



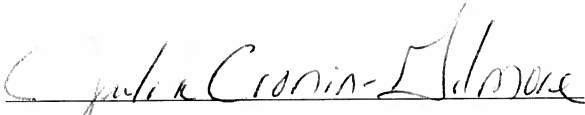
DISSERTATION APPROVED BY

8/29/2014

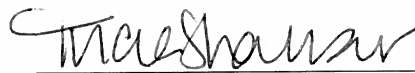
Date



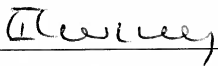
Isabelle Cherney, Ph.D., Chair



Julia Cronin-Gilmore, Ph.D.



Tricia Sharrar, J.D.



Isabelle Cherney, Ph.D., Program Chair



Gail M. Jensen, Ph.D., Dean

CALLING, CONFIDENCE, COMPETENCE, AND CONNECTIONS: A GROUNDED  
THEORY FOR OPTIMIZING WELLBEING OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY  
PRESIDENTS

---

By  
Amy C. Novak

---

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Creighton University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department  
of Interdisciplinary Leadership.

---

Omaha, NE  
August 29, 2014

Copyright 2014, Amy C. Novak

This document is copyrighted material. Under copyright law, no part of this document may be reproduced without the expressed permission of the author.

## Abstract

In the next five years, estimates suggest that half of the current college presidents will retire (Song & Hartley, 2012). This leadership transition opens the door for countless female leaders to consider the role of university president. Women account for fewer than 25% of the current college presidents (American Council for Education, 2011). This grounded theory study examined how female university presidents at small, private, four-year universities in America defined and experienced wellbeing. Research clarified the important linkage between wellbeing, leadership resiliency, job satisfaction, and job tenure (Rath & Harter, 2010). The following research questions framed the study: 1) How do female university presidents describe wellbeing? 2) How do female university presidents experience wellbeing? 3) What factors have strengthened the wellbeing of female university presidents? 4) What factors have hindered the wellbeing of female university presidents? 5) What strategies do female university presidents use to enhance their level of wellbeing? Using a grounded theory framework, the researcher interviewed ten female college presidents at small, private, four-year universities across America. The results suggested that women who viewed their role as a vocational calling, exhibited high degrees of self-confidence, developed leadership competence through professional development and strong teamwork, and sought out relevant and supportive networks of connection fostered the conditions necessary to nurture more optimally their wellbeing. The research participants elucidated strategies for developing a new leadership paradigm that supports the wellbeing of current and future female university presidents.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my committee for their advocacy, engagement, and support of my intellectual and spiritual growth throughout the program. In particular, I wish to extend gratitude to Dr. Isabelle Cherney whose appreciation for my passion of the intersection of leadership and faith fostered engaging discourse that spurred this research. Dr. Julia Cronin-Gilmore provided ongoing counsel, focused critique, and challenged me to delve more deeply into the meaning of wellbeing among female university presidents. Professor Tricia Sharrar extended her insight while continuing to serve as a mentor for women in leadership. These three women modeled the support female leaders require as they aspire to authentic, transformative leadership grounded in an appreciation of a woman's wellbeing. Kevin Kenkel, the Dakota Wesleyan University librarian, shared countless resources and expertise about the research process. His assistance enabled the completion of this project. I also extend sincere gratitude to the many colleagues in the Creighton online classroom and at Dakota Wesleyan University who challenged me to think differently and reflect openly. Their insights shaped this work.

I owe significant gratitude to my children, Peter, Isaac, Luke, Mark, Seemela Grace, Marianna, Elijah, and Zechariah, whose countless bedside notes cheered me on to the completion of this project. In particular, Isaac's keen eye improved my graphics, figures, and tables. His editing assistance was invaluable. Finally, my husband Ken served as a continual inspiration. His support, encouragement, listening, and reviewing strengthened all of my work. I could not have been successful without his unwavering belief in me.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Examining Women’s Leadership in Higher Education.....	5
The Challenge of the Small College Presidency.....	6
Barriers to Women Becoming Presidents of Small, Private Colleges.....	8
The Significance of Wellbeing and the Small, Private, College Presidency.....	8
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Significance of the Study.....	10
Purpose of the Study.....	13
Research Questions.....	14
Definition of Terms.....	14
Organization of the Study and Summary.....	15
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	17
Introduction.....	17
Defining Wellbeing.....	17
Economic Wellbeing.....	18
Multivariate Attributes of Wellbeing.....	20

The Gallup Model of Wellbeing .....	22
Career and Wellbeing .....	24
Financial Health and Wellbeing .....	26
Social Wellbeing.....	27
Physical Wellbeing .....	27
Community Wellbeing .....	28
Spirituality and Wellbeing .....	29
Adversity and Wellbeing .....	30
Obstacles to Female Wellbeing .....	32
Cultural Perceptions of Work .....	33
Perfection Myths.....	35
Strategies for Enhancing Female Wellbeing.....	36
Relevant Theoretical Frameworks for Achieving Wellbeing .....	39
Theory-in-Use and Espoused Theories.....	40
Total Leadership Theory .....	41
Cultural Hegemony.....	43
Summary .....	44
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	46
Restatement of the Problem .....	46
Research Design .....	46
Data Collection .....	48

Population and Sample .....	49
Interview Process and Protocol .....	51
Validity and Reliability .....	54
Data Analysis.....	57
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	58
Summary .....	59
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....	60
Introduction.....	60
Participant Profile and Description.....	61
Research Question One: How do Female University Presidents Define Wellbeing? .....	62
Research Question Two: How do Female University Presidents Experience Wellbeing?.....	64
Theme One: Spiritual Practice.....	65
Theme Two: Physical Health .....	67
Theme Three: Strong Spouse, Partner, or Friendship Support.....	68
Theme Four: Prioritization/Time Management.....	69
Theme Five: Employment Contract Terms .....	71
Theme Six: Career Wellbeing .....	71
Theme Seven: Reflective Space .....	73
Research Question 3: What Factors Hinder Wellbeing? .....	74
Theme One: Diverse Position Demands.....	75
Theme Two: Community Caution.....	75

Theme Three: Perfectionism .....	76
Research Question 4: What Factors Strengthen Female Presidential Wellbeing? .....	78
A Grounded Theory of Wellbeing for Female University Presidents .....	78
Pillar One: A Vocational Calling.....	80
Pillar Two: Self-Confidence through Self-Awareness .....	82
Pillar Three: Leadership Competence .....	84
Pillar Four: Making Connections .....	88
Summary .....	90
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE	
RESEARCH.....	
RESEARCH.....	92
Introduction.....	92
Conclusions.....	93
Defining Wellbeing .....	93
The Importance of Wellbeing.....	97
Barriers to Wellbeing.....	98
Experiencing and Optimizing Wellbeing .....	100
A Grounded Theory of Wellbeing .....	100
Implications.....	103
Future Research .....	106
Capturing Stories: Case Study Research .....	106
Leadership Longevity and Wellbeing.....	106

Life-Phase and Wellbeing .....	107
Institution-Type, Work-Type and Wellbeing .....	107
Gender and Wellbeing in the University Presidency.....	108
Summary .....	108
References.....	111
Appendix A.....	121
Appendix B .....	123
Appendix C .....	125
Appendix D.....	127

## List of Tables

	Page
Table 1: Women Presidents by School Type.....	6
Table 2: Theories of Wellbeing .....	22
Table 3: Participant Profile Description .....	62
Table 4: Matrix of the Relationship between Interview Questions and Research Questions.....	131
Table 5: Assessment of Overall Wellbeing .....	132
Table 6: Demographic Information .....	133

## List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: Gallup Wellbeing Model .....	24
Figure 2: Friedman Total Leadership Model .....	42
Figure 3: Word Cloud of Factors Influencing Wellbeing of Presidents .....	48
Figure 4: Grounded Theory Data Collection Process .....	65
Figure 5: Grounded Theory Model of Wellbeing for Female University Presidents .....	79

## CHAPTER ONE

**Introduction**

In June of 1986, Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt described the absence of women in executive leadership as a “glass ceiling,” an invisible barrier fostered by traditional attitudes about women’s roles and their ability to balance the perception of a woman’s traditional role in her family with demands of the working professional. Recognizing the barriers such attitudes created, the US Congress established the Glass Ceiling Commission in 1995 to explore strategies for increasing the number of women in executive leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The growth of women in executive roles in business, military, education, healthcare, and the non-profit sector occurred during the first decade of the new millennium. This growth confirmed the shattering of the once impenetrable glass ceiling. Women began emerging as chief executive officers, presidential candidates, and university presidents. Carly Fiorina, president of Hewlett Packard remarked, “I hope we are at the point that everyone has figured out that there is not a glass ceiling” (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Unfortunately, just as quickly as women began to make gains, new data emerged that revealed a different story. Women’s overall sense of wellbeing began to decline. Research by Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) for the National Bureau of Economic Research confirmed that the level of female wellbeing, both in absolute and real terms declined from its initial test result in 1972.

A new gender gap emerged. Unlike the traditionally described gender gap, this gap did not reflect numbers of women in positions or wages of women. This new gap reflected wellbeing. Despite the growth in opportunities for female leaders, overall female wellbeing dropped significantly lower than its previous levels, and lower than

males across all career types and educational attainment levels (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). Coinciding with this decline in female wellbeing, the growth of women leaders in particular industry sectors plateaued (The White House Project Report, 2009). What once was perceived as an exponential growth of women in leadership positions leveled out within certain industries, including business and higher education (The White House Project Report, 2009). The data suggested that women were less likely to be retained in executive leadership positions, often leaving much sooner than their male colleagues in similar roles (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; The White House Project Report, 2009). Puzzled by this reality, prominent women leaders began discussions about the perceived failure of women to both attain and maintain executive leadership roles and the subsequent decline in perceived wellbeing by women across America (Sandberg, 2013; Slaughter, 2012). Decreasing happiness, declining longevity in position, and plateauing numbers of women in the executive suite drove Sheryl Sandberg to encourage women to “lean in” to their professional opportunities and not “leave before you leave” in response to the maternal calling of family responsibilities (2013). Since this finding emerged, little research has been conducted to explore the reasons for the declining levels of executive female wellbeing.

Sandberg’s (2013) book provided a potential explanation for the declining levels of female wellbeing. She contended that a significant obstacle for professional women is overcoming the notion that as mothers and working professionals, a woman could, “do it all” (2013, p. 122). Sandberg acknowledged that “most women do a great job worrying that we don’t measure up” (p. 123). Extending the argument further, University of California sociologist, Arlie Hochschild, asserted that while women have found their

place in the workplace, the overall women's revolution has stalled. Women described their lives as a "tap-dance recital in a minefield" (2012, p. 264). Juggling the increasing demands of professional and personal obligations, women's wellbeing garnered secondary consideration to a host of other priorities to which women felt obligated to respond. Another prominent female executive, Anne Marie Slaughter, the first woman director of policy planning at the US State Department, articulated that current work place expectations and policies failed to allow women to balance their intrinsic aspirations to advance professionally while maintaining strong connections to their families. Was this professional and familial imbalance at the root of this declining level of wellbeing? What other factors may be influencing the wellbeing of female executives? Slaughter (2012) lamented after announcing her departure from Washington D.C. that current professional workplace expectations prevented women from maintaining long-term executive leadership positions. Other female executives contributed to the conversation, lamenting the pressure to "lean in" (Brooks, 2014). For Sandberg, "leaning in" suggested an effort to stay in the workplace and demonstrate the capacity of women to lead at the executive level. Others, however, viewed this suggestion as a prescription for an overly harried, exhausted existence. Brooks asserted, "When a workplace is full of employees who always lean in and never lean back, it's full of employees who are exhausted, brittle and incapable of showing much creativity or making good decisions" (2014, p. 7).

Conversations recorded by women across America suggested the need to "figure out how to combine professional success and satisfaction with a real commitment to family" (Slaughter, 2013, para. 18). Hochschild suggested that women strive for

appreciating the wholeness of their lives, whether that meant family, personal time, or hobbies (2012). Professional women in multiple fields frequently remarked, “I look for role models and can’t find any” (Slaughter, 2012, para. 18). The absence of stories that elucidated the ability to achieve wellbeing validated the necessity of the current research. Equipping women executives with the knowledge, models, and strategies for securing wellbeing would enhance their longevity in the position and increase the overall success of female leaders. Moreover, achieving an understanding of how other women were creating a new professionalism that embraced their wellbeing, both personally and professionally, would garner growing support among women seeking to achieve positions of executive leadership.

After all, women had spent nearly 10,000 years being conditioned and cultivated into their roles as mothers and caregivers, and in fifty short years, women were trying dramatically to fulfill that traditional role in concert with a plethora of other professional and personal expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Gloria Steinem cautioned women in 1960 to be wary of the notion that doing both jobs perfectly is possible. “You can’t do it all. No one can have two full-time jobs, have perfect children and cook three meals....Superwoman is the adversary of the women’s movement” (Sandberg, 2013, p. 123). As more women emerge into positions of executive leadership in education, business, and other industry sectors, research must unearth the attributes that contribute to female wellbeing. This attitude of perfectionism is one of the strongest impediments to a woman’s resiliency in her professional career (Sandberg, 2013). However, identifying an impediment is not nearly as important as comprehending what constitutes wellbeing for female leaders. The experience of wellbeing demanded rigorous exploration as women

achieved and then maintained positions of executive leadership. This research study explored how successful female university presidents defined wellbeing, their experience of wellbeing, the factors that hindered and supported their wellbeing, and the attributes and strategies they believed were necessary to optimize their overall wellbeing.

### **Examining Women's Leadership in Higher Education**

Higher education provided an important glimpse into the emergence of female leaders. According to the American Council on Education (ACE) survey of college presidents, women accounted for 26.4% of today's college presidents (ACE, 2011). Among private colleges, women accounted for 21% of the college presidents. While these numbers do not reflect equality between genders, the data illustrated that over the past two decades, the emergence of women leaders in higher education has steadily increased (The White House Project Report, 2009). According to the Institute of Education Sciences, in 2011 more women earned degrees in all levels of post-secondary education than men. Moreover, women continue to advance among faculty ranks. Unfortunately, while such data confirmed more women are attaining degrees and stepping into positions of leadership, women still lagged significantly behind men in executive leadership positions in higher education. While recent data detailed some growth in the number of females in leadership positions, the research illustrated that the overall rate of growth in the number of female college presidents dropped off precipitously from its double-digit percentage increase between the 1980s and 1990s (ACE, 2011). Notably, in 1986 women represented 9.5% of university presidents. By 1998, the percentage of women in the chief executive role nearly doubled to 19.3% (ACE, 2011). The report continued, "If that rate of increase had persisted, women would

now be approaching half of all college presidents instead of barely over a quarter” (ACE, 2011). Table 1 illustrates the incremental growth in the percentage of female presidents since 2006. Given that college closures have increased since 2008, the data reflected an even more modest increase in women university presidents. Like the industry data highlighted in the opening paragraphs, higher education demonstrated a plateau in female executive leadership.

Table 1

*Women Presidents by School Type*

Type of Institution	2006	2011
Doctoral	13.8%	22.3%
Master’s	21.5%	22.8%
Bachelor’s	23.2%	22.9%
Associate	28.8%	33.0%
Special focus	16.6%	20.5%
Public (all levels)	26.6%	29.4%
Private (all levels)	18.7%	21.9%

*Note.* (American Council on Education, 2011)

The *White House Project Benchmarking Report on Women’s Leadership* (2009) confirmed the challenge facing female presidents of small, private institutions. While the Ivy League institutions deserve recognition for increasing the number of female presidents, many small private institutions remain relatively stagnant in the number of females appointed to the presidency (The White House Project Report, 2009).

### **The Challenge of the Small College Presidency**

Small, private colleges face unprecedented challenges further complicating efforts to recruit and retain women. Evidence suggests an alarming decline in the number of qualified candidates willing to seek small, private college presidencies (Fain, 2007; Horgan, 2013). Furthermore, the length of tenure in the role of college president also

appeared to decline while simultaneously the average age of the private college president steadily increased. “In 1986, when ACE first conducted its survey of presidents, 42 percent of campus leaders were 50 or under, and only 14 percent were 61 or older. By 2006, nearly half of presidents (49.3 percent) were 61 and over, and the new ACE survey shows that percentage rising to 58 percent in 2011” (ACE, 2012). The aging of the presidency aligns with an increase in presidential turnover at small, private institutions. Hartley and Godin (2009) concluded that presidential career tracks are increasingly unappealing because of the unrealistic demands of the position, the growing focus on fundraising, and the responsibility to multiple stakeholder groups. Small college presidents face increasing pressure to be successful fundraisers, astute financial leaders, charismatic speakers, political lobbyists, alumni heroes, and student advocates. They are expected to connect routinely with parents, students, and alumni/alumnae while simultaneously casting the vision, supporting the fundraising aspirations, and making the case for the value of private education. The combination of multiple stakeholder groups, limited endowments, and the high tuition dependency creates high financial volatility in these institutions. This reality explains the high rates of university closures over the past decade (McDonald, 2014).

According to the Bloomberg survey released in April, 2014, half of all private colleges with enrollments under 5,000 students are expected to close by 2025 (McDonald, 2014). High levels of tuition-dependency in regions facing declining numbers of high school graduates, the aggressive building boom of the first decade of this century accompanied by the high debt assumed by many of these universities to support this expansion, declining philanthropic giving, and political rhetoric questioning

the value of higher education continued to erode the stability of these once thriving institutions.

### **Barriers to Women Becoming Presidents of Small, Private Colleges**

The negative publicity surrounding private higher education further hinders efforts to recruit women to this role. As Table 1 illustrated, the number of women assuming the role of president has stagnated. According to Lapovsky (2014), “If women continued to increase their share of presidencies by one percentage point every two years [as has been the trend the past several years] ... it will take 48 years to hold half of the college presidencies; that is a very, very long time” (para. 2). Women in other academic or institutional leadership roles increasingly fail to see themselves in the role of the president. The focus on the demands and challenges of the position often discourage qualified female candidates from even considering the position (Lapovsky, 2014).

Exploring the reasons why women declined consideration of the college presidency, the Higher Education Research Service noted several barriers, including the lack of opportunity and support to move into leadership positions, the discouragement about taking the position, the lack of leadership identity with the position due to the absence of role models and compelling stories, and different expectations for men and women in the role (Lapovsky, 2014).

### **The Significance of Wellbeing and the Small, Private, College Presidency**

The rapidly evolving changes sweeping higher education placed notable demands on university presidents. Specifically, presidents perceived that the job entailed more work, all the time. With work at the forefront of a university president’s existence, wellbeing and factors that contributed to wellbeing often took a backseat to more

pressing matters. Where private university presidents often hailed from ministerial roles with the expectation that their sermons would recruit students, a university president today must facilitate change, posture the institution to capitalize on emerging market opportunities, and make courageous and savvy financial decisions to ensure the university's stability. The requirement of a university president to respond to complex and diverse constituencies in a highly public yet personalized manner provided the rationale for exploring wellbeing among female university presidents.

Predictions suggest that half of the current, small, private college presidents will retire in the next five years (Song & Hartley, 2012). Combining this reality with a woman's struggle to remain in the presidential role suggested the importance of exploring attributes that contributed to wellbeing and resiliency among female university presidents. While much of the research remained focused on women attaining the college presidency, this research explored the important factors women ought to consider in both becoming a college president and then equipping themselves for the wholeness and wellbeing required to maintain this role. As retirements of current college presidents continue, women have a tremendous opportunity to step into leadership roles at these institutions. Clearly, the demands of the position require leaders with strong levels of wellbeing who see challenges as opportunities to create transformation through education.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The statistics revealed a troubling trend. The number of female university presidents remained relatively stagnant over the past decade (ACE, 2011). With less than 25% of the small, private universities' presidencies held by women, higher education

may struggle to thrive, if not merely survive, without the diverse insight and problem-solving initiatives contributed by executive female leaders. Fewer women in leadership equates with less diversity of thought, less advocacy of women in higher education, and more tunnel vision in our approach to addressing constituency demands in higher education (Bowen, 2008; Corcoran, 2012; Wilson, 2004). Bowen (2008) asserted that unless action is taken, the absence of women and minorities in leadership roles represented a “potential leadership deficit” and a “failure of vision” on the part of university boards that need to do more to advocate and to support women and minorities in these roles. Despite the growth of women earning degrees in higher education, fewer women have stepped into the executive leadership role. The small college presidency presented distinct and unique challenges. Women faced a variety of obstacles in avoiding the burnout that often accompanied the position. Developing a strong sense of wellbeing enhanced a woman’s ability to appreciate her strengths and weaknesses, equip herself with the tools of leadership resiliency, address concerns of personal and professional life balance, and diminish the stress and burnout common among university presidents.

