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Challenges and Breakthroughs of Female Department Chairs Across Disciplines in Higher Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the department chair role relative to challenges and breakthroughs women leaders experience both inside and outside the discipline of education. The research reported is an exploration of relatively uncharted territory, adding to the data-based studies that exist of female leadership in this post-secondary context. Incorporated into this survey-based study are constructs established in the literature around relational and organizational aspects of leadership behavior. While attention is given to gender and leadership issues reported by 121 female department chairs, the discussion is broader than gender considerations. Focus is on the major challenges that practicing leaders have encountered, particularly within the domains of administration and scholarship. Included is discussion of these leaders' initiatives, reflections, and advice, complete with verbatim quotes, thematic analyses, and relevant tables. One recommendation is that more research be conducted of the issues and work of female department chairs, with consideration of the gender dynamics involving work-role identity. Other recommendations include the advocacy of women faculty members as college-level leaders who are effectively mentored.

Key words: Department chair, higher education, women

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Introduction

In this discussion, I explore the somewhat neglected topic of women's leadership in academic leadership roles and offer study of the reported experiences of female department chairs in their leadership positions. Specifically, I inquired into the influences that led academic leaders across disciplines to assume this position, in addition to some of the challenges and rewards of their chairship, administrative and scholarly dimensions of their work, as well as lessons learned and advice that could benefit other leaders. A snapshot of the complexity entailed in this job for female leaders for whom gender is an influencing factor for many emerged from the study. A prevailing tension for the female chairs is of increased accountability and pressure to report departmental outcomes on the one hand, and the commitment to model a democratic leadership style and make a difference on the other hand.

By accounting for the perspective of female department chairs, there is potential to advance conversation about the meaning of administrative leadership relative to women. Challenges and breakthroughs that to some extent center on democratic agendas for various disciplines emerged from the data analysis. As a department chair who was hired in May 2007 through an external search at a research university located in the United States, I am motivated to learn from other chairs. The insights shared by the participants have already informed my practice, and the hope is that readers will also find these stimulating and useful.

Background Issues

The department chairs who participated in this study were prompted to specify their qualifications for the position, as well as the major influences leading to their chairship.

Qualifications for the Position

Many of the chairs viewed their experience and expertise as a major qualification contributing to their selection as chair and possibly to their effectiveness. They had held varied leadership positions over time and in such roles as director of graduate and undergraduate studies, as these typical comments confirm: "I have a 12-year track record of exceptional teaching, leadership, and service at this institution" and "Years of service as the coordinator of the unit, an unpaid position, has made me effective as its chair." The chairs had built their credentials within their departments and had applicable knowledge about its inner workings.

Selections also largely, but not exclusively, coincided with one's status (tenured professor): "Seniority at the time was *the* qualification." The chairs also highlighted their strong interpersonal skills (with colleagues and administrators) and their outstanding leadership, mentoring, and problem solving skills. Gendered language was evident with the self-referential uses of cheerleader, role model, maternal, mother, good listener, and nurturer. For the chairs who, in the majority of cases, were selected internally, they had responded to the need for departmental leadership by "stepping up to the plate." As many revealed, "I was the only willing candidate. The Chair position is not viewed as desirable but rather as being a good citizen"; "I was willing to do the job," and "I teach about leadership and administration so this was a chance to practice what I teach." *Willingness to serve*, then, was a prevalent motivator among the

internally selected chairs: "No one else was capable of doing it, either because of other commitments or because of personality conflicts." Others accepted the role as a strategy for protecting their more junior colleagues from being sidetracked in their academic journey.

Known for their outstanding organizational skills, the chairs reported that they had built their reputation by spearheading projects involving accreditation, grants, and more. They saw themselves as goal oriented, time managers, with an eye for detail and invaluable knowledge about curriculum issues. A few referred to themselves as academic entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the chairs had established themselves as leaders who believed that their departments should stay (or become) cohesive through such strategies as good communication and open dialogue. They believed that they had stood out because of their "non-confrontational, mediating style" and because they knew how to be diplomatic and seek win-win solutions. Some were seen as the only person "available and qualified who wouldn't polarize the department," which amplified the political aspects of their selection and of their professional lives.

Some of these leaders reported also being known for their commitment to fairness, consensus-building, equitable practice, and departmental governance and advocacy. Others expressed being supportive of diversity that included their support of wide ranging approaches to research. Someone had initiated "a civility agreement that all faculty signed" before she became the chair—"[they] still use that as a centerpiece to guide [their] interactions."

Major Influences Leading to Chairship

Most of the chair–respondents were internal candidates for which departmental colleagues, college deans, and inept faculty competition had the greatest influence, in addition to the departmental culture. Frequently the culture they inherited was portrayed as having been problem-ridden and ineffectual. Those hired from the outside had been nominated by an internal candidate, become disillusioned with the inept leadership they had witnessed, or were moving (back) into academe. To a lesser extent, the influence both groups (insiders and outsiders) cited was the lure of a salary increase, in addition to the motivation to make a difference and the belief they were "destined for larger leadership roles." A few were attracted to the administrative and managerial aspects of the leadership role. Only several noted the influence of mentors on their career goals, a rarity for women leaders that is not uncommon, especially among early generation female administrative leaders in education (see Short, 2009).

Theoretical Lenses

There is a consensus in the literature that department chairs are important in the overall academic leadership team in higher education institutions (e.g., Stanley & Algert, 2007). They can be elected or appointed (Wescott, 2000), and they may be identified from within the faculty ranks or through a national search. Such individuals have decision-making authority, and they are directly responsible to the dean, which distinguishes their role from other departmental leaders, such as program directors. Three major domains—academic, administrative, and leadership—are the purview of the department chair's position; this framework that McLaughlin, Montgomery, and Malpass (1975) described decades ago is still relevant. The departmental

chairship is considered one of the most or even *the most* challenging leadership position in the academy (Stanley & Algert, 2007).

Moreover, because women may be less inclined than males to think about their career trajectory, they may not advance as quickly or as far as their male counterparts. This is particularly the case within traditionally male-dominated fields, such as educational administration (Mertz, 2009). Empirical studies have found that women in general, including young gifted women across ethnic groups (Brizendine, Brown, Irby, & Reed, 2008), experience others' expectations and judgments as barriers to their development and success.

Hence, in response to the broad socialization patterns of female faculty members, deans and provosts in higher education institutions can help build organizational and human capacity by actively fostering the readiness and interests of women to assume college-level leadership positions. Institutional decision makers who are proactive about addressing gender equity in the academy support leadership opportunities and outcomes for female faculty members so that "parity between males and females in the quality of life, academic, and work outcomes" can be achieved (Koch & Irby, 2002, p. 3). University reports provide guidance with respect to solutions and directions, and task forces, while few, have been formed to investigate the work of department chairs and recommend courses of action (Chu et al., 2003a; Chu & Veregge, 2003b).

Gender, along with race and social class, is a social construct that can promote or marginalize individuals and groups, thus granting or barring privilege (Byrd, 2008; Koch & Irby, 2002). While "stereotyped beliefs about the attributes of men and women" promote a double standard in work settings (Heilman, 2001, p. 658; Koch, 2004), these beliefs are encoded from within and are manifest in not just how gender is viewed but also enacted (Koch, 2004). Nonetheless, as van Engen, der Leeden, and Willemsen (2001) cautioned, while many studies tend to reinforce gender-based leadership styles (e.g., women have a tendency to lead democratically, and men, autocratically), the literature on this topic is inconsistent and inconclusive. van Engen et al. speculated that the methods and organizational contexts used for study purposes may be exerting an influence over what is found. An example that seems to fit this assertion is Gmelch, Carroll, Seedorf, and Wentz's (1990) powerful finding that over 40% of 800 department chairs, females and males alike, suffered emotionally from having to make decisions affecting others, settling collegial differences, and assessing faculty performance. Perhaps leadership behaviors (e.g., sensitivity to interpersonal conflicts) are less a matter of gender and more a matter of leadership or perhaps "feminist leadership" (Barton, 2006).

