

MAKING SENSE OF GENDERED COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE  
SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICERS

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## FEMALE SSAO GENDERED COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES

### DEDICATION

To my spouse, James Mitchell III, for “leaning in” through the years as I worked to complete this experience. This does not necessarily mean I am going to be available to do more dishes and laundry though...I kind of like what we have going for now.

To my daughters, Amelia Ruth and Eleanor James, who kept me motivated – your mama is here to show you what women can accomplish so that you can grow into two strong women yourselves.

To my mama, you are the strongest, most hardworking person that I know. I am so blessed to have you as a role model to me and my children. I would not have the drive and perseverance that I have had I not been blessed with you as a parent.

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*“A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself.” — Oprah Winfrey*

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*“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.” — Hellen Keller*

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*“If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it.” — Margaret Fuller*

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### ABSTRACT

This research utilizes an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis design to investigate female senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) as they experience and implement gendered communication practices in the higher education workplace. Research regarding female SSAO interactions are absent from discourse on gendered communication and no comprehensive studies on the effect or use of gendered communication environments have been completed. This research addresses the following questions: How do female SSAOs make sense of their gendered communication practices and experiences? How do the perceptions of the female SSAO's communication practices impact their experiences? Through completing a pre-interview reflection, personal and professional demographics survey, and open-ended interview, 18 female SSAO participants shared their experiences and implementation of gendered communication. Findings show that female SSAOs fluidly use both masculine and feminine communication attributes, are recipients of negative gendered communication and gender-based microaggressions, establish connections with their female identity through communication, and are highly reflective professionals regarding their personal and professional communication.

*Keywords: gendered communication, higher education, SSAO*

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

*“This is the first place I worked where I honestly felt it would be different if I were a man” – Colleague comment. Spring 2019.*

This research explored how female Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) experience and implement gendered communication in their workplace. The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) as they implement and navigate gendered communication practices in the higher education workplace through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. There is a lack of research regarding the gendered communication experiences of female SSAOs. As such, this study contributes to a body of research regarding SSAOs, distinguishes itself within communication research, and stands out as work specifically examining gendered communication. Gendered communication is a highly complex issue involving influences and constructs of: power, gender, intersectionality, and societal norms. As such, this study has narrowed the focus to female SSAOs and their implementation of communication within their professional lives.

Two specific events have led to a deep, personal interest in these experiences and the drive to explore them through a phenomenological study.

I am a “type-A” person. I believe things should be in their place, that there are standard ways to achieve various outcomes, and that generally I know the best way to achieve them. This has calmed over the years of my professional career as I have met new people, experienced diverse institutions, and gained a deeper understanding of working with others. And, quite simply, I have met people who do know the best way to achieve goals and objectives.

As a young professional several years ago, I was given the opportunity to lead a large committee within my department. My understanding is that I was called to direct this committee

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at a late stage due to shifting resources in the department. Pleased with the opportunity to exhibit my organizational skills and work ethic, I excitedly took the helm. This committee was to accomplish a time-sensitive objective and that time was quickly passing. As I took command, I provided clear directives, established roles and tasks for my colleagues, and established a clear organizational method to accomplish the main objective. Had I more time, I would have engaged in developmental conversations with colleagues about their goals, objectives, and insight on the tasks at hand. However, as the time quickly moved along, and a committee comprised of mixed experience levels, I determined that a straightforward, directive communication and organizational framework was the best course of action. At a regular meeting with my supervisor all of this came to a halt when the optimistic progress I believed was occurring was suddenly called into question. “You are being a bully.”

As a committee chair, now more experienced and more aware of my surroundings, I had the opportunity to invite the institution’s president to speak to the larger group. The questions were straightforward, but the context was heightened as the institution moved towards large changes. There was also, potentially, an air of uncertainty from our guest who had never met with our group before and was set to discuss questions that all focused on these large changes. Aware of the important visitor, I asked for advice from a mentor to ensure that everything would be in place for the event. As the time came, I greeted the president and noted an unexpected attendee: a female high-ranking administrator was joining the meeting as well. Excited for the perspective this individual would contribute, we quickly ensured the appropriate space was available at the front of the room. For the next hour, the president spoke on various topics, guided by questions that were submitted, as well as his own priorities for the given context. Although I witnessed several nonverbal supportive gestures, the second administrator never

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spoke to the group. There is no doubt that the meeting was to focus on the president, however, as a participant I was struck that the second administrator was not called on to comment or add perspective during the conversation. “I was there for support.”

These two experiences have contributed to me completing this research. My personal experience was a memorable pitfall of a female utilizing masculine communication techniques as a leader. The second experience, that of a high-ranking female administrator, was one in which feminine communication was there as a support person, not actively contributing to the larger discussion, and not encouraged to contribute beyond being there for “comfort.” My experience is an effect of Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), where I did not exhibit communication techniques that were aligned with my gender identity resulting in backlash. The second experience is that of a woman who is valued as an individual present in the meeting, but as I interpreted the experience, was not valued as a contributor per se.

### **Background**

The presence of women in leadership and administrative roles in post-secondary education has evolved and developed in the past 150 years. In 1871, Frances Elizabeth Willard became the first woman college president of Evanston College of which she also helped to found (Kent, 1924). According to the *Fact Book of Women in Higher Education*, a hundred years later, the presence of women leadership in the presidential position was in constant growth from 1975 to 1989, more than doubling in number from 148 (1975) to 328 (1989) (Touchton & Davis, 1991, p. 102).

A dozen years later, the American Council on Education (ACE) found that the representation of women in the president role has continued to increase, steadily climbing from 21% in 2001 to 30% in 2016 (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). The largest

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representation of female presidents occurred within institutions at the associate's level with 36%, while the lowest representation occurred at the doctorate-granting institutions with just 22% of presidents identifying as women. Overall, per the 2016 data, 46% moved into the presidency after serving in a Chief Academic Officer or Provost position, while just 15% served as "Other Senior Executive in Higher Education" of which the SSAO would be classified (ACE, 2017). Further, current data may indicate an increase in women presidents with a larger presence of women in pipeline positions. Interestingly, this is a decrease from 2011 where 52% of female presidents previously served as the Chief Academic Officer/Provost, and just 10% most recently served as a "Other Senior Executive in Higher Education" (ACE, 2017). Most notable for this study, 40% of chief academic officers were women (White House Project Report, 2009).

Following the 2017 American Council on Education American College President Survey, the organization brought together 10 leaders to discuss the experiences of women administrators. Within this report, a particularly relevant section was titled "The Additional Job of a Woman President" (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018, p. 5). Participants shared two main experiences that they felt were unique versus their male counterparts. First, others viewed the female presidents with the additional expectation that they be knowledgeable of all aspects and act as a practitioner at the institution. One participant compared a male and female president, stating:

It's hard to think they would stop and ask a male president [what the fax number is for the office]. Some people see a woman and think you're in a service role. They see women as having infinite wisdom about stuff to keep the day going. (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018, pp. 5-6)

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Second, participants explained an overlapping expectation that female presidents are viewed as “motherly” figures in their roles, despite their natural tendency to act in such a way. As one participant explained: “I have a young chief of staff, for example, and she’s productive, but she expects me to know her whole personal life. . . . I never developed that skill set” (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018, p. 6). Interestingly, this awareness is mirrored in an emergent theme of female SSAO participants to be discussed in Chapter 4.

Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) are typically highly educated, 60% of which hold professional or doctoral degrees (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014, p. 8); experienced, 10+ years of leadership in higher education; and competent in their roles within student affairs. These roles include advanced training in leadership, mentorship, management, and other topics. However, women SSAOs work in a men-dominated administrative environment in which these professionals can sometimes find themselves assuming a diminished role within the institution, leadership team, and cabinet meetings.

As this research focuses on female SSAOs in higher education organizations, it is also important to gather data on the current status of these positions nationally. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) commissioned a study authored by Wesaw and Sponsler (2014) to examine the SSAO. Results indicated that the “average” SSAO was 50 years or older and Caucasian (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014, p. 8). At this publication date SSAO respondents indicated a near even gender representation with 51% reporting to be male and 49% reporting to be female (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014, p. 8). In a 2018 report from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources, data indicated that 56% of SSAOs are women, followed by 33% of SSAOs reporting as white males, followed by 8%

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African American males (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018, p. 16). Seventy percent of respondents indicated that they directly report to a president while 16% report to a Chief Academic Officer (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014, p. 10). Interestingly, Wesaw and Sponsler (2014) found that male SSAOs were more likely to aspire to be the president of an institution versus female SSAOs. Based on the data presented above, this indicates that a female SSAO is likely to be supervised by a male president (70% of time) or male chief academic officer (60%).

The student affairs workforce, those that would serve directly under the SSAO, is largely female. Pritchard and McChesney (2018) found that, of this population, 71% identify as women while just 20% as men. Additionally, of the entire student affairs professional workforce, 51% are white women (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). Placed in context, the female SSAOs in this study largely supervised a majority female workforce while reporting to a male president or provost. I suggest that this creates a unique balance in communication environments that the SSAOs must navigate.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As indicated above, female SSAOs serve a largely female workforce within the student affairs professional divisions. However, based on the gender representation within institution's presidents and chief academic affairs officers, female SSAOs are most likely to be supervised by males. Considering the predominance of gendered communication practices, this creates a need for SSAOs to interact and communicate differently dependent on the environment around them. As both receivers and senders of gendered communication, it is believed that these interactions impact their quality of life, feelings of professional support, and retention in position, among other variables.

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A quantitative study I collected in 2019 utilized the Gendered Communication Instrument established by Weinberg, Treviño, and Cleveland (2015) and a demographic survey to examine the landscape of gendered communication practices of female student affairs professionals. The study resulted in 136 unique responses gathered from a national outreach effort to three major student affairs professional organizations over approximately one month's time. Participants were asked to classify their experience level based on their position's working title: entry level (coordinator), mid-level (manager, assistant director), advanced (director, dean, assistant vice chancellor), and SSAO. Although a diverse amount of responses were collected, only eight participants identified themselves as SSAOs. With that, the ability to directly focus upon understanding SSAOs was limited. As I considered the data on all female student affairs professionals, I found that entry level participants had greater negative correlations to masculine communication attributes, including: assertiveness, egocentric, and the overall masculine communication average. Mid-level participants had negative correlations to several feminine communication attributes, including: compassion, communal, personal, and warm. Advanced participant's data showed positive correlations with masculine and non-binary communication, as well as mixed masculine and feminine practices of: relational (feminine), warm (feminine), and egocentric (masculine).

Why were there no significant findings for the female SSAO participants? Were their communication practices so nuanced that perhaps quantitative data cannot adequately examine them? SSAOs, as evident in the 2014 NASPA review, shared several common experiences: education, professional experience level, supervisory departments, and position within the institution's leadership team (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Further, the position in the institution is unique for female SSAOs. As described above, they represent a largely female workforce in a

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largely feminized field in the institution. This may encourage participants to engage with feminine communication: encouraging collaboration and communal discussion, consideration of relationships in addition to professional roles, and engaging or sharing their personal experiences with others as a way to connect. Conversely, female SSAOs are likely to share the experience of being supervised by a male. Female SSAOs then may be encouraged to engage in masculine communication implementation in order to mirror or counter a masculine supervisor's use of direct and assertive attributes, for example. This research, therefore, provided rich, descriptive data to make greater sense of these experiences to better understand the gendered communication implementation and experiences of female SSAOs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) as they implemented and navigated gendered communication practices in the higher education workplace through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. There is a lack of research regarding the gendered communication experiences of female SSAOs. Findings show that female SSAOs fluidly use both masculine and feminine communication attributes, are recipients of negative gendered communication and gender-based microaggressions, establish connections with their female identity through communication, and are highly reflective professionals regarding their personal and professional communication. As such, this study contributes to a body of research regarding SSAOs, distinguishes itself within communication research, and stands out as work specifically examining gendered communication. These findings, and in partnership with participant statements, indicated the importance of colleagues as advocates and partners, collaboration over competition amongst leadership peers, and the importance of presidential leadership.

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### **Research Questions**

This research was framed to examine the gendered communication implementation and experiences of female SSAOs through two research questions. How do female SSAOs make sense of their gendered communication practices and experiences? How do the perceptions of the female SSAO's communication practices impact their experiences?

### **Significance of the Study**

The aforementioned quantitative survey introduced statistically significant findings regarding three major groups of female student affairs professionals: entry, mid-level, and advanced. However, there were no significant positive or negative correlations with the SSAO data with communication practices. Regarding degree attainment, a terminal degree had a significant correlation to both masculine communication and non-binary communication. Yet, not all SSAOs have a terminal degree. I anticipated that SSAOs may exhibit communication techniques spanning both the masculine and feminine communication schemas, a reference to their ability to balance both their division and leadership level communication experiences, in order to implement effective communication within their positions. For example, a female SSAO may exhibit a more personal style with their direct reports: engaging in more sharing, relationship maintenance, and engagement. Conversely, in their peer or supervisor relationship, guided by resource management and strategic goals, they may exhibit more direct or assertive communication attributes. As such, I conducted this research to provide clearer insight into the experiences and implementation of gendered communication of female SSAOs engaging specifically in the various roles they serve on campus. Findings from the data indicate that female SSAOs consider their identities when communicating and adjust regularly to their environment to fluidly move between feminine and masculine attributes.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Role Congruity Theory posited that any unexpected result of an individual and alignment of what one believes her role to be, results in prejudicial treatment. As Eagly and Karau (2002) stated, prejudice toward female leaders theorizes that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: (a) perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles, and (b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman (p. 573).

Role Congruity Theory explained that the resulting prejudice includes “less positive” feelings towards female leaders and possibility that it is “more difficult” for females to become leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 573). Therefore, if a female SSAO is exhibiting masculine communication schema in the workplace, she may be perceived to be incongruent with her gender role and expected communication traits. This incongruence may result in interpersonal responses from others that negatively impact the SSAO’s workplace.

Eagly and Karau, in partnership with other researchers, have studied gender, leadership, gender roles, and expectations for nearly 30 years. Building upon publications that synthesized leadership research, an early reference “showed that even in the relatively unstructured settings of this research, men are more likely to emerge as leaders” in “leaderless groups” (as cited in Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995, p. 127). In their publication, “Gender and the Effectiveness of Leaders,” Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) found that the participants were equal in a leadership effectiveness measurement, but that the conditions and environments supporting either gender role may impact that equality. In short, women serving in environments in which the leaders were described in feminine terms and men serving in environments in which leaders

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were described in masculine terms better aligned with higher efficiency. They concluded that there is a “pervasive gendering of leadership roles that can operate to the disadvantage of women or men” (Eagly et al., 1995, p. 140). A gendering of leadership roles, as described by Eagly et al., has three clear impacts on an organization’s health. First, leader themselves, faced with an incongruence of their natural or default leadership techniques being unmatched with the expectations the organization has expected of leaders. It is important to note that when leadership is gendered, it is something that cannot be overcome with situational leadership but only through the revision of what is expected. Second, it impacts the organization and the lowest levels, those that strive to be leaders themselves. Through seeing a diverse leadership profile these employees contribute more to the organization. By not seeing themselves as potential leaders, the organization loses key opportunity to develop employees. Finally, through gendered leadership roles, top level administrators strip key components of a diverse workgroup. A diversity of identities naturally facilitates a diversity of ideas and concepts. Creating leadership that looks and sounds alike removes the opportunity for growth through diverse viewpoints. Interestingly, the authors proposed that these findings may change as more women entered the management roles across organizations. In short, as more women become leaders they shift the concepts and ideals of what leadership is imagined in the organization.

Building upon the findings in 1995, Eagly and Karau (2002) proposed Role Congruity Theory. Role Congruity Theory “consider[s] the congruity between gender roles and other roles, especially leadership roles, as well as to specify key factors and processes that influence congruity perceptions and their consequences for prejudice and prejudicial behaviors” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 575). Briefly, a woman in a leadership position acting outside of her expected gender role may face prejudice for that behavior. They posited that this prejudice can occur in

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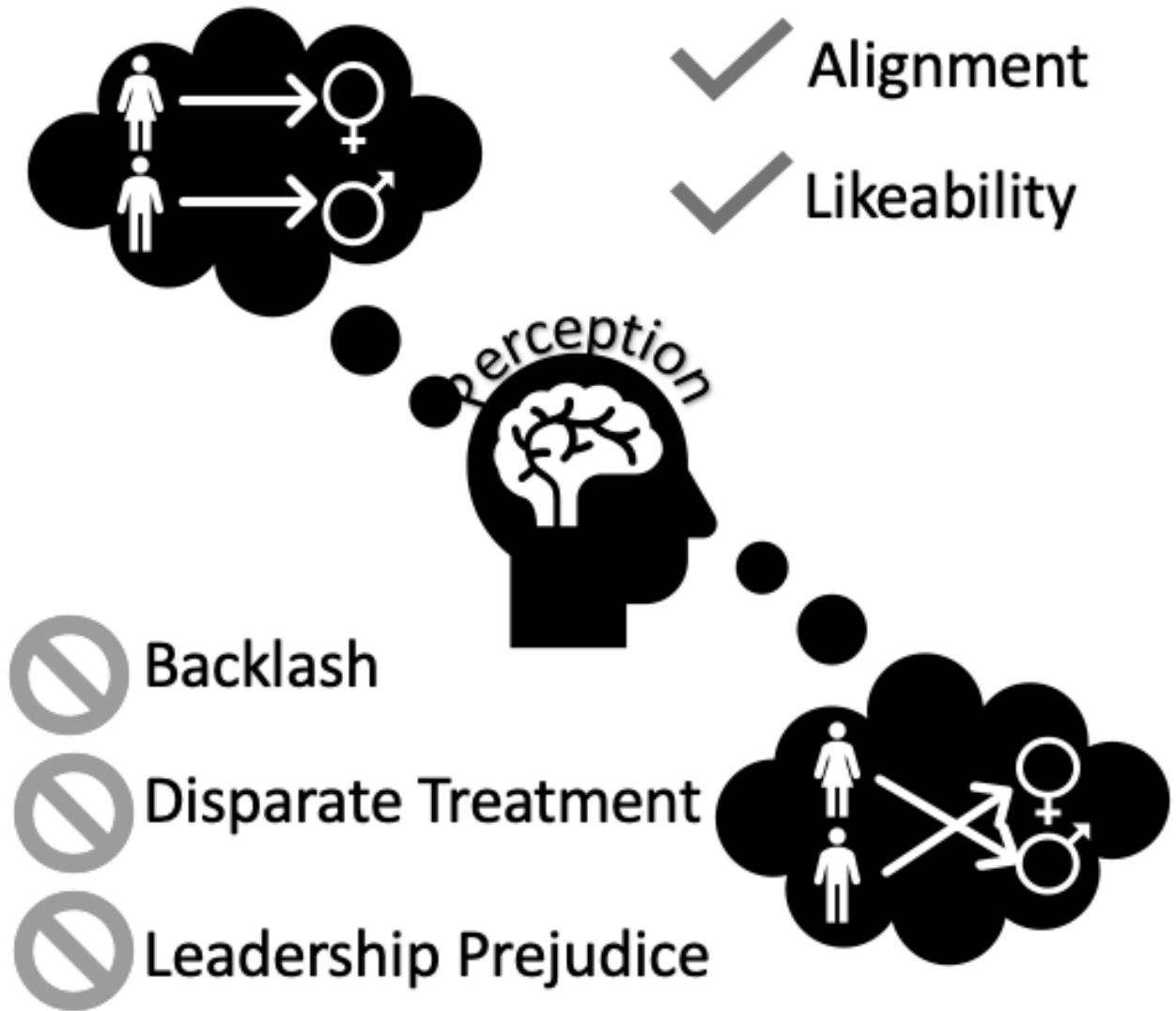
two ways: lower evaluations of leadership potential for women, and lower evaluations of actual leadership behavior of women (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 576). Both prejudices occur because the potential for, or actual behavior of, the women are outside of the “descriptive norms of gender roles” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 576). Female SSAOs are no different than the woman studies by Eagly and Karau and are likely to face the same lower evaluations of both leadership potential and behavior compared to their male colleagues.

The image below in Figure 1 visually depicts this theory. Role Congruity Theory hinges on the perceptions of one party regarding the prescriptive behaviors of the another. Interactions impact the involved parties in positive, more neutral, and negative ways. Of particular interest is whether the parties “align” or face “backlash” for their expected communication traits.

Alignment occurs when an individual’s gendered communication matches with their presumed gender identity, for example, a male exhibits masculine communication schema.

**Figure 1**

*Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002).*



Both sides equally contribute to the environment of female SSAOs as they navigate their position and workplace within the institution. For example, A SSAO who has a positive experience related to Role Congruity Theory may become more confident using her communication practices in the organization and achieving specific end goals through strategic skills. However, female SSAOs who have experienced backlash in their role congruity may be

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less willing to manipulate their communication techniques based on the environment. Backlash occurs when individuals use gendered communication schema that do not match with their presumed gender identity, for example, a female using masculine communication techniques. Alignment tends to result in a positive experience, generating advantages for the individual including likeability (Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995) or positive performance evaluations (Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008). Backlash typically produces negative consequences or reactions from others, including disparate treatment and leadership prejudice.

### **Definitions of Terms**

#### ***Female vs. Woman***

The terms “female” and “women/woman” was used frequently within this research and was intended to be interchangeable depending on the structure of the discussion. Female as a gender construct, while women/woman as a sex construct. Similarly, expressions and behaviors of women are descriptive constructs of gender. Additionally, female is classified as an adjective whereas a woman is a noun. When describing participants, they will be noted as “female Senior student affairs officers” and individual participants may be referred to as a woman or women.

#### ***Masculine and Feminine Communication***

For the purpose of this study, I focused on gendered communication as defined as either masculine or feminine in the current context. However, as the workplace matures and reacts to societal changes, this differentiation would need to be adjusted to adequately represent the workplace landscape. Weinberg and Cleveland (2017) coined gendered communication as “the good, the bad, and the ugly.” Gendered communication can be beneficial to shifting a conversation to enacted gender rather than sex (good), gendered communication emphasizes implicit and explicit gender division (bad), and gendered communication, comprised of feminine

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and masculine, further creates a binary and re-confirms power structures already present (ugly) (Weinberg & Cleveland, 2017). It is believed that the introduction of non-binary gendered communication research would serve to better contextualize the workplace. However, this research is not intended to address non-binary gendered communication within its scope, therefore, I recommend reviewing other relevant communication research to engage more with that area.

The gendered communication schema is the complete “toolbag” of attributes identified within masculine and feminine communication. Several prominent researchers have defined masculine and feminine communication schema via various measurements and studies (Boucher, 2016; Dow & Condit, 2005; Leaper & Ayres, 2007; McHugh, 2010; Mulac, Seibold, & Farris, 2000; Newman et al., 2008; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Reid, Keerie, & Palomares, 2003; Smith et al., 2013; Weinberg, Trevino, & Cleveland, 2015). Largely, their findings defined feminine communication schema to include attributes of: relationships, communal, conversational maintenance, personal and concrete, responsive, and tentativeness, whereas masculine communication schema included establishment of control, instrumental speech, commanding, direct, assertive, abstract, and less emotionally connected (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2017).

### *Senior Student Affairs Officer*

This research highlighted female individuals who were classified as the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) at their institutions. These positions generally supervise a division of “student services” offices and departments including, but not limited to: campus activities, student conduct, counseling services, orientation, student affairs assessment, orientation, career services, wellness programs, disability support services, on-campus housing, recreational sports,

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and multicultural services (CAS, n.d.; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014, p. 18). These individuals self-identify in this position but should also be considered the SSAO within their institution by those at the executive level.

### **Summary**

This research examined the lived experiences of female SSAOs as they experienced and implemented gendered communication practices in the higher education environment. Using a framework of experiences and implementation of gendered communication, participants captured the essence of these components in order to bring light to the female SSAOs professional environment. An explanatory quantitative study in August 2019 provided inconclusive results regarding the experiences of female SSAOs in the higher education workplace. No statistically significant findings indicated what communication attributes or schema were favored by this population, despite findings for entry, mid-level, and advanced participants. Therefore, this study explored the experiences of female SSAOs to uncover the nature of their communication and how they engaged with their divisions, peers, and supervisors in the workplace.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

As this study provided a greater sense of the gendered communication practices of female Senior student affairs officers, the literature reviewed in this chapter also examined these related concepts. The review begins with Standpoint Theory which serves to examine the researcher's role within the data collection in relationship with the participants. Standpoint Theory served as a foundation to build upon, providing context and explaining the environment within which the participants engage. Following Standpoint Theory, Intersectionality (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013) and Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 2013) are introduced and reviewed to serve as explanatory theories related to how female SSAOs implement their gendered communication. As Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) is posited as a theoretical framework of gendered communication, a brief review of three related theories are then presented: Stereotype Threat (Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016), Backlash (Rudman, 1998), and Imposter Phenomenon (Clance and Imes, 1978). As examined in the framework, the implementation and experiences of gendered communication impact each other. As such, Stereotype Threat, Backlash, and Imposter Phenomenon are proposed as additional considerations of how female SSAOs experience gendered communication while Role Congruity Theory will be re-introduced in Chapter 3. The final portion of this chapter highlights previous research which examined gendered communication practices in the workplace to frame the experiences of female SSAOs.

### **Standpoint Theory**

Standpoint Theory stated that "societies are made up of different groups that have different amounts of power and privilege" (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2016, p. 48). By reflecting on an individual's "membership" in a group, one of which is gender, you can understand the experience they encounter (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2016). In approaching this complex topic of

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gendered communication, an accounting for the context and environment of the participants is necessary. As a starting point, this accounting provides an understanding of the space they operate within and the identities they employ. When one gives voice to a marginalized group, in this case women, subjects then are able to provide insight about the environment upon which they are reflecting, in this case experiences and implementation of gendered communication. Serving as a lens in which to view the future research, Standpoint Theory, served to explain the presence of waves of gendered communication over time and its effect on the women in this study. It is important to remember, however, that Standpoint Theory can be used in an intersectional manner and additional consideration should be given to ensure that the experiences of white women do not overshadow those of other racial groups.

For example, historically most women's issues have focused upon the struggles of Caucasian women. A second wave of feminism consisted of several movements led to bring more rights to women in the workplace and elsewhere. This liberal ideology gave way to women's groups including radical feminism and women's liberation movement (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2016). Also, in the second wave, multiracial feminism began to find voice for women from all backgrounds relying on terms like "womanism" to support their movement (p. 64). Most importantly, a third wave of feminism has benefited from and built upon the achievements of second wave movements. "Mainstream third-wave feminism" is distinct in providing more opportunities to all women – multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, abilities, and identities (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2016, p. 72). Key achievements in third wave feminism include the evolution of work outside the home, engagement in traditional male-dominated positions and workforces, and greater awareness of discrimination and harassment of females.

### **Intersectionality**

The following two sections introduce two theories deeply tied to the participant's experience as female SSAOs in the higher education workplace. As Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) stated, intersectionality should be defined as an analysis due to "its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power" (p. 795). Further, by "conceiving of categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power—emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is" (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013, p. 795). However, identities do not simply act independently of each other, but work collaboratively or in partnership with one another. As you cannot easily separate identities from each other, participants were asked to consider how their identities impact their gendered communication. Results, as discussed in Chapter 4, showed some participants considering the cumulative effect of their identities in these gendered communication experiences.

Understanding how multiple, overlapping identities interact is crucial in analyzing the experiences of female SSAOs. Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) wrote that "intersectionality helps reveal how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories" (p. 797). For example, an African American female SSAO's experiences cannot be considered that of just a female SSAO, but her full identity profiles must be considered. The African American identity cannot be separated from the female identity. Understanding how other identities interact is required to fully comprehend the concepts at play. Further, by not considering intersectionality as an analysis, the research contributes to "colorblind intersectionality." As described by Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall

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(2013), “Colorblind intersectionality invites attention to the privileged intersectionalities among politicized constituencies, providing a conceptual account that attends to the unrecognized intersections that underwrite many of the divisions and competing agendas within political movements for greater equality” (p. 802). Therefore, the experiences of the female SSAOs attempt to highlight the intersectionality and unique identities of each participant as they describe and interpret their own gendered communication experiences.