### **Significance of the Study**

A variety of attitudinal barriers, including women’s perception of their inability to balance professional and personal commitments, appeared to impede a woman’s interest and potential nomination to the role of president. In 2009, “Only 63% of the female college presidents were married compared with 89% of their male colleagues, and only 68% of the women had children (mostly over 18) compared with 91 % of men” (The White House Benchmarking Report, p. 20). Managing professional and personal commitments remained a noted obstacle for women in the role of executive leadership

(Bolman & Deal, 2003; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Hewlett, 2007; Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). Hewlett declared that women are “more likely to respond to the pull of family when they feel hemmed in by a glass ceiling” (2002, p. 68). Eagly and Karau (2002) noted that women continued to face stereotypes influenced by traditional gender roles. Sandberg confirmed the struggle to balance personal and professional obligations. Citing work by psychologist Jennifer Stuart, Sandberg elaborated, “The effort to combine career and motherhood may be particularly fraught. The stakes are high, as they may expect nothing less than perfection, both at home and in the workplace. When they fall short of lofty ideals, they may retreat altogether, from workplace to home or vice versa” (2013, p. 125).

These statements confirmed Eagly and Carli’s (2007) claim that women’s rise to executive leadership represented a labyrinth of barriers and obstacles that often impeded attainment of executive leadership or longevity in executive leadership. Moreover, once in the executive leadership role, women further struggled with balancing the personal and professional obligations in their lives. The commonly held belief by many women suggested that the model of work created by their male colleagues needed to be the model under which they worked (Switzer, 2006; Brooks, 2014).

Recent research revealed a troubling statistic about women’s longevity in leadership positions. Fuerst (2006) noted that while women are assuming leadership roles at increasing rates, the length of duration in such a leadership role lags behind that of their male counterparts in higher education. Limited research existed to explain the factors that keep women from maintaining formal positions of leadership in higher education (Hall, 1996). Fuerst posited that the significant voluntary turnover of

university presidents and senior academic administrators resulted from high levels of job stress, role ambiguities, and burnout (2006). Additional research is required to explore the aforementioned conclusion in more detail. Moreover, an inability to claim a sense of balance between the woman's professional and personal commitments often yielded limited leadership tenures. Gender stereotypes of women as communal, nurturing caregivers, and men as agentic, competitive, and commanding leaders exacerbated societal perceptions that women must "do it all" (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Achieving wellbeing appeared necessary for successful professional tenure. Cheung and Halpern (2010) acknowledged that women who successfully involved their families in their work lives tended to exhibit higher levels of wellbeing. Additional research confirmed that wellbeing included a balanced work-life interface, but also adequate integration of social relationships, attention to physical and financial wellbeing, spiritual engagement, and ongoing mentoring (Astin & Leland, 1991; Rath & Harter, 2010). Rubin and Macko (2004) highlighted the complexity of achieving wellbeing amid the current societal expectations about traditional gender roles, caregiver responsibilities, work hours, and work policies. "What we discovered in our research is that while the empowerment part of the equation has been loudly celebrated, there has been very little honest discussion among women of our age about the real barriers and flaws that still exist in the system despite the opportunities we inherited" (Rubin & Macko, 2004, as cited in Slaughter, 2012, para. 21). While women face difficult societal, attitudinal, and perceptual barriers in their ascent to executive leadership, a woman who is successful in achieving an executive leadership position often finds few guiding strategies, role models, mentors, or stories that enable her to value and develop the attributes that

contribute to her wellbeing once in the role. Emerging research on wellbeing confirmed the growing necessity of understanding the experience of wellbeing and the attributes that contribute to enhanced wellbeing. Individuals with high levels of wellbeing generally experience greater levels of job satisfaction and job tenure. Appreciating the factors that strengthen or inhibit wellbeing supports the success of female college presidents into the future.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to identify how women optimized wellbeing in the role of university president. Specifically, the study explored the definition female university presidents ascribed to wellbeing and their experience of wellbeing. The study further examined what attributes hindered and enhanced female university president wellbeing.

Using a grounded theory framework, the research process sought to gather insight from female university presidents about the attributes or traits that supported their wellbeing in both their professional and personal lives. Grounded theory research relied on the use of a rigorous, inductive methodology to develop conceptual categories that characterized the responses of the study participants (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Specifically, using qualitative research principles, the researcher inquired, listened and “empower[ed] individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Identifying the factors that influenced female university presidents’ wellbeing required the researcher to engage each participant in a process that accounted for the responsibilities, interactions, and attributes that contributed to her

professional and personal wellbeing. Identifying the strategies these women use to enhance their overall wellbeing comprised a second element of this research study.

### **Research Questions**

In an effort to garner insight into the experiences of successful female university presidents, this grounded theory study sought to answer the following questions:

- How do female university presidents describe wellbeing?
- How do female university presidents experience wellbeing?
- What factors have strengthened the wellbeing of female university presidents?
- What factors have hindered the wellbeing of female university presidents?
- What strategies do female university presidents use to enhance their levels of wellbeing?

### **Definition of Terms**

A number of terms are defined to provide clarification for the purposes of this study.

- *Wellbeing*: Wellbeing included the presence of positive emotions and moods, the absence of negative emotions, resiliency to cope with challenges, and satisfaction with life (Center for Disease Control, 2013). A Gallup organization study of wellbeing classified wellbeing into five categories: relationship/social wellbeing, physical (health) wellbeing, financial wellbeing, community wellbeing, and career wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010).
- *Executive Leadership*: Executive leadership represents the position of university president (Madsen, 2008)

- *Work-Life Interface or Balance*: Work-life interface or work-life balance is the perception of wellbeing attained when a woman develops a strategy to successfully balance her personal and professional life in alignment with her needs, values, and priorities (Stirling, 2012).
- *Leadership Success*: Presidents define leadership success as serving their communities through an understanding of the mission, vision, and values, as well as demonstrating an understanding of what the communities want and expect from the college. This is measured through the renewal of a presidential contract (Bowen, 2008).
- *Job Stability*: Job stability is the length of time one remains in a particular position (Monks, 2009).

### **Organization of the Study and Summary**

Over the past three decades, women have made significant strides in attaining leadership positions in higher education. However, recent evidence confirmed stagnation in the growth of female executive leadership. Further the evidence suggested that women in the position of president struggled to maintain the role for terms comparable to their male colleagues. This research study hypothesized that leadership longevity and job satisfaction is strongly linked with wellbeing. As women continue to assume greater leadership roles, research must enlighten women with the stories and strategies necessary to enhance their overall wellbeing. Women appear to be clamoring for models that enable them to maintain wellbeing amid personal and professional obligations. Research indicated a significant gap in the literature regarding the wellbeing of female executives. Little qualitative or quantitative research existed to explain the decline in overall

wellbeing experience by female executives. As higher education leaders increase the efforts to encourage more women to lead from the executive suite, these same leaders must equip women with a framework for a new professionalism that recognizes and values female wellbeing. In the absence of wellbeing, women decline potential opportunities or leave positions of executive leadership early in their tenures.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the present study and established the importance of examining wellbeing as an attribute of personal and professional success of female university presidents. Chapter 2 explores the history of wellbeing, the various definitions of wellbeing and reviews the literature linking wellbeing to leadership resiliency and leadership success. The literature review also examined the evolving research on work-life interface and the strategies that support women in balancing their professional and personal obligations. Chapter 3 introduces the research methodology and rationale for selecting a grounded theory approach. It provides information about the sample size, the data collection and analysis process, as well as the research questions introduced in this qualitative study. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the research. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings and the implications of these findings for the wellbeing of female university presidents. This chapter also discusses future research considerations.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an analysis of the research conducted on wellbeing. The review analyzes the modern-day evolution of the definition of wellbeing, from a notion based solely on single variable attributes to a more complex, multi-dimensional ideal reflected in the contemporary discussions of professional and personal leadership. The review further introduces the various barriers that impede female wellbeing and finally concludes with an examination of the theoretical constructs that provide a framework for understanding how female university presidents may best optimize wellbeing. These constructs provide an awareness of theories of human behavior that strengthen an individual's ability to achieve wellbeing, as well as those theories which may impede the personal adoption of strategies to optimize the wellbeing of female university presidents.

### **Defining Wellbeing**

Wellbeing emerged as a prominent factor of leadership effectiveness in the early 1990s (Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008). Often linked with resiliency, wellbeing suggested an ability to adapt to emerging changes and cope with challenges as they evolved. Early debates discussed the factors that defined subjective wellbeing (Dolan et al., 2008). Some research examined the linkage between resiliency and job satisfaction (Luthans, 2002). Other research explored the attributes of leaders and job performance as a factor in leadership longevity and wellbeing (Luthans, 2002). Economists attributed wellbeing to economic prosperity, while psychologists connected wellbeing with individual personality characteristics (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). Still others examined the implication of work-life balance on wellbeing (Walsh,

2013). The diversity of perspectives on wellbeing challenged the meaningful application of many of the research study findings. The attempts to provide broad, generalized statements of wellbeing left many researchers questioning the application of such findings.

The application of a qualitative approach to the question of wellbeing may allow the current researcher to provide stories, examples, and strategies that female leaders may draw upon and adapt to their personal definitions of wellbeing. Strengthening overall wellbeing serves to increase the leadership longevity and success of female university presidents.

### **Economic Wellbeing**

Researchers differed about what contributed to an individual's assessment of his or her quality of life (Dolan et al., 2008). Economic theory posited that increases in income yielded higher levels of wellbeing. Economists viewed individuals as rational actors seeking to maximize utility and viewed financial stability as the leading factor in establishing wellbeing (Dolan et al., 2008). Initial Gallup organization research confirmed this linkage between wealth and happiness (Rath & Harter, 2010). "We found that when evaluating their lives, people often give disproportionate weight to income and health" (2010, p. 5). Moreover, other data revealed a positive, yet diminished, return between income and wellbeing. As income reached certain levels, an individual's perception of wellbeing plateaued (Clark, Frijters, & Shields, 2007). Unemployment also manifested a correlation with subjective wellbeing. Gallup researchers concluded that long-term unemployment yielded social isolation, financial instability, and other consequences that decreased wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010).

Easterlin (1995) extended the research by exposing the relative variances between economic prosperity and economic wellbeing. In his extensive research across 120 nations, Easterlin found that income and health only positively influenced wellbeing when considered in comparison to other peer groups (Easterlin, 1995; Easterlin, 2006). Thus, some individuals may have high levels of wealth, but articulate lower levels of wellbeing because their relative wealth appeared less than other individuals within their social networks. Stevenson and Wolfers's research examining wellbeing through the lens of The General Social Survey further confirmed the Easterlin findings (2009). The General Social Survey, an instrument designed by the National Opinion Research Center, measured levels of happiness and wellbeing each year from 1972–1994, and every other year since that time. Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) found that despite increases in the overall financial prosperity of the US population since 1972, overall happiness declined, both in absolute and relative terms. They posited that financial prosperity remained an important factor in an individual's perceived wellbeing, but the researchers acknowledged that this measure alone failed to explain adequately wellbeing (2009).

Stevenson and Wolfers (2009) confirmed a more notable finding among women. As women's economic status increased, their overall level of wellbeing did not increase (2009). This finding remained particularly intriguing since the relative responsibilities of women had shifted so dramatically since 1972 (Hochschild, 2012). Between 1972 and 2010, women participated in the workforce in dramatically larger numbers. Thus, the researchers initially believed that the opportunity for workforce participation would have increased the overall independence and financial prosperity of women, thereby yielding higher levels of wellbeing. Notably, the research showed the exact opposite finding

(Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). Compared to men, women's level of happiness declined significantly from 1972 to 2008 (2009).

### **Multivariate Attributes of Wellbeing**

These data, along with evolving research from psychologists and sociologists revealed more complex definitions of wellbeing (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Diener and Seligman (2004) asserted that economic representations of wellbeing failed to capture the complexity of the individual's personality, familial structure, social network, and other qualitative factors that may influence wellbeing. Relying on the simple economic argument that maximizing individual utility necessarily increased wellbeing, this conclusion narrowed the ability for other factors such as social commitment, spiritual engagement, or familial structure to influence wellbeing (Dolan et al., 2008; Rath & Harter, 2010).

Veenhoven (1991) suggested that defining wellbeing required the individual to make judgments about the multiple factors that affected her level of satisfaction with her overall quality of life. Theoretical discussions from psychology highlighted the importance of distinguishing overall wellbeing from context-specific wellbeing (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004). Overall wellbeing recognized the general satisfaction an individual had with her life. Context-specific wellbeing suggested a general satisfaction with a specific area of her life such as finances or career wellbeing. As the debate ensued, various researchers attempted to develop models to account for multiple factors as a function of overall wellbeing.

Chen and Spector (1991) identified four self-reported factors that influenced an individual's wellbeing. These included personal and professional circumstances,

aspirations, comparisons with others, and a person's baseline happiness or dispositional outlook (Chen & Spector, 1991; Warr, 1990). Konow and Earley (1991) extended this research by arguing that happiness level as a definition for wellbeing remained influenced by a multitude of factors including the following: employment levels, ability to cope with adversity, familial and friend networks, duration of smiles, heart rate and blood pressure levels in response to stress, and measures of brain activity in response to stress. In each of these cases, the researchers attempted to broaden the discussion of factors that influenced an individual's level of perceived wellbeing. However, limited research existed to clarify a potential relationship between gender and wellbeing. Overall, the influence of particular factors remained mired in complex quantitative models that attempted to describe human behavior. Some researchers questioned whether quantitative measures could adequately describe subjective perceptions of wellbeing (Dolan, et al., 2008). Table 2 highlights the various theories that have contributed to the research and discussion of wellbeing.

Table 2

*Theories of Wellbeing*

Theory	Author	Definition	Relevance
General Social Survey (1972)	National Opinion Research Center	Equates wellbeing with financial stability.	Linkage between financial prosperity and wellbeing.
Self-Reported Wellbeing (1991)	Chen & Spector	Equates wellbeing with career, personal circumstances, and peer comparisons.	Includes qualitative variables.
Comprehensive Factors (1991)	Konow & Earley	Includes physical, personality, employment attributes and peer comparisons.	Extends definition beyond finance.
Subjective Wellbeing (1991)	Veenhoven	Includes personal perspective.	Wellbeing is subjective.
Resiliency (2002, 2007)	Luthans; Luthans & Youseff	Resiliency levels strengthen wellbeing. Linked to job satisfaction and job tenure.	Resiliency linked with wellbeing.
Happiness & Wellbeing (2009)	Stevenson & Wolfers	Happiness is a primary measure of wellbeing.	Overall happiness declined as income increased.
Spirituality and Wellbeing (2009)	Piedmont	Spirituality increases resiliency and thereby strengthens wellbeing.	Links mission, position, and spiritual health.
Gallup Wellbeing (2010)	Rath & Harter	Includes career, social, community, financial, and physical attributes.	Provides comprehensive framework.
Gender and Wellbeing (2013)	Walsh	Gender and position type influence perceptions of work-life balance.	Equates work-life issues with wellbeing.

### **The Gallup Model of Wellbeing**

Limitations emerged as researchers sought to develop models that quantified specific subjective measures of wellbeing. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) acknowledged that many measures may be used to identify whether a person has good

living conditions, employment, or financial stability. However, wellbeing consisted of a more complex response that examined “what people think and feel about their lives, such as the quality of their relationships, their positive emotions and resilience, the realization of their potential, or their overall satisfaction with life” (CDC 2013, para. 1). The Gallup Organization validated the CDC assessment by leveraging the findings of over 150,000 respondents across the globe about wellbeing. The Gallup researchers proposed five factors of general wellbeing. These factors reflected a qualitative assessment by the individual of wellbeing in the following areas: social interactions, physical health, career wellbeing, financial stability, and community engagement. According to Rath and Harter (2010), each of these factors significantly influenced an individual’s overall subjective perception of wellbeing. Together, high levels in each of these areas infused energy and resiliency into the individual’s personal and professional life. Wellbeing represented the complex interaction between these five areas. Deficiencies in one or more areas contributed to an individual’s perception of poor wellbeing. Alternatively, individuals who demonstrated higher levels of wellbeing in all five core areas demonstrated greater levels of personal happiness and contentment, stronger organizational leadership, and higher levels of overall professional performance (Rath & Harter, 2010). Figure 1 provided a visual representation of the Gallup factors that influence wellbeing.



*Figure 1.* Gallup Model of Wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010).

### **Career and Wellbeing**

The Gallup research argued that “liking what we do” matters (Rath & Harter, 2010). Given the length of time individuals commit to work, enjoying one’s career strengthens one’s overall level of wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010). The research noted that people with high levels of career wellbeing were “more than twice as likely to be thriving in their lives overall” (Rath & Harter, p. 16). Thus, career wellbeing represented a pivotal aspect of overall wellbeing. Data related to work engagement suggested that individuals who aligned their employment with their personal passions were substantively happier and satisfied in their lives.

The research in career wellbeing distinguishes between workaholism and work engagement (Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009). Definitions of workaholism included working excessively and working compulsively (Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009). Workaholic individuals exhibited a compulsive focus on work. They were often unable to extract

work from their thoughts and were driven uncontrollably to work continuously (van Beek, Hum Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012, p. 32). In contrast, work engagement suggested a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (van Beek, et al., 2012, p. 32). Individuals with high degrees of workaholism often experienced anxiety, burnout, and overall dissatisfaction with their careers (van Beek et al., 2012). The demands of the college presidency yielded a propensity for individuals to engage in workaholic-related behaviors. Presidents often remarked about the 24/7 demands of the position and characterized their work as constant (Selingo, 2005). Thus, the relevance of examining the relationship between career and wellbeing appeared poignant for the purpose of this research.

Additional emerging research related to career wellbeing included the discussion of career and vocational calling. Various definitions of calling exist. However, most scholars conclude that vocational calling embodied three particular components: an external summons, meaning/purpose, and prosocial motivation (Dik & Duffy, 2013). Dik and Duffy’s definition of calling describes it as “an approach to work that reflects the belief that one’s career is a central part of a broader sense of purpose and meaning in life and is used to help others or advance the greater good in some fashion” (2013, p. 429). Individuals who exhibited a high sense of calling similarly demonstrated a greater career commitment, organizational commitment, and higher employment retention (Duffy, Allen, Autin, & Bott, 2013; Hirschi, 2012). The emerging research on vocational calling confirms a strong linkage between calling and wellbeing (Dik & Duffy, 2013). Individuals who view their work as linked to a higher purpose remain more engaged,

connected, and energized. Vocationally-inspired leaders seldom perceive challenges as insurmountable obstacles that create anxiety, burnout, and diminished overall wellbeing.

### **Financial Health and Wellbeing**

A secondary component of wellbeing identified in the Gallup research included financial wellbeing. The data revealed the linkage between financial stability and overall wellbeing. Financial stability does not necessarily correlate with higher levels of income (Rath & Harter, 2010). Rather, financial stability reflected an individual's capacity to live comfortably without exceeding the available financial resources. Thus, an individual who lived within his or her means generally exhibited higher levels of overall wellbeing. High levels of debt, unemployment, and the general use of the individual's money all influenced overall levels of wellbeing. Specifically, individuals who used some of their disposable income to foster positive experiences, for them or for others, had higher levels of financial wellbeing, than those who merely spent money on accumulating more goods. After taking care of basic needs, the acquisition of additional material goods has less impact on overall wellbeing than the use of such money to foster experiences and memories (Rath & Harter, 2010). Individuals who strive to attain financial security through disciplined use of their funds and targeted use for creating positive experiences generally exhibited higher levels of wellbeing.

For many individuals in executive leadership, contracts correlate with financial wellbeing (Laponsky, 2014). Ensuring a strong contract frees the individual to be courageous in one's leadership decision-making without appearing saddled with the uncertainty affiliated with contract negotiations or an unclear contract. Clear contracts strengthen wellbeing.

**Social Wellbeing**

Appreciating and experiencing social networks strengthened overall wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010). In a longitudinal study of happiness and social networks, Christakis and Fowler (2009) concluded that social networks strongly correlate with wellbeing. In particular, women appeared strongly influenced by their networks to other individuals (2009). According to this research, social networks included the family and friends, and one's friend's friends who ultimately shape an individual's life experience, and thus an individual's wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010). The Gallup research concluded that an individual with at least one close friendship increased the level of wellbeing, specifically yielding stronger physical health, higher levels of satisfaction with employment, and general contentedness with life. The absence of a strong social support networked generated negative feelings of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and boredom (Rath & Harter, 2010). The research further encouraged a circle of close friends, in contrast, to a single friendship or relationship. Different members of a support system provided different means of support to an individual. Close friends at work may provide distinct type of support compared to a spouse or partner. Finally, the research encouraged people to seek members of a social support system who nourished their wellbeing, rather than detracting from it. The research recommended avoiding particularly negative individuals or those who frequently diminish a person's energy.