While there is not a large body of literature available, some scholarship at both the higher education and PreK–12 levels has contributed to discussion of feminist leadership principles and their usefulness for dealing with challenges of the future (Barton, 2006; Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006; Klein et al., 2007). Through gender equity research and action, organizational value is being placed on humanity, social justice, equity, and student centeredness, and on transforming academic institutions into inclusive, holistic, responsive environments. However, indicators used to assess equality in administrative leadership positions suggest that ethnicity/race is considerably more challenging than gender in post-secondary and PreK–12 contexts (Jean-Marie, 2005; Klein et al., 2007). Another powerful caveat to the changes in organizational values is that gender stereotypes are activated so easily (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Research on female leadership has the potential to not only confront but also alter social expectations and their educational effects.

While this is more an inquiry into female leadership than gender stereotypes and gender-based leadership styles, these lenses have relevancy here. The issues participants identified, prompted by survey questions asked, generated connections to these topics. Feminine leadership styles are described as interpersonal-oriented, charismatic, and democratic, and related to gender because of stereotypes of women as being sensitive, warm, tactful, and expressive (Trinidad & Normore, 2005). Individuals with a feminine gender-role orientation may emphasize collaboration and cooperation, whereas the masculine gender-role orientation emphasizes control and institutional power, competition, and authority (Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006). In education and even in leadership positions (Heilman, 2001), female leadership styles have been characterized as "more democratic, participative, inclusive and collaborative" (Trinidad & Normore, p. 583), as well as less *agentic* or achievement oriented.

Statement of the Problem and Orientation

More study is needed of the department chair role and specifically "of how chairs see themselves, their challenges, and their sacrifices" (Gmelch, 1991, p. 45). Compounding this issue, few empirical studies of women faculty and leaders exist, which is an outgrowth of how power and authority are not only distributed but also legitimated within the academy (Byrd, 2008), in addition to the preponderance of male department chairs in studies of middle management. While women have advanced in leadership positions, progress has been slow; their representation in such *masculine-typed* elite jobs as department chair is modest at best and, in prestigious research universities, rare (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Short, 2009). Their rarity in such positions helps explain why the female department chairship is an under-studied area of leadership studies (Wallace, 2006).

Leadership studies mostly focus on other leadership positions such as the superintendency (e.g., Brunner, 2007) (as well as other business/corporate executives), in addition to gender-based leadership styles (e.g., Eagly et al., 2003). My analysis of the literature that addresses the department chair role surfaced five categories: (a) anecdotal perspectives of department chairs (e.g., Wescott, 2000); (b) reports produced by organizations (e.g., National Council for Research on Women), institutes, and university task forces (e.g., Chu et al., 2003a; Chu, & Veregge, 2003b); (c) how-to books (Lees, 2006); (d) case studies of settings that combine study of department chairs with other academic leaders (e.g., Wallace, 2006); and (e) survey-based study of male and female department chairs (e.g., Gmelch, 1991). The current study falls into the fifth category but with exclusive focus on women.

Methodology and Target Population

Instrument Development and Validation

Research-informed. The questionnaire that I developed for this pilot study focuses on women academic leadership. Benefitting from the literature that informs this topic, it was constructed in such a way as to elicit the relational (e.g., interaction, communication, support) and organizational (e.g., goal setting, direction, task) aspects of leadership behavior in the target population's work. These general domains have been supported in Trinidad and Normore's (2005) review of the leadership literature. However, this conceptualization of leadership behavior is static and limiting, which is why Wheatley's writings (e.g., 1999/2001) about organizational dynamics and change proved influential to my thinking. Thus, the survey questions I framed invited reflection on organizational life in whatever organic and evolving forms were being experienced, with some attention on challenges and breakthroughs. Because this study focuses on women in chair positions, it does not include a male comparison sample.

Questionnaire design. The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) focuses on the relational and task aspects of leadership style of behavior. Question-items were organized into a demographic section (16 questions) and open-ended responses (19 questions). Currently practicing female department chairs' feedback was sought along these dimensions: qualifications, personal or professional factors, administrative duties, scholarly leadership efforts, mentoring support (received and provided to others), collaborative experiences, challenges to one's work, insight into associations between gender and leadership, and lessons learned.

Questionnaire procedures. The survey was administered on the Internet via an official body at my University; all identifying information (e.g., names, emails) was safeguarded and has since been erased. Participants were asked to click directly on the Internet survey link and not to confirm their participation via email so that their anonymity could be assured. The survey data were automatically captured at the survey site in Excel format. No incentives (e.g., financial compensation) were offered, and no costs were incurred.

Displays. The examples listed in Tables 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 present data saturation relative to the survey question asked (e.g., major administrative duties performed), and they cover the main examples in the data.

Peer assessors and critique. Following Institutional Review Board approval for this study in 2007, six female academic leaders whose profile resembled that of the study's target group acted as peer assessors. This strategy of seeking validation for undertaking research has been established as sound methodological practice. Guba and Lincoln (1989) espoused that peer assessor critique has value in the context of research development partly because it potentially empowers one's stakeholder group. This peer group individually affirmed the relational/ organizational focus of the instrument and made suggestions about the items.

This peer group also informed me of current female department chairs *not* listed in the *U.S. News and World Report*. In all, 15 individuals were identified, and 10 completed the survey.

The initial response rate of 67% combined with the quality responses they produced encouraged me to both identify and access the target population, nation-wide.

Participants and Recruitment

To identify female department chairs, I utilized the *U.S. News & World Report's* (2008) top-50 list of national universities. These are based on the Carnegie Classifications, the established standard in higher education and research. My sampling was purposeful (Creswell, 1998), and it consisted of women in leadership roles at highly-ranked, doctoral-granting institutions. Using the top 50 list, I identified 385 female department chairs, located across colleges and disciplines. Relative to both institutional lists, I searched each institution's website, college by college and department by department, to identify members of my target population. Of the 385 surveys submitted, 121 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 31%.

Also, using the University Council of Educational Administration's (UCEA) membership list, I accessed female department chairs in educational leadership (*UCEA Convention 2007 Program Guide*, 2007). An additional 45 institutions were contacted via the UCEA website; in 2007, this association had 77 member institutions, 27 of which were in the top 50. Surveys were also posted to listserves totaling a membership of 731.[1]

Demographic Portrait

Of the 121 individuals who completed the survey, 111 were serving as department chair or head, in addition to nine interim chairs and one co-chair. (Incomplete surveys were excluded from the analysis.) The majority of the chairs were serving on a permanent line, with contracts ranging from 2 to 4 years; some were serving second terms. Many were seasoned chairs, with anywhere from 16 to 35 years but 34 had 15 or fewer years. Regarding time spent in this leadership role, 22 had had only 1 year or less; the majority (55) had spent 2 to 4 years, with substantial time spent in this role for 25 respondents (5 to 8 years); even more so, 11 respondents had had 9 to 12 years in this role, and 4 of them, 13 or over. From the data reported, most (45%) had spent anywhere from 2 to 8 years in the role but some (18%) were new to it.

Fifteen different departmental disciplines were represented by the chairs who were leading departments from inside and outside education. Education had the greatest concentration of respondents; outside education they were mostly from the humanities/social science and engineering, with a fairly even distribution among a range of other disciplines (see Table 1). The number of full-time faculty in their units averaged just under 18 (17.9), which represents fairly large units. They earned their terminal degree anywhere from 1968 to 2002. All but five were located in doctoral-granting institutions. Their institutions are located in 29 different US states, with the highest representation (38%) from California, New York, Florida, and Illinois.

Table 1. Disciplinary Areas Reflecting Department Chairs' Work (n=121)

Discipline	Departments
Education (33/121)	educational administration/leadership, special education, educational psychology, counseling
Humanities/Social Science (14/121)	Black studies, classics, English, linguistics, medieval studies
Foreign Languages (12/121)	romance languages and literatures
Engineering (12/121)	computer science, chemical, civil and environmental, industrial design, mechanical, agricultural and extension education
Communications (8/121)	information science, rhetoric, technical
Sociology (8/121)	human ecology, social work
Arts (7/121)	theater, finer arts, musicology, arts history, archaeology
Anthropology (5/121)	
Business (5/121)	collective bargaining and labor law, organizational behavior and management information systems, journalism, marketing, fiber science/fashion design and merchandising, management
Kinesiology (4/121)	sport management and physical education, occupational therapy
Medicine (4/121)	public health, nursing, obstetrics. gynecology
Science (4/121)	physics, zoology, epidemiology and biostatistics
Architecture (2/121)	urban planning
Liberal Arts (2/121)	international relations
Behavioral Science (1/121)	psychology

The average age of this group is 53 and its ethnic configuration was White majority (115), with 3 African Americans, 2 Hispanics, and one Asian American. Time spent in their current rank averaged 8.6 years. In response to prompts indicating their knowledge and interest with respect to gender issues in leadership positions, most (53%) indicated that they have knowledge of gender issues in leadership positions and 56% that they have interest in this area.