Building upon Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), Lykke (2011) established intersectionality as a:

broad, open-ended and inclusive conceptual tool for feminist analysis . . . [in which it is used] . . . as a thinking technology that encompasses a multiplicity of ways in which the concept is used to analyze how power differentials, normative and identity formations in the terms of categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, nationality, etc., co-produce in/exclusion, mis/recognition, dis/possession, re/distribution, majoritising/minoritizing, etc. (p. 208)

Lykke (2011) later emphasized that instead of “interact[ing],” the identities “intra-act” as they are “clashing against each other but not generating mutual transformations” (p. 208). I find the above characterization and discussion especially important for this research. The higher education workforce, like many others in the United States, are greatly impacted by power and division along the identities that Lykke (2011) discussed. With that, an intersectional analysis was crucial in further understanding how female SSAOs use gendered communication and how gendered communication experiences impact their job satisfaction.

Related, Bonilla-Silva (2011) offered considerations regarding both racial grammar and the concepts of universal data. The reality of the research field is that “stories about whites

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become universal stories about all of us. This is how whites frame these stories symbolically but, of course, this is not the case in reality” (p. 177). In order to effectively establish the data and analysis as representative of female SSAOs the participants ought to be representative of the population serving in these roles. Finally, if the research does not include representative participation and fails to analyze the experiences using an intersectional approach, it is threatened by being considered another project which serves to write a “universal story” (Bonilla-Silva, 2011) without truly being one. With that, I actively sought to gather a diverse participant pool which resulted in 33% of participants identifying as African American, Asian/Asian American, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

### **Expectancy Theory**

Like intersectionality, Vroom’s Expectancy Theory, serves to frame how female SSAOs implement gendered communication in their workplace. Expectancy Theory was established in 1964 by Victor H. Vroom who sought to “describe the components of successful alignment” (Vroom, 2013, p. 271). In brief, Expectancy Theory posited that an individual’s behaviors come about due to their motivation and drive to complete established goals (p. 271). The related proposition of this theory is as follows: “the force on a person to perform an activity or set of activities is a function of the attractiveness or valence of a goal multiplied by the expectancy that the activity will result in the attainment of that goal” (Vroom, 2013, p. 271). Expectancy theory is helpful in identifying why a female SSAO may or may not utilize various gendered communication schema in her workplace communications. For example, a female SSAO establishes a goal to increase funding to her division by 5% and via partnerships with an academic unit. That female may employ other communication tools, those that she may not necessarily typically use, in order to propose partnership with the academic unit lead, perhaps a

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male. By intentionally adjusting her behavior, she is attempting to obtain new funding, of which can accomplish her goal, with the expectation that she will be successful because of that change in behavior.

A 1992 survey of female SSAOs organized by Randall, Daugherty, and Globetti (1995) sought to create a portrait of the population. Their findings created a description of these women, including: demographics, position information, career development, institutional data, and their job satisfaction (Randall, Daugherty, & Globetti, 1995). Unsurprisingly, their data showed “that the female senior student affairs officer is characteristically white, middle-aged, married, and has been in the student affairs field for more than ten years” (Randall et al., 1995, p. 19). Most interestingly is the author’s discussion within the job satisfaction findings. Beyond the average satisfaction data, they found that “financial problems, politics, lack of support, and time demands” (Randall et al., 1995, p. 21) were the features of their positions which are greater challenges. Relevant to Expectancy Theory, this study found that “women are particularly underprepared for the ‘games and politics’ that are so traditionally a part of top level administrative positions” (Randall et al., 1995, p. 21). Similarly, female SSAOs may potentially be unprepared due to their default feminine communication style that emphasizes communal and collaborative work over competition for resources and objectives.

### **Stereotype Threat**

Stereotype Threat is a situation in which members of a stigmatized group find themselves in a situation where negative stereotypes provide a possible framework for interpreting their behavior . . . the risk of being judged in light of those stereotypes can elicit a disruptive state that undermines performance and aspirations in that domain. (Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016, p. 415)

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This particular concept has a wealth of related studies specifically focused on women independently (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005; Flore & Wicherts, 2015; Halberg, 1987; Heilman, 2001; Iffert, 2014; von Hippel, Wiryakusuma, Bowden, & Shochet, 2011) or comparing men and women (Heilman & Chen, 2005; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008; Mulac, Incontro, & James, 1985). Although Stereotype Threat and Backlash Effect share some common concepts, and originate in essentially the same theories, I perceive Stereotype Threat to be more antagonizing than backlash as the term “threat” infers an offensive standing. This in comparison to Backlash Effect which is a defensive term indicating the resulting actions rather than the offensive actions against another. Regardless, there is no doubt that both theories are problematic and research summarized within this chapter indicates negative effect on the recipient.

### **Backlash Effect**

While many studies reference the Backlash Effect, Laurie Rudman introduced this concept and continues to produce research regarding its vast effect on many related topics (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001; Rudman & Kilianski, 2000; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Rudman’s work examines the concept thoroughly and observes various hypotheses which mitigate or manage Backlash Effect.

In “Self-promotion as a risk factor for women: The costs and benefits of counter stereotypical impression management” Rudman (1998) issued a basic understanding that Backlash Effect occurs when “negating expectancies can backfire on women, causing them to be rejected for violating gender role prescriptions” (p. 630). This particular study, involving three individual experiments, examined self-promotion and motivation within a job interview environment. All three premised on the consideration that, for self-promotion, it is “intuitively

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more normative and acceptable for men than for women” (Rudman, 1998, p. 629). Although the results had varying alignment with earlier research (some conflict with Carli, 1990 and Carli et al., 1995), Rudman (1998) found evidence that “it may still be problematic for women to speak directly and assertively about their own skills and qualifications, especially in the presence of other women, despite the fact that doing so decreases their chances of being negatively stereotyped” (p. 634). The heart of this finding speaks to the experiences of female student affairs professionals or SSAOs in the workplace and may impact the career pipeline from entry level staff to executive on to president or chief officer of the institution. Additionally, in this study, and other related studies, there are important findings on how gender mitigates the perceptions of female behavior. Including, and most interestingly, this study found that in two experiments men participants “liked the self-promoting female target more than women did” indicating that the greater issues do not necessarily stem from an opposite-gender construct (Rudman, 1998, p. 635). In conclusion, as Rudman (1998) states, “women may be stuck in a Catch-22 in which they are damned if they do self-promote, and damned if they do not” (p. 629). Of course, one may exchange “self-promote” for any other stereotypical masculine trait, as we see in the research below.

Rudman and Glick (1999) built upon the self-promotion study to examine the effects of a feminized management position. In a growing trend of feminization of positions, would a female or male be preferred? The study found that hiring for feminized positions resulted in discrimination towards agentic women over agentic men. Further than what is purposed in Rudman (1998), Rudman and Glick (1999) stated that “stereotypes of women's communality are particularly prescriptive (more so than stereotypes of men's agency), and that perceived violations of this prescription can lead to employment discrimination when interpersonal skills

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become an explicit job requirement” (p. 1004). This discussion directly highlighted female SSAO’s role expectations. As Rudman and Glick (1999) stated, “because women are held to a higher standard of niceness than men, they may be more likely to be punished for perceived violations of these standards” (p. 1004). Consequentially, agentic women face being considered “interpersonally insensitive” despite their clear competence in the role (Rudman & Glick, 1999, p. 1004). In feminized positions (vs. masculinized positions), “the perception that agentic women are not nice may elicit hiring discrimination when interpersonal skills are explicit criterion for the job” (Rudman & Glick, 1999, p. 1005). Results of this study re-confirmed the findings in Rudman (1998) in which agentic women were rated lower on likeability than agentic men and hiring discrimination was more frequent when the position was feminized (Rudman & Glick, 1999).

In student affairs, arguably the most feminized workplace in the academy, SSAOs are expected to be competent in their roles yet remain “nice” in order to avoid backlash against their colleagues, subordinates, students, faculty, and staff. Interestingly, Rudman and Glick (1999) hypothesized that by feminizing management, especially mid-level positions, workplaces may be encouraging the discrimination of “competent and ambitious” women (p. 1009).

“Prescriptive gender stereotypes and backlash towards agentic women” by Rudman and Glick (2001) sought to recreate the 1999 study while contributing additional significant findings regarding Backlash Effect. In another simulated hiring experience, students were presented with “feminized” and “masculine” positions in which “agentic” or “androgynous” candidates were selected (Rudman & Glick, 2001). This study also explored implicit and explicit stereotypes. Their conclusion speaks directly to the experience, in my estimation, of what SSAOs encounter:

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The prescription to “be feminine” while simultaneously fulfilling agentic requisites is akin to walking a delicate tightrope, where the consequences of losing one’s balance are both social and economic. By placing women in double jeopardy, the mandate to “direct while not being directive” is also costly psychologically and in terms of mental resources. (Rudman & Glick, 2001, p. 759)

The research specifically found that females who fail “to ‘soften’ female agency—to explicitly counteract it by projecting an image that is both nice and able—results in backlash” (Rudman & Glick, 2001, p. 759). Thus, SSAOs who do not actively work to be agentic, appear competent, and overtly “nice” face backlash from both peers and colleagues.

Similar to Rudman and Glick (2001), Rudman and Kilianski (2000) explored explicit and implicit gender behavior. However, instead of focusing on the workplace directly, Rudman and Kilianski (2000) explored implicit and explicit attitudes toward female authority, now exploring the concepts of gender role, gender stereotype and gender authority (p. 1315). Gender role attributes disparities to traditional gender stratifications, whereas gender authority reviews the workplace specifically in that each gender has roles and experiences simply by its presence (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000, p. 1315). Gender stereotype hypothesizes that via the expectancies in gender authority, women who are in authority positions face negative attitudes towards their incongruent gender authority (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000, p. 1316). Rudman and Kilianski (2000) believed that the presence of the gender stereotype may potentially support the presence of discrimination (p. 1324). The conclusions “suggest that negative reactions to female authority may stem, in part, from an implicit prototype for male leaders and the attendant belief that it is more natural for men to take control” (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000, p.1325). This study is relevant to the SSAO position as well in that females are largely underrepresented amongst high-

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level administrators in higher education (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). Low numbers of female administrators may reinforce negative reactions against female authority as the majority male workplace reinforces gender role, gender stereotype, and gender authority.

Several years later Rudman and Phelan (2008) continued the discussion of agency in women leaders while revisiting the concept of “impression-management” explored in Rudman’s 1998 study. In this unique review there is additional connections established between job satisfaction, or lack thereof, and the experiences women leaders face as they exhibit agency, to appear competent, while falling victim to backlash. As Rudman and Phelan (2008) concluded, this dilemma has serious consequences for gender parity, as it undermines women at every stage of their careers. It also has consequences for organizations, as it likely contributes to female managers’ higher rates of job disaffection and turnover, relative to male counterparts. (p. 61)

In summary, “this dilemma effectively forces women to choose between gender identity and their career – a choice men are not required to make” (Rudman & Phelan, 2008, p.74). The last statement speaks specifically to what I hypothesize is a direct impact on SSAOs. As professionals leading a feminized and majority female division, SSAOs may be expected to exhibit the communality of their gender role yet appear competent to effectively lead the division. However, to their majority male colleagues (i.e. cabinet-level administrators), they are called to appear agentic, to a degree, as to avoid crossing the boundaries of gender authority. Their colleagues, however, largely lead masculinized workplaces in which their gender authority is reinforced and supported. The differences between the experiences of the SSAO and their male colleagues bring to life the dilemma explained above.

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Building upon all work completed in the 2000s, a 2012 series of studies by Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Nauts examined an active preservation of male authority via what is termed status incongruity hypothesis or SIH (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan & Nauts, 2012, p.165). Comparing Rudman and Kilianski (2000), these studies specifically built upon the gender role, gender stereotype and gender authority hypotheses. A popular term of Rudman, they examined the “catch 22” women leaders face: agency represents competence and a female’s leader ability to be selected for a position, however, too much competence or agency results in backlash (Rudman et al., 2012). Their findings indicated that “gender status rules virtually guarantee men's greater access to power and resources, resulting in a system that rewards men for leadership abilities while punishing comparable women, thereby reinforcing the perceived conflict between a women’s gender and power” (Rudman et al., 2012, p. 176). As Rudman would say, SSAOs also find themselves in a classic “catch-22.” They are at first expected to be skilled and competent leaders of divisions that serve the entire student population and manage the operations of hundreds of employees.

This “catch-22” includes required skills such as a deftness for budget, resource management, human resources, student development, problem solving, and motivation – to name a few. As female SSAOs lead a “feminized” division of a female majority workforce they may more typically utilize a communal nature common of feminine communication practices. Conversely, they are also asked to be equally effective and collaborative colleagues at the cabinet level. This may call for assertive and agentic communication tactic in order to show competence, all components of masculine communication. However, this use of masculine communication practices may result in a role incongruence and Backlash Effect for the SSAOs among their, largely male, cabinet colleagues. As Rudman posited above, a female leader must

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appear both competent, to be selected for the position, and within their gender role, as to not result in backlash or negative interpersonal or professional repercussions.

Several related studies and articles were found that examine many similar topics to Rudman's Backlash Effect including role stereotypes (Baker, 2014; Bosak & Sczesny, 2011), expectancy violations (Burgoon, 1993), identity conflict (Cadsby, Servátka, & Song, 2013), status expectations (Farley, 2008), role incongruity (Korenman, Wetzler, Carroll, & Velilla, 2019), and social influence (Reid, Keerie, & Palomares, 2003).

Many researchers included conversation related to Backlash Effect to explain or study other concepts that are mitigated by this theory. These studies examined competition (Cadsby, Servátka, & Song, 2013), credibility (Blickenstaff, 2011), humor (Holmes, 2006), influence (Carli, 2013), negotiation (Compton, 2005), performance evaluations (Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008), and reward (Blevins, Sauerwald, Hoobler, & Robertson, 2019; Weinberg, Treviño, & Cleveland, 2015). Although these concepts may certainly align with the female student affairs professional experience, I believe two topics most closely align with female SSAO gendered communication: leadership (Badura, Grijalva, Newman, Yan, & Jeon, 2018; Baker, 2014; Bosak & Sczesny, 2011; Burton & Weiner, 2016; Dugan, 1996; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Whisenant, Lee, & Dees, 2015) and likeability (Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995).

### ***Leadership***

As noted above, there were several studies which connect content related to Backlash Effect with leadership roles, competencies, and skills. Eagly and Karau (2002) illustrated the backlash female leaders experience based on gendered communication experiences. Instead of relating this towards Rudman's Backlash Effect, Eagly and Karau (2002) termed this behavior as

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prejudice. Specifically, the authors stated that women face two types of prejudice when faced with a “perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 573). The first prejudice looks forward: viewing the women as less competent than men for future leadership roles. This type of prejudice is most impacted by the masculinization of “ideal” leadership traits and the perceptions of the rater (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 577). The second form of prejudice examined both men and women already in a leadership role, showing evidence that the woman was rated less competent in that role. This form is described as “the extent that women fulfill their leader roles in a particularly dominant, assertive, directive, or self-promoting style, they present greater deviation from the injunctive norms of the female gender role and would receive less positive reactions” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 578). Female student affairs professionals could be stymied by the first prejudice, never making it to the second. For example, if a female professional is viewed as less competent than a male competitor, how are they to be appointed as an SSAO to begin? This pipeline causes an immediate backup at the initial phase causing greater harm to potential female leaders.

Both types of prejudice are potentially highly relevant to the female SSAO experience. The first form may provide a justification of why the female SSAO population is not representative of the larger number of females in lower student affairs positions. The second form may impact job satisfaction for current female SSAOs in their roles. If they are consistently rated lower than male cabinet-level colleagues, female SSAOs may question their commitment to the position or institution deciding ultimately that they are not happy within the role.

Whisenant, Lee, and Dees (2015) created and implemented a study to test role congruity for female athletics directors (AD). Interestingly, it appeared the rate of women in the AD role was similar to that of women in cabinet-level positions in the academy. Whisenant, Lee, and

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Dees (2015) stated that 43% of coaches and 20% of Athletics Directors are women (p. 475). Comparatively, a 2009 report from the White House Project found that 23% of university presidents and 40% of chief academic officers were women. Both sets of statistics indicated a majority male workplace for both the female SSAOs and ADs. Whisenet, Lee, and Dees (2015) found support in their findings for the presence of role incongruity effects among female ADs. As they stated, “the very presence of women in leadership positions violated the ingrained norms and expectations that even male coaches who were low in sexist attitudes followed the trend of perceiving female athletic director as less favorable” (Whisenet, Lee, & Dees, 2015, p. 483). In summary, the mere experience of being a female AD resulted in prejudice from male coaches who found those women “less favorable.”

Although this study was specifically related to sports and highly individualized skills and concepts focused on “fairness,” it still related to the female SSAO experience. The female SSAO, it was believed, would face a similar backlash or stereotype to female ADs as their perceived gender and leadership roles would be in conflict. Of additional importance is to further consider the individual evaluating the female SSAO. Is it their largely male colleagues or supervisor, or is it their largely female workforce? For example, if it is a male colleague or supervisor, they could be evaluating the female SSAO based on gendered expectations of a leader that historically have aligned with masculine behavior. Similarly, a largely female workforce Depending on the audience, the backlash could be based on underlying assumptions from their leadership bias and what they expect from the female SSAO.

### *Likeability*

Although not explicitly relating the research to Backlash Effect, Carli, LaFleur, and Loeber (1995) examined aspects of likeability and influence related to gendered communication

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practices. Their results indicated that when men rated women who use masculine communication practices they are consistently rated lower on both likeability and influence (Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995). Further, although both male and female speakers were successful in a “social style,” results indicated that women who used a “social style” were more likeable and influential (Carli et al., 1995). In summary, Carli, LaFleur, and Loeber (1995) determined that “women who display high-status behavior are threatening to a male audience unless they also communicate that they have no desire to usurp male status” (p. 1038). Related to the Backlash Effect, this publication found that women who acted outside of the expected feminine communication style risked lower likeability and influence unless it was tempered by a “social style” in order to relieve males that their status was not in danger. Otherwise, the women’s likeability was threatened.

SSAOs are the leaders of their divisions, often commanding the work of hundreds of staff members at the institution. This role, often times, may command “high-status behavior” in order to manage the requirements the large division entails. However, amongst their colleagues, female SSAOs may temper these communication practices in order to manage the interpersonal interactions and relationships required to be successful at the cabinet-level.

### **Imposter Phenomenon**

The Imposter Phenomenon (IP), introduced by Clance and Imes (1978), was defined as “women who experience the imposter phenomenon maintain a strong belief that they are not intelligent; in fact, they are convinced that they have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise” (p. 241). Women who exhibit this phenomenon also experience “clinical symptoms” such as “generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration” in their workplace (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241). Clance and Imes (1978) identified four behaviors of this

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phenomenon: (a) overworking to avoid being “discovered,” (b) masking true knowledge and feelings to support the interests of supervisors or superiors, (c) interpersonal behavior to gain favor with superiors in an effort “to be liked as well as to be recognized as intellectually special,” (p. 244) and (d) displaying behavior to avoid appearing confident which would be considered anti-feminine and thus be ostracized by colleagues.

Building from Clance and Imes (1978), there are several studies that examine Imposter Phenomenon as related to perfectionism (Dudau, 2013) and prevalence among faculty (Knights, 2014, Hutchins, 2015, Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2016). This section serves to introduce research related to mitigating Imposter Phenomenon behavior (Patzak et al, 2017) and how imposter behaviors are articulated and differentiated (Leonhardt et al, 2017).

Dudau (2013) studied the relationship between Imposter Phenomenon and perfectionism, determining that perfectionism is exhibited in both “conscientious and self-evaluative” forms (p. 130). Based on Clance and Imes (1978), Dudau (2013) reinforced six symptoms of Imposter Phenomenon: “the need to be the best, the erroneous perception that superhuman qualities are normal, fear of failure, fear and guilt about success and the tendency to discount personal competencies” (p. 130). Their results found that participants who exhibited Imposter Phenomenon sought to gain parental approval, were difficult on themselves in the workplace in that they required validation from colleagues, take sub-par performance harshly, and had difficulty with criticism (Dudau, 2013). Although Imposter Phenomenon was not related to conscientious perfectionism, Dudau (2013) believed this could have been due to misunderstandings about the adaptations of Imposter Phenomenon and thus recommends further study on these topics.

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Leonhardt, Bechtoldt, and Rohrmann (2017) studied the Imposter Phenomenon prevalence or reliance differentiated by position or circumstances. Results indicated that there were two distinct categories of Imposter Phenomenon behavior. The first category resembled traditional Imposter Phenomenon as theorized by Clance and Imes (1978) in which individuals exhibited high anxiety and negative emotions and, in the work setting, had a tendency of perfectionism, low self-regard, and exhibited procrastination (Leonhardt et al., 2017, p. 6). The second group was labeled as “strategic imposters” (Leonhardt et al., 2017, p.7). These individuals were found to inconsistently exhibit Imposter Phenomenon behavior in that they exhibited positive self-concept, fell short of what would be described as perfectionism, had no markedly high anxiety levels, and generally had positive moods. So why would there be two different groups who were somehow regarded as both having Imposter Phenomenon? Leonhardt et al. (2017) theorized that the second group, strategic imposters, use this behavior to create an atmosphere of lowered expectations. With that, the individuals “downplayed” their strengths so that when they performed at a higher level success is more prized (Leonhardt et al., 2017, p.8).

Similar to Leonhardt et al. (2017), Patzak, Kollmayer, and Schober (2017) examined mitigating factors in Imposter Phenomenon behavior and how self-compassion may act as a “resilience factor” for those impacted. They analyzed Imposter Phenomenon behaviors and their prevalence in academic faculty as they sought to find what resiliency factors or “interventions” can be made to positively benefit “young and promising” academics in retention (Patzak et al., 2017, p. 3). Patzak et al. (2017) found a statistically relevant connection between gender and Imposter Phenomenon behaviors. In summary, male and androgynous students exhibited far less negative Imposter Phenomenon behaviors than the female participants. Additionally, results indicated that students who exhibited Imposter Phenomenon behavior have a negative

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association with positive self-compassion behavior and lacked “self-kindness and mindfulness” (Patzak et al., 2017, p. 8). Other behaviors included propensity for focusing on their life’s negative components, isolation, judgmental of their self and their actions, and negative outlook on their inclination for failure. With these findings, Patzak et al. (2017) established a connection between self-compassion as a resilience factor in Imposter Phenomenon behavior and have hypothesized that learning or improving one’s self-compassion can increase success amongst the young women in the study.

Finally, three studies analyzed Imposter Phenomenon tendencies among faculty members (Knights and Clarke, 2014; Hutchins, 2015; Hutchins and Rainbolt, 2016). Knights and Clarke (2014) found that there were three types of participants: “imposters, aspirants, and existentialists” (p. 341). “Imposters” were found to be consistent with Clance and Imes (1978) while aspirants looked beyond their current station in life towards a position or lifestyle in which they aspire to (Knights & Clarke, 2014). The third and final group, existentialists, faced uncertainty and doubt between fulfilling their positions and finding ultimate purpose in their positions, including a constant analysis of their work and self-questioning related to purpose. Hutchins (2015) looked to correlate Imposter Phenomenon behavior with emotional exhaustion and coping skills and found that faculty, most notably untenured, exhibit Imposter Phenomenon behavior and that Imposter Phenomenon is positively correlated to emotional exhaustion. Patzak et al. (2017), as reviewed earlier, was also concerned by this prevalence in that retention of qualified faculty members was hindered by this phenomenon. Hutchins (2015) found that those faculty exhibiting high levels of Imposter Phenomenon behavior successfully mitigated this behavior with coping skills. In a similar study, Hutchins and Rainbolt (2017) uncovered four key

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themes or incidents that triggered Imposter Phenomenon behavior: “questioning expertise,” “scholarly productivity,” “comparison with colleagues,” and “successes.”

### **Gendered Communication in the Workplace**

To date, I have not been successful in identifying research which reviewed the higher education landscape, specifically SSAOs, and the use of gendered communication. However, despite that, there is related research that systematically reviews the impact of gendered communication in general.

Eagly and Carli’s (2010) chapter *Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership* established the issue of small numbers of female leaders and noted that it is really due not to “glass ceilings,” but to a maze of roadblocks or walls that prohibit female advancement. As they described, “passage through a labyrinth is not simple or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one’s progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead” (Eagly & Carli, 2010, p. 440). Further, like a labyrinth – the goal is not easily visible as well as the obstacles that await. Because of this, the result becomes difficult or impossible to obtain. What are these obstacles? *Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership* (2010) established “vestiges of prejudice,” “resistance to women’s leadership,” and “issues of leadership style” (pp. 440 – 441). “Vestiges of prejudice” explains the effect of long established preferences and prejudice towards masculine behaviors. Behaviors that have been long supported through higher wages, policies unfriendly to family development, and general workplace behaviors that are more aligned with a masculine lifestyle. “Resistance to women’s leadership” accounts for the “shared conscious or unconscious mental associations about women, men, and leadership” (Eagly & Carli, 2010, p. 441). Long-term reinforcement of successful leadership traits including agency, forcefulness, and ambition, which are more aligned with masculine traits, have resulted in an unconscious preference towards male

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leaders who exhibit them. This leaves women leaders, who exhibit more egalitarian leadership, ostracized despite their success in those measures. Finally, “issues of leadership style” continues to build upon the “resistance to women’s leadership” in which women are left confused by how to contribute as a leader in the workplace. This crisis of skills acts as a deterrent to females who perceive it to mean they are not as competent as their male peers. For example, traditional leadership styles may closely align with masculine leadership traits, therefore, feminine leadership traits may be considered unfit for position as they do not easily align.

### **Summary**

This chapter serves to create a foundation upon which to connect female SSAO gendered communication experiences and implementation. Standpoint Theory, a key viewpoint which positions female SSAO participants, examines the importance of the individual’s experience as central to the research. I then presented related theories in which the data will be analyzed and presented, built upon the theoretical framework presented in Chapter one. All of which serves as the springboard to explore the implementation and gendered communication experiences of female SSAOs in the following chapters.

### **Chapter 3. Method**

#### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) as they implement and navigate gendered communication practices in the higher education workplace through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. There is a lack of research regarding the gendered communication experiences of female SSAOs. As such, this study proposes to contribute to a body of research regarding SSAOs, distinguish itself among a smaller amount of communication research, and stand out as work specifically examining gendered communication.

#### **Research Questions**

This research is framed with the overarching objective to examine the gendered communication practices of female SSAOs: How do female SSAOs make sense of their gendered communication practices and experiences? A second question aims to address specific interest in what guides gendered communication practices: How do the perceptions of the female SSAO's communication practices impact their experiences?

#### **Research Design**

Phenomenology is a qualitative research technique established by Husserl to “capture experience in its primordial origin or essence, without interpreting, explaining or theorizing” (van Maren, 2017a, p. 775). Further, van Maren (2017a) stated that:

Phenomenology, if practiced well, enthralls us with insights into the enigma of life as we experience it—the world as it gives and reveals itself to the wondering gaze— thus asking us to be forever attentive to the fascinating varieties and subtleties of primal lived experience and consciousness in all its remarkable complexities, fathomless depths, rich details, startling disturbances, and luring charms. (p. 779)

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In its true sense, phenomenology examines a lived experience, asking “what is this (primal) experience like (van Maren, 2017b)?”