**Physical Wellbeing**

Physical wellbeing comprised the attributes that accounted for overall physical health. From exercise, to nutrition, and sleep, physical wellbeing strengthened an individual's energy level and enabled the individual to more meaningfully engage in

activities that enhance his or her life. Individuals burdened by sleep deprivation, mental health issues, weight issues, or general health issues performed less optimally in their work, often described higher levels of general dissatisfaction with their lives, and were less able to cope appropriately with stress in their careers. Healthy physical wellbeing habits promoted mental acuity, alertness, and enabled more thoughtful, well-guided decision-making (Rath & Harter, 2010; Stickgold & Wehrwein, 2009).

### **Community Wellbeing**

The final category in the Gallup wellbeing framework highlighted the importance of community involvement to overall wellbeing. Community wellbeing reflected the security and safety one experienced in one's daily life. For example, clean water and air, as well as low crime rates, correlate with strong community wellbeing. People caught in the crossfire of war generally exhibit low levels of community wellbeing and such factors contribute to significantly lower levels of overall wellbeing. The Gallup research concluded that community wellbeing distinguished a good life [from] a great one" (Rath & Harter, 2010, p. 93). Additionally, community wellbeing reflected the general "fit" of the individual's personality with the individual's community. Individuals who aspired to live in rural areas experienced lower levels of community wellbeing when they were forced to live in large urban areas. Community wellbeing further reflected the ability of the individual to connect with organizations, interests, and persons within the community in which the individual lived. People high in community wellbeing often engaged in service within their communities. This commitment to service promoted a higher purpose in the existence of the individual and shifted the individual's focus from personal interest to community concern. The Gallup organization recognized community

engagement as *well-doing* suggesting that service broadened the individual's influence and focused him or her on strengthening a greater good (Rath & Harter, 2010). Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam (2000) confirmed the value of community engagement in his seminal work, *Bowling Alone*. Putnam (2000) argued that altruism increased longevity and happiness while decreasing isolation, anxiety, and stress.

In addition to the five attributes defined by the Gallup organization as vital to wellbeing, several other factors emerged as critical to wellbeing, particularly of women in executive leadership positions. A spiritual grounding and courageous self-confidence to address challenges also garnered notable attention by researchers examining the experiences of female executives.

### **Spirituality and Wellbeing**

Several researchers furthered the work by the Gallup organization, arguing that spiritual engagement contributed an additional variable to the wellbeing equation (Piedmont, 2009). Piedmont (2009) argued that an active spiritual life strengthened an individual's resiliency and contributed to one's overall wellbeing. Preliminary research did not distinguish between the constructs of spirituality and religion (Piedmont, 2009). This early research suggested that religious grounding strengthened an individual's ability to manage personal stress and burnout (Pargament, 1997; Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2001). Krymis (2011) asserted that women with a strong sense of spirituality strengthened their ability to balance work and personal obligations. Definitions emerged to distinguish religion from spirituality. Miller and Thoresen (1999) suggested that spirituality existed as an attribute of the individual whereas religiosity consisted of the beliefs, rituals, and practices associated with an institution's spiritual

practice (p. 6). Spirituality and religiosity were not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, they did represent distinct constructs. Piedmont (2009) furthered the definition, suggesting that spirituality represented an intrinsic motivation to create meaningful purpose in one's life. Religion represented an institutionalized practice that integrated tradition and experiences. The two terms overlapped since a purposeful self-existence—the key attribute of Piedmont's (2009) interpretation of spirituality—certainly could be fostered inside of a religious framework. Spiritual practice, whether institutionalized in a formal tradition or not, allowed the individual to achieve a deep sense of transcendence in his or her life. Spiritually grounded individuals expressed a responsibility for the wellbeing of others (Piedmont, 2009). Spirituality equipped an individual with a sense of confidence and security that enabled the individual to overcome challenges and negative life experiences. It contributed to personal emotional maturity, and therefore, enabled individuals to better keep perspective about the events and experiences transpiring around them (Piedmont, 2009). Spirituality also heightened one's capacity to find joy and fulfillment in one's daily experiences. Leaders who embraced and nurtured a sense of spirituality buffered self-focused behaviors and anxiety. Spirituality fortified leaders with emotional maturity, a sense of purpose in their lives, and the self-awareness to see themselves within a greater mission.

### **Adversity and Wellbeing**

As recognized in the CDC definition, an individual's personal and professional wellbeing remained highly correlated to the individual's ability to cope with change, adversity, and conflict (CDC, 2013). Coutu (2002) showed that a leader's ability to address the challenge, conflict, or change and bounce forward to a new state of existence

confirmed a strong sense of leadership competence. Leadership competence promoted wellbeing. Leaders with high levels of wellbeing demonstrated the resiliency necessary to adapt and balance personal and professional obligations.

Luthans (2002) defined resilience as the “developable capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, and failure or even positive events, progress, and increased responsibility” (p. 702). Resilience enabled the leader to react quickly, respond, adapt, and to lead an organization through emerging changes, both negative and positive. Resiliency heightened an individual’s ability to develop strategies to prioritize her personal values alongside her professional obligations. Individuals with low levels of resiliency often exhibited higher levels of burnout and a sense of overall imbalance in their lives.

Youseff and Luthans (2007) distinguished resiliency as a “state-like” attribute. This classification implied that resiliency may change, develop, or evolve over time. A “state-like” attribute remained distinct from positive “hard-wired” traits such as intelligence, talent, or personality that tended to remain relatively unchanged over years (2007). In contrast to these hard-wired traits, Youseff and Luthans (2007) suggested that resiliency may be honed, heightened, or changed by relatively brief intervention strategies, thus confirming the malleability of resilient behavior (2007). Such malleability legitimized current research by suggesting that in cases where interventions may improve resiliency, leaders may benefit from discernment processes that enable the leader to conduct self-assessments on the strengths and weaknesses of her leadership and the subsequent strategies necessary to overcome obstacles and maintain a strong sense of wellbeing.

Christman and McClellan defined resiliency as an “adaptive and coping trait that formed and honed positive character skills, such as patience, tolerance, responsibility, compassion, determination and risk taking” (2008, p. 7). This view suggested that resilient leaders endured challenges by drawing upon a series of character traits that assisted them in navigating both personal and organizational obstacles. Christman and McClellan (2008) confirmed the linkage between self-awareness and the development of resiliency attributes. High levels of resiliency strengthened overall wellbeing. Resiliency confirmed a leader’s self-awareness and self-confidence. A resilient leader detailed a vision or pathway for the organization or for an individual’s personal life. “More than enduring adversity, one changes his or her personality to better persevere through future encounters with hardship” (Christman & McClellan, 2008, p. 7). This research, however, remained limited to the impact of resiliency on professional wellbeing and performance. Little information existed to suggest how such wellbeing developed and whether demographic variables such as gender, occupational status, or familial structure influenced the development of wellbeing in both personal and professional contexts.

### **Obstacles to Female Wellbeing**

Limited research existed on the attributes that contributed to wellbeing among female executives, and virtually no research existed to describe the wellbeing of female university presidents. Despite evidence of fewer women in presidential roles and increasing evidence of job burnout, little specific research assisted women in appreciating the potential linkage between wellbeing, work-life interface, job longevity, and performance. Several studies, however, provided some insight into how women perceive

the struggle for wellbeing and the factors that may influence their perceived level of wellbeing.

### **Cultural Perceptions of Work**

Changing employment patterns for women combined with the redefinition of traditional family roles and responsibilities posed significant challenges for women (Walsh, 2005). These challenges presented obstacles to achieving a quality work-life interface (Walsh, 2013). Research on work-life interface suggested a growing struggle for both men and women, particularly for those in managerial and professional occupations (Blair-Loy, 2004; Hewlett & Luce, 2006). Work-life interface described the ability of the individual to cope with personal and professional obligations and to feel appropriately engaged in each role. Individuals with low levels of work-life interface demonstrated lower levels of life satisfaction, or wellbeing (Walsh, 2013).

In her research on the work-life interface of female hospital doctors, Walsh (2013) found that women were more likely than men to experience higher levels of job burnout. Walsh's research examined whether the role of gender influenced the increasing levels of burnout among women physicians in Great Britain (2013). Referencing earlier research by the British Medical Association (2005), Walsh concluded that work-life interface played a major role in the morale and motivation of female doctors and strongly influenced their overall wellbeing. Professional roles, such as a medical doctor, often required work commitments that "erode[d] the time available for family and leisure activities. Such work patterns are taken to be symbolic of an employee's commitment or dedication to their profession" (Walsh, 2013, p. 440). Brooks furthered, "We've managed to create a world in which ubiquity is valued above all. If you're not at your

desk every night until nine, your commitment to the job is questioned. If you're not checking email 24/7, you're not a reliable colleague" (2014, para. 22). Walsh extended the argument, asserting that professional work cultures more often than other types of positions linked long work hours with professional success. This linkage fostered a work culture incompatible for women's aspirations to achieve wellbeing in their personal and professional lives. Overworked employees yielded burnout, exhaustion, and poor productivity (Brooks, 2014; Walsh, 2013).

The work culture that valued long working hours emerged during a time in which the household structure typically resembled a primary breadwinner with a spouse who stayed home (Hochschild, 2012; Walsh, 2013). In this familial structure, the primary financial provider of a family was able to take on additional hours or work while the other household member remained largely responsible for other household responsibilities. This familial structure incentivized ambitious professionals to take on additional responsibilities and work longer hours. This attitude among executives and professionals continues to pervade our current organizational culture, despite dramatic shifts in the number of dual-income families. Time at work remains a status symbol of professional success.

Equating time at work with leadership success perpetuated several negative trends. First, this cultural norm suggested that women must sacrifice one aspect of their lives for another. As Sandberg (2013) noted, many women leave the workplace feeling the overwhelming pressure to work excessive hours to achieve performance recognition. This compromised a woman's ability to be somewhat involved in the family life, community, social networks, or other off-work experiences she values. This cultural

norm places work above any other wellbeing attribute, often yielding diminished attention to other attributes of wellbeing. Second, excessive focus on long work hours preserved the myth that “more is always better.” Brooks (2014) contended that wellbeing required love and work to have a “protected space in which creativity can flourish” (para. 37). Over-programming our lives yields limited space for the unstructured creative activities necessary to achieve wellbeing and success.

The unpredictable nature of a work schedule created an additional barrier for women who aspired to balance personal and professional obligations. Women doctors, according to Walsh (2013), appeared to be more negatively impacted by these factors. Arguably, female university presidents experienced similar challenges to those in the medical profession. The often-implicit demands of the president’s job required the president to attend weekend or late-night events, as well as engage in extensive travel for purposes of fundraising or political lobbying. The erratic nature of a president’s schedule may yield similar responses to the women Walsh observed in the medical profession. In the absence of a positive interface between professional and personal aspirations, wellbeing declined for professional women and the likelihood of burnout or job dissatisfaction increased (Walsh, 2013).

### **Perfection Myths**

Women continue to believe in the notion that they either “have to” or “can” do it all. Hochschild (2012) argued that despite evidence of a more balanced effort at caregiving between females and males in dual-income households, women continue to believe they remain the primary individual responsible for domestic responsibilities. Hochschild’s (2012) study confirmed that working moms put an extra five to seven hours

per week into domestic responsibilities at home. She remarked that this “created a leisure gap... or an extra two weeks a year of twenty-four hour days” compared to their male counterparts (2012, p. 266). Whether executive women still experience this gap, or whether because of age they may be less involved in child-rearing, the fact remained, women continued to commit unsustainable energy to perfecting their personal and professional roles. Perfection presented a significant obstacle to achieving wellbeing.

The perfection myth assumed that the current work model was the only work model. The perfection myth presented an inherent barrier to the construction of new frameworks for careers that recognized the intrinsic and extrinsic value of embracing wellbeing as a fundamental attribute to happiness, career longevity, and satisfaction with life. The perfection myth prevented a woman from nurturing various personal and professional attributes or aspirations important to her overall wellbeing (Friedman, 2008; Rath & Harter, 2010). Brooks further confirmed the necessity of a new paradigm that shifted the cultural attitude away from perfectionism as a model of womanhood.

If we’re going to fight the culture of workplace ubiquity, and the parallel and equally-pernicious culture of intensive parents, we need to do it together [referring to men and women] – and we need to bring our husbands and boyfriends and male colleagues along, too. They need to lean out in solidarity, for their own sake as well as ours” (2014, para. 42).

### **Strategies for Enhancing Female Wellbeing**

Research by Walsh (2013) confirmed distinct factors that mitigated work-life interference between genders. While managerial support and family-friendly work policies minimized the experience of burnout among male doctors, women appeared less

satisfied by these attempts to foster greater work-life interface. Instead, women responded more positively to co-worker support initiatives. Women needed co-workers who were able to empathize with their personal responsibilities and offer support and encouragement. Further, women also affirmed the value of mentoring or sponsorship programs. Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb and Corrigan (2000) found that women demonstrated a higher level of response to supportive relationships than did their male counterparts. McClellan and Christman's (2008) research showed that the presence of strong interpersonal relationships both within and outside an organization strongly influenced a female leader's wellbeing and resiliency. These interpersonal relationships enabled women to process their potential actions before directing the organization on a new pathway or vision. The strength of the interpersonal relationships and the necessity to process potential decisions with other individuals elevated a woman's confidence and thereby enhanced her resiliency in the face of departmental change or crisis.

Rath and Harter (2010) further confirmed the importance of strong social networks to wellbeing. Specifically, individuals who had "at least three or four very close friendships [were] healthier, [had] higher wellbeing and [were] more engaged in their jobs" (Rath & Harter, 2010, p. 42). The researchers also discerned that fewer close friendships diminished overall wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010).

In addition to social networks and support systems, self-awareness strengthened a woman's overall experience of wellbeing. Whatley's (1998) qualitative study of twelve gifted female educators revealed that women who exercised heightened levels of purposeful self-reflection were better able to cope with institutional challenges or personal adversity and exhibited higher levels of professional wellbeing. Self-awareness

garnered through self-reflection encouraged the individual to solidify her values, beliefs, and assumptions that ought to frame her perspective and behavior in the world. The author relied on a multiple case study approach to compare and contrast the individual interviews of the educators. The research concluded that self-reflection honed resiliency, and thereby wellbeing. This strength enabled the female leader to become increasingly confident in her ability to overcome complex personal or organizational challenges. Whatley (1998) asserted that in the absence of self-reflection, women leaders were less likely to adapt to organizational challenges and thus failed to exhibit the resiliency and subsequent wellbeing necessary for leadership longevity or promotion. Because the study examined educators and not executive leaders in higher education, it is unclear whether these same conclusions apply to female presidents in higher education.

Clarity of career role and support of ongoing professional development also contributed to overall wellbeing (Murray, Murray, & Summar, 2000). This study posited that the absence of clearly defined job expectations, or role ambiguity, led to increased levels of stress and higher rates of voluntary turnover. The authors' clarified ways in which chief academic officers or other executive leaders may struggle with role ambiguity. "For example, for CAOs this might occur when they have to carry out a personnel action having a negative effect on a faculty member who they consider a colleague" (Murray, et al., 2000, p. 2). To assess administrator perceptions of stress, the researchers surveyed 120 chief academic officers of public community colleges across the United States. The data revealed that despite general job satisfaction, most community college chief academic officers intended to stay in their position a relatively short period of time. Many expressed concerns about the stress that accompanied the

position, while others highlighted the absence of professional development to address key decision-making responsibilities that accompanied their positions. Notably, the research did not reveal any specific statistical evidence to validate these conclusions; however, future quantitative research may explore how levels of wellbeing may correlate with support of professional development, contractual clarity, and clearly defined job expectations.

### **Relevant Theoretical Frameworks for Achieving Wellbeing**

A review of the literature on wellbeing suggested that several theories may be used to frame the research related to achieving wellbeing. Theory-in-use and espoused theory assisted in explaining how the actions of individuals may be distinct from the beliefs of individuals. Friedman's (2008) total leadership framework articulated a model reflective of the core values, moral principles, and beliefs of the individual. The female university president may achieve higher levels of wellbeing when her leadership aligned with what is fundamentally most important to her. The framework examined leadership beyond career application and suggested that total leadership is optimized when the individual recognized the relevance of four specific domains to her being, including work, self, home and community (2010). In cases where one domain becomes misaligned with the individual's priorities, the female president may experience anxiety and decreases in overall wellbeing. In addition, Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony explained how a society's cultural norms may imperceptibly control the behaviors of female university presidents. The discussion around female perfection may reflect a subtle application of the cultural norms around the dual-role of professional and mother. Overall, these three theoretical models provide insight into how best to optimize

the application of wellbeing and the particular traps that may pose subtle, yet pervasive, obstacles to achieving a more optimal state of wellbeing.

### **Theory-in-Use and Espoused Theories**

Research by Argyris, Putnam, and Smith (1985) suggested that “espoused theories are those that an individual claimed to follow. Theories-in-use are those that can be inferred from action” (p. 82). Theory-in-use implied the actual application of an individual’s behavior to a particular situation. In contrast, espoused theory clarified what the individual may know he or she should do, but such knowledge or endorsement did not necessarily translate into action. When engaging with others, individuals using espoused theory articulated what they should or what they would want others to believe they do, but this may not be the action that is actually taken by the individual. Argyris and Schon (1974) asserted it is often difficult for individuals to separate the espoused theory from the theory in action. In the case of the female president, she may recognize the necessity of maintaining strong physical health. She may reserve dedicated time in her schedule to engage in consistent exercise because she values such activity. However, she may allow a work responsibility to take a higher priority to the physical health, using the rationale that she will exercise later. In the end, the woman may more often than not skip the physical exercise despite the fact that she recognized its value to her wellbeing. Argyris (1976) argued that individuals unintentionally developed a blindness to this type of behavior. He suggested that the absence of significant reflection about an individual’s actual and perceived behaviors created a blindness between the endorsement of one behavior and the actualization of another set of behaviors. People failed to realize that what they were doing was different from the actualized behavior. Moreover, Argyris

(1976) stated that our culture had programmed us to not share with others any misalignment between what one espoused and how one actually behaved. Thus, the individual becomes tolerant of the incongruences between his or her espoused behaviors and his or her theory-in-use behaviors.

### **Total Leadership Theory**

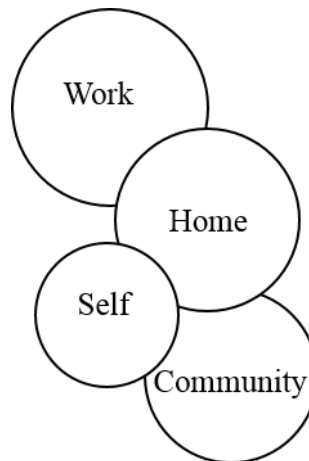
Friedman (2008) draws upon the authentic leadership work of Avolio, Luthans, and Walumbwa (2004) who defined authentic leaders as:

...Those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character" (p. 4).

Authentic leadership identified four attributes that sustained a leader. While not specific in mentioning wellbeing, the attributes identified in this leadership model highlighted the importance of a understanding the purpose of work, an alignment of leadership practices with individual needs and values, the establishment of supportive relationships, and the consistent application of self-discipline to an individual's leadership (George, 2007, p. 12).

Friedman (2008) extended the authentic leadership model by developing domains in which one could apply the authentic leadership principles that honored the core beliefs and values of the individual. Friedman furthered that these core beliefs, values, and principles were embedded within the four domains of our existence: work, self, community, and home. By appreciating and nurturing the "whole" person, the individual

optimized her happiness because the individual honored all that was important to her, not merely a particular aspect of her life. Friedman (2008) declared that “acting with authenticity gives you the strength that comes from doing what you love, drawing on the resources of your whole life, and knowing that you’re creating value for yourself, your family, your business, and your world” (p. 10). The total leadership model required the individual to exhibit high levels of self-awareness. This self-awareness enabled the individual to lead confidently and make decisions. Friedman concluded by suggesting that when the individual successfully aligned her actions and priorities with her four domains, the individual was able to “be real, be whole, and be innovative” (2008, p.11-12). Figure 2 provides an illustration of Friedman’s leadership model. In this model, the individual demonstrated her level of value and priority associated with each domain based on the size of the circle. Similarly, the intersection points suggested the ways in which different domains influenced or crossed over into other domains.



*Figure 2.* Total Leadership Model with Example of the Four Domains (Friedman, 2008).