Regarding their achievements, the chairs had received recognition through teaching and research awards, and grants and funding (Table 2). Major publications and presentations relative to specialty areas of research and writing emphasis for all 15 departmental disciplines are listed in Table 3.

Table 2. Major Awards, Recognitions, and Grants (part of q. 16) (n = 121)

Awards/recognitions	Emphasis	Researcher Remarks
teaching award	very high	for excellence in teaching within one's university, state, or field
scholar/research award	very high	outstanding or distinguished, awarded from one's field, university, or college
grants and funding	very high	Department of Education, National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Science Foundation (NSF), Professional Development Schools, corporate, university-level
presidencies and distinguished offices held within associations	high	of a national or international association or society
excellence in faculty mentoring	high	for outstanding mentoring of students or faculty (field or university-level)
outstanding book award	high	awarded by a national or international association (or center)
Fulbright	medium	for research and teaching in countries outside the United States
fellowship	medium	for research and teaching in countries outside the United States; awarded by centers and institutes
outstanding graduate student	medium-low	academic overall and dissertation
keynote speaker	medium-low	major conferences and universities, worldwide
top paper award	medium-low	national or international association or academic journal
editorship of prominent journal	low	
guest-edited issue of a journal	very low	
service	very low	
exemplary programming	very low	
visiting scholarship	very low	
patents	very low	
leadership award	very low	

Table 3. Noteworthy Publications and Presentations (part of q. 16) (n = 121)

Publications (e.g., articles) via discipline	Specialty Areas of Research and Writing Emphasis
Education (29/121)	change, student achievement, leadership education educational and female leadership, leadership education, special education, language learning, teacher induction, special education programming, cognitive competence, teacher education and development, mentoring relationships, motivational and learning strategies, equity and social justice, learning communities and partnerships, action research, literacy and childhood education, accountability and reform, service learning, race and class, media, film, culture
Humanities/ Social Science (13/121)	Black studies, applied linguistics, medievalism
Foreign languages (11/121)	romance languages and literatures, French, German, Italian, east Asian
Engineering (11/121)	civil engineering, engineering science, environmental quality
Communications (8/121)	professional communication
Sociology (8/121)	domestic violence, sexual abuse, welfare systems, substance abuse, race and class, marriage and family
Arts (6/121)	visual arts, cultural identity
Anthropology (5/121)	cultural study, ethnic identity construction
Business (5/121)	human rights, corporate crime, women in government, politics, labor, and democracy in different countries, law and ethics, strategic management, entrepreneurship, marketing, organizational behavior
Kinesiology (4/121)	sports culture, physical education for girls and women
Medicine (4/121)	nursing education, immunology, rehabilitation, nursing facilities
Science (4/121)	biological systems
Architecture (2/121)	urban planning
Liberal Arts (2/121)	political science, international relations, religious studies
Behavioral Science (1/121)	environmental psychology, maladaptive behavior

Analysis of the Data

The systematic analytical process I used aligned with a basic qualitative study design (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After computing numerical outcomes for the demographic information, I then analyzed the written responses by identifying key words and phrases. This analysis was performed independently and then jointly: Four peer assessors who were *blind* to the starting conjectures/hypotheses regarding gender issues performed a separate analysis of the data (sample sets). A doctoral student "trained" in qualitative methods also analyzed the data. A total of six individuals independently verified the conclusions described herein.

To formulate this analysis, we each coded the data using as a guide the question, what do female department chairs who are academic leaders across disciplines have to share about their experience of the role? Systematic analysis procedures included identification and initial coding of text, development of categories by methods of constant comparison, and generation of themes that emerged from these categories (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). I searched the coded data for units of meaning, collapsed and refined categories, and explored relationships and patterns until consensus and saturation were reached. The coded responses were placed in separate tables (one per survey question), the most illuminative of which are included. Trustworthiness of the data, and its interpretation, was established by combining data procedures with inter-rater reliability.

Thematic Results from Survey

Experience, politics, willingness, organizational ability, a strong work ethic, and an ability to get along with faculty and leaders were cited as factors leading to these women leaders' departmental positions. In fact, they listed both qualifications (e.g., relevant leadership experience) and qualities (namely, good listener, effective mediator, fair, competent, detailed, flexible, collegial, collaborative, and innovative) that together communicate some sense of what was involved in supporting these academics as candidates for the chairship. Some attributed their advancement as leaders more to their qualities than their qualifications. As faculty members, many had launched new approaches to instructional, curricular, and delivery systems.

Although not technically qualifications, the female chairs specified that they were elected or selected for this role, or it was their turn, or no one else who would take it on. Many referred to particular circumstances or politics within their departments that meshed with their qualifications, giving rise to their current role. While their commitment to the department and profession in general was apparent, many shared that their chairship was a politically expedient decision, as in "We have a rotating chair and nobody really wants the position. It was my turn and I'm relatively sane," and "It's a hard job that no one else wanted."

Rewards and Drawbacks for Department Chairs

Concerning rewards or benefits for their service as department chair they illustrated not only advantages but also disadvantages, which underscore the complexity and hardship of this leadership position. They responded that tangible rewards are not compelling in most cases and that the pay-off is more intrinsic. For most, the salary benefits were modest; however, for some, the external rewards were lucrative and while these focused on salary supplements the benefits

went beyond them. They received, as a paired resource, some relief from teaching. The picture that emerged is one of an enormous workload and a low-to-moderate pay-off.

Intrinsic Rewards

The most pervasive reward cited was the role that influence played, enabling the chairs to shape the direction of their units and programs, and to consequently experience the rewards of advocacy. Most emphasized that being in a position to exercise or express leadership is its own reward. Their position enables them to "drive forward new initiatives," "influence the well being and achievement of the staff team," "have control over our programs," and "affect students in all programs instead of just the one in which I teach." They attached the feeling of fulfillment to having influence from within their departments and beyond.

The chairs found it rewarding not only to change the direction of the department and to strengthen it internally but also to change the departmental culture itself. Influence was succinctly described as "the ability to empower others to make change." They saw the results of their personal influence in a number of ways including in the marked improvement in student graduation and faculty productivity. They had also implemented new programmatic initiatives and unit activities that included promotion-and-tenure guidelines and colloquium series.

Contact with administrative leaders was cited as another reward. They found it satisfying to have "access to meaningful decision making" and "a voice in decisions that can affect the profile of the college far into the future." Working with powerful others enabled their momentum toward such goals as raising their departments' profile on campus and in the profession.

Most saw their efforts as pivotal to faculty direction and growth, as in "I think the rewards are helping junior faculty see their way through the tenure process and helping more senior faculty achieve their goals." Related to this, they viewed recruiting new faculty and mentoring as a benefit of their role. They especially found rewarding the opportunity to "create a community and environment in which faculty, students, and staff can be as productive as possible." Many also cited the positive affect derived from connecting with department chairs. Several expressed that they enjoyed the collegial contact made across their state and the nation.

Positive spinoffs were associated with feelings of accomplishment, satisfaction, and appreciation. Dynamics influencing these feelings were reinforced through relationships with faculty members and students, as well as chairs and deans. Feelings of accomplishment, for example, ensued from goal attainment ("achieving the goals I set myself and the department"); increased respect ("pleasure in gaining respect and acknowledgement from my colleagues"), and departmental progress ("satisfaction in seeing my unit grow and advance").

