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Rewriting the Narrative: Women Leaders in Housing Navigating Decision Making

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IN TODAY'S RAPIDLY SHIFTING AND CRISIS-PRONE HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT, women in leadership—particularly those overseeing student housing operations on college and university campuses—are making critical high-stakes decisions that are shaped by both internal and external perceptions of identity. This basic qualitative study uses the Ecosystem Decision-Making Framework as a conceptual context for exploring identity, one of four factors that influence executive leaders in higher education when making decisions during times of uncertainty. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how identity influences the decision making of women leaders in senior housing officer roles. While previous literature identifies a range of barriers that women face in leadership—feeling like an imposter or even code switching to meet often unwritten expectations—this study highlights the voices and lived experiences of women navigating these realities during the decision-making process. The findings aim to inform practices that support the success and retention of women in the workplace, analyzing the systems women are leading rather than the leadership of women.

Within the higher education context, senior housing officers (SHOs) occupy uniquely demanding positions and are responsible for meeting students' most basic needs: safety, shelter, and well-being. Their roles require constant crisis response, deep relational work, and leadership at the intersection of care, policy, and institutional priorities. In an era when higher education is increasingly shaped by uncertainty and crises, the decisions made by these leaders carry amplified significance and responsibility (Gigliotti, 2019). This is further complicated for executive leaders who identify as women, as they are drastically underrepresented in higher education senior administrative roles (Johnson, 2017).

This uncertain environment calls for a deeper inquiry into decision making in higher education during times of crisis (Gigliotti, 2019), including special attention to how the identity of individual executive leaders influences these processes (Čaluk, et al., 2025). This context is additionally complex because there is no clear pipeline to executive leadership roles in higher education (Bertrand, 2019). This study centered a critical and often overlooked group of women serving in senior leadership positions across the United States to better understand how identity influences decision making during times of uncertainty for women leaders.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Multiple higher education publications highlight the stark differences in leadership approaches between women and men in most senior decision-making roles across

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college and university campuses (Gardner, 2023; Selzer & Robles, 2019). Our study sought to understand how identity influences decision making for women in senior housing officer roles across the United States. As an article in the *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education* highlighted, "It is important to tell women's stories to move the needle and promote and retain women in positions traditionally held by men" (Selzer & Robles, 2019, p. 121).

In addition to research about women leaders in higher education, this qualitative study explores the possibility that factors such as environment, information, identity, and heuristics affect executive leaders' decision making in higher education during times of uncertainty (Čaluk et al., 2025). Given this context, the present study explores this research question: *How does social identity impact decision making for women leaders when confronting uncertainty within student housing?* Women are often perceived as emotional decision makers, overburdened by the multitasking of socially prescribed roles and expectations (Brescoll, 2016). This study seeks to cut through the fog of these misconceptions and showcase the real stories of women in Board rooms and around decision-making tables. For the purposes of this study, definitions of crisis are left for interpretation by each participant. Additionally, this study offers a platform for women leaders in housing to share their stories and for practitioners to better understand the tools and skills necessary to move the needle in the face of adversity, uncertainty, and stereotypes (Selzer & Robles, 2019).

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES OF WOMEN LEADERS

One of the most critical variables to consider in the leadership success of women is the glass cliff, which refers to the "invisible barrier preventing their rise into leadership ranks" (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, p. 81). While this describes how some women rise to leadership positions in times of crisis, we are now interested in understanding how women leaders make decisions during these times and beyond, once they have been situated in their leadership roles.