### **Cultural Hegemony**

A final theoretical framework for discussing the application of wellbeing strategies included Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony. Under this construct, the dominant voice created the beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values, and morals that become absorbed as the social and cultural norm of the society. Marginalized or underrepresented voices begin to accept the norms created by the dominant class (Lears, 1985). Gramsci (1971) suggested that hegemony existed when the "spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general directions imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (p. 12). In the case of the female university president, one may argue that she is battling against a male-dominated model of work and leadership. As Walsh (2013) and Hochschild (2012) articulated, the perception continues to exist that time spent at work correlated with leadership success.

Female university presidents arguably have adopted a second hegemonic framework: perfectionism. This framework posited that women must perform perfectly in all aspects of their lives – professional and personal. This perfectionistic tendency yielded high levels of anxiety, burnout, and decreased happiness (Brooks, 2014; Hochschild, 2012). While hegemonic attitudes continued to be shaped and reshaped by the dominant voice, Gramsci (1971) asserted that the dominant voice largely stayed in control of the beliefs. The pervasive cultural attitudes continued to persist until a sufficient challenge was lodged against the dominant voice enabling it to be given more fruitful consideration by the culture.

### Summary

The definition of wellbeing has evolved over the past half century. From a simplistic equation that measured happiness, wellbeing now suggested a more complex, multivariate construct. Wellbeing appeared influenced by diverse factors ranging from financial stability, to physical health, spirituality, self-awareness, career, and other attributes. The positive psychology movement recognized wellbeing as a holistic variable that often depended upon the values, priorities, and experiences of the individual. Limited research existed on the relationship between wellbeing and gender, and no confirmed research was found on the impact of wellbeing on female executive leadership in higher education. Nonetheless, the research examining female medical doctors in Great Britain presented some potential parallels to the university presidency (Walsh, 2013). The erratic nature of the job, the male-dominated work model, and the struggle with perfectionism in achieving appropriate work-life interface all presented potentially formidable barriers for female university presidents. Despite the increasing number of female faculty in higher education and their successful promotion to senior leadership positions, future research must identify the factors that contribute to female leadership wellbeing. Higher levels of female wellbeing ensure stronger workforce participation and long-term diversity in the presidency at colleges and universities. A greater presence of female leaders strengthens the vitality of our universities and equips these institutions with the critical strengths female leaders bring to executive leadership. Future female presidents may benefit from the insights provided by current female university presidents on what contributes to the wellbeing of women leaders in higher education and how wellbeing activities and strategies strengthen leadership progression

and job tenure. Identifying particular traits or strategies to increase levels of wellbeing may better prepare female leaders to address the myriad of challenges currently confronting higher education. Achieving an understanding of the attributes that contribute to leadership wellbeing yields potential implications for professional development and workplace policies.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### **Restatement of the Problem**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to identify how female university presidents experienced wellbeing and the conditions necessary to optimize wellbeing in this executive leadership role. Appreciating the factors that assisted in developing wellbeing, as well as those factors that hindered wellbeing provided additional potential outcomes of the research. Finally, the research sought to describe strategies for enhancing overall wellbeing of female university presidents. As female university presidents coped with challenges, adversity, and the rapidly changing nature of higher education as well as the complex interactions between their work and personal lives, appreciating how other female presidents experience and optimize wellbeing equips new female presidents or future presidents with guidance for strengthening leadership longevity and success. This chapter described the research methodology used to gather data regarding the wellbeing of female university presidents.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research design shaped the structure of this study. Qualitative research enabled the investigator to elicit more detailed descriptions of the definition, experience, and strategies used to optimize wellbeing among female university presidents (Creswell, 2013). The collected experiences of ten female university presidents shaped the development of a series of themes that guided the researcher in the identifying a grounded theory of wellbeing.

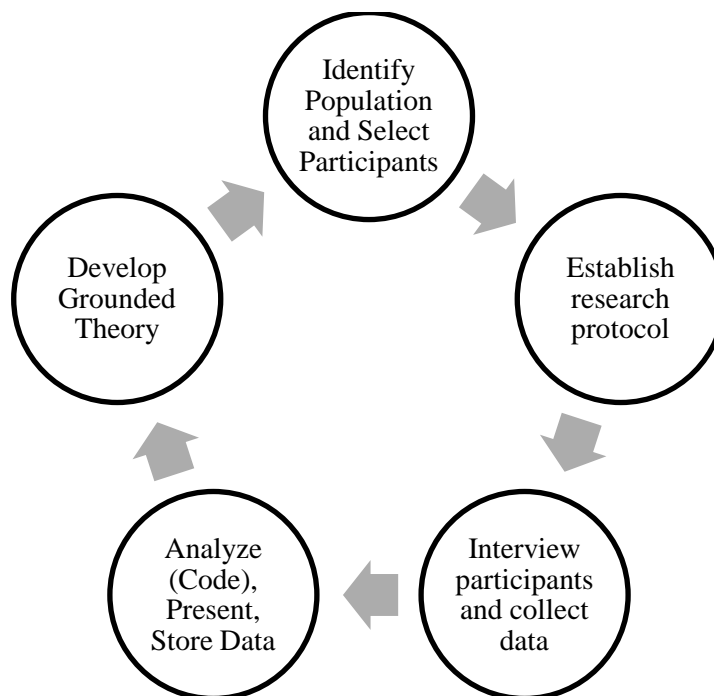
Pioneered by Glasser & Strauss (1967), grounded theory acknowledged the richness of first-person experiences and suggested such knowledge may be used to

discover patterns that confirm new theories of human behavior. This qualitative approach harnessed the voice and experience of wellbeing shared in conversations, interviews, documents, and other sources (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Charmaz (2006) asserted that the application of a social-constructivist lens to grounded theory enabled the researcher to “place more emphasis on the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions and ideologies of individuals... [through] rich data, coding, memoing, and using theoretical sampling” (as cited in Creswell, 2013, pp. 65-66).

A constructivist approach to grounded theory encouraged the researcher to delve into the emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological attributes that contributed to the participant’s life and experiences (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) continued, “A constructivist grounded theory fosters the development of qualitative traditions through study of experience from the standpoint of those who live it” (pp. 521-522). Exploring wellbeing from a social-constructivist lens validated the application of a grounded theory methodology to this research study. Grounded theory allowed for an iterative process in which the “development of a theory and the collection of data related to that theory build on each other” (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008, p. 182). This framework promoted the development of questions that focused the interview process but allowed for dynamic and evolving responses. Constructivist approaches to grounded theory encouraged the researcher to explore the “private thoughts and feelings” and discern meaning from such probing questions (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher then identified patterns that emerged from the interviews and proposed new theoretical foundations based upon the emerging patterns.

### Data Collection

The data collection process characterized in grounded theory research involved clearly defined steps, procedures, and processes designed to ensure that the research study is relevant, rigorous, and feasible (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Figure 3 provides a simplified graphic overview of the data collection process. Typically, the researcher begins by identifying the population. Following population identification, the researcher inquired with the participant about potential involvement in the research study. If the participants agreed to participate, data collection began. The researcher established specific protocols to collect and record the data. These protocols also ensured the confidentiality of participant interviews and ethical use of the interview data. Finally, the data was analyzed, presented and stored for future use or reference.



*Figure 3.* Grounded Theory Process (Creswell, 2013).

### **Population and Sample**

The researcher proposed to select and interview ten female presidents in higher education. Because of the unique challenges facing small, private higher education, the present study focused on women who were currently serving in private, bachelor's degree granting institutions of fewer than 5,000 undergraduate students. Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), the researcher used a purposeful sampling technique to identify twenty female presidents from small, private, four year colleges or universities across America. The researcher recognized that not all potential participants would agree to participate in the study. Thus, the researcher identified a larger number of potential participants in order to secure a minimum of ten participants. Purposeful sampling encouraged the selection of individuals whose experience informed the research study (Creswell, 2013). In this case, female university presidents represented a purposeful sampling population. Individuals who were currently serving or had previously served as a female university president at a small, private, four-year institution constituted a sample population. The Council of Independent Colleges directory provided contact information for female university presidents currently serving at small private colleges. This information supported the purposeful sampling process used to identify potential research participants. The investigator supplemented the purposeful sampling technique with a snowball technique (Creswell, 2013). The snowball sampling technique relied on research participants to identify other individuals who may fit the purposeful sampling criteria. As the researcher began the interview process, the participants were asked to identify others who may be possible candidates for this research study.

Letters of invitation (Appendix B) were sent to twenty-five female university presidents in order to identify an acceptable number of participants for the process (Creswell, 2013). Securing study participants through the invitation process enabled the researcher to identify enough participants to allow the researcher to attain a saturation point with the study (Creswell, 2013). Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined saturation as the point whereby no additional unique data are identified. At the point of data saturation, the researcher detects a consistent set of responses or themes based upon the interview questions (Taylor, 1998). Grounded theory methodology does not prescribe an exact number of interviews, but instead suggested a researcher continue until enough information is obtained to fully develop a theory of behavior (Creswell, 2013).

The letter of invitation explained the research project, informed the participants of the risks involved in the research, and requested their voluntary participation in the study (Appendix B). A follow-up letter was sent to the selected participants who did not reply to the first research invitation. Ten female university presidents agreed to participate in the research study. Each female university president received a copy of the research protocol and were informed of their rights as research participants (Appendix B). A statement of informed consent was provided to each participant. The consent form complied with established qualitative research protocols and included the following criteria (Creswell, 2013).

- The central purpose of the study and the procedures used in the data collection process.
- The option for participants to voluntarily withdraw from the research at any time.

- The confidentiality protocols used for the study.
- The potential risks and benefits associated with the study.

Participants were also informed of their ability to review the transcript following completion of the interview process. Participants were encouraged to correct, add or delete any of the information contained within the transcript following the interview (Taylor, 1998).

### **Interview Process and Protocol**

The interviews of ten female university presidents were conducted via phone and recorded with the permission of the research participant. Using the Kvale & Brinkman (2009) interview protocol, the investigator first identified the interviewees through purposeful sampling. Based on location of research participants and research objectives, the investigator next determined how best to conduct the interview. In this case, the researcher selected a national sample of female university presidents to participate in the research study. Due to locational logistics, the researcher selected the use of phone interviews or Skype interviews to gather the data. The interview protocol then directed the researcher to identify the best method for capturing the interview information. In this research study, the investigator used a high fidelity digital recorder to record all of the interviews. After identifying the process used for conducting the interview, the researcher established the interview questions and the interview protocol.

The researcher developed an interview form with twelve major open-ended questions. Following the interview, the researcher requested the interviewee to complete a survey on her perceptions of her personal and professional wellbeing. The survey also requested that the interviewee identify the level of importance she associated with a

particular attribute of wellbeing. The researcher also requested that the participant table complete a section containing demographic information (Appendix D). Demographic information allowed the researcher to gather relevant information used to characterize the participants and discern emerging patterns potentially related to the demographic variables (Creswell, 2013; Taylor, 1998). All ten interviewees completed the follow-up survey (Appendix D). The framework for the open-ended interview questions evolved from the Gallup framework for wellbeing, the Friedman Total Leadership model, and the research by Piedmont on spirituality and wellbeing (Friedman, 2008; Piedmont, 2009; Rath and Harter, 2010).

The semi-structured, open-ended questions assisted the researcher in ascertaining the wellbeing experience of female university presidents. The investigator used Sampson's (2004) technique of pilot testing to conduct two pilot interviews with a president and provost. In this manner, the researcher tested the questions for clarity and purpose (Sampson, 2004). Additionally, the researcher sought the input of two professional researchers with subject matter expertise in qualitative research to comment on the interview questions and outlined interview protocol. Corrections to the interview form were made based upon findings from the pilot testing and the external review process (Creswell, 2013; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Sampson, 2004). The use of professional research reviewers strengthened the validity of the research questions and confirmed the appropriate interview protocol.

The questions contained in the interview form aligned with the research questions that shaped this study. Appendices C and D provide the interview form and the

alignment of interview questions with the research questions posed in this study. The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

- How do female university presidents define wellbeing?
- How do female university presidents experience wellbeing?
- What factors hinder wellbeing?
- What factors strengthen wellbeing?
- What strategies do female university presidents encourage to strengthen wellbeing?

Qualitative researchers acknowledged that grounded theory enabled a broad and holistic interpretation of the meaning associated with particular experiences (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). This lens allowed for more comprehensive details to be used to enlighten an understanding of presidential wellbeing. Participants were informed of the nature of the study, the study protocol, and the length of the potential interview (Creswell, 2013). Participants voluntarily chose to participate and were permitted to discontinue the interview if they no longer felt comfortable with the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Individual interviews lasted between forty and ninety minutes.

Upon completion of the interviews, the digital recordings were professionally transcribed verbatim. After the transcription, the investigator listened to each recording to ensure transcription accuracy. The researcher made corrections to content that was not recorded accurately in the transcription process. The investigator then shared the transcripts with the participants. Participants were permitted to review the content for accuracy. Along with additions, clarifications, or discrepancies, it was requested that each participant ensure that the interview accurately and realistically depicted her

experience of wellbeing. Participants were asked to make necessary changes within two weeks of receipt of the transcript. Five of the participants had additions, corrections or clarifications.

Each interview was assigned a unique identification code. This code was written on the interview form, in notes taken, and was used to code and save the audio files and transcript documents (Creswell, 2013). The names of the interview participants were not used at any time during the process in order to ensure participant confidentiality.

Throughout the study and in the data collection process, all participants were referred to by their code. All identifying statements or criteria necessary for the study were only altered with the participant's permission to ensure anonymity. The content of the interviews remained strictly confidential and was not shared with anyone.

Paper transcripts have been kept in a locked storage cabinet in the researcher's office. All transcripts will be maintained for one year following the completed dissertation. Electronic copies of the files are also being kept in password-protected files on a secure server. A back-up file is located on a secondary secure server with password protection. The electronic files will be maintained for one year following the completion of the study. The researcher is the only individual with password knowledge and file access. All transcripts sent through email were sent using a password-protected file-coding system.

### **Validity and Reliability**

The investigator in this study remained cautious of biasing the interview by presupposing a particular response or hypothesis based on a review of the literature or her own personal experience as a university president. Prior to the initiation of the interview

process, the researcher recorded her own responses to the questions. In this manner, the researcher bracketed her experiences and allowed “the data [to] speak for themselves” (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008, p. 182).

Ensuring the accurate collection and reporting of qualitative data strengthened descriptive validity (Patton, 2002). Patton argued that descriptive validity is necessary for reliability and rigor in qualitative research. Developing clear research protocols to collect, report, secure, store, and maintain research data ensures research validity (Patton, 2002). The recording of all interviews, use of professional transcription services, as well as the collection and secure storage of all correspondence ensured validity of the data collected for this study (Creswell, 2013). Further, the researcher allowed each participant to review her transcribed interview for corrections, additions, or deletions. Creswell (2013) confirmed that clearly outlined data collection, reporting, and storage procedures validated the data and ensured accuracy and rigor in the study’s outcome.

A qualitative research study strengthened its validity through accurate interpretation. Interpretive validity confirmed the meaning ascribed by research participants to a particular experience. The use of personal anecdotes and quotations throughout the analysis ensured strong interpretive validity (Patton, 2002). Patton stated, “Interpretation is essential to an understanding of experience and the experience includes interpretation” (p. 106). Personal quotes and anecdotes enabled the researcher to use the participant’s words to shape the analysis and conclusions. The researcher sought the input of two committee members to review the interview transcripts and independently identify themes related to one particular question (Creswell, 2013). The researcher’s

identification of themes conformed to the committee members' conclusions which further validated the data analysis process (Creswell, 2013).

Confirmation of external validity occurred through the application of the Gallup (2010), Friedman (2008), and Piedmont (2009) frameworks to the themes that emerged in the interview coding process (Friedman, 2008; Piedmont, 2009; Rath & Harter, 2010). Establishing external validity, interpretative validity, and descriptive validity together confirmed high degrees of triangulation (Golafshani, 2003). Triangulation involved the confirmation of data findings through multiple approaches, including external review, research validity, and coding (Golafshani, 2003). In this study, all three methods were employed to garner the findings and develop a theory of female university presidential wellbeing.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) aligned qualitative study reliability with the idea of "dependability" (p. 300). Reliable qualitative research enhanced the credibility a study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Lincoln and Guba encouraged the use of an inquiry audit in which individuals outside of the research circle reviewed the research protocol, the findings, and the results to ensure that best practices were used in the collection, recording, and analysis of the data. An inquiry audit can be used to examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency (Hoepfl, 1997). The use of professional recording and transcription services ensured reliability, and the confirmation of thematic clusters by the external researchers verified the reliability of the data collection process. Moreover, the researcher permitted the participants to review the data for accuracy following the transcription process.

**Ethical Considerations**

Since the researcher served as a female university president at a small, private college, the researcher attempted to bracket her experiences by recording her thoughts about the role of university president prior to conducting the interviews with the university presidents. The investigator shared the interview questions with two other independent reviewers to ensure no bias existed in the questions designed to solicit responses from the university presidents (Creswell, 2013). The independent reviewers made several suggestions, which were included in the development of the final questions to be used during the interview process. The data collection process ensured the confidentiality of all participants and their responses (Creswell, 2013). The information was coded using a system that maintained and preserved confidentiality in the reporting process (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The research project and all necessary forms were submitted to the institutional review board for approval before the start of the research phase of the study. Similarly, all presidents were informed of the potential use of aggregate data or their personal quotes with identifiers removed from the quotations (Creswell, 2013).

**Data Analysis**

The researcher reviewed each transcript three times (Creswell, 2013). The first time, the researcher read for significant statements. Initial content analysis occurred using open-coding (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Creswell, 2013). Open-coding involved notating important statements in the margins of the transcript and generating possible ideas from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher assigned a concept label to important statements made by each research participant (Taylor, 1998). The notations

were carefully reviewed for interpretive accuracy using protocols established for qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). In the second stage, the researcher recorded significant statements and identified codes associated with each of the statements. Referred to as axial coding, this process generated clusters of meaning associated with different significant statements (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During this phase, the researcher engaged in memo writing (Creswell, 2013). Memo writing enabled the researcher to record her ideas and thoughts related to the data. In the final phase, the transcripts and memos were read again. Selective coding established themes and formal relationships between the themes. In this phase of coding, the researcher proposed a theoretical framework to explain the thematic clusters emerging from the coding process (Creswell, 2013). The investigator clustered the notable responses into themes and linked each theme with the research questions established for the study. A table in Microsoft Word was used to organize the research questions, themes, and significant statements. The study achieved theoretical saturation after the completion of ten interviews. Thus, no new or relevant data appeared to be emerging from additional interviews (Taylor, 1998). The researcher established graphic relationships between various themes, and then subsequently developed a visual model of wellbeing to explain the findings of the interview process (Figure 4). The data analysis and various coding protocols allowed the researcher to describe how the participants defined, experienced, and optimized wellbeing in their role as a female university president (Creswell, 2013).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

As a qualitative grounded theory study, this research posed limitations. Ten female university presidents were interviewed. While the findings confirmed themes

among the participants, it is unknown as to whether these findings could be replicated among female university presidents at all types of universities. It remains unknown whether female university presidents of large, public institutions or community colleges may respond differently than women who serve as presidents of small, private, four-year institutions. The women interviewed in this study ranged in age from 59 to 69. It remains unknown whether women in different age categories may respond differently to their experiences of wellbeing. The researcher assumed that all the university presidents answered honestly and openly about their experiences.

The concept of work-life interface or work-life balance remained complex. Different stages of life presented different challenges relating to work-life balance. Respecting the variances in life-stage, the researcher allowed the concept of work-life interface to unfold through the questions, rather than be predefined by the study.

### **Summary**

Grounded theory research confirms the development of a theory when a sufficient collection of experiences are captured to identify clusters of attributes, essences, and structures that contributed to the wellbeing of female university presidents. This research study did not aim to classify the particular, but rather, to generalize on the significance of the broad experience, and then use such generalizations to describe a theory. The methods used in grounded theory research required the researcher to question, reflect, focus, and intuit from the responses a general theory of conditions that optimized female wellbeing in the role of university president (Creswell, 2013).

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### **Introduction**

The literature reviewed in chapter two elucidated the important connections between wellbeing and individual health, happiness, and job performance. Individuals who exhibited high levels of wellbeing consistently had higher levels of job performance, employment retention, and lived generally happier and more hopeful lives (Friedman 2008; Rath & Harter, 2010). Given the intensity of demands that surrounded the position of university president, this research study sought to explore how female presidents both defined and experienced wellbeing, as well as the conditions that optimized wellbeing. Research suggested that women with high levels of wellbeing are more likely to be retained and thrive in the role of executive leadership rather than burnout and leave fatigued and drained by the position (Rath & Harter, 2010). This chapter presented the key findings obtained from the ten interviews with female university presidents at small, private, four-year colleges across America. The results of the study informed an understanding of how women presidents defined and experienced wellbeing. The study identified the overall conditions that optimized wellbeing and thereby strengthened the likelihood of successful tenure as a female university president.

