial for campaign violations, "it would not have been the same." For Sarah, the lack of repercussions for the other candidate almost led her to quit.

Olivia and Grace faced challenges with the transition process because the outgoing president did not want to transition women into the role. Olivia felt that without a transition process from the outgoing president, she was unprepared. When describing this process, Olivia said:

> We relied on our professional staff, our administrative staff to really help us get on the ground running, but I think it would have been a lot easier if I had more information. I would have been a lot more confident in the decisions that I was making within the first two months had I had an actual transition into the role.

For Grace, the lack of a transition process took a toll on her confidence. She walked into this position thinking, "I'm not prepared for this, and I'm going to flop. This is going to be a fail." Grace and Olivia stepped into their term feeling a little uneasy while Madison, Sarah, and Chloe felt defeated even though they had just won the election. These two traditional elements were their first experiences that established a "chilly climate," and in turn, was a personal lens that these five women used to construct and make meaning of their experiences throughout their terms as president.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research is timely. While completing this study, the 116th Congress convened with the highest percentage of women at 23.4 % serving in Congress (Pew Research Center, 2018). Women in politics and women taking a role in the democratic process are on the rise (Pew Research Center, 2018). In a recent study, O'Leary and Shames (2013) found that over 40% of women who served in the U.S. Congress had also served in their student government in their youth. Additionally, many young women who served in student government in high school did not do so at the college level. These women entered college with concerns of self-efficacy in terms of their ability to lead, therefore running for an elected position was a risk they did not want to explore (Fox & Lawless, 2011; O'Leary & Shames, 2013).

Exploring the idea of risk aversion expressed through the narratives of women who took this risk provided an opportunity to learn from successful women student government presidents winning their election and finding the confidence to run in the first place. Shuman (2005) saw narratives as a way to provide inspiration and new frames of reference. These women's narratives inspired other women college student leaders as well as provided frames of reference for student affairs professionals who may advise women student leaders. As more women

are taking on leadership roles, understanding how women make meaning of their experiences as student government presidents can help create positive leadership experiences where growth and learning take place.

The Effects of the Student Government Environment

For all seven women, the student government traditions and the foundational organization culture, which one participant Chloe described as a "boys' club," led the environment to become a "chilly climate" to move through. Similar to the research on the "chilly climate" for women in the political realm, these seven women described this climate in terms of the overall organizational culture, the presence of inherent bias against women, and the challenges with both the election and transition process (Damell, 2013; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Spencer, 2004).

For Esther and Hanna, the traditional White male culture of student government and the administration, at times, felt hostile because they both were so different than the norm. Both women tried to change the organizational culture and, at times, felt their woman and minority voices were not welcomed. Hanna tried to share with other members of student government leadership, specifically White men, how the environment was hostile to these groups (e.g., minorities). In reaction, the response was not always open, "because of the identities of the people…they didn't want to hear it." This reaction is not only consistent with Haber-Curran's and Sulpizio's (2017) findings of women student leaders experiencing gender bias, but also with Strayhorn's (2013) research on Black college women's social identities within structures of privilege and power. Further, as both Ester and Hannah noted gender and their marginalized race together, the finding supported Banks's (2009), Settles's (2006), and Winkle-Wagner's (2009) research on Black college women connecting race and gender as one identity construct.

For Chloe, her experience on the executive cabinet was where she initially experienced the toxic organizational culture. Chloe reported the toxic culture to the student government advisor that only made working with the executive members more difficult. The executive members found other ways to "make it hard to work with them" and this hatred she felt from one specific leader within the executive cabinet set a tone that "before I [Chloe] walked into the exec board of discouraging women, disliking women, discrediting anything I [she] could say."

For all seven women, their identities were outside the norm of leadership. Within student government and overcoming this "chilly climate" from being different than the norm for four women was felt through inherent bias against women or women of color. For Hanna, a Woman of Color, she knew her just "being in this space [was] causing a conversation." She had to work hard to get her ideas taken seriously and her voice heard in conversations with peers in the organization and leadership. Esther felt the inherent bias when she decided to run for president as she thought her peers did not want her to run because she did not "look the part.

For Madison and Sarah, the inherent bias found in members of the organization came through small regular occurrences where they felt they had to prove their worth. Madison, as a married woman, was questioned if she could perform the role as president and "build a family at the same time." She spent her term as president feeling like she needed to prove these biases were incorrect assumptions. Sarah found all the smaller occurrences "exhausting and hurtful" and believed her race and gender not only reflected how others treated her but also how "hard [she] had to work." These experiences support the notion that women often believe they have to work harder than their male counterparts to achieve their goals (Pew Research Center, 2018; Sadker & Zittleman, 2009).