Decision Making During Times of Uncertainty

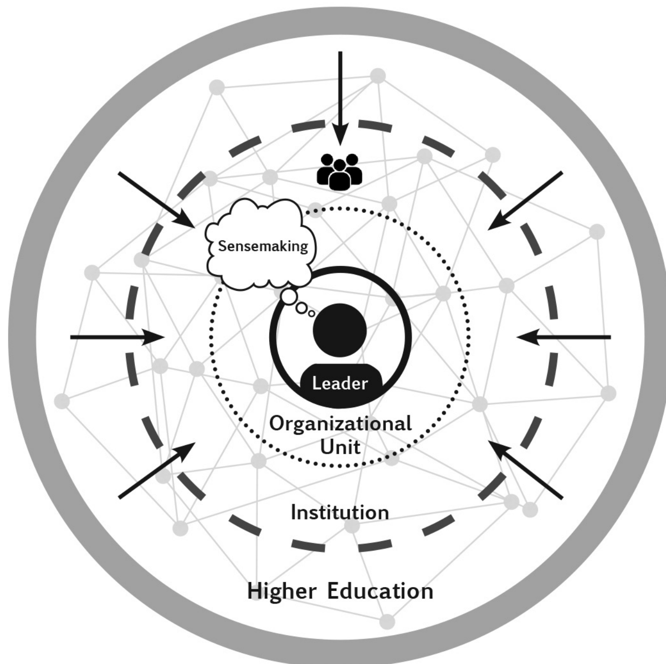
Much of the literature about decision making focuses on the linear, algorithmic processes of leaders in military and corporate organizations (Price, 2023; Simon, 1997; Suhr, 1999; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Scholars have often postulated that leaders make decisions by identifying multiple factors to consider, making sense of these factors in a bounded system, and then producing a decision as an output (Price, 2023; Schwenk, 1984; Simon, 1997; Suhr, 1999). In the context of higher education, however, these

models do not fully account for the unique features of the decision-making process that define those working in institutions of higher education: distributed governance, specific organizational structures, and goal ambiguity (Ruben et al., 2021)—a process further complicated when decisions are being made during times of uncertainty or crisis.

Using this context as a foundation, Čaluk and colleagues (2025) found that making decisions under uncertainty in higher education requires leaders to implement an ecosystem approach, whereby the leader must consider how the unit, campus culture, and the broader socioeconomic environment interact with specific factors related to crisis: environment, information, heuristics, and identity. However, rather than making sense of these variables in a linear process, higher education leaders often consider them in the context of departmental norms, campus culture, the higher education landscape, and socio-political influences. To illustrate this complex decision-making process, Čaluk and colleagues (2025) developed the Ecosystem Decision-Making Framework (*Figure 1*), which situates the higher education leader in the middle of a multi-dimensional and complex environment.

FIGURE 1

Ecosystem Decision-Making



Source: Čaluk et al., 2025

In this framework, the leader is expected to make sense of each dimension, while also recognizing the personal experiences and identities that impact their decision-making process. "Future scholarship may further explore the distributed notion of crisis leadership by broadening the scope of institutions and/or the individuals beyond the senior level who are responsible for handling crisis situations" (Gigliotti, 2019, p. 140).

Characteristics of Women Leaders

To understand the decision-making processes of women leaders and how they change in the face of uncertainty, it is also important to consider what we know about how women lead. Leadership in women can generally be characterized as communal, team-focused, and highly relational (Gardner, 2023), and these attributes are also what make many women more desirable leaders when an organization is in crisis (Kulich et al., 2021; Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

Despite their acknowledged strengths in dealing with crisis, to be successful in higher education environments, women leaders must confront feelings of illegitimacy and deploy multiple strategies including code switching and mentorship support in order to counter these negative feelings. Women leaders often experience what is often referred to as the imposter syndrome, which describes "the traits and behaviors of high-achieving women who were struggling to internalize their success. These women described feelings of fraudulence because they did not attribute their success to their own abilities despite many achievements and accolades" (Parkman, 2016, pp. 51–52). The term imposter phenomenon was initially coined to describe the self-perceived inabilities of high-achieving women, and the feeling is characterized by diminished self-confidence and self-efficacy, dismissal of one's own success, and self-monitoring behaviors that exist despite a high level of achievement (Parkman, 2016). This feeling of insecurity can often be exacerbated across intersectional identities, especially for historically minoritized women (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021).

To legitimize their own leadership and to combat these feelings of illegitimacy, women leaders often code-switch to maintain the neutral leadership style often set as a standard by White male leaders; code switching is the temporary "switching on or adjustment of behaviors to optimize the comfort of others in exchange for a desired outcome" (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 1). Individuals code-switch to legitimize themselves and adapt to the language, gender, or racial expectations of those in power; in the context of this research, women often code-switch to camouflage elements of their identity that are most salient—being female, being a mother—in order to meet expectations of the White male majority.

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As illustrated in the Ecosystem Decision-Making Framework, the ways that individual leaders make sense of uncertainty are influenced by their own social identity. For leaders who identify as women, this identity can be impacted by externally and internally perceived leadership norms. Combined, these set the context for this research.