These interviews further revealed important tactics and strategies for future female presidents to consider in attaining and maintaining executive leadership. While participants acknowledged that the values which define wellbeing for each individual may be distinct, individuals who consistently remained attentive to the values that strengthened their wellbeing enhanced their likelihood of leadership longevity and overall life satisfaction. Attentiveness to wellbeing yielded higher energy levels, positive

commitment to the position, and general hopefulness about the future. A theory of wellbeing among university presidents suggested that women who appreciated the role of president as a calling, exhibited leadership competence, engaged in ongoing self-awareness assessments, and nurtured social connections both professionally and personally exhibited a higher propensity for wellbeing and general satisfaction with their life as a university president.

### **Participant Profile and Description**

The study included ten female university presidents working at small, private, and four-year colleges across the United States. All participants were Caucasian females ranging in age from 59–69. The length of time in the role of university president ranged from three months to twenty years. Nine of the 10 interviewees held terminal degrees, and nine out of 10 came into the role of the president from academia. All participants were currently serving or had served at a private institution with undergraduate enrollment under 5,000 students. The median age of the participants was 63.5 years, slightly above the national average for male presidents (Council of Independent Colleges, 2012). The median years of service in the role of president was 10.3 years. Table 3 provides a description of the participant profile.

Table 3

*Participant Profile and Description*

Presidential Code	Institution Type	Age	Years in Office	Number of Presidencies
P1	4 Year, RF*	69	14	2
P2	4 Year, RF	U-***	3 months	1
P3	4 Year, RF	63	14	2
P4	4 Year, RF	59	2	1
P5	4 Year, NA**	62	5	1
P6	4 Year, RF	64	20.5	3
P7	4 Year, RF	66	8	1
P8	4 Year, RF	64	18	1
P9	4 Year, RF	60	13	1
P10	4 Year, RF	65	8	1

*Note.* \*RF refers to a religiously founded institution. \*NA refers to a non-affiliated, private institution. \*\*\*U- indicates that the information was not provided by the interviewee.

**Research Question One: How do Female University Presidents Define Wellbeing?**

The data analysis revealed that female university presidents defined wellbeing as a holistic experience that appreciated the multiple facets of their personal and professional lives. According to the presidents, women who experienced high levels of wellbeing understood the importance of “wholeness” in their lives. Depending on the presidential perspective, different attributes accounted for wholeness, but overall, women acknowledged the need for attention to core areas of their being that extended beyond career commitments. Generally, the presidents expressed that wellbeing emerged from a self-awareness of the individual’s needs and aspirations. President P7 commented:

For me, wellbeing is the absolutely total piece, the total picture. It’s your mental wellbeing, your spiritual wellbeing—however you describe that—your emotional wellbeing as well as physical wellbeing. It’s family, friends, and the social piece. It’s just very holistic. Wellbeing means being in tune with myself.

President P5 further elaborated:

I think wellbeing is taking care of yourself on the physical, emotional, family, social, and spiritual levels. I think wellbeing comes from accepting and living with your values. You have values; don't get yourself in crosshairs with those values or you are not going to feel good about yourself.

Several presidents cautioned against the use of the term balance since it implied an equal distribution of time between multiple areas. Others referenced the concept of an intentional and appropriate integration of those attributes that make one feel whole. "Pay attention to the inner content, inner substance of your life," remarked President P6. Others encouraged the establishment of structures or schedules that enabled one to set aside time for nurturing all aspects of one's wellbeing.

By setting up this structure of balance where you really know, I'm going to keep my marriage going, or I'm going to keep my relationships going. I'm going to make sure that I'm giving back to the community... or walking or running or whatever it is. (President P10)

While the university presidents in this study may not be representative of all university presidents, and many cautioned against a prescriptive description of wellbeing, several emerging themes surfaced about important attributes that contributed to the university presidents' experience of wellbeing.

## **Research Question Two: How do Female University Presidents Experience Wellbeing?**

The first research question explored how female university presidents defined wellbeing. Distinct from the definition, however, this study sought to explore how the female university presidents experienced wellbeing. Examining the potential application of the theory-in-use and espoused theory, the research observed whether the definition of wellbeing contrasted or complimented the experience of wellbeing among female university presidents.

Female university presidents identified various experiences that contributed to their overall wellbeing. The following six themes emerged as most significant to the experience of wellbeing among female university presidents: spiritual practice, physical health, social support, prioritization/time management, contractual strength, career alignment with institutional mission, and reflective space. Figure 2 provides a word cloud of the factors that most influenced the experience of wellbeing among these female university presidents. The terms described in the word cloud are discussed with more clarity in the in the explication of themes that emerged from the coding of the participant responses.



religious faith is a sort of a requirement. It helps put those difficulties into the right perspective. (President P6)

Several presidents remarked about the necessity of spiritual discipline to their daily wellbeing and effective leadership. The disciplines varied between meditative practices, spiritual readings, time alone with nature, and daily worship attendance. The use of spiritual disciplines strengthened their courage and convictions and provided appropriate time for reflection. A president added:

I think that meditation time provides a reminder that there are higher principles, and there are reasons to be humble, sacrifice, and express a belief in caring about others. It gets you a little bit out of yourself, and it also gets you to quit thinking about yourself. I really try to hit hard on the ego thing, because, I think it's a horrible distraction. You may still have a tendency to think you're important and it reminds you: get off of it.

(President P5)

The spiritual discipline of reflection often led female presidents to a firm understanding of the professional mission of the university, and how the president represents a part of that overall effort. Reflection reminded the president that leadership required humility, compassion, and a commitment to serving others for the greater good. A focus on mission energized the female president and inspired her to address courageously the obstacles and challenges confronting the institution. "When things get tough, I always remind myself of our mission. Giving these students an education and helping them out of tough situations... motivates me" (President P4).

A strong sense of spirituality limited the sense of isolation that often accompanied executive leadership. Spiritual reflection enabled presidents to be comforted by a greater presence in their lives, the sense of refuge that counters the “lonely at the top” symptom of executive leadership.

If you're a praying-person, and a believing-person, you really do believe that God has a plan for people's lives. They could either choose to participate in that [belief] or not, and rely on Him in a way that makes leadership possible. That's what I've chosen to do. I'm going to listen to what scripture says about God being a refuge. I'm going to place myself in that position. I think it is really the only way that I think I could be a leader; otherwise, I would be overcome by fear and doubt and self-criticism and all those things. Instead I can say, “This [humble action]... reinforces that God is in my life, and I cannot do this on my own.”

(President P9)

### **Theme Two: Physical Health**

Female university presidents also acknowledged the importance of physical health to wellbeing. The presidents expressed caution about a prescriptive approach to physical wellbeing, but 90% of those interviewed highlighted the importance of sleep, physical exercise, and nutrition to their overall wellbeing. Approaches to managing physical health varied among the participants. Eight of the 10 research subjects discussed strategies that included regular exercise. For some individuals physical wellbeing meant running each morning, while others enjoyed walks, vegetarian lifestyles, nutritional supplements, or designated time away from work to ensure

sufficient rest. They expressed the necessity of strong physical health to ensure adequate energy and endurance for the position. A president elaborated:

Exercise is part of my weekly routine. I don't get it done every day, but at least four days a week, and on some weeks I actually put it on my calendar, so that way it happens. Exercise is important, and of course regular physical checkups. (President P10)

### **Theme Three: Strong Spouse, Partner, or Friendship Support**

The presidents asserted that wellbeing was also enhanced by the establishment of strong networks of support. Successful female presidents identified a network of support to assist them in navigating professional and personal challenges. From spouses and partners, to close friends and confidants, wellbeing increased among female university presidents who were able to be supported by someone committed to them and their success. Veteran research participants echoed the sentiment of a new president when asked about the importance of strong social support systems. "My spouse. He has been invaluable to my career" (President P3). Nine out of the 10 women interviewed identified a spouse, partner, or close friend as a highly necessary compliment to their wellbeing and success as a university president. These women also acknowledged the necessity of carving out time to spend with close family or friends. Prioritizing time with family and close friends nurtured the wellbeing of many female college presidents.

Successful presidents understood the importance of developing strong allies on the university board of trustees or board of directors. Research subjects identified key board members as vital participants in their support system. While these individuals may not necessarily display close personal friendship, these

individuals provided insight and guidance to the president during her tenure in office. A president stated, “[I discovered] the importance of reliance on input or counsel from my board was very necessary” (President P8). Female presidents also acknowledged the value of networking with other presidents. “What’s been really important is connecting with other women presidents. Wow that’s been great” (President P1). In some cases, women found heightened levels of wellbeing from formal enrollment in a mentor or sponsorship program with other college presidents. As one president remarked:

Make sure you have a good mentor and [can] identify those people who you can trust to bounce things off of... I think [what] is really important [is]... networking and trying to identify someone who is unattached to your institution but [who] has deep history in the industry that you’re in.  
(President P7)

#### **Theme Four: Prioritization/Time Management**

A notable theme within the data suggested a gap between the actual and perceived levels of wellbeing among presidents. This theme emerged more distinctly among those presidents in the study who were newer to the role. Female presidents with more leadership experience shared their common struggles with wellbeing early on in their leadership tenure. The more senior presidents, however, acknowledged the ongoing difficulty of maintaining a sense of wellbeing given the ubiquitous demands of the position.

Women presidents highlighted the challenge of prioritizing the importance of various activities related to their professional and personal lives. Newer presidents

remarked about the difficulty of establishing routines and patterns related to wellbeing. While these presidents recognized the importance of wellbeing, they struggled with adopting practices or establishing priorities that enhanced wellbeing. Newer, as well as more senior, presidents admitted to often allowing work demands to supersede personal requirements for wellbeing. The inability to establish priorities or routines fostered anxiety and feelings of burnout. The presidents in these situations expressed the aspiration to “regain” control of their lives to better support their overall wellbeing.

Here my whole routine [became work]. I never established a good routine when I got here. Almost two years later, I’m really trying to focus on... how I can carve out some time to take care of myself. I would tell women aspiring to this position to get their routine set right away. (President P4)

As these individuals discussed their experiences, they often recognized that their behavior appeared incongruent with what was required to maintain a sense of wellbeing. This gap aligned with the theories of espoused values and actualized behaviors. Prioritizing family, spiritual practice, exercise, or reflection was circumvented by the reality of the enormous workload that accompanied the role. All the presidents expressed occasional frustration at their inability to sort through the variety of demands placed before them. Small college presidents faced unique challenges in responding to numerous and diverse constituencies. As a president, the act of discerning who and what required immediate attention often eclipsed the personal needs of wellbeing. Women often became overwhelmed, anxious, and uninspired by their work. Managing the expectations of the different stakeholders became a necessary priority for all the presidents aspiring to achieve

a stronger sense of wellbeing. President P3 summarized the challenge as the need to understand “what’s important and what can be on the B-list or the C-list.”

### **Theme Five: Employment Contract Terms**

During discussions of financial wellbeing, contract clarity and contract length emerged as a significant factor among female university presidents. Female presidents expressed confidence in making difficult decisions when their employment contract demonstrated a supportive commitment to them personally and to the long-term vitality of the institution. Well-crafted and supportive contracts strengthened a female president’s confidence and verified the board’s support of her institutional vision. Contracts also expressed a board’s commitment to fair and equitable compensation. Contract compensation also ensured women were able to live comfortably while serving in the position. Seventy percent of the study presidents agreed that contracts provided the individual the freedom to make difficult decisions without fearing for potential employment repercussions.

I think the security of the way the board contracts, the way they support [the president] is really important to wellbeing. Because if I had [a fear of losing my contract] in the back of my mind... I would make different decisions. [With a strong contract], I am able to make good decisions... because I have that sense of wellbeing about my future, my income, and all of that. (President P6)

### **Theme Six: Career Wellbeing**

Every woman in the study articulated the importance of her work to her overall wellbeing. Consistently, career ranked very high in her perspective of wellbeing. The

follow-up interview survey required participants to rank the importance of wellbeing to their personal and professional life, and also their current satisfaction with their personal and professional wellbeing. All 10 participants responded that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their work and its contribution to their overall wellbeing.

Connecting to students and appreciating the mission of the institution energized the presidents and fostered an important component of their overall wellbeing. Every president interviewed for this study remarked about how important connecting to students was to her career wellbeing. They often went with students to lunch or attended a student event to remind them of the significance of their work while simultaneously energizing their commitment to their career. Ninety percent of the presidents connected their career with a higher purpose. This linkage mobilized their efforts and reinforced the importance of their work with the achievement of a greater good. Connecting with students further enhanced the resiliency exhibited by these women. When these presidents understood that an unpopular decision may be necessary to enhance the greater good, these women were more resilient to the criticisms of their decisions.

Connecting her work to the institutional mission affirmed the models of authentic leadership (George, 2007) and total leadership (Friedman, 2008). These leadership models acknowledged the importance of connecting an individual's values with the organization's values. Establishing an alignment between personal values, institutional mission, and the "greater good" or society strengthened the resolve of female university presidents. President P2 commented:

I have always been someone who connects with mission. I have been intentional in my career about selecting a place that connects with my

passion. For me, that is education. Watching the transformation in young people.... I wouldn't trade that for anything.

Another president confirmed how she connected to the mission of her institution by encouraging people to expand their lens of the world through networking. “[This job] is all about making connections. Connecting people to people. Connecting people to the institution. That’s what I like to do best” (President P4).

### **Theme Seven: Reflective Space**

The experience of female presidential wellbeing appeared strengthened by intentional efforts to create occasional distance from the work environment. Establishing places and time for respite strongly influenced the wellbeing of female university presidents. Presidents discussed the importance of time in nature, a weekend away from the school, specific evenings that were not scheduled, or intentional efforts to be alone or in private space. Time away from the institution or position rekindled their energy and passion for the job. One president echoed the sentiments of the others: “Quiet time. Peace. You [do] need to get out of Dodge just even to unwind at all” (President P10). Another president stressed the importance of “having time and space for silence” (President P1). The demands of the position often resulted in a 24/7 schedule. Space and time away from the institution allowed the president to reflect on her life, both personally and professionally. Reflective space encouraged a reconnection with the mission. Three presidents discussed the importance of having a second residence where one could go to unwind and relax. Others discussed the importance of scheduling a weekend a month away from the institution. Since many of these women live in university-owned properties, typically located on the campus, they expressed the burden of always needing

to “appear presidential” (President P1). A president continued, “Sometimes I just wanted to put my sweats on and relax without anyone seeing me” (President P1). This theme further validated the necessity of reflection that appeared in the first theme related to spiritual practice. Whether using reflection to find spiritual nourishment, or creating reflective space to remove oneself from the stress of the position, presidents agreed that reflection appeared necessary for wellbeing.

### **Research Question 3: What Factors Hinder Wellbeing?**

The experience of wellbeing articulated by the female university presidents simultaneously confirmed some of the barriers to wellbeing. The women acknowledged that prioritization remained vital for securing wellbeing. The role of the small, private university president remained highly complex and distinct from other executive leadership positions. Presidents were expected to be responsive to multiple diverse constituency groups including students, faculty, boards, the general public, political representatives, the business community, churches, and parents to name a few. Many of the respondents highlighted this in their description of their role.

You become president and it’s a wonderful job, and it’s a horrible job because you’re just multiplying the constituencies that you are responsible for, from students to parents, to boards, politicians, the public, and the business community.... The presidency is 24/7. There is often no one you can confide in and you have to be constantly up on what is happening....

This is a constantly changing field (President P1).

**Theme One: Diverse Position Demands**

The nature of the university presidency presented unique challenges to the wellbeing of an individual. Presidents may be called upon to address a student death during the early hours of the morning, while simultaneously being required to attend numerous university functions, engage in fundraising, and lobby the local, state, and the federal government on education-related issues. A highly complex, rapidly evolving work environment, constrained financial and physical resources, and the mounting pressures to provide affordable, accessible, and relevant education present a formidable challenge to executive leadership. Additionally, faculty governance structures often impeded organizational agility, fostering greater challenges in adopting organizational change. Mindful of these challenges, university presidents remarked about the difficulty, yet implied necessity, of prioritizing tasks, responding to daily inquiries, and providing operational direction while simultaneously facilitating the implementation of the strategic vision for the institution. The study participants remarked about the ease with which one can become quickly engulfed in the work and its expectations. The diverse demands of the position posed notable barriers to the exercise of consistent practices that enhanced overall wellbeing.

**Theme Two: Community Caution**

While the Gallup research on wellbeing stressed the importance of community activities and community engagement to overall wellbeing, the overwhelming consensus of the research participants stressed caution in relying on community to strengthen wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010). Notably, female presidents remarked about the cautionary behaviors they exhibited when working in their respective university

community as well as in their local community. The nature of the decisions made by the university presidents often required them to maintain a professional distance and not invest in deep personal relationships within the community. A president confirmed this situation. “The community [is] way smaller than six degrees; it’s way small. I don’t use that group [the local community] to vent with” (President P1). Being publically engaged within the community remained distinct from becoming privately engaged with individuals within the community. Presidents were encouraged to rely more closely on a trusted support network of connections that may be distinct and distant from the public community served by the university.

### **Theme Three: Perfectionism**

The presidents interviewed in this research study unanimously confirmed research by Hochschild (2012) acknowledging the destructive capacity perfectionistic aspirations had on a female president’s wellbeing. Perfectionism led women to establish unrealistic performance expectations that were often unsustainable and inhibited wellbeing. Perfectionism generated perceptions by external stakeholders and internal team members that the presidency reflected a solo act, rather than a team endeavor. The presidents remarked that when they tried to do everything all the time, the quality of what they did or the experience of where they spent their time diminished. Perfection-oriented expectations yielded high levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout. An interviewee asserted, “If you are prone potentially to wanting to do everything really perfectly...it becomes really hard” (President P2). Another advised, “I think wellbeing is critical and you have to have the ability to look at an institution realistically and don’t let ambition overwhelm you” (President P1). The presidents’ also suggested that an inability to

manage expectations for your constituent populations fostered significant stress and resulted in declines in overall wellbeing. One president remarked about her failure to establish appropriate work routines and constituent expectations and the subsequent harried style she developed. She commented that she felt she constantly had to be present addressing problems or speaking with key stakeholders. In reflection, she acknowledged this perfectionistic attitude resulted in the decline in her wellbeing.

I have gained almost twenty pounds in the two years that I've been here because I don't eat right. I don't exercise anymore. I didn't establish a good routine when I got here, and I set some unrealistic goals. Now, almost two years later, I'm really trying to... carve out some time and really take care of myself. (President P4)

Similarly, the presidents acknowledged the resiliency required to maintain wellbeing. Resiliency enabled female presidents to make difficult decisions without feeling overwhelmed by the criticisms that often accompanied such decisions. As highlighted in the literature, the ability to exhibit resilient behaviors strengthened overall wellbeing (Luthans, 2002). People who are prone to perfection, or who see the position as the end all of their existence were unlikely to maintain the position. A president commented:

I would say, first of all, you can't identify yourself with this position. I mean, it's with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but if tomorrow I wasn't the president of [this] institution, I wouldn't just shrink into nothingness. (President P9)

Aligned with the literature, perfectionism and the nature of the job posed particular challenges to women seeking to maintain a sense of wellbeing in the

presidency. Reliance on community connections to strengthen wellbeing appeared fraught with challenges. Perfectionism, unrealistic ambition, and unchecked egos prevented female presidents from developing a team of leaders prepared to assist the institution in achieving its goals. When the president framed the university as her sole responsibility, failure and burnout appeared as likely results. One president clarified the challenge:

When I've seen women who flamed out early, in most cases, I think that work/life balance wasn't there. When I think about a couple of the women that I've seen who have had some painful, painful experiences that they did not know how to handle or were unable to handle.... They retreated rather than trying to figure out what kinds of resources [they] could bring... to deal with the challenges. (President P10)

The research participants recognized the different factors that inhibited wellbeing. As cognizant as these presidents were of factors that inhibited wellbeing, they also exhibited clarity in the factors that strengthened their overall wellbeing. Notably, the presidents confirmed a foundation of attributes required to steadily increase and ultimately optimize wellbeing in the presidency.