The traditional election and transition processes are the beginning steps to becoming and serving as student government president. For five women in this study, the demands and unfavorable circumstances during the election or transition process set the tone as chilly. Chloe, Sarah, and Madison faced additional campaign stresses due to the rigor of the election process. Chloe and Sarah reported campaign violations though the other candidates did not face any consequences. Both women felt that the process would not have been the same if they had campaign violations reported against them. Then, for Olivia and Grace, the lack of a transition process due to the outgoing president not wanting them to serve in the role created challenges in terms of starting their term not feeling prepared.

Combatting the "Chilly Climate"

All seven women found ways to cope and overcome the challenges related to the "chilly climate" of the organization. They turned to building and finding a supportive community that served as a resource and an encourager throughout their one-year term. For the women, the supportive community included finding support through family, peers, mentors, advisors, or administrators. For Chloe, Hanna, and Grace, this supportive environment included their advisor and faculty. The advisors and faculty helped lift these women with encouragement and made their voices heard in meetings.

All seven women mentioned relationships with other women as significant to their success in combatting the "chilly climate." For Olivia, Esther, and Madison, they ensured their running mates shared similar gender and racial identities to create that supportive community within their executive cabinet. Chloe, Grace, and Hanna found support in their relationships with their advisors, who were also women. Sarah turned to mentors in the community who shared her identities and experiences to help her combat the culture and environment of student government.

Six of the women made sure that while others could define success within their terms, they redefined success in their role as combating the chilly climate of the organization. Grace, Madison, and Olivia defined their success by completing their platform promises whether the effort was an individual effort or a group effort. The focus on their platform allowed them to remain motivated and positive even when faced with challenges within the traditions and culture of the organization. Esther and Hanna defined their success by completing the term. Despite all the turmoil, these two women faced during the year, finishing the term and not quitting early was how they viewed success. Chloe saw success as not related to completing tasks, but as personal growth and the ability to remain authentic throughout the process.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

Begin Early

All seven women were involved as student leaders both in pre-college and early in college. This engagement and initial leadership experiences set the foundation for future involvement that focused on making a significant impact and helping others. Student government association was initially established as a tool to create change as well as ensure students' concerns were expressed (Cohen, 1998; Klopf, 1960). With a similar focus, SGA can become the organization for women to join who are looking for similar experiences from what they have had prior to college. Student affairs professionals, specifically SGA advisors, can capitalize on this by ensuring this mission is a clear message to incoming students looking for ways to be engaged on-campus.

All seven women who participated in this study became involved in student government within the first year; five started their student government involvement within their first semester. Advisors for student government should focus their recruiting efforts of new members on first-year students or new transfer students early. Recruiting women for involvement in SGA at the onset has a larger impact on these women taking on higher leadership roles within the organization. Getting women involved early is the first step in creating an environment that cultivates future women student government presidents.

Examine Processes and Focus on Transitions

Once women are involved in student government, the organizational culture and traditions can become barriers for advancement. Student affairs professionals need to be conscious of the organizational culture and traditions to ensure that they do not become barriers. Using the illustration coined by Eagly and Carli (2007), the labyrinth described the complexities and numerous barriers women encountered as they worked their way up to leadership positions. The women faced barriers and complexities at all levels of advancement within student government. SGA advisors need to work with students in the organization to limit barriers throughout each

opportunity for women to advance.

Some of the possible processes traditional to student government to explore are the election process and transition process. Five of the women shared experiences where these processes created additional challenges, which in turn affected how they made meaning of their experience as student government president. The gender-based challenges that the research explored in terms of local, state, and national elections (O'Leary & Shames, 2013; Center for American Women in Politics, 2019) were similar to the gender-based challenges the women faced when running for student government president. The shared experiences of the women in this study reflected challenges with self-efficacy, societal expectations of work and family life balance, biases associated with feminine leadership, and sex discrimination as described in the research (American Association of University Women, 2016; Chin, 2011; Fox & Lawless, 2011; Kaufman & Grace, 2011; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003; Wilson, 2004).

Student government advisors need to evaluate their current process to ensure barriers are limited. In addition, SGA advisors need to hold student leaders accountable when barriers become evident in the pre-election debates or the current student government culture. The transition process represents the first step in building confidence within the future student government president. For women who are already coming into their presidency experiencing issues with self-efficacy, the transition process is even more crucial to how they make meaning of the experiences that unfold during their term as president. SGA advisors should review their transition process and ensure that the process is providing the newly elected president with the foundation, and in turn, confidence to start their term as president. Advisors should specifically review the process. If students are taking the lead in the transition process, advisors need to ensure that inherent biases do not come into play. All presidents should receive a similar transition process, and not only the newly elected student leaders in good terms with the former student government president.

Create a Supportive Community

A supportive community built on a variety of strong relationships with peers, administrators, mentors, and advisors was a vital component. Similar to the research, a lack of effective networking and mentors create additional challenges for women leaders specifically for women leaders in the political realm (American Association of University Women, 2016; Wilson, 2004).