There are two distinct and well-reviewed pathways for phenomenology research: descriptive and interpretive. Descriptive phenomenology is a continuation of Hesserl’s concepts and beliefs regarding the lived experience. As Wojnar and Swanson (2007) examined, Hesserl believed research was best done individually with independent researchers and participants in which the researcher used “attentive listening, interaction, and observation to create representation of reality more sophisticated than previous understandings” (p. 173). Additionally, descriptive phenomenology, in order to isolate the experience being studied, required the use of bracketing: “consciously and actively seeking to strip away prior experiential knowledge and personal bias so as not to influence the description of the phenomenon” (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173). Bracketing includes three steps: isolation and separation, breaking down the phenomenon, and acknowledging and “suspending preconceptions” of the phenomenon (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173).

The second pathway of phenomenology research is interpretive, or hermeneutic, established by Hesserl’s student Heidegger who believed that research participants were capable of providing interpretation of their experiences related to a phenomenon (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173). Unlike descriptive tenants, Heidegger did not believe that phenomenon and experiences can be separated as outlined in bracketing. Instead, the *dasein*, described as “the human way of being in the world,” has to be considered to fully understand how the experience is placed within the larger global context (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 174). Additionally, instead of bracketing, Heidegger believed that researchers should instead understand, before undertaking their research, their own biases, experiences, and beliefs in order that they may

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better connect with the interpretations of the participants (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). This concept was titled the “hermeneutic circle” and is well described by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) as being “concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels. To understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole you look to the parts” (p. 29). For example, in order to understand the use of gendered communication practices by a female SSAO, you must also examine the context of the immediate environment, the organizational structure or norms, and the strategic goals of the relationship.

Recent research continues to produce relevant and contemporary arguments for the use of phenomenology. For example, Wilson (2015) outlined four key benefits of this research design: understanding, uncovering, explication, and empowerment (pp. 40-41). Beyond the benefit of understanding the lived experience, mentioned above by van Maren, Wilson (2015) wrote that phenomenology allows for participants to explicate meaning from their experiences with the help of discussion from the researcher (p. 41). I find this particularly useful in the experiences of gendered communication for female SSAOs. Gendered communication, I believe, is something experienced, but perhaps not to a level in which understanding of practices occurs. A participant may understand or be aware of the fact that they experience frequent interruption from their male colleagues. However, they may not reflect and examine how that experience relates to their own performance, how they unconsciously respond to the interruption, or how that interruption may affect their own communication. In the end, although they experience gendered communication practices and effects, they have not achieved understanding and empowerment. Finally, Wilson (2015) argued that phenomenology allows for the empowerment of participants through their

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sharing of experiences (p. 41). This study includes detailed accounts and vivid descriptions of experiences so that the reader may understand these experiences, too.

Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis, or IPA, was established by Jonathan Smith who sought “an approach to psychology which was able to capture the experiential and qualitative, and which could still dialogue with mainstream psychology” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 4). IPA was selected for this study because it is described as an “approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). What is the clarifying difference, therefore, between Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis and interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology?

Smith, Flower, and Larkin (2009) described IPA as a technique rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (p. 12). Phenomenology and hermeneutics are both outlined above in detail leaving idiography undiscussed thus far and a deliberate difference between the two phenomenological paths. Idiography calls for research to focus on the detail of the experience or the “particular” in both an individual and a worldly perspective (Smith et al., p. 29). To achieve this focus, research examines detail at two levels: “depth of analysis” and consideration of how “particular experiential phenomena have been understood from the perspectives of particular people, in a particular context” (Smith et al., p. 29). In short, we must understand how the individual perceives an experience in addition to how others perceived the experience.

It is because of this combination of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography that IPA is situated well to accomplish examination of female SSAO experiences. For what Smith, Flower, and Larkin (2009) argued, IPA is “concerned with understanding personal lived experiences and thus with exploring persons’ relatedness to, or involvement in, a particular event

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or process” (p. 40). Through examining the gendered communication experiences of female SSAOs, how practices are both experienced but also implemented, we will come to understand how the participants “make sense” of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009, p. 40).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) is used to provide context in examining the phenomenon of gendered communication in the experiences of the SSAOs. Overall, Role Congruity Theory uniquely considers the effects of gender, expectations, and position in a way that replicates the experiences of female SSAOs. Role Congruity Theory hinges on the perceptions of one party regarding the prescriptive behaviors of the another. Interactions impact the involved parties in positive, more neutral, and negative ways. Of particular interest is whether the parties “align” or face “backlash” for their expected communication traits. Alignment occurs when an individual’s gendered communication matches with their presumed gender identity, for example, a male exhibits masculine communication schema.

### **Sample**

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) expressed that Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) should use purposeful sampling as the research attempts to examine a specific experience (p. 48). With that, elaborate sampling techniques were forgone in an attempt to include female SSAOs in a way which provided space for their experiences and insight into the phenomenon.

SSAOs are a unique population. By title, they are the one, and only, lead administrator responsible for the division, department or unit of student affairs. Their direct peers are not at their institution, but located within the many universities and colleges across the country. As leaders, they attend high-level conferences, engage in large, yet personal, professional networks, and connect with their peers through their unique, demanding positions. As such, their time is

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valuable and reserving two hours is difficult to arrange. To further examine and focus the sample, a beta study was completed in Fall 2019 to study female student affairs professionals and their gendered communication practices. Additionally, I had hoped to uncover best practices of participant recruitment in order to benefit future engagement.

### *Fall 2019 Beta Study*

In August 2019, I began formal, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved research of gendered communication practices with a quantitative study sampling female student affairs professionals. All participants were recruited via online advertisements, targeted newsletters, and word-of-mouth. After completing the survey, participants were asked if they wished to participate in a future research study further examining gendered communication and related concepts. In total, 140 participants completed survey. With the success of that study, I engaged in a similar participant recruitment plan.

### *Participant Recruitment*

Recruitment included outreach to Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education's (NASPA) "Women in Student Affairs" and "Center for Women," the Association of Student Conduct Administrators (ASCA) "Women of Student Conduct," College Student Educators International's (ACPA) "Coalition for Women's Identities," and a personal/professional social media group colloquially named "SAMS" or "Student Affairs Moms." All groups allowed for social media posting and both NASPA groups included the survey request in their community newsletter.

In addition to the "pipelines" identified above, I recruited additional participants through purposeful sampling with the assistance of gatekeepers. With the support of several SSAOs, who have so far shown great interest in these experiences, I connected with their networks to expand

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the research to unknown participants who contributed new perspectives and created a sample in which a diversity of experiences and demographics were present. It is believed that most participants who engaged in this study were recruited through these gatekeepers.

Finally, I engaged with NASPA's research professionals to inquire about partnerships available with their organization. I was pleased to be connected with the Data Analytics professionals who requested the study proposal and proof of IRB approval. After completing their process, I was provided a list of NASPA members who self-identify as women or female and as the SSAO of their institution. This data request resulted in a list of 709 potential participants including their name, institution, and mailing address. The list did not include their e-mail address. Due to the length of the list, and the time required to find the related e-mail addresses, I once again engaged in purposeful sampling. Taking the entire list, I sorted the names by state and then reviewed each position within the state for a common SSAO title. For example, many states were comprised of "coordinator" or "academic advisor" titles which would normally fall below the SSAO level. As such, I intentionally selected one individual from each state which was assumed to be an SSAO with titles similar to "dean of students," or "vice president for student affairs." Five participants were recruited through this method. All combined, this study includes the experiences of 18 female SSAOs.

### **Participant Information**

Table 1, below, includes the profiles of the 18 participants who contributed data. Many of their attributes are identified to provide a summary of their professional context, however, I have omitted demographic information that may compromise their confidentiality. Figure 2 illustrates one demographic category and four key contextual components of the female SSAO participant workplace.

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**Table 1**

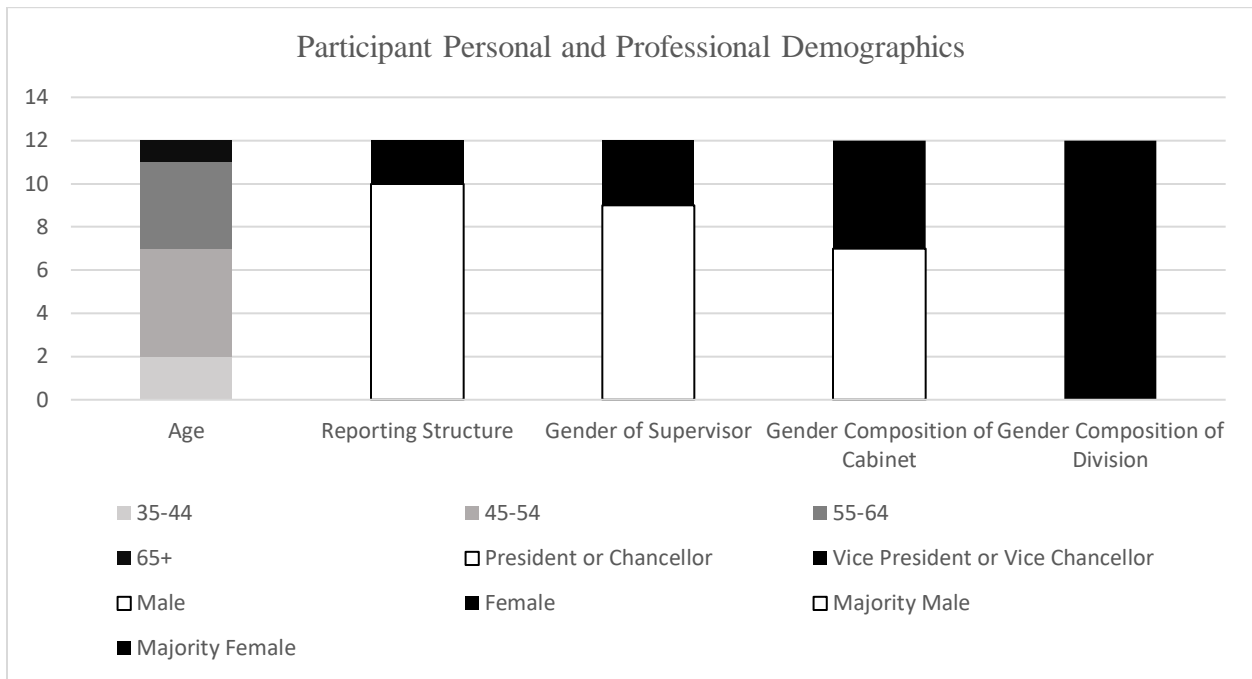
*Study Participant Personal and Professional Attributes*

Participant	Time at Institution	Degree Obtainment	Institution Classification	NASPA Region	Institution Size
1	5 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Private not-for-profit	Region IV-E	1,000 to 3,000
2	16 years	Master's Degree	4-year Private not-for-profit	Region VI	1,000 to 3,000
3	22 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region V	20,000 to 30,000
4	6.5 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region IV-E	15,000 to 20,000
5	23 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Private not-for-profit	Region III	3,000 to 10,000
6	34 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region VI	15,000 to 20,000
7	14 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region VI	3,000 to 10,000
8	12 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Private not-for-profit	Region I	3,000 to 10,000
9	3 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region V	15,000 to 20,000
10	15 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region IV-W	10,000 to 15,000
11	3 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region VI	Above 30,000
12	2 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region V	10,000 to 15,000
13	5 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region VI	3,000 to 10,000
14	12 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Public	Region VI	20,000 to 30,000
15	<1 year	Terminal Degree	4-year Private not-for-profit	Region III	3,000 to 10,000
16	5 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Private not-for-profit	Region IV-W	1,000 to 3,000
17	5 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Private not-for-profit	Region III	3,000 to 10,000
18	33 years	Terminal Degree	4-year Private not-for-profit	Region VI	3,000 to 10,000

*Note.* Of the participants, 12 identified as “White or Caucasian,” four as “Asian or Asian American,” one as “Black or African American,” and one as “Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.” This information was not attributed in the table as doing so may have compromised the confidentiality of participants.

**Figure 2**

*Study Participant Personal and Professional Attributes*



*Note.* Additional personal and professional demographic information for participants.

**Research Procedure**

Data was collected in two stages within this Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis design. With the time limitations of this population, the multiple stage qualitative collection allowed for what Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) called for when they recommended “in-depth interviews” and “diary” reflection (pp. 56-57). In the initial design, participants were asked to complete the consent document followed by a pre-interview reflection activity and personal and professional demographic survey. Although not explicitly constructed from the IPA design, this pre-interview reflection assisted in priming the participants with reflection and consideration toward the content to be discussed in the second stage. Based on experiences in four pilot interviews studying gendered communication, I found that the average participant did not have a consistent foundation of knowledge about the subject. In fact, two participants had little or no

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immediate knowledge of various communication practices or consideration that there may be descriptive or prescriptive attributes of masculine and feminine communication. As such, the reflection primed the participants on the phenomenon of gendered communication to better provide thoughtful and reflective responses within the second stage. The reflection activity is provided in Appendix A.

After completing the survey and reflection, participants were asked to provide contact information to schedule the interview. Interview questions were designed based on the gendered communication schema research, to incorporate the selected framework, and to thoroughly examine the experiences at the heart of gendered communication. For example, participants were asked about any experiences they had with masculine communication schema. Had they ever been interrupted? Spoken over? Had they witnessed another individual exhibiting those behaviors? Special note was made that masculine communication schema can be exhibited by any individual of any gender. Previously, a beta study was created using a sample of four high-level female administrators who reflected on their experiences with gendered communication. With no previous information and scholarship to build upon, prepared questions were proposed to gather their understanding and experiences of the concepts being studied. However, participants in the pilot study were intentionally chosen as I believed them to be more experienced in defining concepts, creating thoughtful questions, and reflecting on their behavior and experiences in a comprehensive manner.

IPA semi-structured interviews should additionally consider a structure in which participants are asked to share their experiences, in a narrative form, as well as encouraged to examine and interpret those experiences within their own contexts (Smith et al., 2009). Per the recommendations, the questions included a strategic movement through description to

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interpretation of the gendered communication phenomenon to accomplish a substantive review within 90 minutes. For example, the first and second section of the interview specifically asked participants to describe how they implement communication or what experiences they have had with those they supervise, colleagues, and their supervisor. The final section was dedicated to the interpretation of their implementation of gendered communication and how their identities may impact their communication. The proposed interview questions are provided in Appendix B.

### *COVID-19*

In March 2020, a global pandemic known as COVID-19 enveloped the world. This highly contagious disease caused vacations, travel, conferences, and events to be cancelled for the safety of all participants. Student Affairs divisions were the front line of this decision, and among many tasks were: managing residence halls, student life, recreation centers, and registrar and admissions operations. Additionally, these divisions were called to further orchestrate the re-opening of campuses for the Fall 2020 semester, including: reconsideration of residence hall layout for safe housing, health and counseling services to address student crisis, registration and financial aid for response to adjusting course modality, veterans and international students for course registration changes, new student orientation adjustments to serve an entirely online purpose, and CARES act funding request organization and disbursement. Thus, the population, Senior Student Affairs Officers, as executives in each institution and crisis or emergency responders on campus, were leading or co-leading an institution's overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included migration of students on- or off-campus, opening or closing of health centers and counseling centers and recreation centers, responding to student behavior in a new online arena, disbursement of CARES act funding and general student-related issues that now occurred in the time of great anxiety and concern.

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With this in mind, recruiting, confirming, and gathering data from participants became increasingly difficult. Originally to have occurred at a national conference, with nearly 10,000 participants, the communications were now moved into an entirely online landscape. Additionally, the original timeline was scheduled to occur from February to April 2020, the peak timeframe occurred at the start of the pandemic and stalled as campuses struggled to find solutions and responses to the growing crises in their communities. As many campuses concluded the Spring 2020 term, recruitment began again with a full push to enroll, confirm and gather data from those that were interested in participating.

### *Data Collection*

Because of the pandemic, the research design and timeline was altered significantly due to participant availability. Suddenly needing to manage the crises on campus, participants were no longer available in March, April, and May 2020 for two hour interviews. As such, the plan for conference-based interviews was cancelled in lieu of virtual modality and the total time shortened to 90 minutes to accommodate participant schedules.

Further, due to a lack of initial response, the design of participant interaction was changed significantly. This procedure change drastically shortened the timeline from consent, survey, reflection, contact information, interview to consent, contact information, survey, reflection, and interview. This adjustment is estimated to have increased total participants from three to 18. However, due to the change in procedure, it is believed that less participants followed through on the survey and reflection pieces as they were a secondary link which could easily be overlooked with the interview confirmation logistics. This is compared to the original design which included the survey and reflection in the steps proceeding the contact information

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for interview scheduling. One had to advance physically through those stages to provide your contact information.

Specifically, I found that a large percentage, approximately two-thirds, of those that began the survey did not move through to complete the contact information. One participant interviewed mentioned that the survey and reflection took a considerable amount of time and perhaps other participants were not able to finish to the end with their limited time resources. With that consideration, the protocol was altered to capture consent from the participant and contact information. I then emailed the participant with scheduling information. Once scheduled, the participant was sent a confirmation email for the interview which included a second link to the personal and professional demographic survey and pre-interview reflection. This had the benefit of moving the participants toward scheduling faster, but meant that a supplementary portion of data may not be completed as it was easily overlooked. Ultimately, however, it is believed that this rearrangement of process resulted in additional numbers of new participants. Five participants completed the data collection in the first design, while six participants completed the full data collection in the second design. Six participants did not complete the personal and professional demographics survey or pre-interview reflection.

Due to the ongoing global pandemic occurring in May, June, and July 2020, all data was collected virtually. The survey and pre-interview reflection were facilitated and tracked through SurveyMonkey. Interviews occurred via an online communications platform, Zoom, with the exception of one phone call due to internet connectivity. All interviews were recorded via a personal cell phone and computer recording device. Participants were made aware of the recordings at the start of the interview and had the ability to decline the recording. No video recordings took place. Interviews ranged from 29 minutes to 1 hour and 27 minutes. Initial

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transcription was done via Artificial Intelligence transcript services in the Otter.ai software tool as well as dictation tools present in Microsoft Word. The draft transcripts then underwent two reviews: an initial formatting correction, and a thorough edit utilizing the actual recorded sessions. All transcripts were redacted for personally identifying properties (i.e. current employer, names, position titles) as well as private information regarding others (i.e. student crisis specifics, specific institutional history). There was a clear presence “filler” or “tentative” words, including: “right?” “kind of,” “sort of,” and “maybe” throughout nearly all participant interviews. These qualifiers were largely removed from the transcripts for readability. I was the only individual to listen to the recordings and construct the transcripts. When this was complete, participants were assigned pseudonyms and transcripts were provided to them for review via email within two to five days following the interview. Eight participants returned transcripts with edits or no comments, and ten did not return transcripts.

### *Personal and Professional Survey*

A total of 12 participants completed the personal and professional survey. The survey was connected to the pre-interview reflection, so the same participants completed both portions. This survey is provided as Appendix C and included information on both the institution as well as the participants themselves.

### *Pre-Interview Reflection*

Unlike the personal and professional demographic survey, the pre-interview reflection included five open-ended questions which intended to allow the participants time and space to reflect on this topic prior to the scheduled interview. Five questions were posed:

1. What is your awareness of your communication practices?
2. How do you use communication in your workplace?

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3. Does your specific role within the environment impact your communication practices? If yes, how?
4. Please share an experience you have had in which you implemented communication practices in order to achieve strategic objectives at your institution.
5. Please share an experience you have had in which you believe negative or positive objectives were achieved through the use of a gendered communication schema.

### *Interviews*

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) recommended that all interviews should begin with an effort to establish a connection or “rapport” with the participant (p. 64). This is especially important, the act of trust building, as that will allow for the participants to share their experiences and feel empowered to interpret them openly and honestly. Several additional recommendations were also incorporated: allow for flexibility in questioning, do not rush the interview or put a limitation on your time, and ask follow-up questions to appropriately “probe” the experiences of the participant (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 64-65).

Interviews were held for no longer than 90 minutes and were scheduled for a date and time convenient for the participants. This often meant early morning interviews to accommodate for the time difference between the researcher and participant. The semi-structured open-ended questions explored the gendered communication practices and experiences in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the theoretical framework while exploring the phenomenon. Considering time was a scarce resource for the participants, questions were prioritized to address overarching themes initially and secondarily to move towards less central concepts as time permitted. However, all interviews were able to be completed within the 90 minute goal after having asked all questions within the protocol.

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A total of 18 female SSAOs participated in the interview stage. It is known that 12 of those participants completed the personal and professional demographics survey and the pre-interview reflection. However, as the contact information for each participant was collected for the sole purpose of scheduling an interview, the participant name and address information was removed from the data after scheduling occurred. Further, despite reminders and notes to each participant, some participants did not complete either the survey or pre-interview reflection. Each interview followed the same protocol:

1. Researcher introduction
2. Research introduction
3. Participant introduction and background
4. Inquiry section 1: experiences and implementation of communication
5. Inquiry section 2: institution and divisional organizational structure
6. Inquiry section 3: making sense of communication experiences and implementation,  
and
7. Interview closure and transcript distribution

### **Data Analyses**

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) outlined six steps for the data analysis of IPA:

1. Reading and re-reading
2. Initial noting
3. Developing emergent themes
4. Searching for connections among emergent themes
5. Moving to the next case, and
6. Looking for patterns across cases (pp. 82-101)

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These six steps will be articulated in detail in the following paragraphs.

Initially, the researcher must become immersed in the data, the process of reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. They must understand the words participants used, how the interview progressed, and the experience the audio of the participant. Through this process, one begins “active engagement with the data” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82). By conducting the interview, editing and correcting the notes (interview and reflection) in two phases, and then reviewing again, I ensured myself that I was in full engagement with the data.

After the researcher is immersed in the interview, they may start the initial analysis or “noting” of the data itself (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). This initial pass is the most broad in which the review notes any consideration or interest in the concepts with which the participants engage. There are three broad categories of notes, as described by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009): descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual (p. 84). Descriptive notations include “key words, phrases or explanations the participant actually uses in their own words” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 84). Linguistic notes focus on how the participant uses language to express themselves during the interview (Smith et al., 2009). Conceptual notes completes the “initial noting” review in which the researcher highlights the interpretations of both the researcher and the participant provides for the phenomenon. As Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) explained, the researcher now uses their own experience and knowledge to provide interpretation of the phenomenon being explained by the participant.

Only after the researcher has thoroughly read each transcript and made thoughtful notations they may then begin to condense information into themes. This is accomplished by attempting to unveil “emergent themes” of the data by making “simultaneous attempts to reduce the volume of detail . . . whilst maintaining complexity” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 91). This requires

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a consideration of detail while also weighing the general understanding of the entire data set (Smith et al., 2009). After establishing emergent themes, they must now be arranged together for meaning. This is done through “abstraction,” “subsumption,” “polarization,” “contextualization,” “numeration,” and/or “function” (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 96-98). Abstraction involves collecting themes that are similar or fulfil notable categories. Subsumption is similar to abstraction, however, it occurs when an “emergent theme” becomes an overarching concept that other “emergent themes” now reside. Unlike abstraction and subsumption, polarization attempts to bring further meaning by juxtaposing themes that are thought to be opposite of each other.

Upon completing subsumption, examples emerged in which themes of “backlash” and “alignment” were compared as tenants of how female SSAOs experience gendered communication. Contextualization creates the opportunity to place the data and themes with the context of the participant. Numeration focuses on the prevalence of the theme within the transcript – simply how many instances within the entire transcript does that theme appear? Finally, function, considers how “emergent themes can be examined for their specific function within the transcript” or how “the interplay of meanings illustrated by organizing themes by their positive and negative presentation may be interpreted beyond what the participants presents in terms of their meaning” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 98). Although contextualization, numeration, and function can all be helpful in data analysis, the emergent themes uncovered with subsumption and abstraction proved to be more effective and conclusive.

After completing a thorough review of the first case, the subsequent analysis step requires to then recreate these steps on the next case, or data set. Consistently applying the re-emerging themes will assist in the next step: looking for patterns across cases. Specifically, how do female

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SSAOs make sense of their gendered communication practices across cases? Does gendered communication have similar positive or negative effects on participant experiences?

### **Peer Review**

At the conclusion of data collection and analyses, review was sought by four peers regarding Chapters 3, 4, and 5. Feedback was gathered electronically and considered for applicability within the frame and feasibility of the research. Some feedback was not included in the final dissertation work as it was not within the scope of the study. However, many comments were integrated to clarify the themes, findings, and future research. It is believed that the input of these colleagues created a more concise study, allowing for the participant experiences to be highlighted. For example, one reviewer expressed the need for more clarification on the fourth theme and encouraged me to expand further.

### **Position Statement**

I began professional work in higher education immediately after completing my bachelor's degree at Saint Louis University. I moved to full-time work at Wesleyan College, the first institution of higher education dedicated to women, and served as the Director of Residential Life. Through these experiences, I learned and became passionate about women's leadership attainment, challenging and supporting female identity development, and experiencing the benefits of single-gender education. Wanting additional training in this profession, I moved back to Saint Louis University and completed a Master's in Higher Education Administration. I wanted to participate in college student development, encourage college student success, and make positive impacts on student lives and knew that these experiences could provide those opportunities. In the last ten years, I have continued to focus on student success in many roles including residential life and academic advising. Currently, I serve

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in the Office of Judicial Affairs, facilitating and leading student learning through constructive conversations. I am focused on achievement, taking and making opportunities to learn from mentors and leaders to best accomplish my goals. As a woman, I look to other women in leadership positions for direction, advice, and development.

I am a first-generation college student who has achieved advanced degrees, and I consider myself a feminist in both theory and practice. As a professional, I believe it is important that I model leadership and mentor women in the student affairs field. Based on my personal experience as a woman, and the literature presented, I believe that active and consistent advocating and coaching is the responsibility of all. In the end, wide scale, professional success for strong, confident women is crucial to the balance and success of higher education in order to develop future leaders.

### **Summary**

Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis was used in designing a study to explore: How do female SSAOs make sense of their gendered communication practices and experiences? Through selection of this design, and engaging with pre-interview reflection and semi-structured interviews, I agreed to “commit [myself] to exploring, describing, interpreting and situating the means by which [the] participants make sense of their experiences” with gendered communication practices (Smith et al., 2009, p. 40). Additionally, the analysis, as explained by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), in partnership with the theoretical framework, created emergent themes which were condensed and combined to create meaning to further empower the participants and other individuals who engage with gendered communication in the higher education workplace. The use of Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis produced a wealth of data which created four concise research themes to be presented in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 4. Data Analyses**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) as they implement and navigate gendered communication practices in the higher education workplace through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. There is a lack of research regarding the gendered communication experiences of female SSAOs. Through the use of Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis and a combination of surveys, pre-interview reflections, and open-ended interviews, the following question guided this research: How do female SSAOs make sense of their gendered communication practices and experiences? Additionally, one sub-question was proposed to examine these experiences further: how do the perceptions of the female SSAO's communication practices impact their experiences? This chapter will summarize the research procedures, especially in light of a global pandemic, and a review of qualitative themes and trends across these themes.

### **Analyses Procedures**

The qualitative data captured within the pre-interview reflection and interview was analyzed using the guidance from Smith, Flowers, and Larken (2009) as outlined in Chapter 3. Step 1 of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis simply requires the researcher to read and re-read the data collected to become familiar with the words and experiences shared by the participants. To accomplish this, the analysis in step 1 occurred at least three times: initial review of transcript from Otter.AI, full review of transcript matching with audio file, and once more after having been uploaded into NVivo. Although the first two reviews occurred mainly for grammatical and formatting reasons, I became familiar with the participant and what they shared as I repeatedly read and listened to their interviews.