#### **Research Question 4: What Factors Strengthen Female Presidential Wellbeing?**

##### **A Grounded Theory of Wellbeing for Female University Presidents**

Four foundational pillars represented the wellbeing of female university presidents: calling, competence, confidence, and connection (Figure 5). When integrated together, these pillars provided the conditions necessary for female presidents to optimize wellbeing. Self-awareness grounded the entire model, because without self-awareness

the president lacked the most basic starting point for optimizing her wellbeing. Understanding the foundational pillars allowed each leader to assess her strengths and weaknesses and thus comprehend a fuller picture of the gap between the definition of wellbeing and the experience of wellbeing. The various elements of wellbeing — spiritual discipline, physical health, spousal/partner or friend support, prioritization, contractual strength, and reflective space – all depend upon the leader’s ability to take an honest inventory of her character as represented by the pillars (calling, confidence, competence, and connection). Such a holistic evaluation confirms the necessity of self-awareness as the foundation of wellbeing.

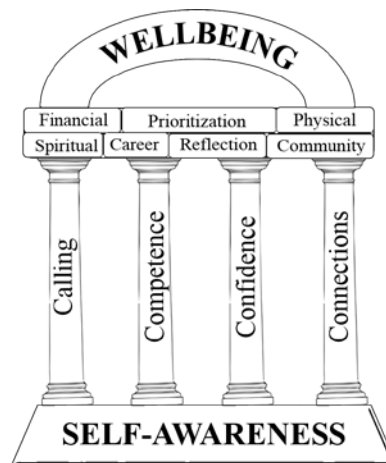


Figure 5. A Model of Wellbeing for Female University Presidents.

Wellbeing achieved its highest level among female presidents who demonstrated the following: 1) a deep understanding of their vocational *calling* to the role of president; 2) an authentic awareness of self that enabled the president to demonstrate *self-confidence* and thereby *courageously* make decisions; 3) a high level of leadership and business *competence*; 4) an ability to network and make *connections* that supported and

nurtured the president. Referred to as the 4C's, presidents who consistently worked on honing the four pillars of wellbeing appeared more able to invest in the activities vital to their wellbeing. An individual who prioritized activities that most supported her wellbeing described themselves as energized and open to innovation and risk-taking. These presidents, cognizant of the role of the pillars in establishing the conditions of for wellbeing, ultimately felt more confident in establishing a personal wellbeing framework and priorities that allowed her to nurture the individuals or activities vital to her wellbeing, whether spiritual, physical, financial, career, community, social/familial, or some additional factor.

### **Pillar One: A Vocational Calling**

Dik and Duffy (2013) defined calling as an approach to work that “reflect[ed] the belief that one’s career is a central part of a broader sense of purpose and meaning in life and is used to help others or advance the greater good in some fashion” (2013, p. 429). A deep understanding of vocational calling required an authentic awareness of one’s strengths, weakness, values, and priorities. Research participants emphasized the importance of viewing one’s presidential leadership role as a facilitator of a mission, larger than oneself. Appreciating the broader mission of her executive work enabled the president to act with a more strategic lens. These women felt more secure in making difficult or unpopular decisions while avoiding the pitfalls associated with criticism of such decisions. In addition, if the president’s calling aligned with her personal core values, she remained motivated, positive, and captivated by the work. This finding corroborated George’s (2007) work on authentic leadership and Friedman’s model (2008) of total leadership. In each case, leadership opportunities that aligned an individual’s

personal values with the institution's core values, resulted in leadership longevity and institutional success. Several presidents elucidated the importance of viewing one's position as more than simply a career, but rather a vocational calling.

I think my biggest advice would be [to] make sure it's a call. Make sure it's a call and not just a desire for more money or to be in charge... because then that [the vocational calling] will sustain you. If you really believe it's your vocation to do what you're doing, it will sustain you through probably anything. (President P8)

Another president furthered:

Number one, you have to really want to do the job. A lot of people kind of fall in love with the idea of being a president without really understanding the reality. My success has been really wanting to be a president.... I think you have to want it, but you also have to be very realistic that once the glow wears off, it's a really tough job. You have to think, okay, what is it that every single day makes me get up and come in and do it. (President P3)

A president further cautioned against being lured into the position by the power or prestige associated with the title. "I always caution people about don't just fall in love with the glitz of the job, because there's an awful lot of grind in the job" (President P6). Ashcroft's (1996) theory of vocational discernment clarified the important role of vocational calling to professional success. He remarked, "A woman's identity, her authentic personhood, includes her gifts, the things she loves to do, the things that energize her. These, in turn, are part of her calling and may become her work" (1996, p.

31). When work becomes something other than a vocational calling, fatigue, anxiety, and burnout often manifest themselves.

### **Pillar Two: Self-Confidence through Self-Awareness**

Self-confidence prepared women to prioritize her activities to optimize her wellbeing. Self-confident, female university presidents identified, prioritized, and engaged in activities that enhance their wellbeing. Courageously tackling major organizational issues, self-confident women handled criticism without crumbling. Confidence also enabled women to surround herself with individuals prepared to support her institutional vision. Confident women were better prepared to execute a vision, rather than becoming distracted by the criticisms leveled against her plans. The presidents remarked about the necessity of self-confidence to establish new models of work and leadership that demonstrated courage and risk-taking.

Without self-confidence, I have seen a lot of women just hang onto somebody, for whatever reason, and it ends up being really detrimental to them, because then they have to carry the load. They're carrying a load that they don't have to carry simply because they don't have the "whatever" to replace them. I have replaced people when I felt they weren't doing a good job. A lot of people suffer from the inability to do that.... Courage is a word that is often applied to me in terms of making tough calls, and they're not popular. (President P3)

A strong sense of self-awareness strengthened the president's self-confidence. A self-confident president established priorities that enabled her to nurture her whole being.

What I've learned over time, is you need to have enough confidence in yourself that you

don't sell yourself short on other important matters (President P9). One president expressed the sentiments of many when she asserted:

You need a good psychological profile on yourself. Figure out what your needs are. It's been a real learning experience for me because I didn't think about any of those things before I got here. I just thought about the job, and I think you really need to sit down and understand who you are and what your personal needs are and how those are going to be fulfilled once you move into a job that is basically 24/7. There's so many different expectations of you. You really have to be self-aware to take on this kind of responsibility and maintain a sense of wellbeing. (President P4)

The attributes that constituted wellbeing may differ based on each individual; however, self-confident individuals prioritized activities that nurtured their wellbeing. For example, some presidents spoke of the necessity of nurturing their spiritual soul on a daily basis, while others highlighted the necessity of nurturing a strong personal friendship. Each of these attributes may be supported differently depending on the level of importance established by the individual for this attribute. Heightened self-confidence diminished a woman's belief that she needed to perform perfectly in all aspects of her life in order to be deemed successful. In contrast to Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony, self-confident women diminished the legitimacy of the perfectionist argument by recognizing the dangers of perfection to wellbeing (Brooks, 2014). Study participants expressed the necessity of self-confidence in overcoming the guilt that some women experience when establishing routines that prioritize wellbeing activities over email or work-related activities. Self-confidence strengthened a woman's

resolve to perform well, but enabled her to overcome the notion that her work must represent the “be all and the end all of her existence” (President P9). Complimenting a president’s sense of call and self-confidence, the study participants elucidated the importance of leadership competence as a core pillar required to optimize wellbeing.

### **Pillar Three: Leadership Competence**

Leadership competence strengthened the wellbeing of female university presidents. Many described leveraging previous work experiences to develop a strong sense of intuition about creating the culture and vision for the institution. Specifically, the women articulated the necessity of having strong backgrounds in team-building, strategic planning, business analytics, change leadership and fundraising. While the women recognized that they may not be successfully skilled in every area, self-confident and self-aware women sought to develop a team that complimented their strengths and weaknesses and equipped them to be effective leaders despite their recognized shortcomings.

Successful presidents noted that the position required the humility to recognize that individually one person did not have the complete skillset. Competent leaders surrounded themselves with strong team players. These presidents recognized that they could not do everything well, nor that they knew everything there was to know about higher education. Presidents expressed that the inability to surround oneself with a good team potentially yielded leadership failure and a subsequent decline in wellbeing. Similarly, the idea that institutional success is dependent solely on the president led to an arrogance not conducive to the climate necessary for small colleges and universities to thrive.

That's where building a good team is just critical. The ego thing I think is a bigger deal than people realize, but not being afraid to let people speak up about ideas and so forth. If you have to be the center stage, I think you are on a dead-end track. (President P5)

Importantly, the study participants asserted that one of the most critical skills underlying leadership competence included strong listening abilities. Listening skills enabled the president to discern the important opportunities that emerged from careful listening to key stakeholders. The female presidents frequently described their leadership competence as an ability to listen and harness the brilliance of others to achieve desired outcomes or results.

I would say that [my strength] is a willingness to seek to understand the issues and try to focus on the issues—kind of an analytical facilitator....

You have to be able to read things quickly and get the right people on board to implement the solution. I think that's partly a form of intuition...partly experience, and partly intelligence. I think it would be difficult in this job if you didn't have that. (President P2)

Many of the presidents credited their past experiences, both within and outside of higher education as preparing them for the presidency. The ability to reflect upon past learning and leverage those experiences to share the institution's efforts strongly contributed to the longevity of their presidencies.

Strategic planning skills assisted presidents with casting a vision for the future. One president remarked, "Being able to see the future, that is what a good president

does” (President P8). Another president further validated the importance of strategic planning skills.

In a specific term, I think it is using the planning process to push people to get down to the details and to create work, plans, and outcomes.... I would say this is my best strength because I have the ability to see consequences.

[I can] look at what we’re doing now and see the future consequences of those decisions. (President P6)

Furthermore, the presidents’ encouraged women to seek diverse work experiences and value the opportunity to learn about new areas that may be outside one’s traditional area of expertise. The presidents’ encouraged the aspiring female president to attend professional development sessions that broadened her understanding and appreciation of the university environment. One research participant described transitioning from the business environment to higher education. She discussed the importance of attending sessions related to board governance, faculty governance, and higher education finance.

Understanding business analytics surfaced as a critical competency among eighty percent of the participants in the study. Female presidents who came directly from academic disciplines outside of business remarked about their frustration in understanding the complexity of the finances in higher education. “I think some experience on boards and understanding financials...would be helpful” (President P7). These women encouraged newly appointed female presidents to become involved in understanding the business of the university. Strategies ranged from the recommendation to take MBA courses to finding mentors who can explain and teach an individual about how non-profit organizations operate. Appreciating how bonds work or the impact of

debt on university viability exemplified business knowledge vital to the effective oversight of a college or university.

Facilitating change also demanded leadership competence. The presidents acknowledged that higher education today faced unprecedented challenges.

Education is in such an uproar right now. [I am] just trying to chart a path forward and understand with [my team and my board], what are we going to look like in several years? I have a lot of ideas but I think the biggest challenges are figuring out best paths to the future or a set of best paths to the future. It's tough right now. (President P10)

Successful female leaders exhibited the competence and confidence necessary to lead their organizations to adopt cultures of agility that enabled ongoing change. "Presidents need to be turnaround strategists and have the ability to adapt to the changing reality of the marketplace and the changing reality of the institution" (President P10). A president cautioned against using a "vigilante" strategy to facilitate change, but these leaders, nonetheless, must facilitate the development of cultures that more agilely respond to emerging opportunities and changes in the marketplace. A passion for problem-solving, innovation, or risk-taking often accompanied women who thrived as university presidents. A president asserted, "You have to stay on top of it and you have to see your job everyday as a way to figure out how to solve problems and position your institution for success" (President P5).

Fundraising represented a fundamental role for private college presidents. Unable to access state or federal resources, small, private institutions require donor support to offset some of the increasing costs of higher education. Fundraising required

relationship-building, persistence, and occasionally, a comfort with doing the unusual. Female presidents were typically building relationships with successful alumni, often male. A willingness to spend time on the golf course or participate in a hunting fundraiser was necessary to nurture donor relationships. Women seeking the presidency were encouraged to seek mentorships with other fundraisers or to attend professional development sessions to become comfortable with her own approach to fundraising. Since fundraising has become a vital role for any small, private college president, women must appreciate this role as critically important to her success and invest time and energy in the honing of fundraising skills and the development of key major donor relationships.

#### **Pillar Four: Making Connections**

Successful university presidents aligned themselves with supportive connections that nurtured their calling, confidence, and competence. Female university presidents identified supportive personal relationships as critical to their overall wellbeing. Even single members of religious communities remarked about the necessity of deep personal relationships as a condition for achieving wellbeing as a university president. Supportive relationships included spouses, mentors, friends, and partners. These connections enabled presidents to have an outlet for discussion of professional and personal challenges and discernment of strategies to address those challenges. One president stated:

[With reference to her spouse] He would completely help me look at it in a different way. I think I've been able to stay the course and be more resilient as a leader because I have a spouse who looks at everything differently.... Lots of things are confidential, but so is everything between

us. We talk about a lot of things, maybe beyond what I should, and I get a tremendous amount of wisdom and the ability to keep going on because many times the way I see it negatively, he helps me see it... positively.

(President P9)

In addition to the advisory role that many spouses, partners, or friends provided to the university president, a deep and meaningful relationship also served to provide unconditional love and support of the president.

Another president furthered:

A deep friendship has been very, very, very important. When you make decisions and everybody else hates you, there is somebody that likes you.

There's a certain security that deep friendship brings (President P8).

Further validating the importance of a deep relationship for navigating personal and professional wellbeing, a veteran university president remarked about the value of her spouse. "He's [her spouse] a rock. He understands and supports higher ed and he understands, supports and loves me...Bar none, the support of my husband is what helps me through the tough times" (President P10). Many of the women presidents discussed the reality of commuter marriages or relationships. In these cases, the anecdotes and experiences suggested location of the partner/spouse or friend mattered less than the availability, objectivity, and depth of the relationship to the overall wellbeing of the individual. Many of the women described having commuter-relationships at some point during their career. Even in these periods, the reliance of the individual on this deep relationship strengthened her ability to attain wellbeing. Heightened levels of wellbeing translated to increased leadership effectiveness of the female university president. The

study participants also acknowledged the importance of making and nurturing other connections with individuals capable of supporting you in the role of president. As a woman president, the ability to establish a network of support to encourage, mediate, and counsel remained vital to achieving a holistic sense of wellbeing. Connecting with other female presidents, nurturing a relationship with key members of the board of trustees, or connecting with a mentor outside one's institution appeared frequently as strategies used by successful presidents to nurture wellbeing. A president elaborated:

... [I]t was somebody on the board. There were a few that were very helpful. Not that they helped me directly but they were helpful for me in reflecting and being there and being supportive. That, and continuing to attend national meetings like CIC [Council of Independent Colleges].

Being with other college presidents, that was very, very important.

(President P7)

### **Summary**

Female university presidents defined wellbeing from a holistic perspective that acknowledged their personal and professional needs and aspirations. The ability to embrace a lifestyle of wellbeing remained challenging amid the demands of the position and some of the societal perceptions that link time at work with positional success. Attitudes of perfectionism also impeded a woman's ability to effectively align her professional obligations with her personal wellbeing needs. The presidents cautioned against assigning prescriptive attributes to wellbeing and instead recognized that strong self-assessments enabled the president to determine the priorities that most influence each individual's overall wellbeing. While they were hesitant to define a specific set of

attributes for the wellbeing of different individuals, the female presidents articulated ideals that aligned with the development of a grounded theory of wellbeing. Calling, confidence, competence and connections appeared vital to establishing a foundation to effectively prioritize, and thereby, optimize their wellbeing. Referred to by the researcher as the foundational pillars, these formative structures strengthened the ability of female presidents to nurture their wellbeing. Appreciating the position as a vocational calling, undertaking an honest and ongoing self-assessment, exercising self-confidence, achieving leadership competence, and nurturing connections increased the likelihood that women would allocate time for aspects of their lives that bring them wellbeing. The literature review suggested that higher levels of wellbeing strengthened leadership resiliency, job satisfaction, job tenure, and overall hopefulness and energy for the position. Referring to Figure 5, presidents who leveraged a calling, confidence, competence and connections created more optimal conditions to support a disciplined and sustainable approach to wellbeing.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### **Introduction**

To answer the central question of this grounded theory study, how do female university presidents experience and optimize wellbeing, the researcher gathered insight from ten, small, private college presidents across the United States. These interviews provided insights about the barriers that inhibited wellbeing, as well as the factors that strengthened wellbeing. Research participants acknowledged the challenge of nurturing wellbeing amid the 24/7 demands of the position. Notably, these individuals expressed the vital nature of nurturing wellbeing as a mechanism for succeeding as a university president. Securing wellbeing required self-awareness. Self-aware, female university presidents optimized wellbeing when their professional life represented a vocational calling, they exhibited high degrees of self-confidence, they demonstrated strong leadership competence, and they surrounded themselves with supportive connections. Articulated in a grounded theory of wellbeing, these four foundational pillars – calling, confidence, competence, and connections – facilitated a female president’s ability to understand the attributes that contributed to her wellbeing while simultaneously creating the conditions necessary to develop disciplined habits of wellbeing. The four foundational pillars enabled female university presidents to define a new model of professionalism that acknowledged the multiple domains of her existence: work, community, home, and self (Friedman, 2008).

The definition of wellbeing varied among the research subjects, but all, expressed wellbeing as a function of more than career satisfaction. Attributes

contributing to wellbeing among these female university presidents included physical health, spiritual engagement, career, contractual strength, the ability to prioritize, reflective space, and social/familial connection. Overall, these women viewed wellbeing as a sense of wholeness, necessary to energize and sustain them in their professional and personal roles. This chapter discusses the conclusions reached in the study, the implications of those conclusions for female university presidents, and identifies areas for future research.

## **Conclusions**

### **Defining Wellbeing**

The women interviewed in this study each identified different attributes that contributed to their wellbeing. The research participants cautioned against providing a prescriptive definition of wellbeing and instead encouraged individual discernment of the attributes that nurture and support each individual's happiness and satisfaction. This finding aligned with recent research suggesting that wellbeing represents a subjective variable, defined best by an individual's discernment of what he or she values most (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Friedman, 2008; George, 2007; Rath & Harter, 2010). In their description of wellbeing, the interviewees expressed the importance of self-awareness in identifying the factors that most influence an individual's wellbeing. Friedman (2008) validated the importance of self-awareness in his alignment of various domains with leadership and wellbeing. Seven major themes emerged as significant contributors to the wellbeing of female university presidents: spiritual engagement, physical health, social support systems, contractual strength, an ability to prioritize, a career that aligned one's values with the organizational mission, and reflective space.

Ninety percent of the college presidents interviewed for this study confirmed the importance of spiritual engagement to their overall wellbeing. Piedmont (2009) and Krymis' (2011) argument that spiritual health strengthened wellbeing garnered resonance throughout the research interviews. The definition of spiritual engagement depended upon the individual, but the female presidents found inspiration, motivation, and refuge in spiritual practices. The research participants relied on such disciplines as meditation, daily worship attendance, and spiritual reading to provide inspiration and solace amid the challenge of their work. These efforts to center one's efforts on something or someone larger than oneself strengthened the wellbeing of these women.

Physical health garnered a high level of importance among female university presidents. Strong physical health provided the energy and strength to do the job. Carving out time for daily exercise, eating nutritionally-sound diets, establishing schedules that allowed for adequate rest, or taking nutritional supplements all exemplified strategies used by the women to achieve strong physical health. Without good health, women became worn down and less capable of dealing with the daily stress associated with the position. The women confirmed the Gallup research on the critical link between physical health and wellbeing (Rath & Harter, 2010).

A confidential friendship, whether a spouse, close friend, or partner all provided vital support to the wellbeing of female university presidents. Women described the necessity of relying on an outside, objective perspective to express the challenge of work or to provide support during periods of hardship. The women in the study described these deep friendships as a wellspring of love amid difficult times of isolation, criticism, and distrust. Relying on close friends, spouses, or partners appeared vital for thriving in

the university presidency. These findings validate Eagly & Carli (2007) and Slaughter's (2012) conclusions that the communal nature of women often required networks of social connections to offer support for women in executive leadership roles. Slaughter (2012) reminded executive women of the importance of supportive relationships to maintaining leadership.

A female university president's ability to prioritize remained pivotal to wellbeing. Prioritization required the self-confidence to decline some work-related functions while simultaneously carving out time for activities related to her wellbeing. Prioritization also enabled women to categorize her work and address concerns in a focused, yet orderly manner. Determining the work-related activities required immediate attention and identifying those work demands that may be handled by other members of the president's cabinet strengthened a woman's wellbeing. Employing strong time management skills allowed the university president to focus on the most important needs of the institution and maintain a strategic lens toward institutional advancement.