For the women who had a strong supportive community, their one-year term left a more favorable impression on how they would describe the experience. For women who continued to feel defeated or struggled through their term as president, the lack of support of relationships around them played a significant role in how they made meaning of the challenging experiences. Student government advisors play a significant role in building relationships with members of the organization. Building these supportive relationships should not wait until the students are in high leadership roles. Student government advisors should work to build these relationships with members of the organization at all levels. Building relationships with members seen in lower levels of involvement in terms of the structure of the organization can help these students feel empowered and motivated to pursue higher positions within the organization.

Building this supportive community for student government presidents involves more than just the student government advisor. Other administrators and faculty play an essential role, as well. For participants, the supportive community needed to include many different on-campus and off-campus partners. Another important implication concerning who should make up these supportive communities involves the need to form relationships with others who share identities.

Many of the participants in this study worked to establish relationships or create communities where other women or other women of color were present. Similar to the research, the need to have mentors who looked like the presidents, whether women or women of color, had a positive influence on women student government leaders (Onorato & Musoba, 2015; Salas, 2010). Such mirroring represents a significant implication for not only student government advisors, but also higher education administrators. The need to diversify leadership

in higher education directly relates to having women and women of color present in administrative roles on campus, in this case, particularly more senior leadership roles that work with student government leaders. For these women to build relationships with other women leaders, they need to be able to find them, and therefore, must be present in these positions.

Examine Student Leadership Training for Inherent Bias

While student government advisors need to focus on processes including recruitment, election, and transition, higher education administrators who focus on training student leaders have some implications. There is a need to focus on overall student leadership training where inherent bias can be reviewed. For the seven women, the challenges they faced as women leaders, navigating their feelings, finding their voice, developing self-efficacy, and fighting the pressure were related to how they made meaning of their interactions with others and the "chilly climate." Leadership training should help women and Women of Color develop strategies to help them through these challenges. Higher education administrators can also build leadership training towards creating an environment where these challenges do not exist.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study of experiences of women student government association presidents at public research institutions in the Southeast has the potential to inform future studies on women college student leaders, women student government leaders as well as specifically Women of Color in those positions. The findings from this study could also inform studies on the intersectionality between gender, race, and leadership in addition to women and Women of Color in local, state, and national political leadership.

As a result of the interviews, significant themes were created related to the impact of prior leadership experiences, the role and impact of a "chilly climate," and the role and impact gender and race played in the way women make meaning of their experiences. The importance of a supportive community that should include people who shared identity also emerged. Each of these themes could provide a lens for which further research is conducted.

Additionally, this research was limited to seven women student government presidents in the Southeast. As the current research focused on women student government presidents in the Southeast region, further studies with women student body presidents in the Southeast as well as other regions of the United States would add to the research. The participants in this study were diverse, with four identifying as Women of Color and three as White women all at predominately white institutions. Further studies with different and more diverse populations can help examine how to increase Women of Color in leadership roles and how to serve them better.

Further research on why women student leaders choose to become involved in student government and why women student leaders choose to run could determine best practices for recruitment and the election process. This current study only scratched the surface in determining the reasons women become involved in student government and decide to take on leadership within the organization. Further research could also take the approach of looking at why women choose not to become involved in student government and decide not to run for student government president. Research on both groups of students could determine future best practices for student government.

This study has provided a solid understanding of the experiences of women student government presidents at public research institutions in the Southeast and how these women made meaning of their experiences. What has left us curious are the experiences of other groups of women student government presidents as well as their experiences at different points of their political involvement.

CONCLUSION

Women student government presidents experience their term with their personal lens and perspective at the forefront. The way these women make meaning of their experiences during their term relates to how their identities play out in their environment. While each woman had her own experiences, many of these women had similar experiences that affected the way they made meaning of their term as president. Each participant developed strategies to navigate the challenges, found ways to use her strengths, and worked to build a more inclusive organization. While this research began with a desire to explore these women's experiences as leaders, the project evolved examining the way their gender, race, or other identity descriptors impacted not only their experiences but how they made meaning of these experiences.

A narrative telling the personal story of each woman student government president was created, giving power to each individual woman to define her perspectives within the social construct of her underrepresented voice (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Harding, 1988). While the researchers did not present the social construct during the interview process, each woman established a social construct for her environment and saw herself as an underrepresented voice. From the narratives, themes emerged as it related to their individual meaning-making of their shared experiences leading up to serving as student government president and their experiences during their one-year term.

The study provided rich data and insight into a specific population where research was limited. The goal of the study was to understand the experiences of women student government presidents and provide insight into this group of underrepresented leaders and give a voice to their personal narratives. Although there is ample opportunity for further examination of this population, this study provides insight on women student government presidents' experiences and how they made meaning of these experiences.

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