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The second step, initial noting, “ensures a growing familiarity with the transcript, and, moreover, it begins to identify specific ways by which a participant talks about, understands, and thinks about an issue” (p. 83). I viewed this as casting a wide net over the data, adding introductory coding references and comments over large swaths of content to be refined and reviewed at a later step. Additionally, a key component of this step, and which is indicative of interpretative phenomenology, notes focusing on “things which matter to them” and “the meaning of those things to the participant” (p. 83). There are three levels of this note making: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual.

At a time in which I felt immersed in the reflections, I moved to step 3: emergent themes. By combining the conceptual comments (step 2) and the overall initial notes, the reflection’s “narrative flow” is divided to illustrate the emergent themes. These themes “are usually expressed as phrases which speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual” (p. 92). Further, these themes are intended to include two parts: the participant’s experiences and the researcher’s analysis. Themes include both prescriptive and descriptive notes. For example, a passage may represent feelings of imposter phenomenon but may not be specifically detailed by the participant. Conversely, a participant may clearly articulate their communication attributes following and in line with the attributes defined in Chapter 1.

After developing a map of these themes, in the order in which they occurred, step 4 attempts to bring order by grouping the emergent themes into natural connections. Several options are available to researchers to accomplish this: abstraction, subsumption, polarization, contextualization, numeration, function, and a combination of two or more (pp. 96-99).

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I believe that the tools of “subsumption” and “abstraction” best aligned with this data and how it fit together. For example, abstraction calls to gather data that naturally grouped together under a new, larger theme. This was easily done with components of masculine and feminine communication schema. An example of emergent themes, as presented below, included the presence of imposter phenomenon or considerations of likeability. Subsumption also assisted in establishing the emergent themes related to how female SSAOs experience gendered communication.

Once complete, all transcripts were then analyzed in step 6 at which time they were considered for any possible “patterns” that occurred between and across cases (p. 101). For example, I began to see repeated themes of feminine and masculine communication attributes across nearly all participants. This developed into a pattern and was further examined into an emergent theme. The qualitative data captured within the interview was analyzed using the guidance from Smith, Flowers, and Larken (2009) as outlined in Chapter 3.

### **Research Themes**

After completing the process of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, four themes emerged from the pre-interview reflection and interview qualitative data:

1. Female SSAOs fluidly use both masculine and feminine communication attributes,
2. Female SSAOs as recipients of both negative gendered communication or gender-based microaggressions,
3. Female SSAOs and a feminine identity, and
4. Female SSAOs as highly reflective professionals regarding personal and professional communication

The following sub-sections will present each theme further, examining several key components of each theme identified in the analyses explained above. Further, in an attempt to show the

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breadth of the data and experiences, each theme will include carefully selected sub-points with at least one or two direct quotes from participants so you can see how I completed this analyses..

For readability, additional, full participant quotes are provided in Appendix F. This is intended to allow others to live the experiences of the participants and understand how the themes are interpreted.

### ***Female SSAOs Fluidly use both Masculine and Feminine Communication Attributes***

In Fall 2019, a beta research study reviewed the communication preferences of female student affairs professionals. In total, 128 participants completed the survey which included demographic and professional questions in addition to a gendered communication measure established by Weinberg, Treviño, and Cleveland (2015). Results indicated some correlation between educational attainment position to masculine and feminine communication schemas and various individual communication attributes. However, little correlation was found amongst either terminal degree obtainment or SSAO position and the various attributes. The only significant correlation related was a slight positive correlation between terminal degree attainment both masculine communication schema and non-binary communication schema. Note that non-binary communication was a term to categorize respondent communication schema findings. Because non-binary communication was not clearly defined in the communication measurement, a temporary understanding of this communication was used based on the similarities in average between the masculine communication schema and the feminine communication schema per the gendered communication measurement. At the time, this result was not particularly outstanding as just 21 of 128 participants had a terminal degree. However, it is now considered early evidence of what was found in the 18 interviews that constituted this study.

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Interviews with the female SSAOs indicated that participants, and likely the larger population, move between masculine and feminine communication attributes in a fluid and natural way, indicating familiarity and comfortability with the communication skills. For example, Participant 1 shared two clear examples of both masculine communication attribute “direct” and feminine communication attributes of “communal” and “inviting input”:

There are times that I’m definitely inviting input and taking questions and things, but as we’re getting down to the “ok these are decisions we need to make” it does become something that you cannot do with 20. (Participant 1)

I’m really very open to giving space for “OK let’s process how we’re moving through this and where are people at with it.” And “how are you feeling and what are the questions you have and what concerns you have?” (Participant 1)

Data further shows that because of this fluid communication style, some participants expressed difficulty knowing their “true” communication preferences.

### **Masculine Communication Attributes.**

As described in Chapter 1, masculine communication schema includes the following attributes: direct, establishment of control, instrumental speech, commanding, assertive, abstract, and less emotionally connected (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2017). No substantive results showed that participants used many or most of these attributes with any prevalence. However, participants indicated a clear preference as “direct” communicators in what emerged as a pattern among interviews.

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Nine participants described their communication skills as “direct” specifically. These descriptions ranged from Participant 1 simply stating “I’m generally am a pretty direct communicator” to more extensive responses as provided by Participant 3:

So, I’m pretty direct because I never want people to mistake “what did she say?” You know? I had a boss maybe five, six years ago who didn’t like to give people bad news. And so, we caught on to this, everybody loved him, he is a great guy, but I would sit in meetings and you know he just couldn’t say no to people. And he would wiggle his way around. I was one of many people. We would walk out of the meeting with whomever and they’d be like “well that went well,” and I’d be like “what? you know he didn’t say yes to your proposal and in fact he’s not going to support it.” And they would be like “well yeah he didn’t say yes.” So, we just had it translate for him. I didn’t mind doing... every president is different, and you make a decision “is this somebody I want to stay and work with?” And if you do that, they’re like anybody who works for me or anybody else.

(Participant 3)

Participant 12 also described her style in a way in which I interpreted it to mean “direct” stating, “but I also have learned a long time ago that beating around the bush does not work. All that does is it breeds confusion and questions. And so, I just don’t. I call it right out.” Other participants, in addition to those summarized noted above, used other descriptors that are interpreted as being “direct”:

I appreciate having supervisory relationships where we can be frank with each other.

(Participant 1)

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I want to communicate with the least amount of words, I want to get to the point. There isn't a whole lot of like niceties at the beginning. I remember when I was a first time manager and I sent an email out to a staff member and it was somebody I had very good relationship with and he wrote back and he said, "Oh, you know, it would be really nice if you kind of started off with like, "Hi, how are you? Have a great day," thank you.

(Participant 11)

In summary, a majority of the participants either declared themselves to be a "direct" communicator or described attributes that together would indicate direct communication. While other masculine communication attributes were present in the interviews, there was a clear pattern amongst participants who favored this attribute in particular.

### **Feminine Communication Attributes.**

As defined in Chapter 1, feminine communication schema includes the following attributes: communal, personal, focus on relationships, tentativeness, concrete, conversational maintenance, and responsive (Wood & Fixmer-Oraiz, 2017). All 18 participants indicated some level of feminine communication schema in their interviews, the most represented being "communal" (17), "personal" (17), and "focus on relationships" (16). Although actual numbers are not necessarily impactful in qualitative studies, other attributes were also well represented: "tentativeness" (7), "concrete" (6), "conversational maintenance" (4), and "responsive" (3). Similar to "direct" above, participants expressed both the specific concepts as well as descriptive examples to show alignment with these attributes.

Communal was rarely directly named, but frequently expressed by 17 participants indirectly, using words or phrases that, when used together, were interpreted as meaning "communal":

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I'm really very open to giving space for "OK let's process how we're moving through this and where are people at with it." (Participant 1)

It's all about input. And hopefully we go back and forth enough that a decision just emerges. I mean everyone knows when the buck stops with me. And if in fact a decision doesn't emerge, I'm going to make a decision. Obviously, I've been there for [time], I'm not stupid and how I do it I'm going to get as much information as possible. But a decision is going to get made. (Participant 18)

As one of the most prevalent uses of feminine communication, the use of "communal" as an attribute was thoroughly demonstrated as a pattern amongst participants.

Personal communication, similar to communal, was also described rather than opting to author that specific term. Examples of a personal communication attribute were shared by clear majority of participants (16) as being "vulnerable" or "authentic." I understand that these two concepts may not be understood to all as "personal communication" attributes. However, I interpret the context and use of these two concepts as the participants engaging in personal communication attributes. In short, participants feel that their "authentic" sharing of themselves and their experiences creates a personal connection with others and the work that they do. Similarly, this "personal" side of them can mean that they are vulnerable to others through their sharing. Further, the use of the terms "authentic" and "vulnerable" was interpreted as connecting to others as an individual outside of their specific title. For example,

Yes, I think that my personal style of transparency, of showing some vulnerability, letting people see the person and not just the role has been respected and been used now by other people on cabinet as well. (Participant 5)

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Participant 5 expressed that by sharing more of themselves they were able to engage further with another professional. Other participants shared specific examples of when they engaged in deeper conversation through the sharing of personal stories, experiences, or feelings:

So, if you look Brené Brown's vulnerability piece, it's exactly what I would consider . . . it's basically "I don't know all the answers, I'll give you my true self. If that doesn't help and doesn't work, let's figure out what might. But I'm gonna give you the best I have, and I'm going to be vulnerable because I don't have all the answers, nor will I ever." And I hope I don't either because that means I'll stop learning. (Participant 8)

It's really interesting. So, I have a pretty informal communication style. So how I'm talking to you right now is how I talk. I don't code switch. I'm authentic in how I communicate. And so, I find though that at cabinet there's a lot more posturing that happens. And people choose words differently, so they don't exactly say what's happening they sort of imply what's happening. (Participant 17)

Interestingly, "personal" can mean both "vulnerable" and "authentic" but also engaging with another professional about their "personal" background and interests. For example, a female SSAO may engage another professional in sharing a personal experience related to a topic at hand. As of this writing there are a number of protests and our country is experiencing a period of unrest related to concepts surrounding systematic and systemic racism. A female SSAO, Participant 5, encouraged the personal sharing of staff within her division to further discuss the civil unrest context. Personal may also be explored in partnership with another feminine communication attribute titled "focus on relationship."

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The third attribute for feminine communication shared by participants was a focus on relationships. Again, similar to “communal” and “personal,” participants would traditionally share this attribute by descriptive words or phrases. This component also included a clear majority of participants (17) who would describe this attribute most commonly by using phrases that describe caring for one another, liking others, and a balance of professional and personal engagement:

Even when we challenge it is with a great deal of mutual respect and caring and we enjoy each other. (Participant 1)

So, I think I can still be true to my “matter of fact, direct style” but also care about them and check in with them and let them know that they mattered to me. And that I want them to take care of themselves, especially during times of crisis like right now. Some people might call it tough love. (Participant 11)

The examples above illustrate a female SSAOs interest in an ongoing relationship with her peers or colleagues in the work environment. This is not a transactional environment, but one in which individuals work together with a concern and interest in establishing and reinforcing relationships with one another.

A final common attribute shared by these fluid communication styles is related to what I connect to both direct and communal communication: transparency. Eleven participants described a component of their communication schema as being “transparent,” “forthcoming,” and “openness”:

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In that group I tend to be even more forthcoming. I don't know if it's really about my communication style as much as that is how deep I delve into different pieces of information. (Participant 1)

Very honestly. I try to do that very openly. I will tell my people, "I will always try to give you the most honest response that I have. Now know that when it is personnel related or when there are confidential or sensitive issues, I will not be able to disclose at that level.

But whatever information I am able to share with you, that is my goal." (Participant 7)

I perceived this component to represent what female SSAOs believe they perhaps owed to the professionals they engaged with as communal leaders. The interest in "transparency" was perhaps their attempt to engage others.

### **Code Switching or Situational Communication.**

Communication attributes are not all used at once, but in coordination with each other or intermixed within a given situation or time period. This is no different for the female SSAO participants. Nearly all participants, 16 in total, expressed the use of code switching or situational communication attributes in a way to effectively engage in an environment. As Participant 6 described below, this is an intentional use of communication in an attempt to "match," "counter," or "exhibit" the communication required in the given situation. Examples from the transcripts include:

So, I also recognize that one of the greatest abilities as women, is that we can change our communication style based on the environment that we're in, right? Sort of how like people of color will change their communication style depending on who's surrounding them in a moment. You do a quick scan of a room and you know how you got to show

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up, you know, and so I know how to show up differently. And I hope differently doesn't mean integrity versus non integrity, kind versus unkind, but the words and the style that I use. (Participant 6)

Interestingly, one participant specifically stated that she does not “code switch”:

It's really interesting. So, I have a pretty informal communication style. So how I'm talking to you right now is how I talk. I don't code switch. I'm authentic in how I communicate. (Participant 17)

I just feel like I'm not at my best self if I'm not authentic in terms of my communication. So, I think that's why I do that and it's interesting, I think I was raised that way. My dad never code switches. My dad sells used cars and he is the same person you see regardless of where he is. I also think that college students can smell someone who's code switching a mile away. And that's not I think an authentic way to communicate with college students. (Participant 17)

Code switching and situational communication allows the participant to first review a space and then opt to intentionally adjust their communication to account for the environment. This, perhaps over time, may become a natural and unconscious action by seasoned professionals. As such, some participants expressed “confusion” over their true communication attributes and preferences. Interestingly, Weinberg, Treviño, and Cleveland (2015) found that those that maintained a singular communication style experienced more beneficial hierarchical and non-hierarchical rewards (p. 32). As they state, having a singular communication style “might be preferable to assume a simple, focused identity” otherwise code switching may elicit “confusion among relevant audiences” (Zuckerman, Kim, Ukanwa, & von Rittmann, 2003, pp. 1019-1020).

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However, of note is the environment in which the female SSAOs are operating. The participants would address their largely female workforce and then, likely, separately work within the cabinet or president-environment. It is not found that the female SSAOs regularly code switched within the same population but rather addressed separate populations in varied ways.

### **Communication Attribute “Confusion.”**

Notably, the final related component of this theme involves an expressed “confusion” over the participant’s actual true communication style. I interpreted this component in two ways. First, this may be because participants had an unconscious bias towards masculine and feminine communication as independent schemas and their use of both may confuse their understanding of communication output. Second, participants, as discussed later, may also view themselves as such adaptive communicators that they find it more difficult to specify the attributes of their natural communication. Although ambiguity over attributes is not shared by a majority of participants, only Participants 10, 12, and 18 expressed this, I find it interesting enough to share:

I can code switch in terms of politics. I can code switch in terms of geography, so I can easily be the [Midwestern State 2] girl one minute, and the [Midwestern State 1] girl the next and they're two different things. I think that language and how I interact with both men and women also is a part of that. So, you know, sometimes I wonder almost that I think I've gotten so good at fitting into where I'm going or where I'm a part of that sometimes I struggle to find or to reconnect with what my own voice even is. (Participant 10)

So, at this point, I don't know what is my communication style? Did I artificially develop it? Is this who I really am? I don't even know anymore, you know? But I think when I

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think about my true authentic style, maybe it is . . . I never baby talked to my kids. And I think that's probably from some of my early experiences. I don't want to be like those hyper feminine girl or women on TV. And so, there's probably like internalized sexism there too. (Participant 11)

With my direct reports, and I think this is probably true throughout, I'm very direct. You ask me a question, I'll give you an answer. I don't lie very well. Honesty has really served me well because I've been there a long time. Oftentimes honesty doesn't serve you well in the short term, but it serves you well in the long term. I'm quite direct. I'm very relational, but I'm not very emotional. Is that true? I don't know if that's true. I show a lot of passion I guess but I'm not . . . You know this is a hard question for me, Leslie, I don't know how I communicate. I think I'm direct. I think I'm honest, I use humor. I'm always concerned about people's well-being, their family, how that works but for me it's about the work. (Participant 18)

The final quote, perhaps out of context, appeared to be a slight clarity issue with communication skills. First, note that Participant 18 has served over three decades as an SSAO. With the wealth of experience, it may be expected that she would clearly be able to describe her communication skills and preferences. Second, this was the first question asked of the participant, within five minutes of the research being introduced and the two schemas being defined. With that, I interpreted this answer as a slight confusion of their communication attributes, and perhaps a real-time attempt at classifying her own communication within the gendered schema.

In summary, patterns in the data related to “direct” and “communal” attributes as well as the frequent use of code switching and situational communication, are combined together to

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establish an emerging theme of fluid masculine and feminine communication schema.

Unfortunately, as professionals who identified as female, they shared experiences of negative gendered communication as well as gender-based microaggressions.

### *Female SSAOs as Recipients of Negative Gendered Communication or Gender-Based Microaggressions*

Female SSAOs, as defined in Chapter 1, generally supervise a division of “student services” offices and departments including, but not limited to: campus activities, student conduct, counseling services, orientation, student affairs assessment, orientation, career services, wellness programs, disability support services, on-campus housing, recreational sports, and multicultural services (CAS, n.d.; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014, p. 18). The participants were no different – supervising 30 and 480 employees in up to 25 departments. All participants but one held a terminal degree, and all had been at their institution from three to 33 years. All of this is to demonstrate the expansive experience, education, and professional requirements of the SSAO role. Despite this, nearly all participants experienced negative masculine communication experiences and backlash within their interactions at the institution. As noted above, additional qualitative participant data is provided in Appendix F.

#### **Backlash.**

In response to the theme above, fluid masculine and feminine communication schema, and as an example of Role Congruity Theory, 17 participants expressed experiences of “backlash” related to their own communication experiences. Revisiting this concept, in summary, “backlash” occurs when there is a perceived incongruence by person A about person B’s identity and expected communication attributes (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Experiences from interview transcripts are described below:

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So, one of my colleagues here, she's had very similar experiences where people are just like "I don't like to work with her because she's very direct." I think she's really good at what she does and certainly she uses a different style of communication than I use, and it's not better, worse, it's different, right? And it tends to be more masculine because it's more direct and I think people have gotten really upset working with her. (Participant 2)

I had to go down the hall and explain to the [colleague] a couple of years ago, when we disagreed, I'm not attacking you and when I'm asking you questions, I'm really asking questions because I'm trying to gather information. Because I think he didn't do well with that and I think it was his confidence level. And I said I need to be able to have that kind of give and take, that's my style. And if you're going to be my colleague, we really need to do this together. (Participant 3)

As a note, Participant 14 is the only individual missing from this "backlash" analysis. There are some unique components of this Participant: extensive professional experience prior to higher education role and numerous male leaders as mentors. This particular Participant routinely mentioned male mentors who helped to form her relationship at the institution and were used as gateways, if you will, into the workplace environment after transitioning from another profession. I interpreted her lack of "backlash" experiences as not an absence of them but rather importance of other experiences which served to relegate this area to a less important memory for her.

In summary, backlash occurred when individuals use gendered communication schema that did not match with their presumed gender identity, for example, a female using masculine

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communication attributes. Backlash typically produces negative consequences or reactions from others, including disparate treatment and leadership prejudice.

### **Negative Gendered Communication Experiences or Gendered Microaggressions.**

Unlike backlash, in which behavior is tied to a perception of congruity, participants expressed negative experiences related to masculine communication experiences, independent from their own communication schema. These behaviors were categorized as “speaking over” (10), “ignoring” or “disregarding” (9), “diminishing” (7), “interruptions” (6), “taking of ideas” (5), “sexually inappropriate” (3), and “anger of contrary opinion” (2). In the themes shared above, I chose to share a few of the examples to illustrate the concept. However, because nearly all participants described an example of the above experiences, an excerpt is provided by each participant who experienced the behaviors in Appendix F to show the pervasiveness and variety of ways in which female SSAOs experienced this component. For now,

So, I lived in [Southern State] in [Southern Urban City] I had people directly tell me to my face . . . I had a student that I supervised that said to me “well you're a woman and so even though I work for you it doesn't mean I need to listen to you.” Point blank. You can't be any more blunt than that. So, then the next day he no longer worked for me 'cause I'm like well if that's the problem, then that's the problem. But, yeah there's been instances where I know it's like as a result of my identities, my insecurities, my biases, like all of that. (Participant 2)

Absolutely I mean our senior staff, to get a word in I must interrupt. If I say something it could just be brushed over. And if a male counterpart says it it's valued. (Participant 5)

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And I do think sometimes though, even with the president being a female, sometimes it takes a male voice for her to hear what I'm saying. So, I've noticed other cabinet members will just repeat what I've said. That's happened two or three times. They'll just repeat something I've said and then she'll be like, "Oh . . ." I don't know why she does that in a group setting because she would never do that if it were just one on one. (Participant 17)

In summary, the pervasiveness of negative gendered communication experiences and gender-based microaggressions can be felt through the excerpts shared above. I interpret these experiences in a far different way, with my positionality, versus those interviewed with extensive experience in their role. To some, it has become almost common, whereas others are still quite shocked and surprised by an experience. However, taken together, it is important to note the context that this often occurs in: cabinet-level conversations. The majority of these experiences occurred amongst executive leadership at the institution, those trusted to be the mentors and leaders for hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of employees.

### *Female SSAOs Connection with a Female Identity*

All participants were required to self-identify as female in order to be a participant. Despite this, however, not all participants may actively engage with a female identity in their professional capacities. During the interview, each participant was asked "How does, if at all, your identities impact your communication?" This question, was placed within inquiry section 3: making sense of communication experiences and implementation. Some participants also shared how their many identities impact their experiences and communication, illustrating the concept that identities cannot merely be separated and treated independently, but must be examined in a holistic capacity. Thus, I will be focusing on the experiences attributed and interpreted as a

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female identity, yet will include additional comments regarding other identity experiences as they occur.

The central components of this theme highlight the traditional gender roles that permeate the institutional workplaces of the participants. Supporting areas within this theme include: feminine identity, emotional labor, benefits of alignment per the Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), role modeling and coaching as a female leader, and the historical role of Female SSAOs. Because of the intentional limits for the research questions and data collection methods, I will further discuss future research implications regarding identity and gendered communication in the next chapter. As noted above, additional qualitative participant data is provided in Appendix F.

### **Feminine Identity.**

A total of 16 participants identified aspects of communication related to a female or feminine identity. These experiences varied to an expression of overt femininity, like “kindness” (Participant 6), to deliberately expressing femininity in order to gain representation in a masculine-dominated space, like Participant 4’s wardrobe choices. Participants recounted examples of how their female identity or femininity impacted their implementation of communication:

I think I told you the story before some of the system vice chancellors have berated me, if you will, for being too nice and too kind. Right? And they're not all male identified either. Who say it in a very vile way, “you know [Participant 6], you're just too nice,” or “they're really lucky you're nice.” Like it's a weakness. Like it is a deficit. Like it is a disease. With that kind of vileness. And I, as a new Vice Chancellor, and as an interim Vice Chancellor, as one of the youngest Vice Chancellors, it took years for me to figure

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out what was this and then to realize that my authentic self which I have to believe is kind. And that it takes incredible strength to be kind, in the face of everyone else throwing other people under the bus and talking over each other and being mean to each other and one upmanship. And “I rule, and you suck,” and the only way I can get ahead is by putting you and your team down. I choose to not engage in that. And that's not masculine, that's sick, that's an unhealthy work environment. And I choose not to engage in that so am I kind? I believe I am kind, but it takes incredible strength to be kind, particularly in an environment like that, that is so pathological and unhealthy. (Participant 6)

So, there's verbal and nonverbal communication, as well. So, when I got the job at [Midwestern College 2] I was a 20 year [resident of Northeastern City 1]. But I came with a black and grey wardrobe. Black, grey. Is pretty much all I wore. I came from a culture with a lot of suits. I have a closet full of suits. I walked in to a cabinet in this incredibly hyper masculine culture. And I went out and consciously, or unconsciously, I'm not sure, but I now wear almost all dresses and skirts. I wear lots of color. That I kind of had been: guess what you've hired a woman, now I'm not gonna let you pretend I'm not sitting here in my electric pink skirt, and grey pattern tights, and boots. You're not gonna ignore me. I am here. So even when I wasn't talking a lot in cabinet, I never disappear. (Participant 4)

The excerpts shared above span the breadth of femininity or feminine identity in a variety of different ways. For example, Participant 6, expresses an intentional outlook of “kindness” in the work that she does. This, as she describes, is ridiculed as being “too nice” or being easily pushed

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over. However, I interpret this as owning their identity as a female and owning the ability and right to communicate with kindness. Similarly, Participants 9 and 11 explored intentional behavior of feminine identity and how their own behavior either aligns or contradicts that belief. All of these individuals clearly chose to engage with a female identity quite specifically, but in their own varied ways.

### **Emotional Labor.**

As referenced by Lutz, Newlands, and Fieseler (2018), emotional labor is the “management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (p. 636). Emotional labor, as experienced by female SSAOs, includes the work of emotionally supporting a male, a supervisor, or specifically attending to the feelings and emotions of another individual. Although it is not as prevalent as a component, it speaks greatly to the identity and unique experiences of female-identified individuals.

I think my role, I don't want to say I'm the feelings checker. But I definitely am with the group. I am the one . . . like this is an environment where you could be very nervous to share your opinion if it's a counter opinion to the group and I think because I've been here so long I'm OK using my voice to do that. (Participant 5)

Why is that all on you to somehow massage every single person's feelings in the meeting? That's just not possible sometimes. And part of leadership that is I think harder for women than for men is either carrying that around or letting it go. (Participant 9)

Emotional labor, although not expressed by all participants, examines an additional consideration for female SSAOs as they communicate. This relies on their ability to adapt and consider others in a way that does not appear to be felt amongst their masculine colleagues.

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### **Alignment.**

In the first theme, female SSAOs as fluid masculine and feminine communicators, I discussed the concept of backlash as experienced amongst the participants. Revisiting this concept, the contrary experience is “alignment,” which, in summary, occurs when there is a perceived congruence by person A about person B’s identity and expected communication attributes (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In essence, person B is communicating in a way in which it “aligns” or matches with their identity as perceived by person A. In cases of alignment, the individual that implements the communication are positively reinforced through concepts like “likeability” and concrete events like a promotion or assignment to a beneficial committee. Experiences from interview transcripts are described below:

Yeah, no I definitely, just last week we had a senior leadership meeting and it was right around the time where everything was happening with all the civil unrest that's happening here. And I opened the meeting and I was vulnerable with everyone. That this is not something we talked about. And I got a little bit teary even when talking about it and said “you know this is really hard topic to voice and people are afraid because they're afraid to say the wrong thing but then when you say nothing you know that that says a lot and for us that are in leadership positions, places of privilege and power, we need to say something and not be afraid of saying the wrong thing.” And I got a lot of positive feedback from “thank you for being vulnerable,” “thank you for saying that.” (Participant 5)

The example that really comes to mind is a fairly sad one honestly. We had a student who died [redacted], one of those tragic, tragic situations. And it got a ton of media attention

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in our market and the decision was to send me out to do the interviews and the press conference, and all of that. And I did choose a very feminine, relational, affective-emotive approach to that. To really share the sadness and to use that in part, I mean really consciously, to camouflage the fact that we can't tell a lot. We can't talk a lot about a student's private story but to just to go out with "well we can't comment on that because of FERPA" approach would not work. And I think it did work in conveying our sadness and sharing the information that we could share. And the comms people felt like it went better than those conversations have gone in the past. (Participant 9)

From Participant 9's personal response to a student death, to Participant 5's communal work within their division to bring light to colleagues' struggles during community civil unrest, the quotes above examine the critical role that these participants serve on the campus and how they use feminine communication attributes, and align, to positively react in a given situation. In turn, their use of these attributes resulted in affirmative responses from stakeholders further impacting future situational communication through positive reinforcement.

### **Role Modeling and Coaching as a Female Leader.**

In addition to experiences related to speaking for themselves, countering negative masculine behaviors, and backlash, several female SSAOs described feelings of responsibility to role model, advocate, or coach other female professionals in their workplace. These experiences expressed a commitment to encourage leadership and grow and develop younger professionals specifically as female leaders. Ragins and Scandura (1994) summarized several costs and benefits among female mentors. Costs include the increased visibility on their work which adds additional pressure to individuals under more scrutiny than their male peers as well as feminine stereotypes of favoritism towards their female mentees (Ragins & Scandura, 1994, p. 959).