The opportunity to engage in problem-solving with success was highlighted with respect to recruiting and promoting highly qualified faculty in their units, satisfying goals set by their units, and resolving problems involving faculty and students. Some units were defined by the values of collaboration and hard work. Several individuals reported having an outstanding staff with whom they work closely. Citizenship was especially highlighted as a reward. Notably,

"because my Department has a strong ethic of citizenship," the senior faculty members "take our turn at this task for a 2-year term."

The chairs mostly agreed that their position enabled them to benefit from being recognized in the role of leader and as someone doing important work towards improving their departments. One might assume that a reward of the chair's position is the career advancement it offers. However, as might be fitting of a feminine orientation toward leadership, with less emphasis on the traditional value of careerism, only four of the chairs mentioned the possibility of becoming a dean in the future and one, a provost. Instead, the major benefit they were experiencing was personal stature and growth: "The reward is for the institution to take me seriously and to hear my voice" and to act as a "visionary for my group and motivator." Caring more about reputation, growth, and voice than career blazing may be a feminine stance. Flexibility and autonomy were also attractors, as in being able to transport their children places.

Extrinsic Rewards

The chairs mentioned departmental recognition more frequently than personal recognition. They liked having the opportunity to strengthen their unit and increase its visibility through such means as "adding new dynamic faculty" and "making things happen."

In a few cases, salary was cited as the single most important criterion: "Honestly, I would not have accepted the position without the increase as my salary had become compressed over the years." Great variability was evident with respect to the salary increases secured with the promotion, ranging from modest (a $1,000 supplementary per year) to sizable (over $50,000). Accompanying the salary increase, and, for some, additional perks, is release from their teaching load, although most commonly they had a reduction of one or more courses per year.

The workloads they carry were described as too heavy, ranging from matters of accountability and data control, curriculum updates, and budget constraints to student complaints, compounded by long hours. For some, while "there is no question that the workload is huge and the extra compensation inadequate, the rewards are significant." However, others shared a rather bleak picture with respect to personal and professional rewards, as in "There is some financial remuneration, but not enough. The workload is *enormous.*" Even where they are relatively well compensated, the increase fails to compensate for their workload; hence, the reward for this position was, for many, internal satisfaction.

Modest salaries and stipends, and inadequate course releases were viewed as insufficient. Additionally, the releases from teaching did not compensate for "the hit to [their] research agenda and how salaries are driven by publications, not service." While some asserted that they had "moved the department forward significantly," others felt that the chairship was not forwarding their personal academic career or benefitting them in any way apart from the financial: "The stipend for summer does not compensate for the lack of enough time for research or the workload itself." In addition to inadequate salary increases and supplements for some chairs and a loss of research time reported by most, teaching was identified, albeit to a lesser degree, as problematic. While some did not feel sufficiently compensated for having to teach too much, a few others said that they missed teaching.

Recognition and appreciation were not pay-offs for some. They think that "faculty have little idea of the amount of work involved for a chair in obtaining even simple things like permission for externally-funded faculty research leaves." Much more time was being spent in the office, with an ensuing loss of flexibility in their schedules. The restriction on their daily freedom was compounded with the responsibility for undesirable jobs: "Most faculty do not want the burden of scheduling courses, deciding curriculum issues, or evaluating fellow faculty."

For those experiencing high stress and demands, they found that while "financial rewards and release time" compensates to some extent, this does not make the difference it should. Time-consuming personnel issues contributed to the stress: "This is a really hard job, and no amount of compensation can make up for the grief it entails, largely because of very difficult personnel issues that consume my time." One person simply wrote "ulcers!"

Gender issues were apparent where individuals felt pressured to serve or to continue for another term. While some individuals hinted at a feeling of powerlessness, several were explicit: "I experience very few benefits, unfortunately. I am given a course release and a small stipend, and I can essentially set teaching assignments, but beyond that I'm basically powerless." Some attributed the lack of control they felt to the way decision making occurs in their colleges, with most of the impactful decisions occurring in the dean's office. An overall loss was voiced by 15 chairs who reported "Virtually no rewards—it's a net loss in time and work relationships."

Administrative Duties: Time Spent and Major Functions

Sixty to 80% of the chairs' time was spent on administrative duties (with outliers specifying, at the lowest 20%, and the highest, over 90%). The average time spent is consistent with data cited in other reports (e.g., Chu & Veregge, 2003). Obviously this is the key aspect of the chair's job. Administrative duties consuming their time are outlined in Table 4, with personnel matters (e.g., providing support, resolving conflicts) a salient task. Although hiring and recruiting, tenure and promotion, and mentoring and advising are all personnel issues, the chairs treated each as a duty of some significance; thus, these tasks were highlighted separately.

Table 4. Major Administrative Duties Performed by Department Chairs (n=121)

Duties	Examples in Data
Personnel (51/121)	personnel support and development; dealing with student and faculty problems; overseeing student-instructor conflicts; problem-solving; faculty evaluation; conferring with faculty on personnel issues
Reviews (48/121)	personnel/faculty reviews and evaluation (e.g., annual review, tenure and promotion, post-tenure, merit, personnel); departmental reviews; preparing tenure and promotion cases); related legal issues; contract renewals; accountability reviews; accreditation and other program review requirements; reviewing markers of productivity
Recruitment (36/121)	procuring qualified adjuncts and overseeing and assigning adjuncts to teach; hiring teaching assistants and lecturers to staff courses; faculty searches and recruitment; student recruitment; hiring office staff
Meetings (30/121)	numerous meetings with faculty, students, and administrators dealing with issues and problems raised. Focused on faculty-and-student concerns; committee, program, department, college, and university meetings attended. Presence expected at numerous meetings. Preparation required for meetings and follow up (action taken), attending executive committee meetings, organize meetings (and other events) for department and college
Reports (26/121)	administrative and accountability reporting, preparing statistical and other reports for the university; writing different kinds of institutional reports, e.g., instructional budgets; conducting data collection and analyses; reviews of faculty performance; securing data, reporting on it, and reacting; tenure case summaries; annual reports; overseeing the preparation of reports; faculty assignments; grants preparation and reporting; writing for program reviews
Scheduling (25/121)	dealing with course scheduling, coverage, and student enrolment; managing class schedules of individual faculty
Budget (24/121)	managing departmental and grant budgets; developing and defending budgets that fit with departmental and university mission; holding budget meetings with staff and dean; overseeing compliance with budgetary regulations; determining staffing based on budgetary allocations
Staff (23/121)	staff and faculty supervision; staffing courses; appointing staff; faculty and staff personnel actions, solving problems with and involving staff; determining staffing needs and patterns
Programs (21/121)	program administration and development, accreditation and other program review requirements; oversight of programs, including study abroad and language programs; promotion of various departmental programs; fund-raising for programs; working with faculty to develop new and review current programs
Committees (16/121)	serving on and leading departmental, college, and university committees; creating committee assignments and convening committees; writing committee reports; organizing/charging committees; emailing and updates
Planning (10/121)	planning curriculum offerings every semester; assessment systems planning; planning in the context of departmental goals; strategic planning
Mentoring (10/121)	mentoring new and untenured faculty

Scholar Leadership Efforts: Time Spent and Major Functions

A little over 23% (23.4) of the women chairs' work, on average, involves scholarly leadership (e.g., promoting faculty's research initiatives). Despite the challenge of being able to dedicate time to this area of work, they were able to generate an impressive list of scholarship that they have initiated, facilitated, or collaborated on.

Overall, scholarly leadership was identified as the other key aspect of their job and a function they value. Because of the weight of their administrative duties, their scholarly leadership efforts are pressed into a secondary but crucial role. The two domains of work can also be viewed as compatible or even interchangeable to some extent—as Tables 4 and 5 reveal, certain functions are common to both domains (i.e., mentoring, recruitment, programs, and reviews). The scholarly leadership functions that consume their time (see Table 5) are mainly resource-related (e.g., providing funds for faculty professional development).