Contractual clarity enhanced a female university president's wellbeing. Contracts expressed to women in these leadership roles the board's level of confidence in their leadership. Strong contracts encouraged the women to act courageously to cast a vision and address challenges facing the organization. Contracts provided a safety net from the criticism that often accompanied difficult leadership decisions. The failure of a board to provide a strong contract often jeopardized the leadership effectiveness of a female president and fostered distrust between the president and the board. This distrust inhibited wellbeing and fostered cautionary behaviors on the part of the female

university president. Female presidents described the freedom they experienced in developing models of work that were conducive to their work, home, community and self when contracts provided strength and clarity.

Aligning the female president's values with the mission of the institution appeared vital to maintaining the position. An attentiveness to the whole person as embodied in Friedman's (2008) *Total Leadership* model inspired the alignment of an individual's core wellbeing values with their behaviors. Friedman's (2008) model articulated the necessity of a holistic perspective of one's existence that focused on all the spheres of a person's life: work, home, community, and self. Incongruences between mission and values limited the effectiveness of presidents and often led to burnout. Discerning the values that motivate and inspire the president and ensuring an alignment of such values with the organization's mission allowed her to craft an inspiring vision and remain motivated by the task, despite its challenges. Presidents also appreciated working in environments that promoted a greater good. Seeing education as a vehicle for improving economic and social mobility contributed to the perseverance, resiliency, and determination women exercised in the role.

The necessity of space away from the institution also appeared as vital to the wellbeing of these university presidents. All of the interviewees described the importance of carving out time for space away from the institution. This space enabled the female president to reflect and recharge. Reflective practice appeared as a notable discipline among eight of the ten university presidents interviewed. This opportunity to reflect on the personal and professional goals and aspirations of the president

strengthened the wellbeing of the president and enabled her to establish new routines or new strategies for optimizing her leadership performance and wellbeing.

### **The Importance of Wellbeing**

In the next five years, over half of the sitting college presidents are likely to retire (Song & Hartley, 2012). This dramatic shift in leadership opens doors for women aspiring to executive leadership in higher education. With more women than ever earning advanced degrees, women need to understand how to best build a foundation for success as a university president (Institute for Education Sciences, 2011). Emerging data suggested while women have made tremendous gains in educational attainment and workforce presence, their level of happiness continued to decline (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). These data validated the necessity of exploring how to strengthen a woman's ability to successfully achieve wellbeing while leading from the executive suite. For too long, this discussion focused on the barriers to women's success. Corcoran (2012) highlighted the growing problem of women dismissing the possibility of the presidency. "It would appear that qualified women are opting to stay in the pipeline and forego the college presidency, a very public, stressful and demanding role. Maintaining a balanced work/home life outweighs the draw of the upper tier for many women" (p. 150). The growing reality described by Corcoran confirmed the importance of this research.

Research also suggested that wellbeing continued to be of paramount importance to women in executive leadership roles (Walsh, 2013). The limited number of women presidents and the struggle of many of them to maintain their tenure in the role reflected the urgency of exploring wellbeing as a strategy for maintaining the university presidency (Corcoran, 2012; Rath & Harter, 2010). Failure to be attentive to the

elements that comprise an individual's wellbeing yielded heightened levels of anxiety, frustration, poor health, and other social and emotional problems (Rath & Harter, 2010). Individual's with low levels of wellbeing demonstrated lower levels of resiliency, higher levels of employment turnover, and general dissatisfaction with one's life (Luthans, 2002; Rath & Harter, 2010). As recent data from the Gallup organization suggested, attentiveness to wellbeing strengthened job satisfaction, job tenure, and overall happiness (Rath & Harter, 2010).

### **Barriers to Wellbeing**

Traditional models of work and allocation of familial responsibilities continue to pose barriers in the development of new models of professionalism that embraced female wellbeing (Hochschild, 2012). This research study elucidated the impact that perfectionism and time-in-office models had on female wellbeing. Ninety percent of the women interviewed highlighted the challenge posed by these cultural perceptions for new or aspiring presidents. The female presidents' cautioned about adopting perfectionistic attitudes toward one's personal and professional life. The presidents' highlighted numerous stories of women who left the role because of the burn-out experienced from adopting a model that failed to acknowledge wellbeing as a vital attribute of leadership longevity. Brooks (2014) corroborated the growing discussion on the cultural barriers posed by current work models for women in executive leadership. Self-confident female presidents recognized perfection as unattainable and traditional models of office time as incongruent with their wellbeing needs. These women were careful to suggest that a strong work-ethic was important, but they were less inclined to be motivated to stay in the office merely because of the perception their office time

equated with leadership success. President P9 described this experience when she acknowledged that if free time opened up unexpectedly in her day, she often seized the time to take a quick walk or spend some time in the chapel.

The female presidents expressed new models of work that aligned time and engagement with the domains of her existence that she most valued. For these women, achieving perfection appeared neither realistic nor necessary. Self-confident female presidents developed routines or prioritized activities that allowed her to nurture her wellbeing in the various domains of her life—work, home, community and self (Friedman, 2008). These women recognized that different domains of their existence merited different levels of wellbeing activities or commitments. The wellbeing that evolved from activities in each of these spheres of a woman's life sustained successful female university presidents.

While recognizing the danger of honing a perfectionistic model of work, these women also acknowledged the challenge of prioritizing wellbeing in their daily routine. They believed that in the absence of a disciplined commitment to wellbeing, burnout often occurred. Confirming Madsen's (2008) argument that the university presidency demanded a robust skill set and high levels of political engagement and constituent attention, the women in this study acknowledged that the pervasive demands of the position often hindered their ability to prioritize experiences or activities that contributed to their overall wellbeing. Women described the difficult, almost daily conflict, between their wellbeing priorities, and the competing demands of the position. Revelations by the female presidents of the conflict between knowing and doing confirmed the struggle between espoused theory and theory-in-use as it applied to the university presidency

(Argyis & Schon, 1974). Self-awareness enabled women to distinguish between the two behaviors and high levels of self-confidence provided the impetus to develop new models of leadership and work that accounted for wellbeing (Sandberg, 2013).

### **Experiencing and Optimizing Wellbeing**

This study stepped aside from the traditional exploration of why women do not pursue the presidency, and instead examined how women who were successfully appointed to the presidency succeeded in maintaining wellbeing. As countless female provosts, deans, and female academics articulated, aspiring women need to hear more stories of the female university president and how she defined a new model of professionalism that recognized the multiple domains of her existence (Brooks, 2014; Slaughter, 2012). The research presented in this study explored strategies for the development of a new professionalism that enabled the individual to create her optimal leadership style based that acknowledged the attributes of her wellbeing (Friedman, 2008). This research proactively examined the success of ten female university presidents and helped confirm the growing body of literature that acknowledged the necessity of wellbeing as a strategy for becoming a *thriving* female leader, in contrast to a *surviving* female leader (Corcoran, 2012; Stirling, 2012).

### **A Grounded Theory of Wellbeing**

Self-awareness fostered an understanding of the values and priorities necessary to promote wellbeing. Female presidential interviews asserted that a higher state of wellbeing could be achieved when self-awareness revealed the following: a career aligned with a vocational calling; a high level of self-confidence, leadership competence in team building, planning, business analytics, and fundraising, and an ability to network

and make connections both personally and professionally. Identified as the four C's – calling, confidence, competence, and connections – the female presidents interviewed in this study independently acknowledged these four pillars as vital to the development of a leadership model that supported wellbeing.

Experienced presidents encouraged a thoughtful discernment of whether the role represented an authentic calling. Women presidents strongly encouraged a formal discernment process to identify whether the position represented a passion or whether the position attracted her for the power, title, or glamour associated with the role. Women presidents whose values aligned with the mission of the institution achieved higher levels of wellbeing. The mission of an institution often equipped the female university president with a higher purpose for her work and empowered her to make the bold decisions necessary for institutional vitality. Appreciating a vocational calling required women to see the position as something larger than oneself. The experienced presidents suggested that women who were able to see the greater purpose of their work were more likely to maintain their position and find wellbeing from their work.

Self-confident female university presidents demonstrated self-awareness. These presidents did not appear threatened by recognizing their shortcomings and establishing a team of individuals equipped to assist her in leading the institution. The female presidents in the study described self-confidence as essential to creating new models of work that diverged from traditional models. These new models integrated activities that supported wellbeing. Self-confident presidents shed perfectionistic tendencies and adopted models conducive to their leadership style and aligned with the importance associated with various domains in their life.

The research participants also encouraged the ongoing assessment of leadership competencies related to the role. Seven presidents mentioned the necessity of staying current on political changes impacting higher education. Others discussed the necessity of training in professional fundraising, while still others encouraged the continued development of core business analytics. The presidents acknowledged that while no one individual is likely to possess all of the necessary attributes for the position, female presidents were encouraged to demonstrate continual learning in the role and stay abreast of changes influencing their institution and higher education, generally. Attending professional development sessions, engaging in lunch conversations with leaders in different institutional areas, regularly reviewing the financials of the institution all served to strengthen a female university president's ability to maintain her leadership competence, and thus, her wellbeing. Seven of the ten presidents interviewed in this study had maintained their position for at least eight years. These women valued their ability to understand the business of the institution. Financial literacy represented a core strength of successful female university presidents.

Connecting with other presidents remained a fundamental priority expressed by eight of the study participants. These women presidents' strongly encouraged recently appointed presidents to visit with current female presidents to gather insight and perspective about the role. Listening to other women in this role allowed the new president to consider her own strengths and challenges and appreciate the types of responsibilities inherent in the position. Female presidents encouraged the development of both formal and informal mentor relationships. These relationships provide an invaluable, objective sounding board for issues that may arise. Having a mentor limited

the isolation experienced by many female university presidents. Mentors contributed guidance, asked relevant questions, and supported newly appointed presidents in their role. A president clarified, “I think many women would say the same thing. It would have been great to have had a mentor or to have known, ‘Hey, you’re going to struggle with this, that, and the other thing’ ” (President P4). Another encouraged:

First of all, talk to other female presidents... find out what the job is really all about. Because it’s so easy to be drawn into the glamour and the flashy parts of the job. So much of the job is... strategizing and fundraising, developing relationships, balancing internal activities with external activities.... The more people you talk with who actually are doing or have done the job, you have a better sense of what it is like... and how to cope with challenges you may be facing. (President P6)

### **Implications**

Without ongoing research and the publicity of new models of work that take into consideration wellbeing, women will be less likely to maintain and thrive in the position of university president. As presidential retirements increase over the next decade, women have a tremendous opportunity to step into these roles and bring a diversity of thought and leadership to college campuses across America. Women must equip themselves with the stories of successful women who developed new paradigms of work that nurture their wellbeing. The wisdom of these presidents will provide an evolutionary framework for a new professionalism that organically weaves wellbeing into the holistic life of the female university president. As the women in this research study commented, they have few case studies or stories available about how women

achieved wellbeing in executive leadership. Unfortunately, many more stories exist of how women fail or become frustrated with their inability to achieve a sense of balance and thus leave the position early (Sandberg, 2013). Female cognizance of calling, confidence, competence and connections will enhance their own wellbeing and strengthen leadership longevity.

The Lilly Foundation and the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) currently offer professional development sessions on assessing readiness for the university presidency. The content of these sessions, while useful, only limitedly accounts for the potential differences between male and female models of wellbeing and work. Both the Lilly Foundation and the Council of Independent Colleges assist prospective presidents in exploring the role of president as a vocational call. This significant focus verifies the findings of this research study. However, potential distinctions in how women and men approach these positions appeared absent from these professional development opportunities. The professional development emphasized the experience of male presidents and devoted limited time to discussing the challenges that may be unique to female presidents.

The research presented in this study indicated that women experienced distinct barriers to wellbeing. Capturing the stories, introducing self-assessment tools, establishing more formal mentor programs, and encouraging current presidents to connect with newly appointed presidents equips them with the strategies to integrate wellbeing experiences and activities into their daily routine. These strategies will assist new presidents and future presidents in managing expectations in a new work model.

Resourcing women presidents with this experience and knowledge represents an important priority for the long-term success of female leaders in this role.

Acquainting newly appointed female presidents or those aspiring to the presidency with the Friedman (2008) model enables them to appreciate the different domains of their life. From this vantage point, newly appointed presidents should clarify the value associated with each particular domain – work, home, self, community. Rather than striving for balance, women must seek to achieve alignment with the attributes that contribute to wellbeing across all her domains. Where balance implied the equal distribution of time between each domain, alignment suggested that the president devote the time necessary based on the value she associated with a particular domain. President P1 emphasized the importance of nurturing friendships with other female college presidents, while President P6 invested in time with nature as an essential force for maintaining and optimizing wellbeing. Self-awareness provided a foundation upon which women can understand the value and priority she established for various wellbeing activities.

Friedman (2008) expressed the belief that individuals who exercised holistic leadership greatly enhanced their capacity for happiness, authenticity, creativity, and risk-taking. An alignment of work with wellbeing experiences greatly strengthened the ability of a female university president to maintain her position and thrive both personally and professionally. Attentiveness to wellbeing energized female presidents and sustained them through high pressure challenges.

### **Future Research**

Wellbeing continues to emerge as a critical issue in maintaining executive leadership positions, especially among female university presidents. Considerable research has explored the barriers posed to women seeking the university presidency, but limited research existed to truly understand how women experience the role of president and maintain wellbeing. Future research must begin to identify the factors women presidents see as vital to their leadership longevity and success. Many additional areas of research manifest from the findings of this study.

### **Capturing Stories: Case Study Research**

Researchers need to continue to capture the stories of women presidents and identify ways to share the story. Future research needs to unearth the rich details of what leadership models look like that integrate a woman president's values and wellbeing priorities. Case study research that documents how other women presidents navigate the challenges of the position, while devoting time to their wellbeing, serves to inspire more women to thrive in their positions. Aspiring female presidents need more case study examples to appreciate the factors that hinder and the elements that support female presidential wellbeing. Quantitative research should explore definitions and experiences of wellbeing among female university presidents. Quantitative studies could measure wellbeing over time to determine whether potential relationships exist between length of time in office and the experience of wellbeing.

### **Leadership Longevity and Wellbeing**

Limited details existed on the current longevity of female university presidents. While a vast amount of data existed on the profile of current university presidents, little

gender-separated data explored the longevity of male and female university presidents. Longevity data could inform professional development for not only new presidents, but also for female presidents who have maintained the position for a significant number of years. Establishing a data base of information that captured longevity data informs future research related to wellbeing.

### **Life-Phase and Wellbeing**

With younger women stepping into the role of university president, future research must explore how women with children under sixteen approach wellbeing and the presidency. Few women in the role of college president currently have young children. Researchers should conduct case study research to provide insights into the wellbeing of current female presidents with young children. Equipping younger women with strategies for creating wellbeing in her professional and personal life will strengthen the potential interest of younger candidates for this position and will assist current presidents in retaining the position. The research could further examine whether potential shifts in wellbeing activities occur across the woman's lifespan. For example, are the wellbeing themes among younger women distinct from women in a more senior generation? Similarly, are women who are in the position longer more likely to have higher degrees of self-awareness and thus, more confidence in establishing frameworks to nurture and support their wellbeing compared to women who have served for shorter periods of time.

### **Institution-Type, Work-Type and Wellbeing**

While this research focused on women at small, private universities, future research should also explore women at other types of institutions such as public

institutions, research-oriented universities, specialty schools or community colleges. Researchers could explore whether different types of schools support or challenge a female president's wellbeing in a distinctly different manner compared to the small, private university. Similar research should examine whether distinctions exist in wellbeing among women presidents in small, private universities compared to presidents and executive leaders of business, industry or non-profit organizations. Examining the strategies used by women in other executive leadership roles may inform women in academia about relevant models for integrating wellbeing into their work.

### **Gender and Wellbeing in the University Presidency**

Examining potential gender distinctions in wellbeing may inform future strategies for wellbeing and the workplace. For example, research should explore how men define and experience wellbeing and whether such attributes contribute to the overall job satisfaction and leadership tenure of a male university president. Data suggest that more men in the university presidency have young children compared to women (ACE, 2012). Exploring how men with young children experience wellbeing in the presidency could provide insight into strategies for achieving positive interface between the professional role of president and the personal role of engaged father. While the experience may be distinct for women, as men become more engaged in the activities of the home, the research could provide important insights into how women in similar roles with young children may navigate wellbeing in the university presidency.

### **Summary**

This research study explored how ten female university presidents of small, private, four-year universities defined and experienced wellbeing. The university

presidents identified wellbeing as a vital contributor to presidential leadership success. Wellbeing among female university presidents reflected the collective alignment of the president's personal and professional values and priorities with her leadership model. Overall, the discussion revealed four foundational pillars that formed a grounded theory of wellbeing. These foundational pillars—calling, confidence, competence, and connections—strengthened a woman's ability to sustain and optimize her wellbeing.

Effective female presidents developed new models of leadership that acknowledged the value associated with each of their respective domains. This meant that some women created daily frameworks that prioritized activities related to wellbeing. Others tapped the expertise of colleagues to strengthen wellbeing. Still others, encouraged get-away weekends to re-energize for the position. In her current position, a woman president needed to experiment with strategies for achieving quality engagement of the elements in her life that contributed to her wellbeing. Female presidents encouraged new presidents to prioritize wellbeing among the rigorous professional demands of their role. Prioritization or time management represented a paramount strategy for positional longevity. Developing habits of wellbeing prior to the presidency and then confidently integrating those habits into the work routine appeared vital to wellbeing.

The anecdotes and experiences of female university presidents confirmed a linkage between wellbeing and the capacity for leadership success. Wellbeing energized female presidents for the significant demands of the position. In addition, female university presidents emphasized that wellbeing transcended professional work or career satisfaction. Successful female leaders believed wellbeing linked career outcomes with

physical, spiritual, financial, familial, and social experiences. Wellbeing embodied a set of values that contributed to a holistic view of the woman's existence. As women prepare for future roles as university presidents, more stories need to be captured to empower women with the tools, strategies, and confidence to embrace a new professionalism that recognizes the value of the different domains of her existence to her wellbeing. Female university presidents must continue to equip current and future generations of female presidents with the stories, inspiration, and mentorship to navigate a new professionalism for the executive office that recognizes how women thrive in the role of university president.

## References

- American Council for Education. (2012). *The American college president: 2011 edition*. (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, D.C.
- American Council on Education. (2011). *Women presidents: now 26.4% but still underrepresented*. Retrieved from <http://www.wihe.com/printBlog.jsp?id=36400>
- Argyris, C. (1976). Theories of action that inhibit individual learning. *American Psychologist*, 31(9), 638-654.
- Argyris, C. Putnam, R., & Smith, D. (1975). *Action science*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Argyris, C., & Schon, D.A. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ashcroft, M.E. (1996). *Balancing act: How women can lose their roles and find their callings*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
- Astin, H.S. & Leland, C. (1991). *Women of influence. Women of Vision*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Avolio, B.J., Luthans, F., & Walumba, F.O. (2004). *Authentic leadership: Theory building for veritable sustain performance*. Working paper: Gallup Leadership Institute, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Blair-Loy, M. (2004). Work devotion and work time. In Cynthia Fuchs Epstein and Arne Kalleberg, (Eds.), *Fighting for time: Shifting boundaries of work and social life*, (pp. 282-316). London: Sage.
- Blanchflower, D., & Oswald, A. (2004). Well-Being over time in Britain and the USA. *Journal of Public Economics*, 88, 1359-1386.

- Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (2003). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- British Medical Association (2005, June). *BMA cohort study of 1995 medical graduates, 10<sup>th</sup> report*. London: British Medical Association.
- Bowen, W.G. (2008). *The board book: An insider's guide for directors and trustees*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Brooks, R. (2014, February 21). Recline: Why "leaning in" is killing us. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/02/21/recline>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). *Well-being concepts*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory. A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Chen, P.Y. & Spector, P.E. (1991). Negative affectivity as the underlying cause of correlations between stressors and strains. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 7, 398-407.
- Cheung, F.M. & Halpern, D.F. (2010). Women at the top: Powerful leaders define success as work + family in a culture of gender. *American Psychologist*, 65(3), 182-193.
- Christakins, N.A. & Fowler, J.H. (2009). *Connected: The surprising power of our social networks and how they share our lives*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.

- Christman, D. & McClellan, R. (2008). Living on barbed wire: Resilient women administrators in educational leadership programs. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(1), 3-29.
- Clark, A.E., Frijters, P. & Shields, M.A. (2008). Relative income, happiness, and utility: An explanation for the Easterlin paradox and other puzzles. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 46(1), 95-144.
- Corcoran, C. (2008). *Women college presidents: Leading with authenticity*. University of San Francisco, California.
- Coutu, D. (2002). How resilience works. *Harvard Business Review*, 80, 46-51.
- Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Diener, E., & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). Beyond money. Toward an economy of well-being. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 5 (1).
- Dik, B.J. & Duffy, R.D. (2013). Research on calling: What we have learned and where we are going? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 83(3), 428-436.
- Dolan, P., Peasgood, T., & White, M. (2008). Do we really know what makes us happy? A review of the economic literature on the factors associated with subjective well-being. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 29, 94-122.
- Duffy, R.D., Blake, A., Autin, K.L., & Bott, E.M. (2013). Calling and life satisfaction: It's not about having it, it's about living it. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 60(1), 42-52.