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However, Ragins and Scandura (1994) asserted that the benefits outweigh the costs in the relationships formed during this mentor-mentee relationship. As females, by in large, find relationships to be critical in their interactions with others as forming this mentor-mentee engagement offers relationship opportunities for career development and personal/professional support (Ragins & Scandura, 1994, p. 960).

I think women have to look out for women. And it helps, as I say, when it's not just you being the lone voice. But saying “yeah you keep cutting her off, you keep talking over her, and you're probably not aware of it but we are so could you stop?” It is very helpful. Yeah when your sister is kind of, you know, it's better that than men having to step in because I don't want to be a damsel in distress. (Participant 3)

And part of that I will again emphasize is because, and even at this current point in my career, I am still fighting to make sure that our women leaders have a seat at the table. Again, Student Affairs, right. (Participant 7)

As demonstrated above, many participants felt it necessary to serve in two prominent roles as female leaders. First, to role model communication and behavior to those that they supervise. For some, this meant engaging more actively in meetings while used experiences to link the role modeling directly to masculine communication attributes. Second, female SSAOs worked to coach colleagues on how to engage with incidents. As Participant 3 recalled, this can include coaching others on how to collaborate and support one another.

### **Historical Role of Female SSAOs.**

The final component for this theme focuses on the historical role of females in the SSAO position. As Harriman described in the period piece, *Dean of Women* (1933),

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In more placid days the dean of women occupied an unquestioned status of authority. She was both a benevolently severe duenna and an arbiter elegantiarum. By unwritten law it was agreed that college girls ought to lead cloistered lives. The parents and the college officials were at one on this point. To their desires the girls were not inclined to raise strenuous objections, and they deferred to the judgement of the dean of women in all matters pertaining to their department (p. 367).

The history of a student affairs official has its' firm roots in the "dean of students" or "dean of women" roles on higher education campuses extending back to the creation of these institutions. As women, the past is clearly held by the "dean of women" – and as described above – a tenuous position in which they were expected to impose behavioral expectations and standards upon the students under their keep. This results in a history of "women's work" and policing of behavior that remains far outside the academic work, largely led by men. For example, SSAOs were regularly expected to manage issues related to students in nearly every facet of institutional life. This ranges from on- and off-campus activities to classroom management addressed via the student conduct code thus leaving the pure educational aspect of academia to a strict definition of "professor."

Although not widely discussed amongst participants, I interpreted this component to be closely tied to a female identity and thus impactful on how female SSAOs may experience gendered communication. As one cannot separate identities and histories, I believed that a female SSAO is subject to the conscious or unconscious perceptions of the academy based on their historical female predecessors.

As a white woman in student affairs there's just a whole load of history there. And thinking and being conscious of the ways that white womanness is coded to a certain kind

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of disciplinarian. You know, not the scholarly discipline, but the “I’m going to teach you how to be in this world and I’m going to police.” You know the southern women communicating to me that I didn’t look nice enough for work in that careful way. What they were trying to tell me was “you need to pull up your socks, you need to do better at how you look.” There’s just a whole bunch of white womanness that is about molding others into a particular way of being. And Student Affairs has a long and horrible history of being the place that taught people how to be a certain way. So, I’m really conscious of how I bring, and especially as I’m getting older. You know it’s different when you’re in your 20s, it’s different when you’re in your 30s, but as a woman in her 50s aging into that role of “Dean of women” is always in the back of who we are as white women in Student Affairs. And just really wanting to be aware and conscious of how I may lean into that or find myself inhabiting that identity without intending to has been really important for me. (Participant 9)

[Interviewer: Hmm. And is that because you think it’s Student Affairs, which sometimes very much gets relegated to the side, or do you think it’s your identities in any way?] I think both. I think Student Affairs, but I also think because I’m a woman. I think if it was a man in this position, it would be different. (Participant 14)

Participant 9 had considerable reflection on the historical role of female SSAOs as “dean of women” and what how that impacts modern day academia. Further study, as introduced in Chapter 5, should examine identities related to this sub-point to determine if additional impacts are felt by Caucasian or white SSAOs versus female SSAOs of other racial or ethnic backgrounds.

*Female SSAOs as Highly Reflective Professionals Regarding Personal and Professional Communication*

The final theme of this analysis focuses upon the female SSAO as a deeply reflective professional regarding communication implementation and experience. This theme is interpreted as “sensemaking.” Weick and Sutcliffe (2005) stated that sensemaking:

Involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing. Viewed as a significant process of organizing, sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into these ongoing circumstances. (p. 409)

Sensemaking is an “ongoing, instrumental, subtle, swift, social” experience over three steps: categorizing the experience, communicating the experience, and sharing the experience within the institution (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2005, 409). The participants demonstrated “sensemaking” in three components that illustrate the feelings of deep reflection: critical considerations of self, imposter phenomenon, and concern for likeability. As noted above, additional qualitative participant data is provided in Appendix F.

**Critical of Self.**

The qualitative data presented by participants included nine individuals who experienced reflection that resulted in critical thoughts of their own communication implementation. Being critical of oneself, as research has uncovered, unveils that the participant has engaged in repeated review and analysis over a given experience or conversation. Beyond being reflective, this ongoing consideration impacts their ability to operate seamlessly in future experiences. For

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example, participants shared how their everyday responsibilities were impacted by their own critical thinking of their communication experiences.

So, I do a lot of overthinking. And this I know, and this I have tried to not do. I would say probably 80% of the time I'm fine. We go in. We communicate. It seems like everybody's got it. It's clear. But I would say there's probably 20% of the time where I'm like am I explaining this correctly? Is it not clear? 'Cause then you know I'll get questions a couple of days later or like somebody may not do something and I'll say OK what was the reason it wasn't done? Was not clear? So, I think for me making sense of how I communicate is based on the feedback that I'm getting like directly and indirectly. (Participant 2)

I think, like a lot of women, I over evaluate the impact. You know I have a long list of things I've said in my life that I deeply regret, and they come back to me at two in the morning and haunt me. Or accidental rudeness. Or sometimes not accidental rudeness. So, I think a lot about communication and about how I do it. I think, too, I'm a naturally very pessimistic person. I'm always expecting the worst. I think of myself as not particularly warm person or very congenial. So, I have thought a lot as a person who wanted to become a leader, about emotional self-regulation, about appearing to be extroverted, learning to try and communicate in a more positive way, and communicate a vision and be hopeful as a leader when people are not feeling hopeful. And how to do that authentically. I think I never stopped thinking about my communication. Honestly it's so much of what people get from you as a leader, it's not what you do, it's what they hear you say or the way you communicate verbally or non-verbally. That makes your leadership. (Participant 9)

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Although it was prevalent amongst participants, a future research implication is explored in Chapter 5 to examine the degree to which male SSAOs or other leaders are critically reflective of their own communication. I interpreted these experiences to be tied closely to imposter phenomenon in that a negative criticism of self may feed into the typical symptoms of imposter phenomenon.

### **Imposter Phenomenon.**

Clance and Imes (1978) stated “impostor phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phonies, which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women” (p. 1). As noted above, I interpreted some of the excerpts within “critical of self” to be symptoms of Imposter Phenomenon. When people receive or perceive negative criticism of a communication experience, they may naturally start to question their ability to perform the duties they are assigned. The 18 participants of this study, as summarized above, represented females of advanced education, experience, and professional status. As such, these participants should have confidence, ingrained understanding of their accomplishments, and an understanding of the wealth of contributions that they bring to the environment. However, as described by Clance and Imes, they reflected precisely the individuals who fall within the imposter phenomenon core group.

Yeah and for sure it's the impostor thing, it's like you know the constant “how do I have a seat at this table? How do I have a voice at this table?” Like I have to prove myself and I've actually had that conversation with my supervisor, and she was like “where are you feeling that from?” And I was like its internal more than anything else, right? It's nobody telling me on the outside “you're an idiot,” right? (Participant 2)

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It is evident in the experiences that there was a natural progression, for some, from being critical of themselves to engaging in imposter phenomenon behaviors. The late night rehashing of a “rude” comment that Participant 9 made (critical of self) may easily translate to Participant 2’s concerns of not feeling like they are “enough” or accomplishing the objectives expected of them.

### **Concern for Likeability.**

Seven participants expressed a concern of being “liked” or seeking “likeability” when considering their communication attributes. Participants shared contemporaneous experiences or sense making in reflection that shared a consideration that “likeability” was either sought or desired. Examples included:

Sure, and again, this is probably where I tend to hold back. It's the same old story and the research bears this out is that a woman who is assertive is a bitch, a man who acts in the same manner as leader. And so, I think that I probably have had to work, I think a lot of women have to work harder, to try and make their case. But unlike men, I have to worry about their feelings, whereas they don't necessarily have to worry about mine. I have to worry about egos. I have to worry about the politics. I'm more thoughtful about that in terms of how I do things. (Participant 10)

So, I want to like what I do. I want to like who I work with. And I want to like going to work. I don't like working with jerks. I don't like being a jerk, although I can be, and I have been. (Participant 12)

Because they have some of the same things about loyalty and altruism and compassion and trust. So, yeah, I don't want to be disliked. (Participant 12)

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The final aspect of the fourth theme is important in context to the female SSAOs roles on campus. Likeability is deeply related to the “critical of self” sub-point, like imposter phenomenon, as it is a symptom of this critical reflection. By considering if others like you, they allow others to subjugate their communication and place their ability to be successful on the thoughts and feelings of others.

### **Theoretical Framework Analyses**

To best consider the context of gendered communication in the higher education workplace and understand the experiences of female SSAOs, I theorize a two-part adaptation cycle building upon the introduction of Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) in Chapter 2.

### ***Female SSAO Communication Adaptation Cycle***

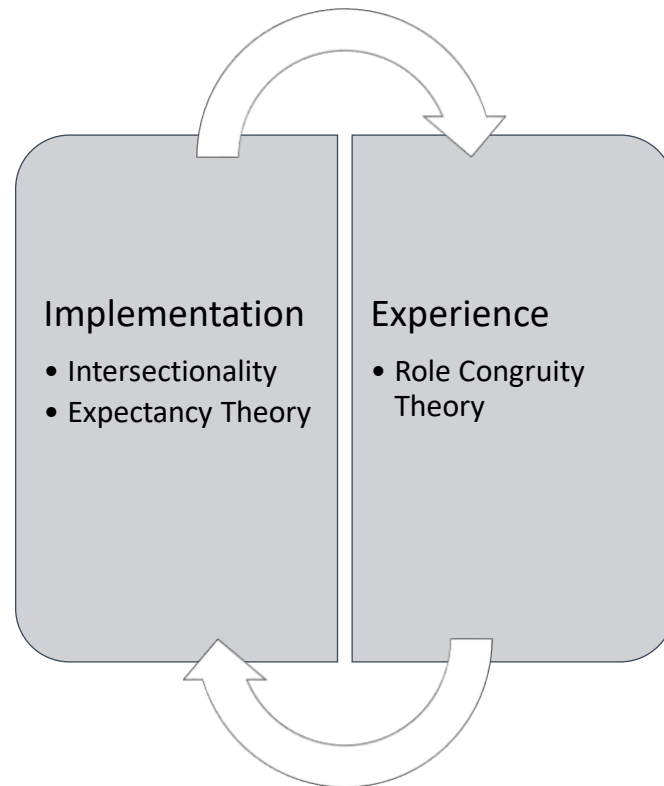
Qualitative data analyzed from the 18 participants exemplified the experience and implementation of gendered communication in the female SSAO workplace. Each part, implementation and experience, engage and impact each other in a cyclical relationship. Figure 3 illustrates this relationship between the experience and implementation of gendered communication. On the left, Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) uniquely considers the effect of gender, expectations, and position in a way that replicates the experiences of female SSAOs. The implementation of gendered communication, reflected on the left side of Figure 3, is analyzed with two contributing theories: Intersectionality (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013) and Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 2013). Implementation of communication, determined to be relevant and useful by the SSAO, is dependent on how the female SSAO is perceived and thus impacts their overall experience. Intersectionality (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013) and Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 2013) were selected for their unique connection to the participant’s

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identities and their role at an institution. These theories could potentially be substituted should a different population be studied.

### **Figure 3**

*Female SSAO Communication Adaptation Cycle*



Based on the data and themes presented above, I have determined that the adaptation cycle is sufficiently aligned with the participant data. Weinberg, Treviño and Cleveland (2015) found correlations between respondent attributes and communication style. In summary, those who tended to use masculine communication style “were younger, had less work experience, and were often male” whereas feminine communication was used more frequently by women and those with advanced education (Weinberg et al, 2015, p. 25). Specifically, implementation of gendered communication, using intersectionality and expectancy theories, aligns closely with the second research question, as discussed at the close of this chapter. In short, themes two and three

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clearly indicate that female SSAO participants implemented gendered communication based both on their intersectional identities and expected outcomes for a situation. For example,

Why is that all on you to somehow massage every single person's feelings in the meeting? That's just not possible sometimes. And part of leadership that is I think harder for women than for men is either carrying that around or letting it go. (Participant 9)

And so, I think that I probably have had to work, I think a lot of women have to work harder, to try and make their case. But unlike men, I have to worry about their feelings, whereas they don't necessarily have to worry about mine. I have to worry about egos. I have to worry about the politics. (Participant 10)

Similarly, the experience of gendered communication is represented in research question one. Results indicate that female SSAOs do experience gendered communication, summarized in theme two, but also overshadowing the experiences in the remaining themes. For example,

So, one of my colleagues here, she's had very similar experiences where people are just like "I don't like to work with her because she's very direct." I think she's really good at what she does and certainly she uses a different style of communication than I use, and it's not better, worse, it's different, right? And it tends to be more masculine because it's more direct and I think people have gotten really upset working with her. (Participant 2)

The data gathered from participants indicates that they clearly understand and identify gendered communication experiences and can account for congruence or incongruence between their attributes and their perceived gender.

### **Research Questions Analyses**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) as they implement and navigate gendered communication practices in the higher education workplace through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

The final section of this chapter revisits the two research questions for a final analysis.

### ***Question One: How do Female SSAOs Make Sense of Their Gendered Communication Practices and Experiences?***

The research has led to the thorough consideration of this central research question. All four themes speak directly to how female SSAOs make sense of their gendered communication implementation and experiences. First, theme one analyzed a fluid communication schema with a combination of masculine and feminine communication attributes. Participants were easily and clearly able to describe their practices and provide examples. This made space for participants to attribute this fluid communication schema to the use of code switching and situational communication adaptation. Theme two includes the reflection of participants regarding the negative experiences and gendered microaggressions they have identified as female SSAOs. The ability to identify and attribute these experiences to gendered communication exemplifies a greater understanding of how gendered communication is experienced. Theme three illustrated how participants easily connected their experiences of gendered communication to a female identity. Further, the female SSAOs made sense of how they practiced gendered communication with role modeling and alignment. Finally, theme four, female SSAOs as highly reflective professionals regarding personal and professional communication, speaks to how female SSAOs make sense of their gendered communication implementation and experiences. Female SSAOs think deeply about how they communicate, and it is exhibited through code switching,

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adaptation, situational communication, the impact on their female identity, and their ongoing reflection on the experiences they have had. Additionally, this reflection has revealed considerations of likeability and the impact of imposter phenomenon on this sense making.

### ***Question Two: How do the Perceptions of the Female SSAO's Communication Practices Impact their Experiences?***

As considered in question one, themes one and two examine how gendered communication practices impact female SSAOs experiences. Theme one describes the adaptation of fluid masculine and feminine communication schema by female SSAOs as an adaptation or situational communication framework in which to be successful as a female leader. Theme two presents experiences in which female SSAOs have encountered negative gendered communication or gender-based microaggressions which have continued to shape their implementation of gendered communication. Finally, because of the conclusion that female SSAOs are highly reflective, the presence of the initial themes shows a clear intra-connected relationship of experience to reflection and implementation.

### **Summary**

Data collected in 12 surveys and pre-interview reflections combined with 18 open-ended interviews resulted in four concise themes of the gendered communication implementation and experiences of female SSAOs. The use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis allowed me to present and interpret data based on the input and reflection of the participants. The in-depth analysis requirements encouraged extensive understanding of the data which translated to considerably well-founded themes with examples and excerpts that spanned the participant pool. Due to the education and experience level of these participants it is believed that no other analysis or qualitative research design would have better fit the outcomes and objectives

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obtained with these participants. This study uncovered shared experiences related to fluid movement between gendered communication attributes, negative masculine gendered communication experiences and microaggressions, the connection between the female identity and gendered communication implementation, and the highly reflective nature of the female SSAO participants. The analyses provided tremendous insight on the everyday experiences of campus leaders as they navigated their roles on campus. Additionally, through consideration of the qualitative data, I have comprehensively addressed the research questions posed for the purpose of this study. In the following chapter, I close these analyses with concluding statements, considerations and implications for institutional practice, future research, and theoretical frame application.

### **Chapter 5. Discussion, Implications, and Future Research**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) as they implement and navigate gendered communication practices in the higher education workplace through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Through the use of Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis and a combination of surveys, pre-interview reflections, and open-ended interviews, I uncovered four key themes:

1. Female SSAOs fluidly use both masculine and feminine communication attributes,
2. Female SSAOs as recipients of both negative and innocuous gendered communication or gender-based microaggressions,
3. Female SSAOs and a feminine identity, and
4. Female SSAOs as highly reflective professionals regarding personal/professional communication

In addition to discussion of these themes, Chapter 4 addressed the research questions presented and supported in Chapters 1 and 2. Chiefly, how do female SSAOs make sense of their gendered communication practices and experiences? Qualitative data indicated that SSAOs move fluidly between both feminine and masculine communication attributes and are ineptly aware of the gendered communication and gender-based microaggressions they experience as professionals. Further, participants shared experiences which highlighted the highly reflective nature of SSAOs as they made sense of their personal and professional communication. Secondly, we ask, how do the perceptions of the female SSAO's communication practices impact their experiences? To answer, I look to the clearly intuitive nature of female SSAOs as reflective communicators who engage in their own extensive self-analysis. Participants also share intentional use of communication, through situational acknowledgement and code switching, to adjust and engage

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with others appropriately. I interpret this feedback cycle as a clear cause-effect pattern from reflection to implementation.

In this final chapter, I will review the limitations and delimitations as a way to further set the context and boundaries on this discussion. As Chapter 4 served to share and bring understanding to the experiences of the participants, the concluding sections of Chapter 5 will build upon the findings to draw conclusions on practice, theoretical framework, and future research.

### **Limitations**

At the conclusion of this study, several limitations affected data collection. First and foremost, there was a global pandemic. As of writing, over six million Americans have contracted the virus after nearly five months of isolation and “social distancing.” In March 2020, about two months after defending the proposal for this study, higher education institutions across the country shuttered in an effort to stop the spread of the virus. The SSAO participants I sought suddenly became key members of their institutional crisis management teams, leading the shut down and eventual planning of the re-opening. March, April and May of 2020 were, for most participants, worked entirely remotely as they struggled to lead their divisions and institutions at a time of daily or hourly changes to institutional directives. Suddenly, June 2020 ushered in a slight adjustment to a new way of work, allowing for a respite and increased availability to participate in this study. I quickly took advantage of that time by increasing advertisements and scheduling participants. Regardless, the impact of COVID-19 was clearly felt, and continues to be a great impact, in nearly every interview with participants frequently speaking to their communication “during COVID.”

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Because of the conditions explained above, virtual arrangements were required to complete interviews with participants. Original design allowed for face-to-face interviews to be planned around two or three national student affairs conferences. However, COVID-19 crisis planning quickly gave way to the realization of wide-spread altered lives around the world. Virtual conversations create an atmosphere in which one-to-one connection is more difficult to initiate. To accommodate the change, I added additional personal experiences, personal background, and further explanation about the interview recording and transcription process. Additionally, many participants mentioned the effect of the global pandemic and institutional crisis on their communication. Often this resulted in a quicker, more direct decision making style. It was understood that female SSAOs generally enjoy a communal group dynamic and decision making process. However, with the constant change required of institutional leadership, many female SSAOs noted that their decision making had to be made quicker and resulted in less communal actions.

### **Delimitations**

Data describes the experiences of 18 female SSAOs at higher education institutions in the United States of America. The participants represent individuals in the northeast, northwest, southeast, Midwest, and west. No participants represented the southwest region. Because of the breadth of experience and personal and professional demographics, there is a high degree of confidence that the experiences of these participants can reasonably translate to experiences of other female SSAOs. However, it is important to note that additional identities of each participant varies greatly for the individual experiences. For example, only one participant identified as African American and one as native Hawaiian. The resulting research themes should be viewed with that consideration. Because, in its essence,

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IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience. And it aims to conduct this examination in a way which as far as possible enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems. . . .

IPA also pursues an idiographic commitment, situating participants in their particular contexts, exploring their personal perspectives, and starting with a detailed examination of each case before moving to more general claims. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 32)

As such, although there was a diverse participant population, it is important to consider the context of the experiences before making assumptions regarding all female SSAO experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework focused on the use of Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) which uniquely considers the effect of gender, expectations, and position in a way that replicates the experiences of female SSAOs.

### ***Female SSAO Communication Adaptation Cycle***

In Chapter 4, I expanded and built upon the theory by constructing the Female SSAO Communication Adaptation Cycle. The cycle is created with two halves: experience and implementation. Role Congruity Theory, in this research, constitutes the experience of gendered communication and the alignment or backlash female SSAOs experience. The second half, communication implementation, or how female SSAOs use gendered communication, is constructed with two contributing theories: Intersectionality and Expectancy Theory. These two theories explain how the identities and objectives of the female SSAOs direct their communication attributes.

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### **Experience: Role Congruity Theory.**

Role Congruity Theory “consider[s] the congruity between gender roles and other roles, especially leadership roles, as well as to specify key factors and processes that influence congruity perceptions and their consequences for prejudice and prejudicial behaviors” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 575). Important in this theory is that it is the perception of another that impacts the experience of the communicator. As such, it is not the female SSAO who is responsible for how they are perceived but instead the recipient of their communication. Many participants were acutely aware of how they were perceived in their communication attributes as discussed in themes two, three, and four. First, participants clearly recalled experiences in which they witnessed or were recipients of negative gendered communication or gendered micro-aggressions. Related to this theory, however, is the acknowledgement that their experience was due to the incongruence of their gender and communication attributes. For example, Participant 1 shares her interpretation of an experience and the genesis of the reaction:

I got lots of signals while I was living there that my communication style was too loud. I was too direct. I was too brash. I did not speak like a Southerner and I definitely did not speak like a southern woman . . . In my case it was much more about my directness. So now that I am back in a place where we have to contend with the upper Midwestern thing about being nice, it isn't nice to name hard truth. (Participant 1)

As the participant recalled, they did not communicate in a way expected or perceived to be the appropriate way in which a “southern woman” should. This resulted in clear “signals” to the participant about what was expected.

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The third theme specifically examined the feminine identity of the participants and clearly corresponds with perceived gender alignment in a communication event. Participant 10 shared consideration she makes when communicating as a woman:

Sure, and again, this is probably where I tend to hold back. It's the same old story and the research bears this out is that a woman who is assertive is a bitch, a man who acts in the same manner as leader. And so, I think that I probably have had to work, I think a lot of women have to work harder, to try and make their case. But unlike men, I have to worry about their feelings, whereas they don't necessarily have to worry about mine. I have to worry about egos. I have to worry about the politics. I'm more thoughtful about that in terms of how I do things. (Participant 10)

I interpreted the participant's consideration, without direct attribution, to alignment. A key masculine communication attribute, as outlined in Chapter 2, is "abstract" and related to ego-protection of the communicator. Thus, the participant's experience regarding the successful upkeep of "egos" and "feelings" of the men, or recipients, of the female SSAO's communication is what determines the alignment. And alignment means positive response in theory and potentially partnerships, collaboration, and additional resources in practice. So, to avoid "backlash" or incongruence, Participant 10 "tend[s] to hold back" and is "more thoughtful" about her communication attributes.

The final theme, number four, documents the reflective nature of the female SSAO participants. A sub-point of this theme concerns the likeability of participants in their workplace. Likeability is attributed to alignment, or the congruence between a participant's gender and their communication attribute. Participant 12 shared how she engages with staff in a similar way:

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You know, there was a study done a long, long, long time ago and it had to do with “what do students want and what do teachers want.” And basically, students are like, “I want to make friends, I want to do well in class, and I want my teacher to like me.” And the teacher said the same thing, “I want my students to do well, I want to do well, and I want to like my students and I want my students to like me.” And yeah, I do, I mean I don't care about being that “best friends at work,” thing. I'm not a big fan of that. But I am a fan of the... so there's “servant leadership.” But there's also “friendship leadership.” And I very much believe in that. (Participant 12)

Participant 12's experience was similar to other participants and how they engaged with professional colleagues. As executives, they understood boundaries at a high level and were ever careful to be professional in the workplace, however, they considered the feelings and perceptions of others as they communicate, erring on the side of having a positive interaction.

### **Implementation: Intersectionality and Expectancy Theory.**

Several participants discussed how their identities impact and interact with their communication attributes and how they implement communication. Although the participant demographics were not extensively diverse, they were not inconsistent with the demographics of female SSAOs and female student affairs professionals as a whole.

You can't isolate . . . “just talk to me about it as a female.” Talk about it as being Japanese. “Forget that you're first generation, how do you feel about it as a . . . ” that doesn't work. So, all of it put together, you know, makes me uniquely me and then makes my communication style uniquely mine, for better or for worse. And I think the ability to be able to reflect on those and connect those, the intersectionality of all of those identities in terms of how we are navigating the world and therefore communicating to the world is

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important. And I hope I never stop that pursuit. I learn something new about myself every day, or learn things that affirm what I already know about myself every day. (Participant 6)

This excerpt reflected an in-depth awareness of the participant's identities, and also how they implement those identities in their communication. Participant 6 is keenly aware of how they are represented and may either use that representation to advocate for objectives or may adapt their communication attributes in consideration of those identities. Interestingly, Participant 6 connected this identity acknowledgement or awareness as a unique component of herself, or potentially female SSAOs as a larger population:

I did say to him, you know "as a female," I think we're talking about salary or something different, it wasn't about communication, but I said, "you know chancellor, I am a first generation college kid. I'm an Asian female. And I'm local, I was born and raised here. And I am the only person on your cabinet with these identities, the only person." And he looked at me and he said, "does that make it difficult for you?" And I realized he didn't know what I was saying. Like my identities were detriments, like they were bad, like they were challenges to overcome. It took me a minute, because I run in circles where we talk about our identities all the time, right? And how whatever impacts you . . . lower pay, lower position, Interim title, not the real title, whatever it is, right? So, we talk like that all the time. So, to have somebody not get what I was saying was like "why isn't he getting what I'm saying?" And I said, "oh no, Chancellor, I am proud of my identities, I wear my identities on my sleeve. Please see me as a local Asian girl. You may not know I'm first generation but when you know that, know that about me." I said, "oh no, no, no, chancellor my identities are not detriments, I am proud of them." And he said, "okay,"

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and he was such a good listener that he was really trying to form a relationship. But it was mind blowing that I was talking to somebody who wouldn't understand. (Participant 6)

Participant 6 alluded to the general identity awareness present and discussed in student affairs work. For example, student affairs divisions across the country are often home to diversity departments, women's centers, first generation programs, and other identity-based initiatives. Further, at student affairs conferences, NASPA and ACPA specifically, you will see participants acknowledging various identities on their name cards. My name card, for example, includes my preferred pronouns, indicating gender identity, my prefix or title, indicating education level or marriage status, and my participation in a "student affairs moms" group, an affinity affiliation, among many others.