Table 5. Salient Scholarly Leadership Efforts Performed by Department Chairs (n=121)

Efforts	Examples in Data
Resources (44/121)	funds for faculty travel (conferences, research trips), professional development (e.g., grants workshops), and research (e.g., site-based research); research funding for graduate students; salary increases for faculty and staff; supported research materials and programs; space and money for faculty; encouraged external funding for research; teaching assistantship workload and assignments; hired qualified individuals in support of grants; raised money to be able to afford more internal forms of support; release time for faculty—reduce course loads (e.g., grants preparation or implementation, tenure-earning dossier preparation, writing); release time to the most productive faculty; hired graduate research assistants for all regular faculty; hired grants support administrator in department; shared information about grant opportunities; information distributed about conferences, grants, fellowship, and other opportunities
Programs (32/121)	curriculum reform and assessment; overhaul of departmental programs integrated with vision statements; new courses developed for majors; developed new degree programs (masters, doctoral); followed strategic plan (e.g., developing goals around research production and grants); found strategies for urging faculty to propose new degree programs and to update existing ones; developed processes for program coordinators to assess their programs for accreditation and alignment with national and state standards; led department through strategic planning; instituted core classes in areas of specialization; developed data-based assessments leading to program changes; professional development of students (e.g., facilitated student exchange programs)
Collaboration (28/121)	increased participation in research and enquiry by wide range of staff; initiated group proposals and workshops; research teams and writing clubs (faculty-faculty and faculty-student research groups); publication review teams, collaborated on research projects, writing articles, presenting at national meetings; helped with stats, read each other's articles, grants, etc.; encouraged junior faculty to apply for grants; arranged for meetings with potential scholarly collaborators; kept faculty and students abreast of scholarship opportunities; shaped new directions of research; fostered collaboration among existing groups both within unit and with outside unit; formed consortiums of departments, institutes, and academies to become hubs for faculty research and international collaboration; organized group scholarly efforts among faculty
Mentoring (27/121)	developed mentoring systems and relationships—target was mostly tenure-earning faculty but embraced seasoned faculty, students, and constituent groups (e.g., school principals); mentored new researchers and staff; encouraged associate professors to become full professors; focused on assistant professors and their research and tenure journey with respect to expectations for tenure; read drafts of junior-earning faculty's articles; provided guidance about acceptable publication and conference outlets; mentored graduate students (e.g., established a scholarly journal featuring graduate student publications); regulated the mentoring of junior faculty; improved training of teaching assistants; talked with faculty about goals, progress, and projects; supported faculty in working on dissertations; created informal and/or formal mentoring programs for junior faculty and students; acted as sounding board for colleagues to explore decision making and the protection of research time

Table 5. Continued

Efforts	Examples in Data
Events (17/121)	junior faculty-only seminars (with a mentoring focus); research lunches with faculty; established events around the mentoring of junior faculty; discussed research issues at departmental meetings; race and rank issues in teaching/ learning and research; series focused on publication of faculty books; sponsored minority faculty as colloquium speakers
Reviews (13/121)	wrote or revised promotion-and-tenure guidelines; oversaw cyclic review of all faculty designed to strengthen research profiles; oversaw mentoring of all faculty in unit; performance evaluations with standards for success established; developed mentoring and evaluation systems for junior faculty; oversaw tenure-and-promotion cases; instituted differential merit raises based on scholarly performance; implemented peer reviews across curriculum; addressed research/teaching emphases of faculty; promoted behavior aligned with unit's mission; monitored faculty scholarship production
Visibility (12/121)	highlight publications; redesigned webpage to market department and faculty research; garnered publicity for faculty accomplishments by submitting to college communications directors etc.; shared successes during faculty meetings and via email; promoted the impact of faculty and doctoral student research
Projects (10/121)	invited coauthorships with the new faculty on chair's projects; extended invitations to write for chair's academic journal and to join in on her articles and guest editorships; created edited book projects and invited all departmental and college faculty to participate; understanding solo projects on translation studies and teaching issues; writing with colleague
Nominations (6/121)	nominated faculty for competitive awards (e.g., fellow in professional society), nominations (e.g., selective service roles, and applications (e.g., grants); pursued research resources for faculty; endorsed faculty requests
Advocacy (6/121)	more voting on issues in department rather than chair making decisions for everyone; broadened faculty voice from the senior male faculty; rotated departmental committee leadership (a stipulated term versus "lifetime"); created executive committee that advises on budget policy and priorities

Mentoring, Coaching, and Network Support

Any support personally available to these chairs is mostly informal and self-generated. A high percentage (47%) reported having no mentoring at all or nothing noteworthy, which they believe has limited their effectiveness. They "really regret not having" mentoring and referred to the position as "lonely": They had to figure out most aspects of the job on their own because the former chair was not a good resource, or because departmental collegial relationships changed when they became the superior, or because supports had not been mobilized for them, or because ineffectual or busy mentors were assigned to them. Given that many had to create their own support systems or extend what minimal support may have been available, it is not surprising that the status they attributed to colleagues/advisors/friends as support networks was given such emphasis, followed by fellow department chairs and leadership workshops (see Table 6).

Table 6. Mentoring, Coaching, and Network Support Provided to Department Chairs (n=121)

Network Supports	Examples in Data
Colleagues (22/121)	informal network of current and former colleagues; friends; spouses; networks on and off-campus; colleagues who are specialists in administration and scholarship; research teams; women colleagues
Chairs (current, group) (20/121)	department chairs in college provide mentoring; mentoring support from other women chairs, sometimes with ongoing network formed; meetings, retreats, and luncheons with college chairs to share information and problem solve
Workshops (17/121)	leadership coaching (time management, personnel management, budgetary concerns, mentoring faculty and students, clarifying university procedures, fund-raising); some attended with other department chairs; women chair seminars; one-day workshops and ongoing workshops
Chairs (previous) (12/121)	assistance and/or mentoring from previous chair(s) from inside or outside department; mentoring received initially or on an ongoing basis; references to former chairs as male
Deans (11/121)	mentoring and coaching provided, which aids effectiveness of chair; deans meet with the chair once a month, especially in the early phase; deans range from being very helpful, to somewhat helpful, to less so.
Administrators (9/121)	upper administrators are supportive, as well as associate deans, human relations directors, etc. who provide support in difficult supervisory and leadership areas; provide counsel in confidential discussions
Faculty (4/121)	assistance from leadership-minded and skilled faculty within unit perceived as trustworthy
Mentors (4/121)	mentors from the past (e.g., former dissertation chair) exert influence for years and provide counsel (e.g., regarding sticky personnel matters)

Salient Challenges for Department Chairs

The greatest challenges in (or obstacles to) the work of department chair were reported to be personnel issues (40%) and resource constraints (39%). Significant overlap occurred between these two areas, in particular where resource allocation for personnel was deemed inadequate. The issue of authority that emerged helps to explain this overlap as some felt hampered, unable to use resources to affect or alter faculty behavior. Their own scholarship was overshadowed by the managerial aspects of their work. Lack of resources was amplified by a focus on bureaucracy where excessive demands for accountability were seen as a negative driver. Deans were sometimes viewed as supportive and effectual and, at other times, traditional or even unethical. A competing area of attention that overlaps with their perception of and relationship to their deans is the authority of the chair. The limited authority they experienced made these leaders feel powerless to affect change and interact in ways commensurate with their role.

Solutions Attempted for Overcoming Challenges

The most frequent responses concerning solutions attempted for overcoming challenges varied from “no solutions found” to various leadership competencies employed. Challenges had not been overcome where there was lack of ample support from departmental colleagues or college leaders or where there had been a personal or professional toll taken on the chair. Of

equal weight, though, was the attention some respondents gave to a complex set of leadership skills developed (e.g., exercising authority, delegation, negotiation, and persuasion; setting high standards and expectations; organizing systems; collaborating with colleagues). Maintaining perspective in the role of department chair was also underscored, with "solutions" to challenges varying from believing that problems have a way of getting resolved, to rising above inequities, petty behavior, and resistance, to intentionally seeking personal equilibrium and inner peace.

Gender and Other Variables as Factors

Gender and other variables contributed to challenges in the workplace. While some respondents (33%) indicated that gender was not a factor in the challenges they faced—whether because they were new in their role, too busy to notice, or resistant to allowing gender become an issue for them—the majority (67%) expressed lukewarm affirmations and outright declarations to this effect. Some explained that it is difficult to discern what actual gender-related issues are, partly because it is "not possible to separate a person from his or her gender." For example, one chair attempted non-confrontational strategies for accomplishing tasks, which she added can be a matter of gender, personality, or leadership style.