- Eagly, A.H. & Carli, L. (2009). *Through the labyrinth*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Eagly, A.H., & Johannesen-Schmidt, M.C. (2001). The leadership styles of women and men. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4), 781-797.
- Eagly, A.H., & Karau, S.J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573-598.
- Easterlin, R. (1995). Will raising the incomes of all increase the happiness of all. *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization*, 27, 35-47.
- Easterlin, R. (2006). Life cycle happiness and its sources. Intersections of psychology, economics, and demography. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 27, 463-482.
- Fain, P. (2007). Wanted: Crisis president. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53(35), A17
- Friedman, S.D. (2008). *Total leadership. Be a better leader, have a richer life*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Fuerst, A.D. (2006). *Community college presidents' perceptions of stress*. Retrieved from <http://udini.proquest.com/view/community-college-presidents-goid:304721142/>
- George, B. (2007). *Authentic leadership. Rediscovering the secrets to creating lasting value*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Glazer-Raymo, J. (2008). *Unfinished agendas: New and continuing gender challenges in higher education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 597-607. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR8-4/golafshani.pdf>
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. New York, NY: International Publishing Company.
- Hartley, H. & Godin, E. (2009). *A study of career patterns of the presidents of independent colleges and universities*. Washington, D.C.: Council of Independent Colleges.
- Hewlett, S.A. (2002, April). Executive women and the myth of having it all. *Harvard Business Review*, 80(4), 66-73.
- Hewlett, S.A. & Luce, C.B. (2006, December). Extreme jobs: The dangerous allure of the 70-hour workweek. *Harvard Business Review*, 49-59.
- Hirschi, A. (2012). Callings and work engagement. Moderated mediation model of work meaningfulness, occupational identity, and occupational self-efficacy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 59, 479-485.
- Hochschild, A. (2012). *The second shift*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Hoepfl, M.C. (1997). Choosing qualitative research: A primer for technology education researchers. *Journal of Technology Education*, 9(1), 47-63.
- Horgan, T.R. (2013, August 8). *The pipeline challenge in identifying, recruiting and supporting new presidents at small, private colleges and universities. A panel presentation and dialogue*. Retrieved on June 20, 2014 from <http://www.nhcuc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/College-President-Pipeline-Challenge-Panel-Findings.pdf>

Institute of Education Sciences (2011). *Degrees conferred by sex and race*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72>.

Konow, J. & Earley, J. (1999). *The Hedonistic Paradox: Is Homo-Economicus Happier?* Loyola Marymount University, CA: Mimeo.

Konrad, A.M., Ritchie, J.E., Lieb, P. & Corrigan, E. (2000). Sex differences and similarities in job attribute preferences: A meta-analysis. *Psychology Bulletin*, 126(4), 593-641.

Krymish, E. (2011). *Women and work-life balance: A phenomenological qualitative analysis of identity, relational style, adaptive style, and drive and motivation, and the role of faith from the narrative life-story framework*. Pepperdine University, California.

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2008). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Lapovsky, L. (2014, April 13). Why so few women college presidents? [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/lucielapovsky/2014/04/13/why-so-few-women-college-presidents/>

Lears, T.J. (1985). The concept of cultural hegemony: Problems and possibilities. *The American Historical Review*, 90(3), 567-593.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Luthans, F. (2002). The need for and meaning of positive organizational behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23, 695-706.

Madsen, S. R. (2008). *On becoming a woman leader: Learning from the experiences of university presidents*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- McDonald, M. (2014, April 14). Small U.S. colleges battle death spiral as enrollment drops. [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-04-14/small-u-s-colleges-battle-death-spiral-as-enrollment-drops.html>
- Miller, W.R. & Thoresen, C.E. (1999). Spirituality and health. In William Miller (Ed.), *Integrating spirituality into treatment* (p. 3-18). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Miller, W.R. & Thoresen, C.E. (2003). Spirituality, religion and health: An emerging research field. *American Psychologist*, 58, 24-35.
- Monks, J. (2009, September). *Job stability among U.S. university presidents*. Robbins School of Business, University of Virginia. Retrieved from [https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/cheri/upload/cheri\\_wp123.pdf](https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/cheri/upload/cheri_wp123.pdf)
- Murray, J. P., Murray, J. I. & Summar, C. (2000). The propensity of community college chief academic officers to leave an institution. *Community College Review*, 28(3), 22.
- Pargament, K.I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Paragent, K.I., Koenig, H.G., Tarakeshwar, N., & Hahn, J. (2001). Religious struggle as a predictor of mortality among medically ill elderly patients: a 2-year longitudinal study. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 161(15), 1881-5.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Piedmont, R.L. (2009). The contributions of religiousness and spirituality to subjective wellbeing and satisfaction with life. In Marian de Souza, Leslie J. Francis, James

- O'Higgins-Norman, and Daniel Scott (Eds). *International Handbook of Education for Spirituality, Care, and Wellbeing*. New York, NY: Springer Science.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Rath, T. & Harter, J. (2010). *Wellbeing. The five essential elements*. New York, NY: Gallup Press.
- Sampson, H. (2004). Navigating the waves: The usefulness of a pilot in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 4*, 383-402.
- Sandberg, S. (2013). *Lean in*. New York, NY: Alfred Knoff.
- Selingo, J. (2005). A chronicle survey: What presidents think. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 52*(11), A26.
- Shimazu, A. & Schaufeli, W.B. (2009). Is workaholism good or bad for employee wellbeing? The distinctiveness of workaholism and work engagement among Japanese employees. *Industrial Health, 47*, 495-502.
- Slaughter, A.M. (2012, June 13). Why women still can't have it all. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/>
- Song, W. & Hartley, H. (2012). A study of presidents of independent colleges and universities. Retrieved from [http://www.cic.edu/Research-and-Data/Research-Studies/Documents/CIC\\_PresSurvey2012.pdf](http://www.cic.edu/Research-and-Data/Research-Studies/Documents/CIC_PresSurvey2012.pdf)
- Stevenson, B. & Wolfers, J. (2009). The paradox of declining female happiness. (Working Paper 14969). National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w14969>.

Stickgold, R. & Wehrwein, P. (2009, April 18). Sleep now, remember later. *Newsweek*.

Retrieved from <http://newsweek.com>

Stirling, C. (2012). *The work-life balance pursuit: Challenges, supports, and strategies of successful women senior student affairs officers*. University of Southern California, California.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sullivan, S. (2006). The work-faith connection for low-income mothers: A research note. *Sociology of Religion*, 67(1), 99-108.

Switzer, J.Y. (2006). Women college presidents: Interviews about journeys and adaptations. *Advancing Women in Leadership Online Journal*, 21. Retrieved from <http://www.advancingwomen.com/awl/summer2006/Switzer.html>

Taylor, S.J. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Wiley & Sons.

*The White House Benchmarking Project Report on Women In Leadership*. (2009).

Retrieved from <http://www.benchmarks.thewhitehouseproject.org>

Trochim, W.M. & Donnelly, J.P. (2008). *The research methods knowledge base*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Mason, OH: Cengage.

Van der Velde, M. E.G., Bossink, C.J., and Jansen, P.G. (2003). Gender differences in the influence of professional tenure on work attitudes. *Sex Roles*, 49(3), 153-162.

Van Beek, I., Hu, Q., Schaufeli, W.B., Taris, T.W., and Schreurs, B.H. (2012). For fun, love, or money: What drives workaholic, engaged, and burned-out employees at work? *Applied Psychology*, 61, 30-55.

- Veenhoven, R. (1991). Is happiness relative? *Social Indicators Research*, 24, 1-34.
- Walsh, J. (2013). Gender, the work-life interface and wellbeing: A study of hospital doctors. *Gender, Work, and Organization*, 20(4), 439-453.
- Walsh, J. (2005). Work-life balance: Challenging the overwork culture. In Stephen Bach, (Ed.). *Managing human resources: Personnel management in transition*, 148-177, Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Warr, P.B. (1990). The measurement of well-being and other aspects of mental health. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63, 93-210.
- Whatley (1998). Gifted women and teaching: A compatible choice? *Roeper Review*, 21(2), 117-124.
- Wenniger, M. D., Conroy, M.H. (2001). *Gender equity or bust: On the road to campus leadership with women in higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Wilson, M.C. (2004). *Closing the leadership gap. Why women can and must help run the world*. New York, NY: Viking Press.
- Youssef, C. M., & Luthans, F. (2007). Positive organizational behavior in the workplace: The impact of hope, optimism, and resilience. *Journal of Management*, 5(33), 774-800.

*Appendix A:*

## Creighton IRB Permission Form



March 27, 2014

Amy C. Novak, MS  
Graduate School  
Interdisciplinary Leadership Program (EdD)

RE:  
IRB #: 14-17002  
TITLE: WOMEN AND WELLBEING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
FEMALE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS

Dear Ms. Novak,

Thank you for submitting the above mentioned proposal to the Institutional Review Board office for review. This project has been determined to be exempt from Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects, as per 45CFR46.101 (b) 2/3. This IRB approval is for a 3 year period. The following documents were received, reviewed, and approved:

1. Application for Review of Exempt Status (per 45CFR46.101 (b) 2/3): Observation, Survey, Interview dated March 25, 2014
2. Appendix I: Letter to Participate Form
3. Appendix II: Information Sheet
4. The submitted Protocol
5. Interview Questions

Continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements:

1. Compliance with the Creighton University IRB policies and procedures
2. Problems must be reported using the Reporting Form for Reportable New Information. Problems requiring report can be found in the IRB Policy 134 "Reportable New Information"
3. All protocol amendments and changes to approved research must be submitted to the IRB and not be implemented until approved by the IRB. Please use the modification form when submitting changes to protocol or consent documents.
4. This study cannot continue after the expiration date, which is March 26, 2017.
5. You are required to submit a renewal/termination prior to this date. If you wish to continue the project, the renewal must be in the IRB office on week prior to the expiration date.

*IRB# 14-17002**Page 2 of 2**March 27, 2014*

If you should have questions during the course of this project, please call the IRB office at (402) 280-2126 and one of the administrators will assist you, or you may email the office at [irb@creighton.edu](mailto:irb@creighton.edu).

Sincerely,



Christine Scheuring, B.S.  
Administrator, Institutional Review Board



The Creighton University is fully accredited by the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protections Program, Inc. ® (AAHRPP)

Creighton University has an Assurance on file with the Department of Health and Human Services: Assurance Identification No. FWA 00001078, the expiration date: July 6, 2016  
IRB Registration Numbers: IRB #1 Biomedical IRB # IRB00000155 (Expiration July 13, 2015); IRB #2 Social Behavioral IRB # TIRB20067 (Expiration July 13, 2015)

Creighton University has an Assurance on file with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)  
Assurance Identification No. FWA00001078, the expiration date July 6, 2016  
IRB Registration Numbers: Registration/Identification No. IRB00000155

*Appendix B*

## Letter of Invitation for Participation in the Research Study

April 7, 2014

Dear President,

My name is Amy Novak and currently I am pursuing my doctorate in leadership at Creighton University. I currently serve as a university president at Dakota Wesleyan University. I am undertaking a research project entitled *Women and Wellbeing: A Grounded Theory Study of Female University Presidents*. The purpose of this study is to identify how female university presidents experience wellbeing. Appreciating the factors that assist in developing wellbeing, as well as those factors that hinder wellbeing, provides additional potential outcomes of the research. Further, the project seeks to identify strategies for enhancing the overall wellbeing of female university presidents.

You have been selected to participate in this study due to your professional responsibility as a university president. This study is framed by four key research questions:

1. How do female university presidents describe wellbeing?
2. What factors have strengthened wellbeing?
3. What factors have hindered wellbeing?
4. What strategies do female university presidents use to enhance their level of wellbeing?

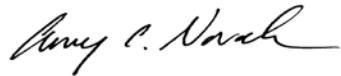
This qualitative study involves a 30 minute interview conducted in person, by phone or via Skype at a time that is convenient to you. The interview will be recorded and transcribed, but your name will remain anonymous. There is no compensation provided for participation in the interview. Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary. To maintain confidentiality, I will provide you with an alias that will in no way link you to the interview results.

The study's results should be of interest to both aspiring and current female university presidents as they determine how to strengthen their overall professional and personal wellbeing. These strategies should provide instructive for women aspiring to leadership positions in higher education. This study may also reveal obstacles that diminish wellbeing and the potential support systems that assist women in overcoming these challenges.

There are no known serious risks involved with this research project. However, if at any time you wish to discontinue your participation, you may withdraw from the

interview process. I have taken all reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential risks. I look forward to gleaning insight from your experience and am hopeful you are able to assist in helping more women understand and appreciate the importance of wellbeing in their role as university presidents. If you have any questions, please contact me by email or phone or through the Creighton IRB office at [irb@creighton.edu](mailto:irb@creighton.edu). Thank you for your willingness to consider participation in this research study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy C. Novak".

Amy C. Novak  
President, Dakota Wesleyan University  
EdD Student, Creighton University

*Appendix C*

Research Information Sheet  
Female University Presidents Perceptions of Wellbeing  
**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: AMY C. NOVAK**  
**Edd Program**  
**Advisor: Dr. Isabelle Cherney**  
Creighton University

**Introduction to Study:** This phenomenological study explores how female university presidents describe and strengthen their wellbeing.

**Study Purpose and Procedures:** The purpose of this study is to examine female university presidents' perceptions of wellbeing. These perspectives will then be used to develop strategies to increase wellbeing among female university presidents.

In this study, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions pertaining to your experiences and opinions regarding wellbeing. Following this session, you will be asked to complete a series of demographic and wellbeing survey questions.

**Risks of Participating in the Study:** Your risks of participation are minimal and comparable to the minor discomfort encountered in any standard psychological testing atmosphere. You may experience stress while completing the questionnaire that will be administered to you. Should you feel overly stressed, please contact the Principal Investigator. If you feel unable to complete the study at any time, you are free to leave as you choose.

**Benefits of Participating in the Study:** The results of this study will be used to determine strategies to strengthen the wellbeing of female university presidents, which may be practically applied within your current work setting.

**Disclosure of Appropriate Alternatives:** You may choose not to participate in the study at any time.

**Confidentiality:** The information you provide during this study will be accessible to Amy C. Novak. Access will also be available to the Creighton University Institutional Review Board. The information that will be available includes all the questionnaire data. In all other instances, any data that is disclosed will be presented in a manner that does not reveal the participant's identity, except as may be required by law. Your confidentiality will be protected and your name will not be used. You will be assigned a code number, which is not tied to your identity in any way.

**Compensation for Participation:** Participation is voluntary and no compensation will be made for participation in the research study.

**Contact Information:** Please feel free to contact the Primary Investigator, Amy C. Novak with any questions or concerns regarding participation or participants' rights.

*Appendix D***Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about your experience as a university president?
  - a. How long have you served in this capacity?
  - b. Describe your professional strengths?
  - c. Describe your greatest professional challenge?
  - d. What factors contribute to your success as a university president?
  - e. What strategies have contributed to your success?

I am exploring how female university presidents describe their experience of wellbeing. I am interested in ascertaining how important a state of wellbeing is to your personal and professional success. I would like you to think about your state of wellbeing as we go through these next questions.

**General Perceptions of Wellbeing**

2. How would you describe wellbeing?
  - a. How would you describe your current state of wellbeing?
  - b. What factors shape your overall wellbeing?
  - c. Using just one word, how would you describe what is most important to your wellbeing?

**Career Wellbeing**

3. Describe the importance of career to your wellbeing?
  - a. What makes you feel good about your work?
  - b. What challenges your current level of career wellbeing?
  - c. How does your career influence your overall wellbeing?

**Professional Challenge**

4. Describe a professional challenges that you have faced.
5. How did this professional challenge affect your overall wellbeing?
  - a. Define what resiliency means to you?
  - b. Describe your resiliency?
  - c. What supports your resiliency?

**Social Wellbeing**

6. Describe the importance of your current social support system to your overall wellbeing
  - a. Who are the members of this support system?

The researcher will need to discern whether the participant identifies people who are in her social support system at work and then whether there are members of her personal support system that differ from those at work. Each of these social support systems will be used to gather feedback on the following questions.

- b. How do you interact with a member of your social support system?
  1. Work-related relationships?
  2. Family related support?
  3. Personal Friendships?
- c. What role do they play in your personal wellbeing?
  1. Work related relationships?
  2. Family related support?
  3. Personal friendships support?

- d. What role do they play in your professional wellbeing?
  1. Work related relationships?
  2. Family related support?
  3. Personal friendships support?
7. Describe your ability to create a positive work-life balance? How does this impact your wellbeing?
  - a. Do you have someone for whom you have responsibility in your home (child, senior parent, etc.)?
    1. If yes: How does this person(s) impact your perception of work-life balance?
  - b. What are the biggest obstacles to achieving positive work-life balance?
  - c. What are the most important contributors to achieving work-life balance?
  - d. What specific strategies assist you in achieving balance between your personal life and professional life?

### **Community Wellbeing**

8. Describe the importance of community in your overall wellbeing?
  - a. How does your community involvement influence your wellbeing?
  - b. What strategies have you used interacting with the community to enhance your overall wellbeing?

### **Financial Wellbeing**

9. Describe the importance of finances to your overall wellbeing.
  - a. What factors influence your financial wellbeing?

- b. What strategies do you use to enhance your financial wellbeing?

### **Spiritual Wellbeing**

10. Describe the importance of spirituality to your overall wellbeing.

If spirituality is important:

- a. Describe your experience of spirituality?
- b. How do you nurture this component of your wellbeing?
- c. How does your spirituality influence your overall leadership?
- d. What strategies do you use to enhance your overall spiritual wellbeing?

### **Physical Wellbeing**

11. Describe the importance of physical health to your overall wellbeing?

- a. Describe your current level of physical activity?
- b. Describe the impact of this physical activity on your overall wellbeing.

### **Strategies for Wellbeing**

12. What advice would you give to future female leaders about wellbeing as they aspire to positions of executive leadership?

13. You have attained this important leadership position, what strategy(ies) account(s) for your ability to maintain this position?

Table 4

Matrix of the Relationship between Interview Questions and Research Questions

Interview Questions	Q1: How do female university presidents describe wellbeing?	Q2: What factors support wellbeing among female university presidents?	Q3: What factors hinder wellbeing among female university presidents?	Q4: What strategies enhance wellbeing of female university presidents?
Tell me about your experience as a female university president. How would you describe it?	X	X	X	
How would you describe wellbeing? How would you describe your personal experience of wellbeing?	X			
Describe the importance of career/job satisfaction to your current level of wellbeing.	X	X	X	
How do professional challenges affect your overall wellbeing?		X	X	
Describe the importance of your current social support system to your overall wellbeing.	X	X		
How do you describe your ability to balance your work-life obligations? How does this affect your overall wellbeing?	X	X	X	X
Describe the importance of finances in your overall wellbeing?	X	X	X	
Describe the importance of faith play in your overall wellbeing	X	X		X
Describe the importance of community in your overall wellbeing?	X	X	X	
Describe the importance of your physical health to your overall wellbeing.	X	X	X	
What advice would you give to future female leaders about wellbeing as they aspire to positions of executive leadership?				X
What factors account for your ability to maintain your position as university president?				X
What strategies would assist other female university presidents in achieving wellbeing?				X

Table 5

Assessment of Overall Wellbeing

Rank your satisfaction with the following: (Please check the category that best applies).

Category	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Career wellbeing					
Community wellbeing					
Financial wellbeing					
Physical wellbeing					
Social wellbeing					
Spiritual wellbeing					
Work-life wellbeing					
Overall wellbeing					

How important are the following wellbeing attributes to your overall leadership effectiveness? (Please check the category that best applies).

Category	Very Important	Fairly Important	Important	Slightly Important	Not at all important
Career wellbeing					
Community wellbeing					
Financial wellbeing					
Physical wellbeing					
Social wellbeing					
Spiritual wellbeing					
Work-Life wellbeing					
Overall wellbeing					

Table 6

Demographic Survey

---

Personal Data

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Race: \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Ethnic Origin: \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Marital Status (circle the appropriate response)
    - a. Married   b. Widowed   c. Divorced   d. Separated   e. Never Married
    - f. Living with a partner   g. Refused to answer   h. Do not know.
  5. How many years have you served as a college president?
  6. How many years have you served as a college president at your current institution?
-