Similar to Participant 6, Participant 11 had two interacting identities: female and terminal degree which impacted her communication:

But things did change for me when I got a PhD. Good for you for getting that PhD. It's power. It's power in a room, especially as a woman of color. People mess with you less, people respect you a little bit more. It can be subtle and I'm like, "wow, this is really messed up." But you know, I'm glad I have it because I have to work a little bit less hard on managing the microaggression. (Participant 11)

In this example, Participant 11 now intentionally interacted as a person with a Ph.D. in an environment in order to assert herself and garner more respect from other individuals. This has created a level of confidence paired with an acknowledgement of responsibility as a "woman of color" identity partnered with the education attainment. In the context of a higher education institution, in which terminal degrees are used by faculty to assert understanding and power over

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a content area, attainment of that degree by a “woman of color” creates an opportunity to assert a level of “power” that is not normally attributed to a member of a minority group.

Like intersectionality, Vroom’s Expectancy Theory is attributed to how female SSAOs implement gendered communication in a given setting. Expectancy Theory posits that an individual’s behaviors come about due to their motivation and drive to complete established goals (Vroom, 2013, p. 271). An example is how participants implemented their communication through the use of advocates and colleagues. Participant 14 explained how this theory impacted her communication attributes:

So, in a group like that, you kind of have to understand the dynamics and who's speaking, most of the time and who's dominant, and strategically sometimes if I need to get something done, for example, I will talk to my female colleagues ahead of time. I say this is what I'm going to be presenting. Okay, I'll say in support of your project or whatever, you know, so that we can tag team. Sometimes that's how you get your agenda pushed forward. (Participant 14)

To begin, Participant 14 acknowledged the environment and adjusted her communication attributes accordingly. By “understand[ing] the dynamics” she then accounts for the behavior. Second, she engaged with her colleagues and advocates outside of the meeting, a communal interaction aimed at furthering her objectives or “agenda” for the meeting. Additionally, this interaction would not be possible without the relationship-focused communication attribute – for you cannot effectively work with individuals you call “advocates” who you have not previously fostered a constructive relationship.

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### Connection to Literature

Research sources examined in Chapter 2 are thoroughly reviewed throughout Chapters 4 and 5 related to the data uncovered through the participants. In summary, female SSAOs shared experiences of both alignment and backlash and how they are impacted by gendered communication experiences. An example of alignment was described by Participant 4,

It's like I almost don't notice it anymore. But that's just part of the interaction. But if I were to say "hi [board member] how are you?" with that, that wouldn't go over well. And so, as a feminist, I've told some of these stories people in a prep program, like a grad program, "oh my god, I would have told him off!" or "I would have stormed off!" I'm like, no you wouldn't. Because in the end I'm a big girl, I can take care of myself. I know how to do this. I was able to push back and do what I need to do and in the end I'm walking out with a gift that is going to help college students fulfill their dreams in ways that I know are important. So no, you're not gonna tell somebody off," you figure out how to keep your integrity. But you adapt. (Participant 4)

This excerpt also expresses the intentionality of communication and the participant's understanding of how the communication is received either positively or negatively. In this case, a clear decision to communicate in a given way due to the understanding of gendered perceptions of behavior. Backlash is the incongruence between perceived gender and communication. This can result in negative outcomes or response to the communicator from those experiencing them. For example, Participant 12 related to feedback as a female SSAO communicating with a masculine communication attribute:

I have used that perfect example of feedback that I've gotten that sometimes my very direct communication style does not resonate with people, men and women. I think

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because of what they expect to get or sometimes it's because of who I might have followed in a position. (Participant 12)

Female SSAO participants also shared how their personal reflection regarding gendered communication impacts their own imposter phenomenon and likeability.

A remaining connection to be made is between Eagly and Carli's (2010) chapter *Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership* and the experiences of female SSAOs. As I have already shared individual examples of imposter phenomenon and likeability, the example below blends them together in an abstract way. Participant 9 shared an unexpected conversation she had with her young daughter one evening and how she made meaning of the reflection,

Why is that all on you to somehow massage every single person's feelings in the meeting? That's just not possible sometimes. And part of leadership that is I think harder for women than for men is either carrying that around or letting it go. It is hard to give up the cultural expectation that if you just did it right everybody would love it. If you were the super mom, super lady, super boss. You would have cookies ready for everybody and everybody would love you. There is something seductive in a really creepy way about over performing to that extent. Right? And I think we get sucked into that. If I were just a little nicer. If I got to work a little earlier. If I wrote a few more handwritten notes. If I remember to congratulate everybody on their work anniversary. Adding these expectations that are not about the job but that are about managing our emotional image in the world. Like I feel the pull of that all the time, I do, and it is so unhealthy. And it perpetuates that for other women in my organization. And actually, I have to say it was my daughter who really opened my eyes about that. I was literally making cookies to bring to a meeting and she was like 13 or 14. And she's like "why are you doing that?"

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So, I said that “it makes for a nice meeting, it shows people that I'm thinking about them and I care about them.” And she's like, “it shows people something that I don't think I would want my boss to show me, like are you expecting all the other women in your organization to go out to their offices and make cookies for them?” And I literally had never thought about what that was communicating to other women in my organization about my expectations for their leadership. And it was just a bolt of lightning. Right? That over performing is unhealthy for me but it's also devastating and setting unrealistic expectations for other people. So, and that is very gendered and really powerful.

(Participant 9)

I interpreted this experience and reflection related to both imposter phenomenon and likeability. Note that the reflection of “just [doing] it right,” being “nicer,” arriving to work earlier, and managing the emotions of those around her more express the concerns that what she is doing is not sufficient in her role. However, her job performance of managing budgets, supervising projects or personnel, managing building operations and procedures are not mentioned. Female leaders have the expectation of completing their work as well as managing the perceptions and feelings of others which creates the internal struggle of imposter and likeability concerns.

Female SSAOs by their mere position have already undergone a maze of roadblocks and walls in that they have worked to be a leader of a division with 30 to 350 employees. They have already accomplished the pinnacle of student affairs work. Because of that, the labyrinth of leadership is not housed internally within student affairs, attainment of leadership positions resides at the top of an institution. As I introduced in Chapter 1, student affairs professionals moving into a president role is an extreme minority, most coming from nearly every other division. Therefore, the “vestiges of prejudice,” “resistance to women’s leadership,” and “issues

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of leadership style” established within the *Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership* (Eagly and Carli, 2010, pp. 440-441) need further research and consideration for the female SSAO professional upward mobility.

Participant experiences portrayed a wealth of content related to all three of these roadblocks to leadership. First, “vestiges of prejudice” explains the effect of long established preferences and prejudice towards masculine behaviors. I believe that a default to competition or negative masculine communication (i.e. interruption, and disregarding) is an effect of these long held prejudice towards masculine behaviors. The long term presence of them has made the behavior seemingly more acceptable.

Similar to the long established prejudice towards masculine behaviors, “resistance to women’s leadership” is the “shared conscious or unconscious mental associations about women, men, and leadership” (Eagly & Carli, 2010, p. 441). As participants shared examples of backlash and alignment, they experienced the effects of this resistance.

Finally, “issues of leadership style” continues to build upon the “resistance to women’s leadership” in which women are left confused by how to contribute as a leader in the workplace. Participant 6 stood out among participants by her awareness of this concept. As she shared:

I think I told you the story before some of the system vice chancellors have berated me, if you will, for being too nice and too kind. Right? And they're not all male identified either. Who say it in a very vile way, “you know [Participant 6], you're just too nice,” or “they're really lucky you're nice.” Like it's a weakness. Like it is a deficit. Like it is a disease. With that kind of vileness. And I, as a new [title], and as an interim [title], as one of the youngest [title], it took years for me to figure out what was this and then to realize that my authentic self which I have to believe is kind. And that it takes incredible strength

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to be kind, in the face of everyone else throwing other people under the bus and talking over each other and being mean to each other and one upmanship. And “I rule and you suck,” and the only way I can get ahead is by putting you and your team down. I choose to not engage in that. And that's not masculine, that's sick, that's an unhealthy work environment. And I choose not to engage in that so am I kind? I believe I am kind, but it takes incredible strength to be kind, particularly in an environment like that, that is so pathological and unhealthy. (Participant 6)

I interpreted this excerpt “resistance to women’s leadership” for a number of reasons. Chief among them is the feminine communication attribute focused on relationships and personal communications that I also connect with being “nice.” Additionally, the stereotype of a woman leader being “nice” in interactions and failing to do so resulting in backlash. Finally, I appreciated Participant 6’s contribution as it showed an awareness of her own leadership and an unwillingness to compromise that leadership for the preferred components their colleagues believed leaders exhibit.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The themes shared in Chapter 4 expressed the environment and experiences of female SSAOs as leaders on their campus. In consideration of those themes, and perceptions shared by participants, four components of a gendered communication environment were found to have great impact on the female SSAOs experience. In the section below, I will engage with each theme and share its importance through the eyes of the participants. The components are, in no particular order of importance:

1. Importance of Colleagues as Advocates,
2. Importance of Presidential Leadership,

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3. Importance of Colleagues as Partners, and
4. Importance of Collaboration Over Competition

### *Importance of Colleagues as Advocates*

Several participants indicated that they serve as, or enjoy the support of, advocates in their experiences as female SSAOs when encountering gendered communication experiences. I further interpreted this as an important component of effective group management: the support of others to accomplish group objectives. Group successes reflect the presence of many individual successes over time. As Participant 6 shared,

I'm better about calling out other people on it, and to say, "I'm sorry, you were trying to say something before the Provost interrupted," or something like that. And try to be a good ally. But yes, it happens here. Way too often. I often think that we live in the world of academics with a lot of intellectual people who have lots of things to say. And again, I can value that, but not at the expense of others.

[Interviewer: When you've done that on behalf of somebody else to be that ally, have you noticed anything as far as how that person responds when that happens? When you're an ally? So, if you're an ally for a colleague, what the colleague has done in response to that?]

Always, always grateful. Because it typically is a female, or it's a person of color, right? Who was over spoken, who didn't have an opportunity, who tried 10 times to raise their hand and was never called. And so always gratitude and instant text message across the board table that said "thanks [participant 6] for helping me out." Or an after conversation,

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but always a sense of gratitude. And other people have done it for me. And that I think is what makes it so rich to be able to pass it on. (Participant 6)

As participant 6 stated, they look to serve as an ally to colleagues to offer support and encouragement, whether verbal or nonverbal to other colleagues as they encounter gendered communication. In this example the participant acknowledged active advocacy in addition to intentional support to females and people of color.

Participant 6 later described her experience of a senior cabinet member, encouraging and reminding the all-female staff about advocating for and supporting each other as they accomplish tasks. Participant 3 shared a similar experience:

But I try to be friendly and I am obviously more . . . I don't have a problem with this: I am more sensitive to women who have to enter that group. I remember my first meeting 21 years ago. I walked in and none of these people are here anymore, and somebody said, "that's your assigned seat." They pointed to the seat. And I went "oh how silly" and they're like "no, that's your assigned seat." I had never been in a structure where you literally, that's where the [SSAO] sits. So, 21 years go by and [position VP] walks into her first ever budget advisory group meeting and you could just see it, you know I mean? And I said "[position VP name], you sit right here next to me." And she's like "oh, OK good." But you know if I hadn't had that other experience . . . so I think things like that have really made a difference to me to feel welcomed. And a little bit of guidance. And then you know I never had to do that again. (Participant 3)

I think women have to lookout for women. And it helps, as I say, when it's not just you being the lone voice. But saying "yeah you keep cutting her off, you keep talking over

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her, and you're probably not aware of it, but we are so could you stop?" It is very helpful. Yeah when your sister is kind of, you know, it's better that than men having to step in because I don't want to be a damsel in distress. (Participant 3)

Similarly, Participant 5 found value in a colleague who served as a "confidential peer":

But I will say something that's really important: I think as a VP, as a female VP, is having a confidential peer that you can chat with, that you can debrief with, like my VP of [division]. If one of us got asked to take notes one more time, you know, it's well just having a person that you can chat with and decompress with I think is really, really important. And someone that you can trust to do that so it doesn't go anywhere else. (Participant 5)

Not all advocates were females or feminine communicators, sometimes the advocates described were masculine communicators, for example with Participant 15:

Yeah, so, if you've not heard of the experience of racial and ethnic minorities being at the table and feeling like they're making a very powerful statement and not being heard and the guy next to him says the same exact thing, and you're sitting there thinking, "wait a minute. I just said that." And you know what really saved me is that our provost who is Middle Eastern, very good fellow, and we're sitting in a room full of African American males who were either graduates, or who had been in HBCU institutions and had some sense of how they operated. This was only my second institution. And so, he would say, "well [Participant 15] just said that very same thing." Or when I bring it up in another meeting and they said that something wasn't done I had to rely on that person to indicate, as a male, that "she brought this up two meetings ago." So, somebody always had to validate the work that I brought to the table. (Participant 15)

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This type of experience was later shared by Participant 17 as well in that it was helpful to have a male colleague repeat or bring attention to her contributions to gain attention from the institution's president:

And I do think sometimes though, even with the president being a female, sometimes it takes a male voice for her to hear what I'm saying. So, I've noticed other cabinet members will just repeat what I've said. That's happened two or three times. They'll just repeat something I've said and then she'll be like, "Oh . . ." I don't know why she does that in a group setting because she would never do that if it were just one on one. (Participant 17)

Evident in this example is the presence of advocacy in a female-led cabinet. The use of advocates is not gendered and can span various identities in a given setting. The importance, across them all, is to support colleagues as they engage in the larger group.

These three examples provide a framework for those operating at the cabinet level in the nation's higher education institutions. Colleagues should consider advocacy as a way to support and enable the communication of female SSAOs. Through the participant examples and experiences, those reading should be encouraged to speak up for colleagues as advocates for their success. How does this occur? Participant 2 shared an experience the cabinet group worked through with a consultant or third party to assist with their group communication. This ongoing work to establish strong communication experiences has positively impacted how members of the cabinet shared space, worked together, and encouraged participation resulting in a more communal and collective decision making model. Therefore, it is recommended that each working team should explore their implementation as a way to share and acknowledge how they communicate and how to incorporate the diversity of gendered communication into their work together.

*Importance of Presidential Leadership*

The participants in this study had both male and female leaders, presidents or provosts, who had a variety of communication preferences. For example, some participants described their male presidents and provosts as having more feminine communication attributes, while some participants described their female presidents and provosts as leaning towards masculine communication attributes. Because of this variation, it is important for the leader of the group to acknowledge her, his, or their own communication style and the impact the experiences of communication within the group they lead. Participant 11 spoke directly to this impact of leadership communication:

Oh, yeah, [interruptions, speaking over, etc. are] such a pet peeve. And so fortunately, I think folks on the executive table are pretty mindful. My vice chancellor is pretty mild mannered. He's not a very aggressive personality. So, I think he role models. There isn't a whole lot of interrupting in that executive space. (Participant 11)

Similar to Participant 11, Participant 17 recalled a former supervisor's clear expectation setting experience within a cabinet meeting:

My very first cabinet meeting with the [first president]: he was like, "old boys network" extreme. And it was really interesting. God bless his heart, that meeting he printed out a New York Times article on "mansplaining" and he handed it around the table. I think trying to demonstrate he's "woke to the situation at hand." And sort of put every other cabinet member on like notice. Do you know what I mean? Like, "don't talk over her."

And so, I think they are very cognizant of that. (Participant 17)

Participant 17 directly attributed the leader's expectation setting to the resulting behavior of her peer's behavior in the cabinet meetings.

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Therefore, as a leader, it is incumbent to critically examine and reflect on how your communication attributes are represented in the spaces that you lead. Whether you intend to or not, your communication impacts how they treat and interact with each other. This is reinforced within Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership: a leader must model the way . . . inspire a shared vision . . . challenge the process . . . enable others to act . . . encourage the heart" (Kouzes & Posner, 2010, pp. 3-4). Most applicable is the call for leaders to "model the way," i.e.: represent how you believe others should behave in the given setting (p. 7). If the leader, likely a president or provost, is modeling turn taking, active listening, engaging constructively with each other, and collaborative language the remaining cabinet will follow.

As such, it is recommended that leaders incorporate general gendered communication theory in their work so that they may recognize and support the diversity of communication within the individuals they support. This can be achieved by acknowledging the attributes within masculine and feminine communication schema, examining how negative gendered communication experiences can impact the group dynamics, and considering how backlash may be unconsciously applied to the detriment of a communicator.

### *Importance of Colleagues as Partners*

The final two implications build upon and are dependent on each other: partnership, and communal over competition. To begin, female SSAOs as colleagues should be viewed as partners. Leaders of their own divisions, they serve as important members of the campus community. As such, they can help move institutions forward using their own unique resources and skills. Members of the cabinet should thus work together to accomplish institutional goals and outcomes, rather than in conflict with each other. Many mentioned "meetings before the

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meetings” or “strategizing” with colleagues to bring their best proposals to the table, for example:

It's a lot of like talking before and after meetings. Like you know if there's things that I'm going to present, that I know I'm going to bring to the table, I'll have conversations with peers before we go in just to say, “OK here's the concept I'm thinking of.” (Participant 2)

So, in a group like that, you kind of have to understand the dynamics and who's speaking, most of the time and who's dominant, and strategically sometimes if I need to get something done, for example, I will talk to my female colleagues ahead of time. I say this is what I'm going to be presenting. Okay, I'll say in support of your project or whatever, you know, so that we can tag team. Sometimes that's how you get your agenda pushed forward. (Participant 14)

In addition to Participants 2 and 14, many spoke about challenging one another in their planning so that their plans and proposals would “stand up” in the cabinet meeting. This collegial work occurred across genders and communication styles.

With this finding, cabinets are encouraged to work together with colleagues to develop their proposals with an institutional benefit in mind; challenging and supporting colleagues with constructive feedback in order to create a successful experience. Many participants expressed interest in the institution’s wellbeing as they realigned their own division outcomes and objectives, while others expressed frustration with colleagues or environments which instead promoted the individual accomplishments of people or divisions. The collaborative nature of female SSAOs participants should be further supported by disrupting a competitive environment in lieu of institutionally focused goals and objectives through partnership.

*Importance of Collaboration Over Competition*

Finally, and building upon the previous finding, cabinets and leadership teams should focus on collaboration over competition. The benefits of this collaboration were further outlined by participants. For example, Participant 15 explained,

So, I think for us, we have what's called “team engine” and we've been given some principles in terms of how we operate. So, if there's something that is touching on a nerve we take the opportunity to recognize that and talk about it. And then we move forward in terms of how we're going to discuss or address an issue. It brings everybody back into focus and then we move forward on our issues so we're permitted to send topics and to address issues. (Participant 15)

Participant 4 shared a particularly destructive environment built upon competition that resulted in less involvement and buy-in:

So, there were the very early days under president [President 1], who was a bit of a bully. He was an extremely competitive human being and built a cabinet around competition. So encouraged people to go after each other in meetings go after, not just ideas, but each other. And if you would disagree with him, he would often belittle people in the room. I didn't even know what to do with . . . so those years I didn't talk much in cabinet at all. I kind of kept my head down and did what I needed to do. (Participant 4)

How would Participant 4 feel comfortable realistically participating from the Student Affairs perspective if she did not feel safe doing so? Interestingly, Participant 4's work group evolved with the influx of new leaders. The new group, as explained by Participant 4, “and so now in this new group I find myself talking a lot more because we now feel like we have a majority, better, more team, consensus. Do what's right for the University kind of people.”

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Similar to Participant 4's initial cabinet experience, Participant 16 shared an example of how unproductive a meeting was with a competition to show individual worth:

Actually, when this started we were having nightly meetings and it was very much like we are individually reporting to the provost, but in front of other people. It sort of drove me crazy because I felt like the point of this is to say things that matter to other people that are in this group. We're wasting time because you have a one on one with her. But nonetheless, I think people felt like they needed to prove their worth. And so that was sort of happening. (Participant 16)

Participant 2 is currently undergoing a multi-year process of engaging in positive communication with her fellow cabinet members. As such, they have worked constructively to better communicate and engage with each other. She shares how that has affected her participation:

Because I was kind of one of the more junior members of that group, there was a lot of hesitancy on my part. And kind of the things you're talking about like "I think" or "I feel like . . ." And in the beginning for sure there wasn't a whole lot of directness. But I think through the work that we've done, like you know I can only speak for myself, I feel more comfortable just saying "this is what I'm thinking." It might rattle somebody else but like that's then when we're engaging in dialogue to get to resolve with this. And still there's certainly, I think I'm more, I'm still reserved and hesitant because there just are stronger personalities and communication styles in that room and so you know they'll be dominant voices in conversations. And we all know, and we all have talked about it. We know who the dominant ones are, we know the less dominant ones are. But I do know that my voice is important. I do feel comfortable voicing my opinion and you know I do feel comfortable saying something that's the opposite of what everybody else says so that we

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have discussion around it. And if we decide in the collective that that's not the best direction then I'm fine with that because it's collectively making this decision.

The collaboration Participant 2 described results in a shared determination of the cabinet that she can engage with because she understands how the decision was made. This collaboration is believed to be moving the institution forward rather than resulting in individual gains.

In order to accomplish objectives that have serve to benefit the institution to its fullest, leaders must encourage and support collaborative work. This is likely to be best accomplished through role modeling how administrators should work with each other. For example, Participant 17 recalled a former president's communication to the rest of the cabinet,

My very first cabinet meeting with the [first president]: he was like, "old boys network" extreme. And it was really interesting. God bless his heart, that meeting he printed out a New York Times article on "mansplaining" and he handed it around the table. I think trying to demonstrate he's "woke to the situation at hand." And sort of put every other cabinet member on like notice. Do you know what I mean? Like, "don't talk over her."

And so, I think they are very cognizant of that. (Participant 17)

Although it appears the president did not expressly instruct the cabinet members on his expectation for their behavior, he provided direction about how the cabinet will interact together and how they will move forward as a group.

This may be completed by restructuring interactions at every level to focus on collaboration, communication, and communal decision making. Additionally, positive and negative reinforcement can be implemented in order to reaffirm the importance of collaboration. For example, aligning institutional resources to objectives which are spearheaded by partnerships between divisions or departments or requiring that new institutional initiatives be collaborations

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between divisions. Leaders would then quickly understand the importance and requirement of collaborating with others to receive resources.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Like many other dissertations, research tends to invite consideration for other avenues of intellectual exploration for future studies. This dissertation is no different. Based on the experiences and implementation of gendered communication by female SSAOs, I there are four key future research opportunities.

First, we should further explore mentorship and the experience of female SSAOs with other female leaders at their institution. Participant 6 shared two impactful experiences she had with a fellow female cabinet member. The first was when she entered the cabinet as a junior member, and the second as that same colleague transitioned out from the institution leaving the Participant 6 as a senior member:

And on the very first day that I went to cabinet, again [previous SSAO] had just retired and this was my first cabinet meeting, the Vice Chancellor for [division] said to me “ah, you're the new Student Affairs person, your area remains an enigma even if [previous SSAO] tried to do a good job explaining it to me, it's still problematic.” How do you answer that when you're the newest kid on the block and you don't know what [previous SSAO] told him, right? And [female VC colleague] said “whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa it's her first day, back up.” Again, ally ship from a female leader, right? And gave me permission not to answer his question because clearly whatever his statement was had nothing to do with me. (Participant 6)

When I first started, [Male name 1] was the VC [division], [Male name 2] was the interim VC for [division], and it was me. [Female name 1] was there, thank goodness. I reported

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to [president]. It was not a kind cabinet. And so, but now that we have an all-female leadership team, and before [Female name 1] retired, she was the Senior Vice Chancellor. When she retired she looked at me and said “okay, sweetheart. You're in charge here of the other vice chancellors, you are the Senior Vice Chancellor.” And I'm like, “what are you talking about?” Right? I still feel like I'm 19, right? I feel like “I'm still this young kid!” And I'm like, “she's right, now at [Western University 1], I have the most seniority as a Vice Chancellor.” She says “you gotta take care, you got to take care of the team.” And so, we have had active conversations, which I have done intentionally, purposefully, and very much forward out there to say to the other vice chancellors, “we've got to stick together, we're an all-female team and what often times will happen is we get pitted against each other, particularly when we report to men. And they're really great guys, they're great human beings, they will never intentionally set us up, but they will. That's how institutionalized sexism works. And we will go after each other and we have to commit not to do that. Are you with me?” (Participant 6)

These two examples showed “bookends” of a mentorship relationship – one of which paving a path and the second of which is “handing off” a leadership position.

A second avenue for future research represents the opportunity to explore additional communication attributes not bound by the definitions utilized in this study. The bounds of data collection did not stray from masculine and feminine communication as defined in the research questions intentionally. Future research should consider more openly the communication of female SSAOs, potentially expanding the identity to be representative of the individuals that serve in these roles across the country including more analysis into gender identity as a non-binary conforming leader. How does a SSAO who identifies as a trans woman experience and

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implement communication? Further, pursuing formally the concept of non-binary gender communication and the impact and implications that schema may have on gendered communication experiences.

The third recommendation for future study was introduced in theme three, female SSAOs connection with a female identity. Further examination of the emotional labor that female SSAOs carry, as well as their historical role on campus, would incorporate a deeper layer of social expectations of female SSAOs in the workplace. For example, participants spoke about having to worry about the “feelings” of others as they communicated and “checking in” on their colleagues after an interaction. Additionally, historical implications of female SSAOs as “dean of women” seemed to have lasting impact on how at least one participant interacted with others. This may be more pronounced in institutions with long histories, or those that prescribe to more traditional gender roles.

A final avenue for research would be a textual analysis of male and female SSAO verbal communication. As I worked with the transcripts, I noted a significant number of filler language or tentative speech. As I was not able to draw direct conclusions, I did not analyze the interview transcripts for those particular conclusions. However, for example, there was a clear presence of “right?” “kind of,” “sort of,” and “maybe” throughout nearly all participant interviews. These qualifiers were largely removed from the transcripts for readability and concise quotes but could be considered further for speech patterns, specifically in comparison with masculine communicators.

### **Conclusion**

It is time to say goodbye to these participants who have thoughtfully and thoroughly engaged with the study and myself. Several of them shared that they were participating in order

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to give opportunity for a fellow scholar to achieve positive academic outcomes. Their vulnerability exposed in deeply personal experiences and reflections indicated their willingness to share in order to promote pathways of opportunity for future leaders. As a result, four themes, four findings, and four avenues for future research have been articulated.

As a result of this study, I hope that developing female leaders see a pathway towards achieving leadership roles and recognize the experiences of these participants as their own. Because the presence of female leadership is not for lack of experience or aptitude or effort. As Participant 3 encouraged me, it is the lack of the feeling that one can do it. That you too can be an SSAO. For those female achievers reading this, strive and understand the experiences as your own upon which to learn and grow. For those in the cabinet and leadership team, understand these experiences presented from the participants as struggles that female SSAOs encounter and how you may support their roles. Through acknowledgement and incorporation of the four findings above, I hope that institutional leaders that supervise SSAOs and serve as colleagues will read these experiences and learn what they can do in developing a workplace which supports and engages female professionals as well as others from all backgrounds.

And, finally, I hope that female SSAOs know that they are leaders to those that serve under their supervision and with them each day. Your advocacy, support, and development positively impact those around you even if that is not shared publicly. We appreciate your questions about our day, the engagement in our professional development, and your vulnerability during student crisis. Many of you have rightly identified your role in administration and cabinet as a goal for the female student affairs professionals that you lead. It means that there is a possibility for all of us to attain high levels of leadership and that your presence in that group provides representation for all of us. I hope you continue to lean in and embrace your unique

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place in the academy and leverage your experience and education to lead those that look up to you and aspire to lead in the future.