Most notably, testimonies were provided of discriminatory, sexist, and power-laden experiences. These ranged widely but centered on the sexist behavior of male faculty, students, and administrators (17%). In the former case, the female chairs "deal[t] with some men who challenge [their] authority and, outside the department, "a certain culture of sexism" was alluded to. Hostility was described toward "women in charge" ("women with children have no place in the academy, and certainly no place in administration"). Notably, a gender division was apparent in the data with respect to "women generally doing the majority of the service work" and even "the grunt work," "freeing up the males to do more research" and to "make important decisions on graduate admissions, etc." Several equated the administrative and service work that women do with "domestic duties." Someone viewed the gender inequities she faces as "a vicious cycle" that eludes her ability to seek balance and enact change.

In some instances, male faculty members, chairs, and administrators were depicted as bullies and resisters of female leadership. Power plays by males who think they can rule through intimidation was described as the core issue, and some claimed that they or their staff was the target. Comments to this effect include "A male chair in my college who is a bully has attempted some inappropriate things, such as telling my faculty what they should and shouldn't be doing to get tenure—scaring the crap out of them; I told him to back off—I will not be bullied!"; "Some of the male faculty I deal with think they can intimidate me and, to some extent, they are right"; and "I spend time fending off men who want to take credit for my work."

Sex-stereotyped roles and attributions were also identified. Some think that the males in their colleges are given more respect, as in "They are largely treated like the 'brains' of the outfit, getting favorable treatment when it comes to course releases, more publicity for their research, and more serious reactions to their scholarship." Other females believed that they are "perceived as soft," which might in fact be a plus depending on the configuration of their other perceived attributes: "Women have to develop a style that is acceptable. If one appears too aggressive, one's effectiveness is impaired. Men behaving in similar ways are perceived as

strong. But women in leadership roles have to appear warm, supportive of others, but strong." They believed that female chairs were perceived as "glorified administrative assistant," caretaker, mother, and housekeeper: "I'm asked to take on extra work because of the need for females on committees, which translates into being expected to do the 'mothering' and 'housework'" and "Staff and faculty colleagues expect you to be more nurturing than men, which simply takes time." Interestingly, some of the terminology they used here aligned with a traditionally masculine terminology: combat, firing line, enemies/allies, and fight.

These women believe that they are harder workers than their male counterparts: "The men who exist in leadership are either lazy or disorganized." Further, "the aggressive/negative attitude that some male colleagues have toward their subordinates" was identified as a compounding problem. Feeling pressured by administration to serve, untenured female chairs felt that their gender had been a factor: "I wonder if a man would have had the same pressure to take the role of chair as an untenured professor or if males would have just refused the role."

Invisibility was felt by those who reported being overlooked and feeling devalued: "Women have difficulty being 'seen', heard, and acknowledged by universities." An example given several times in the data centered on gender dynamics within such public forums as meetings wherein women are ignored at the expense of male colleagues who voice the same idea with acceptance. Male leaders including deans and female leaders as well apparently allowed for this gender inequity to occur. In some cases, the female chairs' salary was lower than that of the senior male faculty, even in their own units.

The majority also identified variables coalescing around age in particular and, with limited attention, race and status/rank. Age was seen as working in the favor of female department chairs who are older and more experienced, except where they were experiencing low energy or a longing to retire (19%). There was agreement among the experienced chairs that "Increasing age has made my work life easier. Experience counts" and that "age adds authority and credibility," although "One has to be careful in wielding that authority in a department that considers itself egalitarian." Some of the women specified the middle years as ideal, as in "I'm pushing 60 and think my age commands respect." However, others pointed out that aging "becomes a disadvantage" without the stamina to carry the department forward. Consequently, they become "one of the old farts" who wants to "hand over the reins."

At the other end of the "age" spectrum, those who are relatively young explained that their age is a factor (12%), in some cases giving rise to discomfort and even discrimination. They stated that "even though I have a great deal of experience it is assumed that I don't have adequate experience due to my age." Consequently, they felt pressured to perpetually prove themselves.

Race apparently played a role in the challenges of only 13 chairs. Several commented that their department is among the most diverse on campus and that the connections forged by them have been "pleasurable" as well as "growth directed." Other chairs felt challenged by the diversity surrounding them, indicating that their departments were not ethnically diverse or that they did not feel "well-equipped" to reach out to persons of color. Race was identified as a more prevailing issue for the chairs from traditionally disenfranchised groups (see Jean-Marie, 2005), both on a personal level ("I'm not just a faculty member—I'm very aware that I'm a Black

woman") and on an observational level ("Black faculty here face significant challenges" and "Race is an issue for ethnic minority staff").

A few of the chairs thought that while age and race matter in academic life, rank or status is what really counts. They find that they must remind people of their rank in subtle ways.

Discussion

Planned-Readiness-Duty-Forced Continuum

While some of the respondents had sought after their current position or responded positively when approached, others had either fallen into the role or even felt pressured to assume it. At the extreme end of what I am coining the planned-readiness-duty-forced continuum, 11% of the respondents explained that the shift to department chair fit with their career trajectory. This move was actualized through hard work, planning, and sacrifices, as well as timing and opportunity: There was "no defining moment—it was a logical path." Pursuing this leadership role combined with taking advantage of professional opportunities, they succeeded in their career goal. Those expressing readiness for this move referred to the "desire for a new challenge," one citing an anticipated "growth spurt." They wanted "to be placed in a mainstream leadership position" where they could "work hard on behalf of others and assume new administrative duties." For others, the position represented a good fit based on their previous leadership roles and vision for what was needed. For faculty who had become chairs within their own units, they had already accumulated social capital (e.g., networks) through having worked with their colleagues and campus leaders.

Regarding "duty," the middle part of the planned-readiness-duty-forced continuum, a sense of duty combined with a view of the chair's role as one of service to the department and university also surfaced in their responses. Some desired to be a good citizen by providing leadership within the department, while others felt resigned to having made this move. Reflective of good citizenry was the honored practice of turn-taking. A sense of obligation was also evident, as in: "I don't crave this position but am willing to do it." The notion of the individual being a good fit for a particular unit because of her values was also communicated, usually described as caring about and being loyal to their colleagues and work environment.

Gender Versus Feminist Leadership

The results from this study overlap with those for which gender is a factor; in general, female chairs view issues somewhat differently than their male counterparts. For example, in a survey-based study of 539 department chairs in 100 different research institutions female chairs gave greater importance than did male chairs to encouraging faculty members' professional development, research, and publication (Carroll & Gmelch, 1992). Although not compared with males in my study, the women emphasized relationship building and democratic agendas to such an extent that their own career aspirations and scholarly work played "second fiddle." Also they implied that their leadership behavior is selfless, for they attend to the scholarly and other developmental needs of faculty to a much greater extent than their own needs. While chairs in my sample did articulate personal career goals and interpersonal boundaries, these were the

exception, broadly befitting a "masculine gender-role orientation" (Trinidad & Normore, p. 583). Hence, my study findings are generally consistent with Eagly and Johnson's (1990) review of 162 studies that found people's leadership styles to be somewhat gender-stereotypic, with women exhibiting more interpersonally oriented and democratic styles, and men manifesting more task-oriented and autocratic styles (cited in Eagly & Carli, 2003).

"Negative attitudes toward female authority" (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000, p. 1316) was how some of the female chairs in my sample explained the treatment of them as housewives, mothers, and servant leaders, and the testing of their authority. This is an illustration of gender inequity—women's social roles have been devalued through their association with the domestic sphere (e.g., family values) (Rudman & Kilianski). They also experienced high stress from interpersonal conflict with their colleagues, and more intensely than with deans or students. In the literature, such personnel issues are second only to administrative paperwork, although in the current study personnel stresses equaled bureaucratic stresses.

Context and Temporality

It was not necessarily a straightforward task for the chairs to identify the major administrative duties they perform. The focus and emphasis of their administrative work is largely dependent on "the time of the year" and other circumstances, which means that the duties vary somewhat: "In the fall it was annual report and preparing promotion cases. Now it is budgeting for next year, doing faculty annual reviews, and determining the teaching schedule for next year" and "Periodically it is larger scale things like the strategic plan."

