

## Chapter 15

# A Critical Review of Gender Parity and Voice Dispossession Among Executive Women in Higher Education Leadership

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### ABSTRACT

*Postsecondary organizational statistics show women remain limited and underrepresented within presidential and provost appointments, and progress has slowed into the 21st century. This chapter presents a critical review of the current scholarship of gender parity among higher education executive leadership specifically for a construct of voice dispossession. In past work, the authors have discussed how voice dispossession occurs among a dominant past culture and imbalanced power domains amid hierarchical structures for evolving organizational cultures as women often adopt a filtered voice or make attributional accommodations amidst challenges within these power and gendered organizational structures. This chapter extends the conversation by examining this focus within the larger body of research into women in higher education executive leadership to reveal limits of access and career success. While these power domains have historically been predominant across North America, parallels exist among other continents.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Organizational considerations and promotional disparities for environments where interrogation of executive leadership inequalities may be allowed and barriers to those where it is not allowed is examined within the current literature for gender parity of women within higher education executive leadership roles. Further, professional associations, research organizations, and past scholarly researchers have reported organizational bias leads to exclusionary practices that limit opportunities and manifest in barriers for women to advance beyond academic leadership roles and limit further promotional opportunities to executive leadership. Along the trajectory of roles in higher education, women often face inequities beyond salary and benefit packages even when they are the majority among many higher education disciplines. Therefore, this critical review is focused on the scholarship specific to higher education executive leadership roles and offers an examination of the patterns of research published as related to gender and gender equalities. Specific solutions and recommendations from the researchers analyzed are discussed along with the empirical literature surrounding the focus of the review.

The authors have previously defined voice dispossession from the literature of discourse analysis whereby voice is a social construct that offers characterization and impression of an academic and/or professional identity (de Magalhães, Cotterall, & Mideros, 2019; Throne, 2018, 2019). Dispossession of voice is considered as an occurrence of repression, silence, invisibility, or mischaracterization of meaning among the domains of power that define the relational structures within a higher education organizational entity (Hill & Bilge, 2016; Musil, 2015; Throne, 2019). In this chapter, voice is situated within the midst of the power domains of higher education executive leadership. This filtered, silencing, or reduction of vocality of opinions, ideas, and innovation among women, in addition to attributional accommodations in physical presence or tone, has occurred across the past centuries of U.S. higher education since the gendered barricades to entry existed (Gray, Bates, Graham, & Han, 2019). Contemporary organizational structures and assumptions continue that limit women's advancement, opportunity, and longevity within executive leadership ranks such as seen in the documental data for salary and promotion, but also often hidden in informal structures such as office spatiality (who has access to doors and windows) or who may converse with whom (Musil, 2015).

This chapter also considers the paucity of published research specific to women in executive higher education leadership as another illustration of the invisibility that exists around gender, gendered culture and organizations, and the overall role, connotations, and perceptions of women in leadership. The authors posit that journals with international foci increasingly are interested in a range of focus in this area that has not kept pace with the current state of educational leadership in the United States (U.S.). Additionally, the authors acknowledge the gains made over the past 40 years in relation to women in higher education leadership as well as women in executive business and management roles; however, continued issues that plagued women in academia in the 1980s and 1990s still exist today, which is not necessarily the case for other countries with different foci for what is considered important for research based on the advancements within their own locales.

The objectives of this critical review are severalfold. First, the gendered dynamics explored in the organizational literature make clear the nature and causes for barriers women face in advancement and promotion to executive leadership roles. Second, the chapter illuminates the aspects of voice dispossession amid biased organizational structures, cultures, disciplines, and interpersonal environments. Third, the chapter's findings underscore the need to identify aspects for improving opportunities for advancement of women into higher education senior and executive leadership roles as well as identify programs or

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