### **Appendix A: Pre-Interview Reflection**

The workplace is a dynamic environment in which you may interact with individuals each day with competing ideas, objectives, and responsibilities. As a senior student affairs officer, you represent a division as a leader and the institution as a high-ranking administrator. These two positions may require you to communicate and react differently in environments depending on your relationship to others and your desired professional outcomes.

Please consider the prompts below and respond with your thoughts, experiences, and understanding regarding this topic. I welcome your responses in any format: single words, narratives, short descriptors, etc.

1. What is your awareness of your communication practices?
2. How do you use communication in your workplace?
3. Does your specific role within an environment impact your communication practices?
4. How do you make sense of your gendered communication experiences?
5. Please share an experience you have had in which you implemented communication practices in order to achieve strategic objectives at your institution.

**Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about your background in student affairs.
2. As you reflect on your own communication, can you share more information about how you communicate in your various roles – can you provide an example?
  - a. Within your own unit you direct and lead? (ex. Do you find yourself in a lot of decision making? Does the institutional politics allow for you to make those decisions?)
  - b. Within your executive or cabinet-level peers on your campus?
  - c. To your supervisor?
  - d. Have you ever experienced yourself or someone else being interrupted, unnecessary silences/pauses, or engaged in an extended monologue or speaking out of turn? Can you share that?
    - i. If no: What does that look like? How does communication happen? How do difficult decisions get made?
  - e. Have you ever been affirmed or experienced a positive reaction to your communication? Can you share that?
3. We've just spoken about you are specifically impacted by communication in various settings. Now I want to speak about more generally how your organization operates. How would you describe communication within your organization?
  - a. Within your own unit you direct and lead?
  - b. Within your executive or cabinet-level peers on your campus?
  - c. To your supervisor?
  - d. How does one establish themselves? In your unit you direct and lead? In your executive peers? (ex. How do you shore up resources? How do you accomplish strategic outcomes?)
  - e. How does one accomplish goals or objectives? In your unit you direct and lead? In your executive peers?
4. With those considerations we just discussed, how do you make sense of how you communicate in those roles? Can you provide an example?
  - a. Within your own unit you direct and lead?
  - b. Within your executive peers on your campus?
  - c. How does, if any, your identities impact your communication?
  - d. Do you have an example of when your communication was perceived positively or had a positive outcome? Can you share that?
  - e. Do you have an example of when your communication was perceived negatively or had a negative outcome? Can you share that?
5. What else would you like to share?

**Appendix C: Personal and Professional Demographic Survey**

**Institutional Information**

1. Your current institution is classified as? (public, private)
2. What is the total institutional enrollment?
3. Institution location (per NASPA region, if known).

**Professional Information**

1. What is your position title?
2. How many years have you served as a CSAO?
3. What position do you report to at your institution?
4. What is the sex of the individual that you report to at your institution?
5. Do you currently represent a department or division at a “cabinet” level?
6. If yes, what is the sex composition of the “cabinet” level professionals?
7. How many total employees are within the division or department you lead?
8. What is the sex composition of the employees within this division or department?
9. How many employees (if any) do you directly supervise?
10. What is the sex composition of the employees you directly supervise?
11. How many departments/offices (if any) do you supervise/oversee?
12. What is the average years of service that your direct supervisees have?
13. What is the average education level that your direct supervisees have?

**Personal Information**

1. What is your current education attainment?
2. What race/ethnicity best describes you?
3. What is your age?
4. What is your gender identity?

### **Appendix D: Participant Consent Form**

Aloha! My name is Leslie Mitchell and you are invited to take part in a research study. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in the College of Education, Department of Educational Administration. As part of the requirements for earning my graduate degree, I am completing research for the dissertation.

#### ***What am I being asked to do?***

If you participate in this project, you will be asked to complete a pre-interview journal activity, demographic information form and a semi-structured, open-ended interview.

#### ***Taking part in this study is your choice.***

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you.

#### ***Why is this study being done?***

The purpose of my project is to explore the experiences and implementation of communication practices by female chief student affairs officers.

#### ***What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?***

The three components of participation vary in time estimates. The demographic information is estimated to take approximately 5 minutes and will collect demographic, professional and institutional information. The pre-interview reflection is estimated to take approximately 30 minutes. Finally, the semi-structured, open-ended interview will be scheduled for 1.5 to 2 hours and ask questions like “can you share more information about how you communicate in your various roles?” and “how do you make sense of how you communicate in those roles?”

Only you and I will be present during the interview. With your permission, I will audio-record the interview so that I can later transcribe the interview and analyze the responses. You will be one of about 25 people I will interview for this study.

#### ***What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?***

I believe there is little risk to you for participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with me during the interview. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop taking any of the components or you can withdraw from the study altogether.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this research.

#### ***Confidentiality and Privacy:***

Your name and preferred contact method will be collected to schedule the interview, should you decide to continue. Once interviews are arranged, names and identifying information will be separated from the demographic/professional/institutional information, pre-interview reflection, and interview responses.

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After I write a copy of the interviews, I will erase or destroy the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) and report my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

### ***Future Research Studies:***

Even after removing identifiers, the data from this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

### ***Questions:***

If you have any questions about this study, please call or email me at 808-956-7705 and [ljmitch@hawaii.edu](mailto:ljmitch@hawaii.edu). You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Chris Lucas, at 808-956-4419 and [cmlucas@hawaii.edu](mailto:cmlucas@hawaii.edu). You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808-956-5007 or [uhirb@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhirb@hawaii.edu) to discuss problems, concerns and questions, obtain information, or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit <http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd> for more information on your rights as a research participant.

### ***To Participate:***

Clicking “I wish to participate” below implies your consent to participate in this study.

Mahalo!

[I wish to participate] [I do not wish to participate]

Appendix E: IRB Approval Form



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of HAWAII®  
MĀNOA

Office of Research Compliance  
Human Studies Program

**DATE:** January 30, 2020  
**TO:** Lucas, Christopher, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Educational Administration  
Mitchell, Leslie, PhD, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Educational Administration  
**FROM:** Rivera, Victoria, Dir, Ofc of Rsch Compliance, Social&Behav Exempt  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Making Sense of Gendered Communication Experiences of Female Chief Student Affairs Officers  
**FUNDING SOURCE:**  
**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** 2019-01055  
**APPROVAL DATE:** January 30, 2020

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH**

This letter is your record of the Human Studies Program approval of this study as exempt.

On January 30, 2020, the University of Hawaii (UH) Human Studies Program approved this study as exempt from federal regulations pertaining to the protection of human research participants. The authority for the exemption applicable to your study is documented in the Code of Federal Regulations at 45 CFR 46.101(b) 2.

Exempt studies are subject to the ethical principles articulated in The Belmont Report, found at the OHRP Website [www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html).

Exempt studies do not require regular continuing review by the Human Studies Program. However, if you propose to modify your study, you must receive approval from the Human Studies Program prior to implementing any changes. You can submit your proposed changes via the UH eProtocol application. The Human Studies Program may review the exempt status at that time and request an application for approval as non-exempt research.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, we encourage you to destroy private information which can be linked to the identities of individuals as soon as it is reasonable to do so. Signed consent forms, as applicable to your study, should be maintained for at least the duration of your project.

This approval does not expire. However, please notify the Human Studies Program when your study is complete. Upon notification, we will close our files pertaining to your study.

If you have any questions relating to the protection of human research participants, please contact the Human Studies Program by phone at 956-5007 or email [uhirb@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhirb@hawaii.edu). We wish you success in carrying out your research project.

UH Human Studies Program, Office of Research Compliance  
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<https://www.hawaii.edu/researchcompliance/human-studies>  
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**Appendix F: Extended Participant Data**

**Female SSAOs Fluidly use both Masculine and Feminine Communication Attributes**

*Masculine Communication Attributes*

I'm generally am a pretty direct communicator. (Participant 1)

So, in terms of my communication style, I'm very direct with people. I don't, you know, I think it's just me having learned from supervisors and people that I've worked with what I've appreciated in what I have not so much appreciated. (Participant 2)

So, I'm pretty direct because I never want people to mistake "what did she say?" You know? I had a boss maybe five, six years ago who didn't like to give people bad news. And so, we caught on to this, everybody loved him, he is a great guy, but I would sit in meetings and you know he just couldn't say no to people. And he would wiggle his way around. I was one of many people. We would walk out of the meeting with whomever and they'd be like "well that went well," and I'd be like "what? you know he didn't say yes to your proposal and in fact he's not going to support it." And they would be like "well yeah he didn't say yes." So, we just had it translate for him. I didn't mind doing... every president is different, and you make a decision "is this somebody I want to stay and work with?" And if you do that, they're like anybody who works for me or anybody else. (Participant 3)

I tend to be reflective. I also tend to be pretty open with . . . I tend to be pretty direct and transparent. Like that is something that I just don't know how not to be. (Participant 4)

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So, I worked a long time not to do that and then I realized really quickly, and reporting to as you say a cabinet, and a president, and a provost, and working with some system vice presidents, who are not very nice. I had to channel what my teachers called bossy, which I hope I've come to channel into being directive and direct and definitive and a decision maker and try to balance the two. (Participant 6)

So, as a leader for my unit, I would actually say that I communicate very directly.  
(Participant 7)

I will say this, if you do the DISC assessment with me, I am a D. I am dominant and I am direct. (Participant 16)

With my direct reports, and I think this is probably true throughout, I'm very direct. You ask me a question; I'll give you an answer. I don't lie very well. Honesty has really served me well because I've been there a long time. Oftentimes honesty doesn't serve you well in the short term, but it serves you well in the long term. I'm quite direct. I'm very relational, but I'm not very emotional. (Participant 18)

I appreciate having supervisory relationships where we can be frank with each other.  
(Participant 1)

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I want to communicate with the least amount of words, I want to get to the point. There isn't a whole lot of like niceties at the beginning. I remember when I was a first time manager and I sent an email out to a staff member and it was somebody I had very good relationship with and he wrote back and he said, "Oh, you know, it would be really nice if you kind of started off with like, "Hi, how are you? Have a great day," thank you.

(Participant 11)

### *Feminine Communication Attributes*

#### **Communal.**

I'm really very open to giving space for "OK let's process how we're moving through this and where are people at with it." (Participant 1)

Yeah I think so because a lot of times I think it's a management technique. To a degree it's empowering. To a degree it's self-serving. Anybody is going to do better on something they thought was their idea or something they're invested in. So why don't I step back just a little bit and let them have that moment? And no one will work for you unless they think it's their agenda too. And so, to some degree, it's empowering but to some degree is self-serving in that it's getting to the end where we need to get to meet our goal or to win the game or whatever it is. So, it's partly empowering and partly management strategy. Like they need to own this. (Participant 8)

So, for me I recognize that process is important, moving too fast is not always good, it's taken me a while to get there, but I understand it. So, I also understand the importance of making sure everyone feels heard, that they have a voice and a perspective. And you

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know sometimes the perspective that is “the most varied” perspective, or you know, “the oddball” perspective as some like to call it, is the one that I'm trying to bring into the conversation, so they don't feel left out of that particular space. So oftentimes I draft it then I send it back out and say, “here’s what we talked about, so where do we land? how do we come to some conclusion with regard to where we want to focus?” And then we finalize. And of course, we go back and identify priorities if there are any. To me it's very much a collaborative process. And it's making sure that everyone feels that they've been heard and are a part of this decision making. (Participant 15)

And so, this is something that I've been working to change, because I think I have for a long time felt responsible to come with the answers. Or at least come with “here's a draft of what I'm thinking and give me feedback.” So, it's at least been that unless I felt like I couldn't do that at all, and I can't even think of a situation where that's the case. I've been trying to establish a strategic plan and what are our strategic priorities, and I really struggled to try to put all of that together so that it would meet everyone's needs, again because of the breadth of what we're doing. And so, what I have in that case, I did bring like “here's what I'm thinking, let's talk about it.” But what I've been learning is that I can come with less. And say, “this is something we need to do, let's talk about this,” and I have not done a good job with that. (Participant 16)

It's all about input. And hopefully we go back and forth enough that a decision just emerges. I mean everyone knows when the buck stops with me. And if in fact a decision doesn't emerge, I'm going to make a decision. Obviously, I've been there for [time], I'm

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not stupid and how I do it I'm going to get as much information as possible. But a decision is going to get made. (Participant 18)

### **Personal.**

Yes, I think that my personal style of transparency, of showing some vulnerability, letting people see the person and not just the role has been respected and been used now by other people on cabinet as well. (Participant 5)

Yeah, no I definitely, just last week we had a senior leadership meeting and it was right around the time where everything was happening with all the civil unrest that's happening here. And I opened the meeting and I was vulnerable with everyone. That this is not something we talked about. And I got a little bit teary even when talking about it and said “you know this is really hard topic to voice and people are afraid because they're afraid to say the wrong thing, but then when you say nothing you know that that says a lot and for us that are in leadership positions, places of privilege and power, we need to say something and not be afraid of saying the wrong thing.” And I got a lot of positive feedback from “thank you for being vulnerable,” “thank you for saying that.” (Participant 5)

So, if you look Brené Brown's vulnerability piece, it's exactly what I would consider . . . it's basically “I don't know all the answers, I'll give you my true self. If that doesn't help and doesn't work, let's figure out what might. But I'm gonna give you the best I have, and I'm going to be vulnerable because I don't have all the answers, nor will I ever.” And I hope I don't either because that means I'll stop learning. (Participant 8)

And, again, just recently there's had to be so much. Couple of things in the live chat that have been going. I mean, obviously, racial injustices have been made more aware to the public over the last couple of months and it was really important to me in live chat, even though that wasn't the intent, it was more like college specific/COVID issues, to make a statement about Black Lives Matter in particular. And I wrote it, because I didn't want to screw it up. But I also knew that's part of it, right? That's part of being vulnerable and having to be okay if you screw up. I was scared to death. And I read so much about not exactly what to say, but where people have gone wrong. But also wanting to make sure that whatever I was saying was authentic to me because I don't want to just say something just to say the right thing. (Participant 16)

It's really interesting. So, I have a pretty informal communication style. So how I'm talking to you right now is how I talk. I don't code switch. I'm authentic in how I communicate. And so, I find though that at cabinet there's a lot more posturing that happens. And people choose words differently, so they don't exactly say what's happening they sort of imply what's happening. (Participant 17)

### **Focus on Relationships.**

Even when we challenge it is with a great deal of mutual respect and caring and we enjoy each other. (Participant 1)

So, I think I can still be true to my “matter of fact, direct style” but also care about them and check in with them and let them know that they mattered to me. And that I want them

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to take care of themselves, especially during times of crisis like right now. Some people might call it tough love. (Participant 11)

And it's also just kind of who I am. So professionally what I have seen is I am able to challenge my staff, hold them accountable, have the hard conversations and still go out to lunch with them. (Participant 12)

It was really still trying to figure out how do we build this relationship and even when we did have face to face meeting . . . you know I'm a hugger, I'm an interacting kind of person . . . couldn't do any of that. So, it really boils down to see me face to face, it boils down to me calling and communicating, it boils down to making sure I'm following up in emails or whatever is necessary to ensure that they have what they need. But the one thing I always want to make sure they understand is that I am available, if that means you call me at 10 o'clock at night, call me at 10 o'clock at night. It's important for me that you feel like you have resolved what you need or that you get what you need so you can move forward the next day. So, I think it is very much about relationships. (Participant 15)

Well I do think that I very clearly want to be relational in my communication. And so that's definitely part of what I've missed in being off campus is I can't just like evaluate my relationship with somebody by passing them in the hallway and having a side conversation. And so, I don't feel those good vibes from that anymore and that sucks, and it makes me like less confident in everything. Because I don't necessarily know . . . I don't have that reinforcement of like “we're good.” (Participant 16)

**Transparency.**

In that group I tend to be even more forthcoming. I don't know if it's really about my communication style as much as that is how deep I delve into different pieces of information. (Participant 1)

So, I talked to them about, you know, we did do budget reductions. I make sure that everybody was involved in that. Like I did a full division session on University budget and did an exercise on what ideas do you have of how we approach this? So, I tend to, not so much, I don't know that I would say consensus builder. I always make it clear it's my decision in the end, but I want everybody to know that they had a voice along the way. That they've been heard and not just listened to. That they understand where my decision came from so that at least they have context for what it is. They may not love what it is . . . but they know how and why we got there. So, I do spend a good amount of time listening and getting feedback and then gathering that together to come up with the decision. Even if it's not going to be a popular decision, we still got there as a group. (Participant 4)

Very honestly. I try to do that very openly. I will tell my people, "I will always try to give you the most honest response that I have. Now know that when it is personnel related or when there are confidential or sensitive issues, I will not be able to disclose at that level. But whatever information I am able to share with you, that is my goal." (Participant 7)

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So, in the division I have attempted to create a place where openness, transparency, honesty, collaboration, and moving beyond collaboration to true partnership is not just valued, but that it's actually demonstrated. (Participant 12)

And then I also want them to know that I am constantly, because they're not at the VPs table, they're not in the cabinet meetings, I am representing their interests well at the next level. So, I often share stories and I think that that's important to have a back and forth. You share the issues, I've taken it up there, this is what we discussed, and this is the outcome, so you know so I think that's important. (Participant 14)

### *Code Switching or Situational Communication*

So, while my preference is all of the communication and the input and everything else, I can also really stand up for myself. I can really put a break on conversation. I can come and I can make the decision and be clear that it is my decision to make. And I know that directly comes out of that time. So, I also just wanted you to hear that while I have that preferred style I have learned over time how to do that other style and will pull it out when it's needed . . . And I'm doing it. I know when I'm doing it. And I'm choosing to do it, right? (Participant 4)

I try to match his communication. Yeah I try to match his communication for sure. I think he appreciates my style and thinks that I'm very effective in my role and so he values it. I don't think he thinks like "oh [Participant 5] is the touchy feely one." You know I think he values it. But to sway him I have to match his approach for sure. You know my proposal needs to be in writing, it needs to be data driven, feelings need to be out of it.

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You know talking about how it would impact people: he would have no care about that. Like my staff are in that or even students for that matter, he's looking at it from one perspective. So yeah I would try to match him. (Participant 5)

So, I also recognize that one of the greatest abilities as women, is that we can change our communication style based on the environment that we're in, right? Sort of how like people of color will change their communication style depending on who's surrounding them in a moment. You do a quick scan of a room and you know how you got to show up, you know, and so I know how to show up differently. And I hope differently doesn't mean integrity versus non integrity, kind versus unkind, but the words and the style that I use. (Participant 6)

But my parents would tell you very intentionally that they raised my sister and I to work predominantly with men. And so, it has never been uncommon for me to have more men in my personal relationships as well as professional relationships. The women that I have, that I'm probably most close to in my personal life, operate like I do very intentionally. And so, we don't necessarily communicate together in that way, but we recognize the need to communicate in a more masculine way because all of us are leaders in worlds where men are making more of the decisions. So, my parents raised us to do this, to operate. And so, I can switch, I can go back and forth. And I've gotten pretty good, I think, at adapting communication styles for the areas that I live in. (Participant 10)

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I'm very thankful for my upbringing being a racial minority within minorities. I had to learn how to get along and survive and thrive in my environment. And then as an Asian American, now it's different and I know [Western State] there's a lot of API's there, but when I was first starting out there were very few Asian Americans in my field. So, I had to learn how to communicate and adapt to different audiences. (Participant 11)

I came into administration at the time that when I first went to some of these collaborative partnerships it was all men, and I was the only woman. Okay. And I think that at that time I had to really learn how to communicate from a masculine point of view. So, it was where we had to quickly understand what the protocols were in the meeting. And, and also understand where each of these players sit in the hierarchy of the organization. (Participant 13)

But, in terms of speaking up and being assertive and taking charge of a meeting those are all things I had to learn. Those are all things I had to learn. So, one time when I was a very young professional I was working in, I think I mentioned this in the survey, I was working in an academic college. And all the department chairs and the Dean were men. And I was the only woman. So, we had kind of an interesting Student Affairs program where I was the Student Affairs person assigned to this college, so it was really interesting. But I was the only woman in the room. And so, if I didn't talk about students and if I didn't share about what they needed in terms of tutoring or whatever, I'd never be able to contribute anything. And so, I learned to insert myself very early on as a young

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person and so it's like “ok I’m not gonna raise my hand, I'm just going to blurt out something,” because all these other people are doing that. (Participant 14)

Yes, so dealing with younger staff, dealing with students, knowing that direct communication can be offensive to them. That they're much more process oriented. This is not going to be a five minute conversation, “bam, bam, bam, bam, okay let's get to work.” It’s let us go through all of our feelings. And, you know, I can do that. It's not my mode that I prefer just because I get fairly impatient. But I do find more and more young people needing that. (Participant 18)

### *Communication Attribute “Confusion”*

I can code switch in terms of politics. I can code switch in terms of geography, so I can easily be the [Midwestern State 2] girl one minute, and the [Midwestern State 1] girl the next and they're two different things. I think that language and how I interact with both men and women also is a part of that. So, you know, sometimes I wonder almost that I think I've gotten so good at fitting into where I'm going or where I'm a part of that sometimes I struggle to find or to reconnect with what my own voice even is. (Participant 10)

So, at this point, I don't know what is my communication style? Did I artificially develop it? Is this who I really am? I don't even know anymore, you know? But I think when I think about my true authentic style, maybe it is . . . I never baby talked to my kids. And I think that's probably from some of my early experiences. I don't want to be like those

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hyper feminine girl or women on TV. And so, there's probably like internalized sexism there too. (Participant 11)

With my direct reports, and I think this is probably true throughout, I'm very direct. You ask me a question, I'll give you an answer. I don't lie very well. Honesty has really served me well because I've been there a long time. Oftentimes honesty doesn't serve you well in the short term, but it serves you well in the long term. I'm quite direct. I'm very relational, but I'm not very emotional. Is that true? I don't know if that's true. I show a lot of passion I guess but I'm not . . . You know this is a hard question for me, Leslie, I don't know how I communicate. I think I'm direct. I think I'm honest, I use humor. I'm always concerned about people's well-being, their family, how that works but for me it's about the work.

(Participant 18)

### **Female SSAOs as Recipients of Negative Gendered Communication or Gender-Based Microaggressions**

#### ***Backlash***

So, one of my colleagues here, she's had very similar experiences where people are just like "I don't like to work with her because she's very direct." I think she's really good at what she does and certainly she uses a different style of communication than I use, and it's not better, worse, it's different, right? And it tends to be more masculine because it's more direct and I think people have gotten really upset working with her. (Participant 2)

I had to go down the hall and explain to the [colleague] a couple of years ago, when we disagreed, I'm not attacking you and when I'm asking you questions, I'm really asking questions because I'm trying to gather information. Because I think he didn't do well with

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that and I think it was his confidence level. And I said I need to be able to have that kind of give and take, that's my style. And if you're going to be my colleague, we really need to do this together. (Participant 3)

Sure, and again, this is probably where I tend to hold back. It's the same old story and the research bears this out is that a woman who is assertive is a bitch, a man who acts in the same manner as leader. And so, I think that I probably have had to work, I think a lot of women have to work harder, to try and make their case. But unlike men, I have to worry about their feelings, whereas they don't necessarily have to worry about mine. I have to worry about egos. I have to worry about the politics. I'm more thoughtful about that in terms of how I do things. (Participant 10)

I literally got told that the reason that the board gives you a difficult time is because you just don't say "yes sir," or you know you just don't ask them . . . if they asked you to do something you don't acquiesce and go ahead and say, you respond with best practices. (Participant 15)

And so, I do have that direct part where I will poke at things. But I am also super cognizant of how that is coming off to people. And that even I am sort of making jokes to recognize that. But now it might backfire on me because now it's just like, "oh yeah there's [Participant 16] with another question or another issue." And that is frustrating to me, particularly because we've grown and there's people that are new and I feel like I

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have not been able to prove to them yet that these things are valuable because they haven't seen that yet. (Participant 16)

And so, anything I would have done at that point would have just seemed self-serving, like a power grab, even though that is exactly what he was doing. (Participant 17)

### *Negative Gendered Communication Experiences or Gendered Microaggressions*

I had experienced a couple of years ago. Was interviewing for a position and getting to what was my final formal with the president and discovering that he actually was not somebody who wanted people to disagree very hard with him and what he thought. I could pinpoint the exact moment when that interview took a sharp turn and we both knew “yup, we’re done with each other because this is not going to happen.” (Participant 1)

There is a male that is on our senior leadership team that is very much like it's gotta be this way or if it's not I'm just going to fume about it, kind of thing. And you know it sets this tone in the room of like OK well maybe I'm gonna speak up, but I know it's gonna anger you. Maybe I'm not gonna speak up because I don't want to add to this, because you know my perspective might be like if you're not getting your way, you can't fume about it. And there's a lot of the, what you said, extended monologues. There's a lot of extended models. Let me explain why my way is the best way kind of thing. Yeah it's uncomfortable . . . (Participant 2)

So, I lived in [Southern State] in [Southern Urban City] I had people directly tell me to my face . . . I had a student that I supervised that said to me “well you're a woman and so

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even though I work for you it doesn't mean I need to listen to you.” Point blank. You can't be any more blunt than that. So, then the next day he no longer worked for me 'cause I'm like well if that's the problem, then that's the problem. But, yeah there's been instances where I know it's like as a result of my identities, my insecurities, my biases, like all of that. (Participant 2)

I had to go down the hall and explain to the [colleague] a couple of years ago, when we disagreed, I'm not attacking you and when I'm asking you questions, I'm really asking questions because I'm trying to gather information. Because I think he didn't do well with that and I think it was his confidence level. (Participant 3)

He will explain to me the things that we need to be thinking about in student life based on where we are with the budget and resources. And there actually is no interrupting him, he just would keep going and going and going and going and going. So, I just kind of sit there and listen and try, but there's not a pause for me to “jump in.” But I want to say “yup, been doin' this for a while, [position], that's my area, yeah? I've got it. Yep.” (Participant 4)

So, my interaction with board of trustees and alumni and development visits. And it has been actually one of the hardest parts for me to adjust to because I didn't know what to make of the fact that every single, every single, board meeting I get a big hug and kiss from every member of the board. We go to things and it's the hand on the small of my back guiding me into breakfast, or commenting on how much they like my dress, or you

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know . . . and I look and they're not hugging the men. But every single meeting I get a kiss and a hug goodbye from every board member. That's true. And alumni meetings it's true. And I have had very inappropriate conversations or questions asked by alumni on development visits. So, I got to be very close friends with my development officer. And I remember saying: dirty old men! Why do you take me to see dirty old men? But guaranteed if you sit, at a meeting, if it's a development meeting with a straight man over the age of 50: I'll have my arm rubbed, I'll have my hand patted, I have my back rubbed. By the 4th or 5th meeting of the day I just want to yell "oh my god stop touching me. Just stop touching me." I had one donor, no lie, my developmental officer and I talk about him still all the time. He asked me if I had ever tried pole dancing. So, when you talk about being intentional with communication: that's where I have to be the most intentional. But I am on constant: "what is it worth fighting? what do I smile for? what do I push back on? How do I push back in a way that makes me hold my head up high but that preserves a relationship?" And after the pole dancing one I remember getting in the car and I just remember saying, the bully, I'll just call him [male cabinet colleague], I remember saying "fucking [male cabinet colleague] doesn't have to deal with this crap." But all my peers are going out raising money and they're not having to be pet the whole night." So that is something I don't think they talk about with SSAO women at all.