In addition to the temporal rhythms of their annual work, the data analysis that emerged from this study does not provide a simple view of administration/administrative leadership as "bad" and scholarship/scholarly leadership as "good." For, high-level activity and low-level activity was used to differentiate the types of administrative duties they perform: "Unfortunately, most of my administrative time is spent on lower-impact activities, such as resolving student complaints. Higher-impact activities include writing proposals to get department resources, etc."

Rather than automatically applying this tiered model as a basis for judging worthy and less worthy tasks, a contextual treatment of the categories "administration" and "scholarship" makes more sense. That is, what was cited as a lower-level activity for one chair (e.g., handling faculty issues) was identified as a higher-level administrative activity or even scholarly task for another. Further, some practical tasks have higher and lower components; for example, in the case of "handling faculty issues," the chairs placed greater value on tasks related to personnel review and advancement than managing disputes with colleagues and students. Finally, the value attached to any particular task can change over time. One can also imagine that administrative work is not to be automatically subsumed in stature by scholarly work, even though this seems counter-intuitive—administrative work embodies some higher functions and values and it carried some prestige in the data.

Hence, one cannot assume that this high/low hierarchy of tasks is static or that it applies generally to all academic leaders. Writing reports, staffing courses, and other seemingly low-

level tasks can actually have repercussions for personnel matters, curriculum development, resource allocation, and, importantly, the sustainability of a unit and its reputation. The chairs expressed concern that higher-level activities (e.g., scholarly leadership and mentoring) are being compromised in their daily work, along with their potential for impact. Several chairs testified that all of the administrative duties performed "are a waste of time but are things that one has to do." Frustration was articulated by many, even disgust, especially concerning ongoing solicitations for detailed information—"responding to endless requests for data from administration and constantly justifying one's existence defines my work," and "my job consists of assessments of everything and everyone under the sun."

Attitudes towards the department chair role are influenced by assumptions embedded in the academic culture. Notably, the respondents used the role descriptor "administrator," not scholarly leader, mentor, or something else, to refer to themselves and their work. They seemed to have internalized the cultural message that the department chair role is basically one of service to their units and universities. On the other hand, the potential for seeing themselves as scholarly leaders showed promise, as many recognized that the scholarship and mentorship dimensions of their role are essential and that they must be better nurtured. As far as vision is concerned, many understood that the 'bricks" (significant targets that are met, such as securing major grants or donors) are no more important to a department's vitality and credibility than its "mortar" (invisible actions taken, such as resolving disputes and mentoring junior faculty members).

Lessons They Have Learned

The lessons they described were varied and complex concerning what they have learned from their experiences as a female leader that could assist future department chairs. As will be seen, it is as though they were being asked to advise future *female* department chairs when, in fact, I had not specified gender. (Six were too new in the role to comment.)

Make informed decisions. Be aware of the institutional climate you're stepping into" and "Avoid leading in contentious departments" were pressing messages. Especially challenging workplaces require a strong leadership style, which does not go over well in general and especially not if it is displayed by a woman. But, where the faculty and college leaders clearly want a strong academic female leader it was thought this might be a good move.

Others were less cautious, encouraging women faculty to consider taking these leadership jobs and not to worry about the time constraints involved because they can be made "workable." Once in the role, they urged new chairs to take on additional leadership tasks early, in both their schools and professional societies. Importantly, they encouraged career planning: "Women need to be more proactive than I was in mapping their career trajectory."

A uniform perspective shared was that while new chairs should assert their authority at the outset, they should only speak about issues for which they had knowledge: "Rise to the occasion early by making your values clear on day one, through action, and plans." Being informed means staying open to ideas from all colleagues, and cultivating buy-in for strategic efforts: "Take the time to do the spadework to be sure you are on firm ground—*then* act."

Maintain perspective. The majority (95%) urged that chairs steadfastly maintain perspective and in a myriad of ways. Importantly, those in this role should understand that "You will not make everyone happy" and that "a sense of humor" is a matter of survival. A strong work ethic together with "a constructive positive attitude" is essential for fostering responsiveness and change. One must recognize that "the trivia goes with the territory" and that the position is "ultimately a service role." One must transcend the bleak realities seemingly inherent in such a position. Being positive and persistent must be a "constant presence" if leaders are to have impact. Doing the work that "one believes in and that makes a difference" gives one fortitude in the face of resistance. "No matter what, be true to yourself," they urged.

The chairs also emphasized the necessity of having strong boundaries: "Separate your professional and personal lives" and "When at work, focus on the job." Boundaries must be adhered to in order to ward off attempts at exploitation: "I have stronger boundaries against those that want to take advantage of me" and "Set limits. People who expect you to be their mother will be disappointed no matter what, so don't give them unlimited attention."

Monitor gender. Many more of the chairs testified that gender is an issue for female leaders than those who felt otherwise. The majority's previous leadership experiences and present position generated the insight that "Gender is a somewhat invisible element in many interactions. Race is an area that we don't violate, but gender is still an area of discrimination that is acceptable." They agreed that while one must be sympathetic, "since women's authority is always being challenged, usually without people being aware of it, it's necessary to keep that in mind and to be careful not to be undermined." As sex-stereotyped leaders who are expected to not just nurture but also "mother" in the workplace, women need to sidestep being cast as "'organizational wives' who do much of the service work without being credited." They will be forced to rise above "provocations about [their] gender and perceived qualities." They insisted that female chairs should not let gender interfere in getting the job done, that they should not try to hide their femaleness, and that they should understand that their experience influences their perspective: "Speak from that experience but do not generalize it, even to other women."

Five individuals alternatively thought that there does not seem to be a "femaleness issue" in their role as department chair. They argued that this logic "would only hold if one thinks that there are characteristics that all women have that all men do not have." Having respect for others, being an effective listener, and being able to discern important ideas and messages are all aspects of the job that are neither "gender specific" nor "rocket science." They stressed that chairs need to help others to learn how to work together, regardless of differences. They asserted, as well, that not every faculty member can develop the characteristics that will make them good chairs.

Balancing the building of consensus in ways tolerant of process and of making autocratic decisions focused on outcomes involves a delicate dance. For many, this has proven a difficult challenge: "In implementing changes that are mandated from the top I have worked hard to encourage participation. This challenge has either made me seem like an overly positive administrator-loving chair *or* an authoritarian chair." Regarding this overriding tension, "Being seen as a problem-solver and facilitator really helps—it's less threatening than being seen as a

'boss.' Someone added, "I have always assumed that some men would resist "'taking orders' from a woman, but our male faculty don't seem to mind being *assisted* by one."

Control emotions. "Never lose your temper—it never helps"—basically, self-monitoring was considered as a desirable capacity of leadership. Once again, it was as though some had interpreted "future department chair" in the survey question to mean *female* leader: "Stay even keel. Use nurturing 'instincts' and don't be shocked or affected by male colleagues when they act like little boys. Take it in stride. Keep your focus and vision." Avoid coming across as "moody" or "having a chip on your shoulder," even when "it seems appropriate to play the guilt card." In fact, they advised only women faculty with "a thick skin" to accept the position.

Find mentors. New chairs were strongly advised by most (95%) of the respondents to find a mentor/source who can keep them informed about unofficial matters. Look for "Some kind of support from other women in similar positions" they urged, in part because "One will be challenged and interacted with in ways different than men and one must figure out how to handle that." Others shared that "Sisterhood really is powerful" and that "Trusted allies and mentors can be found among men and women, but women have an experiential understanding of the challenges we face professionally and personally." A handful (5%) recommended that executive committees and effective chairs be consulted. Because most (85%) viewed "mentors as absolutely critical," they believe that they must be "intentionally sought out."

Practice healthy habits. Faculty new to the chairship role need to care for their physical and mental health; recognize that it is not possible to keep everyone happy; maintain clear boundaries; stay positive; elicit support from colleagues and friends; learn to delegate well; and continue their own scholarship. Personal counseling was even advised. A different kind of practical tip was to "Develop healthy stress releases well before you become chair." A deeper message was not to lose faith: "Hang on fiercely to whatever positive feelings you have about the human race, even as the 'problem children' around you try to erase them."