(Participant 4)

I will say we had a VP leave last year, who really was a bully. I mean I have heard it is the consensus everywhere you go on campus: he was a bully. And it worked for him. But he liked to use gender to try to diminish me. So, for about the first year that I was there, it

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was at least a year, he would introduce me to people like board of trustees, “oh have you met [Participant 4] yet? She's really nice. I'm not nice, but [Participant 4], she's really nice.” And I would say “OK [colleague's name], you need to stop that.” And then it will be another thing, like: “oh well, you know, [Participant 4]'s the nice one.” And one day I had to just flat out . . . and it was actually it was at a social, so it was with other people who are upper cabinet. People that I liked. But he said it again. And I said to him, “[colleague's name], you need to stop saying it. I've asked you multiple times, but it is like a pat on the head. You call someone nice when they don't have any depth and it's gendered.” And he said “no, no, it's not, it's not gendered.” And I said, “yeah but if you're not nice . . .” and the other woman at the table said, “you're a bitch.” And he's like “no.” And I said “[colleague's name], one piece of advice for you, don't confuse niceness for weakness.” And everyone was like “ohhhhhh.” And I was like “no.” I just had had it. Because it was so intentional to try to diminish me. (Participant 4)

Absolutely I mean our senior staff, to get a word in I must interrupt. If I say something it could just be brushed over. And if a male counterpart says it it's valued. (Participant 5)

All the time and I hope I don't do that because those things drive me crazy. I think they are completely disrespectful. I don't know if it's a cultural thing meaning Asian culture thing, if it's a local [Western State] culture thing. If it's a female thing. If it's a person of color thing. If it's a I just was raised to treat people with respect and let them say their piece thing. Probably a combination of all of the above, right? It drives me crazy like it probably drives you crazy. I find it to be incredibly disrespectful. And we do it to each

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other and I hope I don't do that speaking over someone, interrupting them, speaking more than someone else, not giving someone else an opportunity to have a conversation or to say their piece. (Participant 6)

Because I don't know how to explain this, but because I am a female leader I have had to fight my way to the table on certain conversations, right? And we shouldn't have to raise our hand and ask permission to be included in a conversation. Yet that is the case. (Participant 7)

With my one colleague and in [male VP, division 3]. He is a little bit of an interrupter or an ignorer. He's more of an ignorer. He's not overtly but he's one who will [reenacts stares in opposite direction, gets distracted]. I'm confident he doesn't do it on purpose. I don't think he even knows he's doing it. He'll start writing notes, looking out the window or he just kind of loses the thread if a woman is talking. (Participant 9)

There are more men that do that than women and there are times I swear I see women just kind of rolling their eyes like, "oh my god. Here they go again. It's the boys. It's the boys having their kind of side conversation." (Participant 10)

This will be the second president that I've worked for as a vice president and the leader certainly sets the tone. So, the previous leader is a former Republican [politician]. And we got along well but he had just a very distinct way of doing things. And so, I probably was a little bit more reserved than I normally would be in a public setting because I knew

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his ego was attached to, especially being dressed down by a woman that was not going to go real well. (Participant 10)

There isn't a whole lot of interrupting in that executive space but there is somebody in another department that I have to work, and he interrupts me, other people, and it's very much a pet peeve. (Participant 11)

I was asked to co-chair a cable TV committee. So, we needed a new cable contract. So, I worked in housing and [male name] worked in [information technology] and we were expected to chair this. So, I go to the first meeting and it was in our office space because we had a conference room. And there were all men on the committee except for me. And [male name] said, "[Participant 12] would you get us coffee?" I was like, sure. We have a break room; I'll go bring some coffee in. And then, you know, looks at me, "hey, you'll take minutes right?" And I was like, "yeah . . . I'll take minutes." But you can be damn well be sure that the next meeting I was like, "hey [male name] I'd like some coffee," and "[male name] you're going to take notes today and you'll distribute those out by the end of the day?" (Participant 12)

Yeah I mean this happens regularly. It happens regularly in cabinet, you know, so we have, we have male . . . it's not just the VPs who are in cabinet, so we have other folks who are on the cabinet. And so, when you look at it that way, the cabinet is largely male. Like I said the president, often does not give the women in the group eye contact when he's talking. That's just how he is, he just doesn't do that. And so, I've accepted that over

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the years, so it's just like that's how he is, he's not going to change, he doesn't get it, he's never going to get it. (Participant 14)

People always felt this need to say “well you can trust me” or, “I really like you” or “you look good today” or something that plays to my emotional psyche or especially is related to my physical appearance. And I'm thinking other places I've been at up north that would be sexual misconduct or some kind of Title IX violation of how people communicate with each other. So, I also find that I have to get them to think differently about ways in which they communicate. Like they'll call you “baby” or something else and I'm sitting here like, “okay I get it, I'm in the south, but I gotta work on these guys and how they communicate with each other.” (Participant 15)

I think about the newly appointed Vice Provost. He was the Dean of the [College] until a few months ago. He does that a lot. I mean we joke about it because we're like, “you have five minutes to talk, you cannot go any further.” And he definitely will take over a conversation. He will cut off things. (Participant 16)

And I do think sometimes though, even with the president being a female, sometimes it takes a male voice for her to hear what I'm saying. So, I've noticed other cabinet members will just repeat what I've said. That's happened two or three times. They'll just repeat something I've said and then she'll be like, “Oh . . .” I don't know why she does that in a group setting because she would never do that if it were just one on one. (Participant 17)

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Our [VP Finance] does it all the time: talking over, interrupting. Our president doesn't do it. I mean he is quite respectful in allowing you to talk it's just that he doesn't want to hear it. I mean he's respectful enough to know that he shouldn't interrupt and all of that . . . he's read enough gender stuff. It's interesting that that has happened most with me in terms of our [VP Finance]. I've worked with three [VPs of Finance] all of them dealt that way. And I have had three [presidents], two of the three acted that way. (Participant 18)

### **Female SSAOs Connection with a Female Identity**

#### ***Feminine Identity***

I think I told you the story before some of the system vice chancellors have berated me, if you will, for being too nice and too kind. Right? And they're not all male identified either. Who say it in a very vile way, "you know [Participant 6], you're just too nice," or "they're really lucky you're nice." Like it's a weakness. Like it is a deficit. Like it is a disease. With that kind of vileness. And I, as a new Vice Chancellor, and as an interim Vice Chancellor, as one of the youngest Vice Chancellors, it took years for me to figure out what was this and then to realize that my authentic self which I have to believe is kind. And that it takes incredible strength to be kind, in the face of everyone else throwing other people under the bus and talking over each other and being mean to each other and one upmanship. And "I rule, and you suck," and the only way I can get ahead is by putting you and your team down. I choose to not engage in that. And that's not masculine, that's sick, that's an unhealthy work environment. And I choose not to engage in that so am I kind? I believe I am kind, but it takes incredible strength to be kind, particularly in an environment like that, that is so pathological and unhealthy. (Participant 6)

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I mean you watch people in the rank above you and you think, “what would I do in that situation?” Or you evaluate people's behavior all the time, especially if you're thinking about “what would I do?” or “how will I get to that level?” And what I recognize, and I think this is still true today, is that one path or success for women is to sort of take the “Mad Men” approach and use a kind of coded sexual language and to make yourself attractive and to be compliant and positive and happy and you know, sort of the cheerleader girl on the team. When I talk about this sometimes with friends I'm like, she's such a “Darla,” right? That one girl in the little rascals club. That's going way back. But like that Smurfette. In popular culture right there's that, “here's all the different kinds of men there are and there's a girl.” And “the girl” stands for all of femininity so you can like do the Smurfette thing. Or you can consciously compete on the same ground and use your communication style to assert yourself as an equal. And I just, you know, I'm not much of a Smurfette. And sexual identity plays a role in that, right? As a lesbian, I don't play in the same way to those male colleagues. (Participant 9)

So, other feedback that I've gotten over the years is actually that my style, my leadership style, is actually pretty feminine, but firm. (Participant 11)

There's got to be unconscious things at play, right? So, I'm Korean American immigrant and I used to watch Korean shows with my mom. And I'd always ask her, “why do these woman sound like Hello Kitty?” I mean, Hello Kitty doesn't have a mouth and doesn't have a voice. But I imagine if Hello Kitty could speak, that's how these Korean women

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would speak: very artificially high pitched voices. And middle aged women acting like little girls. I don't know if that's the way it is now. But that was the impression that I got when I was growing up. And I was like, I don't understand why they act like that. And I remember just having this reaction, like I don't want to be like that. I want to be taken seriously. I want to have influence. I want to have power. (Participant 11)

I do think the hardest arena for me to communicate in is our Board of Trustees meeting. And I think gender has a lot to do with that and age. I think just being a younger female. I could be the daughter of most of the board members. I think the other thing that's interesting about a lot of females who've been very successful in student affairs are often not as feminine as me. And so, like they don't wear beaded sweaters and big earrings. You know? Or have long blonde hair. That's a space that's a little harder for me to communicate in because part of me is like the whole time I'm in there . . . our board is wonderful and they're very kind to me but also think they sort of look at me like "isn't she sweet" or "isn't she's just the sweetest?" And so that's a harder space for me to figure out how to position what I'm trying to communicate. I've never had a problem with the Board, and they all tell me what a good job I do, but at the same time that's a harder space. I think it would be for any younger female. I've been on since I was under [age] so I think that that would be a hard space regardless. (Participant 17)

So, there's verbal and nonverbal communication, as well. So, when I got the job at [Midwestern College 2] I was a 20 year [resident of Northeastern City 1]. But I came with a black and grey wardrobe. Black, grey. Is pretty much all I wore. I came from a

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culture with a lot of suits. I have a closet full of suits. I walked in to a cabinet in this incredibly hyper masculine culture. And I went out and consciously, or unconsciously, I'm not sure, but I now wear almost all dresses and skirts. I wear lots of color. That I kind of had been: guess what you've hired a woman, now I'm not gonna let you pretend I'm not sitting here in my electric pink skirt, and grey pattern tights, and boots. You're not gonna ignore me. I am here. So even when I wasn't talking a lot in cabinet, I never disappear.

(Participant 4)

### *Emotional Labor*

That it's very feelings focused, it's very interpersonally focused, about making space and all of that. So, I am certain that there are ways in which both my training and my gender identity play out in that communication. (Participant 1)

How many times do women take over when . . . I don't care if it's a woman who left or a man who left. But I think it's very common that there are women in any profession, but I can only speak to ours, who you're either asked or you assume because there's a leadership vacuum. And you know you need another committee to chair like a hole in the head. You're excited about it and everything, but you got plenty to fill your day.

(Participant 3)

I think my role, I don't want to say I'm the feelings checker. But I definitely am with the group. I am the one . . . like this is an environment where you could be very nervous to share your opinion if it's a counter opinion to the group and I think because I've been here so long I'm OK using my voice to do that. (Participant 5)

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And then even like the president, I forget what this was about, it was something and I send him my “Happy Friday.” I don't know if you will read it, but there was something, and we were in a meeting and he said something. He brought it up, he's like “well that's probably something for [Participant 5]’s “Happy Friday,” that would probably make people feel good.” And it was like it was paining him, but I recognize they're not getting that from you, dude, and that's why you hire people that are different than you because they can help compliment you. And there are things that he's great at, that I'm not great at, you know? So, I do think I have gotten positive affirmation for my style. (Participant 5)

Why is that all on you to somehow massage every single person's feelings in the meeting? That's just not possible sometimes. And part of leadership that is I think harder for women than for men is either carrying that around or letting it go. (Participant 9)

And so, I think that I probably have had to work, I think a lot of women have to work harder, to try and make their case. But unlike men, I have to worry about their feelings, whereas they don't necessarily have to worry about mine. I have to worry about egos. I have to worry about the politics. (Participant 10)

One of the new vice presidents started about six months after me. He is the Vice President for [budget/finance]. And he came in, he's got a lot of experience, and he tends to really need to process his day. So, until he hired his “Chief of Staff,” he would come

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over to my office and want to process with me and just kind of . . . and I was like, “okay we can do that.” So now he has his chief of staff, we don't process as much. (Participant 12)

I didn't send it out in communication because, as the protest started in [Midwestern City], I reached out to our president saying, “you got to say something, you need to do something.” and “you're probably already thinking of this,” knowing full well, they were not, right? Like, “I'm sure you're already handling this and you're probably fully there, but you need to say something.” And this is Saturday night at midnight as I'm seeing protests start and that kind of thing. And since then I've had a couple more students from our Black community say “thanks,” and to come to me with, “hey, we need your help with these things.” (Participant 16)

### *Alignment*

But all my peers are going out raising money and they're not having to be pet the whole night. So that is something I don't think they talk about with SSAO women at all. It's like I almost don't notice it anymore. But that's just part of the interaction. But if I were to say “hi [board member] how are you?” with that, that wouldn't go over well. And so, as a feminist, I've told some of these stories people in a prep program, like a grad program, “oh my god, I would have told him off!” or “I would have stormed off!” I'm like, no you wouldn't. Because in the end I'm a big girl, I can take care of myself. I know how to do this. I was able to push back and do what I need to do and in the end I'm walking out with a gift that is going to help college students fulfill their dreams in ways that I know are

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important. So no, you're not gonna tell somebody off," you figure out how to keep your integrity. But you adapt. (Participant 4)

Yeah, no I definitely, just last week we had a senior leadership meeting and it was right around the time where everything was happening with all the civil unrest that's happening here. And I opened the meeting and I was vulnerable with everyone. That this is not something we talked about. And I got a little bit teary even when talking about it and said "you know this is really hard topic to voice and people are afraid because they're afraid to say the wrong thing but then when you say nothing you know that that says a lot and for us that are in leadership positions, places of privilege and power, we need to say something and not be afraid of saying the wrong thing." And I got a lot of positive feedback from "thank you for being vulnerable," "thank you for saying that." (Participant 5)

I know over a decade ago, I was asked to serve on a task force at the county level. And you know, they said "oh, it should take two to three years," but it ended up taking nine years. And by the time that task force disbanded, there were a lot of land issues that had come up. So private owners, development, all kinds of things. And it just so happened, I was elected to be the Vice Chair for the group. So, the President or the chair of the group was a male who had planning and development experience. But then vice chair, they asked me to serve in that role, because based on my leadership I could effectively run the meetings and help facilitate any potential conflict that might come up. So, some feedback I get is very direct. And oftentimes, after a meeting, I'll get an email from people that I

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was like, “Oh, I just love how you da, da, da, da, da,” and those kinds of things.

(Participant 7)

The example that really comes to mind is a fairly sad one honestly. We had a student who died [redacted], one of those tragic, tragic situations. And it got a ton of media attention in our market and the decision was to send me out to do the interviews and the press conference, and all of that. And I did choose a very feminine, relational, affective-emotive approach to that. To really share the sadness and to use that in part, I mean really consciously, to camouflage the fact that we can't tell a lot. We can't talk a lot about a student's private story but to just to go out with “well we can't comment on that because of FERPA” approach would not work. And I think it did work in conveying our sadness and sharing the information that we could share. And the comms people felt like it went better than those conversations have gone in the past. (Participant 9)

### *Role Modeling and Coaching as a Female Leader*

I think women have to look out for women. And it helps, as I say, when it's not just you being the lone voice. But saying “yeah you keep cutting her off, you keep talking over her, and you're probably not aware of it but we are so could you stop?” It is very helpful. Yeah when your sister is kind of, you know, it's better that than men having to step in because I don't want to be a damsel in distress. (Participant 3)

That is my year now. But I do feel like I carry, not femininely, I carry my womanhood differently in this role. Because I think it is important for students to see that too. That I can be vocal. I can be strong. I can be vulnerable. I can be goofy. I am 100% [Participant

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4] all the time. And I think that that's important, especially for women to see women in power be owning, fully themselves, and not hiding. (Participant 4)

Always, always grateful. Because it typically is a female, or it's a person of color, right? Who was over spoken, who didn't have an opportunity, who tried 10 times to raise their hand and was never called. And so always gratitude and instant text message across the board table that said "thanks [Participant 6] for helping me out." Or an after conversation, but always a sense of gratitude. And other people have done it for me. And that I think is what makes it so rich to be able to pass it on. (Participant 6)

And part of that I will again emphasize is because, and even at this current point in my career, I am still fighting to make sure that our women leaders have a seat at the table. Again, Student Affairs, right. (Participant 7)

It is hard to give up the cultural expectation that if you just did it right everybody would love it. If you were the super mom, super lady, super boss. You would have cookies ready for everybody and everybody would love you. There is something seductive in a really creepy way about over performing to that extent. Right? And I think we get sucked into that. If I were just a little nicer. If I got to work a little earlier. If I wrote a few more handwritten notes. If I remember to congratulate everybody on their work anniversary. Adding these expectations that are not about the job, but that are about managing our emotional image in the world. Like I feel the pull of that all the time, I do, and it is so unhealthy. And it perpetuates that for other women in my organization. And actually, I

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have to say it was my daughter who really opened my eyes about that. I was literally making cookies to bring to a meeting, and she was like 13 or 14. And she's like "why are you doing that?" So, I said that "it makes for a nice meeting, it shows people that I'm thinking about them and I care about them." And she's like, "it shows people something that I don't think I would want my boss to show me, like are you expecting all the other women in your organization to go out to their offices and make cookies for them?" And I literally had never thought about what that was communicating to other women in my organization about my expectations for their leadership. And it was just a bolt of lightning. Right? That over performing is unhealthy for me, but it's also devastating and setting unrealistic expectations for other people. So, and that is very gendered and really powerful. (Participant 9)

When I came back to [Midwestern University], I worked for a woman who had been there for about 35 years. So, I have had this incredible privilege of being schooled and mentored by really strong women along the way. So, I feel like even though I've had this in some ways these strong males as vice presidents or whatever. I've had this education to prepare me to be in this space in a way that I'm pretty comfortable with, there's not much that . . . I don't always like it, but there's not too much that surprises me. So, and I've gotten to the point, and especially now with this new president, I'm a lot more able to say where you know this is sexist or this racist or this is whatever. And we can have conversations about that and he's okay with that. (Participant 10)

### *Historical Role of Female SSAOs*

As a white woman in student affairs there's just a whole load of history there. And thinking and being conscious of the ways that white womanness is coded to a certain kind of disciplinarian. You know, not the scholarly discipline, but the “I'm going to teach you how to be in this world and I'm going to police.” You know the southern women communicating to me that I didn't look nice enough for work in that careful way. What they were trying to tell me was “you need to pull up your socks, you need to do better at how you look.” There's just a whole bunch of white womanness that is about molding others into a particular way of being. And Student Affairs has a long and horrible history of being the place that taught people how to be a certain way. So, I'm really conscious of how I bring, and especially as I'm getting older. You know it's different when you're in your 20s, it's different when you're in your 30s, but as a woman in her 50s aging into that role of “Dean of women” is always in the back of who we are as white women in Student Affairs. And just really wanting to be aware and conscious of how I may lean into that or find myself inhabiting that identity without intending to has been really important for me. (Participant 9)

[Interviewer: Hmm. And is that because you think it's Student Affairs, which sometimes very much gets relegated to the side, or do you think it's your identities in any way?] I think both. I think Student Affairs, but I also think because I'm a woman. I think if it was a man in this position, it would be different. (Participant 14)

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And a lot of those bad experiences come from people treating students, faculty and staff from a very matriarchal or patriarchal kind of perspective. And I tend not to do that. I try to provide a space for people to be heard. And to get to the source of what the issue or the focus is or how we can partner together. And then we try to make sure that it happens, and it happens well. (Participant 15)

### **Female SSAOs as Highly Reflective Professionals Regarding Personal and Professional Communication**

#### *Critical of Self*

So, I do a lot of overthinking. And this I know, and this I have tried to not do. I would say probably 80% of the time I'm fine. We go in. We communicate. It seems like everybody's got it. It's clear. But I would say there's probably 20% of the time where I'm like am I explaining this correctly? Is it not clear? 'Cause then you know I'll get questions a couple of days later or like somebody may not do something and I'll say OK what was the reason it wasn't done? Was not clear? So, I think for me making sense of how I communicate is based on the feedback that I'm getting like directly and indirectly. (Participant 2)

Yeah I've had people put me down after I've known I did the right thing, and we got what we needed, and people would make not so sly remarks so that I could hear them. And you know you have to again, I have said this to at least two women in the last year, you have to act like a man right now and not obsess over what people said. You have to let it roll right off your back and I realize what I'm saying by saying that. But I'm just being honest with you. And so, I can think about it on my walk tonight "OK why did they say that to me?" And running, "OK I've thought about it and I'm going to reject it" or "I've thought

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about it and I'm going to go talk to that person because I don't want to offend them” or “I don't want them to feel left out.” So, it all depends on how much it weighs with me when I'm doing that reflection at night. But yeah that happens to me all the . . . I mean it still happens to me and sometimes it bothers me. Please don't misinterpret, you know, but I can't - you can't either. You can't afford . . . you take the lesson from it and then you got to move on because your job is to full and too busy. (Participant 3)

The thoughts and feelings and impact of our communication styles on each other, on mine, on others, and how we feel about how I did, is probably the hardest part. And again, it's the stuff that makes me drive home in the evening feeling really good about myself or really badly about myself. And partly I think it's because we never really know how our style has impacted others unless you get overt feedback. (Participant 6)

I think, like a lot of women, I over evaluate the impact. You know I have a long list of things I've said in my life that I deeply regret, and they come back to me at two in the morning and haunt me. Or accidental rudeness. Or sometimes not accidental rudeness. So, I think a lot about communication and about how I do it. I think, too, I'm a naturally very pessimistic person. I'm always expecting the worst. I think of myself as not particularly warm person or very congenial. So, I have thought a lot as a person who wanted to become a leader, about emotional self-regulation, about appearing to be extroverted, learning to try and communicate in a more positive way, and communicate a vision and be hopeful as a leader when people are not feeling hopeful. And how to do that authentically. I think I never stopped thinking about my communication. Honestly it's so

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much of what people get from you as a leader, it's not what you do, it's what they hear you say or the way you communicate verbally or non-verbally. That makes your leadership. (Participant 9)

One was when I was a hall director. I was sexually harassed by the [SSAO]. He would sit outside my apartment in the lobby. He took me off of committees. He followed me around campus. I don't know why but I still have all of the letters that he wrote to me and when I went to my boss, he asked me on a date. Then when I went to his boss, the director of housing, he said he would talk to the [SSAO] and call me back that evening. So finally, I called the director at 10 o'clock at night, and he's like, "oh, I talked to him, he said that you just aren't doing your work, you're not doing a good job. And you two should have dinner some night." Holy crap. So, I certainly thought a lot about that and about, you know, "what had I done?" And this was way before I would have ever thought to go to affirmative action or Title IX. Just forever, forever ago. So thought a lot about that. What did I do? Was I flirtatious? Was I . . . ? Internalized a lot. (Participant 12)

But you know again that takes a lot of self-reflection, and a lot of . . . I get up at 430 and I read a lot. And then I put myself in situations where I'm not the expert. And I know it's going to be hard, but in that sense, I want to be always open to change and I always want to be open to different perspectives and continually learn. I think that has made me survive as a leader. (Participant 13)

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I guess first of all written communication is hard for me, because I stress about every little thing that I'm going to say and so I've had to do that more and more. But, it really takes me a long time because I feel like it needs to be perfect. In fact, anytime I even get something from, you know, a student or a staff member questioning something I still directly go back to the student handbook and quote from it because I want to be 100% for sure that I'm telling them the accurate thing and I don't mess up or whatever that is.

(Participant 16)

### *Imposter Phenomenon*

Yeah and for sure it's the impostor thing, it's like you know the constant "how do I have a seat at this table? How do I have a voice at this table?" Like I have to prove myself and I've actually had that conversation with my supervisor, and she was like "where are you feeling that from?" And I was like its internal more than anything else, right? It's nobody telling me on the outside "you're an idiot," right? (Participant 2)

So, you know, I just fell into it and appreciate that because I find it extremely rewarding work. I probably went through your typical, I don't know, I'm guessing 10 years of "oh no I could never be a vice president." You know whatever mixture of confidence and skill, that was and then at some point as a mid-level person I started to think "woah yeah that would be cool, I would like to do that!" And you know plenty of mentors along the way said, "look if that idiot can do it, you can definitely do it, if they can get hired."

(Participant 3)

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I share with you because I know that you also are looking at impostor syndrome and all of that. And women going into their leadership roles and stuff, that I do not see myself as you see me. That I'm not being humble here, this is just the God's honest truth, right? I do not see myself as a significant leader on campus. I don't see myself as senior in terms of the number of years that I've been on the cabinet. It's true, you got to just count the years, but I haven't been a vice chancellor for 30 years. I don't see myself that way. And when there are more voices that are louder, that speak more, more definitively. When people hold positions like system vice presidents and chancellors and Deans, and vice presidents and Provost, that there's a natural deference to that I have. And again, I'm very clear: it's all in who I am in my identities and how I was taught to navigate this world. (Participant 6)

[Interviewer: I hear a lot of things about imposter phenomenon. How does that impact how you communicate?] Participant 16: I think those are the exact reasons that I go back to the handbook every single time and then I'm nervous about communicating. You know, or in writing, back to what you said before, because in a dialogue I can much more easily pass that in a tentative way than I can written. Or I can see in somebody's body language, or the way that they react, "I agree with you" or "I don't" and I can switch course. Not that I would change the answer, but I can make it more palatable. Or go back and say, "oh, maybe I need to rethink this." But in a written communication I can't do that, I've done something wrong. Yeah, and it's like for real, it's in writing, we can all go back to it and reference that. (Participant 16)

*Concern for Likeability*

I felt I had committed to being there for five years and felt like I was giving up, felt like I was letting people down, lots of stuff. But I sat there and thought this is not who I am, and I need to leave this before this communication style becomes too easy for me. Because I was getting used to being that way, but I didn't like who I was communicating that way. So, I knew by the end of five years that would become part of who I was as a communicator. So, one thing I tell, I like to mentor women a lot, and one of the things I always tell when I tell that story is what I learned about myself on that job was: 1) I learned I really do like to be liked, but 2) I learned that if I'm not liked it won't kill me which I think it's a very, very important lesson for women. (Participant 4)

Sure, and again, this is probably where I tend to hold back. It's the same old story and the research bears this out is that a woman who is assertive is a bitch, a man who acts in the same manner as leader. And so, I think that I probably have had to work, I think a lot of women have to work harder, to try and make their case. But unlike men, I have to worry about their feelings, whereas they don't necessarily have to worry about mine. I have to worry about egos. I have to worry about the politics. I'm more thoughtful about that in terms of how I do things. (Participant 10)

So, I want to like what I do. I want to like who I work with. And I want to like going to work. I don't like working with jerks. I don't like being a jerk, although I can be, and I have been. (Participant 12)

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You know, there was a study done a long, long, long time ago and it had to do with “what do students want and what do teachers want.” And basically, students are like, “I want to make friends, I want to do well in class, and I want my teacher to like me.” And the teacher said the same thing, “I want my students to do well, I want to do well, and I want to like my students and I want my students to like me.” And yeah, I do, I mean I don't care about being that “best friends at work,” thing. I'm not a big fan of that. But I am a fan of the . . . so there's “servant leadership.” But there's also “friendship leadership.” And I very much believe in that. (Participant 12)

Because they have some of the same things about loyalty and altruism and compassion and trust. So, yeah, I don't want to be disliked. (Participant 12)

So, it wasn't where I was my worst judge, it was more like when I tried to play the game of being liked it put me in arenas that it was like I was a fish out of water. And I was true to myself. I think it's more like I did things because that was the role that was required for me at that point in time. I see that I'm an introvert always in my head. That doing things to be liked, I think, lower on my hierarchy of things. I think being respected for my intelligence, my experience, and how much I could contribute stood head and shoulders above being liked. (Participant 13)

[Interviewer: That actually builds on my second question that I was thinking about. You know there is a lot with female SSAOs about likability. Where you like to be liked. And that doesn't mean that you don't get the job done, and you're not direct, but you're direct

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in a way that you like to be liked. Does that resonate with you at all?] Participant 16:

Absolutely. 110%. Yeah.

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