Facilitate others' success. Democratic thinking was presented as a shared value, with many examples given of collegial support, consensus building, and transparency. Chairs must help their faculty to understand that "We're partners in each other's success"; "We make decisions through consensus where possible"; and "If we've got something unpleasant to say, we do it at faculty meetings." As leaders they will need to behave selflessly: "Chairs must be at a point in their career that their own personal accomplishments are not of primary concern."

Be courageous. Female leaders must be optimistic and confident, responsive and objective, and "not take things personally." Be positive and reassuring even when "you have to say no." Women leaders absolutely need to be strong while "somehow avoiding coming across as bitchy. This is a hard act. People forgive men who are indecisive and incompetent but come down hard on women." Women chairs must have inner strength and courage, "as they will likely be tested for their fortitude and ability to make decisions."

Implications and Conclusion

While many of the women wanted to lead their departments, at least 10 of the respondents had felt coerced: "The position was thrust upon me" and "I was talked into it by a dean when I was too young to say no." Two of the chairs were not yet tenured: "I was told, 'you have to do it, no one else can or will.'" If I turned down the offer, I felt it would affect my tenure process." Someone else said she "was begged to take the position and wanted no part of it. When I realized what was happening to newer faculty, I relented and took the role on an interim basis. I've been stuck ever since." Another individual, also pressed by the dean, "ended up serving for one year but I liked providing leadership, so I agreed to serve permanently."

Obviously "badgering" of female faculty must be closely monitored. Only one instance of a positive outcome or reframing was evident in the data. While some of the individuals had felt pressured to accept the job for which they were not ready, the extent to which this is a gender issue is indeterminate. Thus, it would be faulty to conclude from my survey results that women faculty are, in general, pressured more often than male faculty to assume the chair's position and/or that men are more effective than women in resisting pressure from authority figures.

What views do campus leaders have about what is feasible in terms of promotion for faculty members who serve as chairs? Those without tenure in this position constitute a vulnerable population. A seasoned chair (full professor) declared, "Of course this role would be totally unrealistic for tenure-earning faculty." Those seeking promotion to full professor also voiced concern: "After 10 years of serving as chair I can't be promoted until I do more research," and "I'm barely tenured—I still need mentoring but instead I mentor others." Faculty members who are guided to learn something about the chairship role can benefit from understanding aspects of the complexities involved and to having leadership fostered within their ranks.

As one implication of this study, vulnerable populations should not be placed in this precarious position at all, particularly against their will. Associate professors who serve as chairs should be protected by promotional guidelines and proactively assisted, and their assignments should be within highly functioning units staffed with capable individuals. Given the preponderance of respondents in my sample who were "home-grown," deans often pull departmental leadership from within their college ranks. As Trinidad and Normore (2005) explain, "Someone appointed from inside the organization brings past experience and knowledge to the process" (p. 578). Leadership from within has merit where the future chair is ready for this move and where s/he is properly transitioned into the role and effectively mentored.

More specifically, deans and other leaders can assist new department chairs by reducing "administrivial" requests and encouraging their personal scholarship. Additionally, they can explain creative management techniques, including the resource potential of such boundary-spanning activities as grant writing (Gmelch, 1991). By valuing their performance, and giving credit to them for their successes and competencies, college leaders can help to overturn the negative "outcomes of gender stereotyping that beleaguer women as they attempt to advance their careers" (Heilman, 2001, p. 661) and do the jobs "designated as male" (p. 667).

The issue of identity for female department chairs is also pertinent to this picture of change. How one envisions and names this academic leadership role matters greatly, as ambiguities about women leaders' competence and stature can undermine their authority. Such gaps in their socialization and mentoring help to explain why my study respondents uncritically used the pejorative "administrator" to refer to their work role.

Finally, the relatively invisible work of female department chairs needs more study. Also needed is further investigation of the complexities involved in this role regarding the interrelated dynamics of gender, leadership, and mentorship.

Endnotes

[1]National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (353 members) (the survey was also posted at the organization's website); the Learning and Teaching in Educational Leadership Special Interest Group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) (228 members); and Mentorship and Mentoring Practices SIG–AERA (150 members). An earlier version of this paper was presented in 2009 at the AERA convention.

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Appendix 1. *Leadership and the Female Department Chair Survey* (Author, 2007)

Dear respondent,

This Internet survey is focuses on leadership experiences of female department chairs in higher education. This study represents relatively uncharted territory, as studies in leadership tend to focus on other leadership positions (e.g., superintendency, business/corporate executives) or the general issue of gender-based leadership styles. Instead, this research examines the department chair role and specifically the experiences of women leaders within the academy both inside and outside the discipline of education.

Very short, typed responses are acceptable; longer responses are preferred.

This survey has been designed to solicit responses from female faculty in the current role of department chair or head, co-chair, or interim chair. Your responses will be treated confidentially and they will be reported anonymously. Because your completed survey responses cannot be traced back to you, your identity will be unknown to the investigator.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If you should feel uncomfortable answering any questions on the survey, you are free to exit the survey at any time.

Thank you for your time and insights, Principal Investigator

I. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your current position?
___department chair/head ___co-chair ___interim chair ___assistant chair
2. Check the number of total years you have worked in higher education
___10-15 ___16-25 ___26-35 ___36-45 ___46 or over
3. Check the time spent in the role of department chair/head
___1 year or less ___2-4 years __5-8 years ___9-12 years ___13 or over
4. What is your departmental discipline?_____
5. Number of full-time departmental faculty?____
6. Year your terminal degree was earned?____
7. Type of degree?
___PhD ___EdD ___MD ___JD ___other (specify:___)
8. Type of Carnegie-specific institution?
___doctoral-granting ___master's colleges ___associate's colleges ___baccalaureate ___other (specify_____)
9. Name of state in which your institution is located?_____
10. Your age? ___25-34 ___35-45 ___46-56 ___57-65 ___64 or over
11. Your race or ethnicity? _____
12. What is your current rank? _____
13. State time (in months) in current rank _____
14. Check the statement that best applies:
___I have knowledge of gender issues in leadership positions
___I have some knowledge of gender issues in leadership positions
___I lack knowledge of gender issues in leadership positions
15. Check the statement that best applies:
___I have interest in gender issues in leadership positions
___I have some interest in gender issues in leadership positions
___I lack interest in gender issues in leadership positions
16. List a few of your major publications, presentations, or awards _____

II. OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES

1. What qualifications do you have that you feel contributed toward (a) your selection as chair, and (b) your effectiveness in this role?
2. What personal or professional factors or experiences influenced you to become a department chair? Was there a "defining moment" that motivated you to pursue this position?
3. What rewards or benefits do you think exist for your service as department chair (given the workload)?
4. What percentage of your work involves administrative duties?
   ___20% ___40% ___60% ___80% ___other?
5. What administrative duties consume most of your time?
6. What percentage of your work involves scholarly leadership (e.g., promoting the research and scholarly efforts of faculty members)?
   ___20% ___40% ___ 60% ___80% ___other?
7. What are some scholarly leadership changes you have initiated or performed?
8. Do you personally have mentoring, coaching, or network support and, if so, in what ways has this contributed to your effectiveness as chair?
9. In what ways have you engaged in mentoring the faculty, students, and/or staff in your department?
10. In what ways have you engaged in mentoring the faculty, students, and/or staff outside your unit?
11. In what ways have you collaborated with faculty, students, and/or staff either inside or outside your unit?
12. What are the most important challenges in (or obstacles to) your work as chair?
13. What are some of the ways you have (or have not) surmounted the challenges in your work?
14. Has your gender been a factor in the challenges or obstacles you face at work?
15. What about challenges in your work that can be attributed to other variables, such as race and age?
16. Are there any perceptions, beliefs, or attitudes in your unit or college regarding the association between gender and leadership?
17. Are there any perceptions, beliefs, or attitudes that you have intentionally or unintentionally communicated to your colleagues?
18. What major lessons have you learned from your experiences as a female leader that could assist future department chairs?
19. Additional comments:

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Biography

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