METHODS

This study applies a basic qualitative design to respond to the proposed research question. Interviews were used as the primary form of data collection to offer a more narrative understanding of women's experiences of decision making during uncertainty. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the researchers' institution for this study. The scope of this research spans many geographical locations and organizational structures within student housing programs across the United States. Therefore, a convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants across the country who met the following criteria: identified as a woman, had 10+ years of experience in student housing roles, and were serving as a senior housing officer or leadership team member overseeing a unit on a college or university campus in the United States (*see Table 1*).

TABLE 1

Participant Information

Participant	Role	Years in the field	Years at current institution	Affiliated region	Campus bed-count
1 (Roz)	Director	21-25	17	GLACUHO	~3,000
2 (Jordan)	Executive Director	16-20	18	SEAHO	~5,700
3 (Morgan)	Executive Director	≥ 25	17	NEACUHO	~11,500
4 (Remy)	Executive Director	≥ 25	4	SWACUHO	~9,000
5 (Tatum)	Associate Director	10-15	4	GLACUHO	~1,100
6 (Skye)	Director	16-20	1	WACUHO	~7,000
7 (Bee)	Director	16-20	6	AIMHO	~8,000
8 (Mara)	Director	10-15	1	SWACUHO	~8,000

Eight respondents consented to participate in one-hour virtual interviews. An original interview protocol was developed to guide semi-structured interviews with each participant. Interviews were conducted virtually and transcribed via Zoom. Transcripts were uploaded to Taguette (Rampin & Rampin, 2021) for open coding. A single transcript was open coded by both researchers to develop a codebook and tested to support inter-rater reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The codebook was used to guide axial coding and the eventual development of themes. Both researchers conducted axial coding of all transcripts to triangulate data. Utilizing multiple perspectives in this way supports the transferability and credibility of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to transcripts, both researchers submitted memos to a shared folder, which described evolving themes and observations. Memos are an important artifact that allow researchers to reflect on data and contribute to the overall trustworthiness of the research; when combined with participant responses using the Zoom Whiteboard feature (described in the Findings section), these artifacts provided an audit trail to support dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

FINDINGS

All eight participants spoke about how social identity impacts their decision-making processes during times of uncertainty. Several themes emerged in response to our research question: *How does social identity impact decision making for women leaders when confronting uncertainty within student housing?* Participants largely agreed that gender influences this process in many ways and shared their strategies for navigating institutional culture, including their approaches to gain external legitimacy and credibility in these spaces. We learned that many of these strategies were behaviors learned from other women in the field, individuals whom our participants identified as mentors (*see Table 2*).

TABLE 2

Summary of Findings

FINDING 1 Identity & decision making	Women leaders in housing are very cognizant that their social identities, particularly as women, have influence in their decision-making process.
FINDING 2 Institutional culture	Institutional culture influences the degree to which women feel they have ownership of leadership decisions (code switching, imposter phenomenon).
FINDING 3 Mentorship & role modeling	Women leaders often rely on close networks of other women mentors and act as mentors themselves to support their decision making.

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Identity and Decision Making

Participants described how their identity (including gender, social identity, and other self-defined identities) influences their decision making. When asked how these identities impacted their decision-making process in crises, all the participants offered clear examples of how their identity as a woman or female leader shaped their approach to this process. As a direct response to our question, Remy, an executive director with over 30 years of experience in the field, bluntly said, “My gender matters.”

A part of our interview protocol asked participants to utilize Zoom’s Whiteboard feature to list words that describe their identities. They were also asked to list crises or uncertainties that were part of this decision-making environment, to describe how their multiple identities impacted their decision-making process during these crises, to provide examples of the crises they listed, and to identify how these moments impacted their decision making.

All the participants who identified as parents wrote “mom” as their first or second word under the identity prompt. Most wrote their professional identity last, often citing words like “woman,” “wife,” “queer,” or “biracial” as one of the first markings on the virtual board. Words like “director,” “leader,” and “supervisor” were written towards the end of each list, though one participant subsequently moved their professional title to the beginning. This suggests that participants first think about the identities that hold responsibility for others, rather than an authoritative role in the workplace, such as director or leader. They cite identities associated with being a nurturer and list characteristics such as compassion, empathy, attentiveness, and patience, which are coincidentally often seen as deficiencies in the workplace. However, from the view of women leaders in this study, these are strengths for leading teams and people and changing systems. Bee, a director of residence life in the southern United States, reflected on her own analysis:

> *I’m going to start with the mother one, because I think that is the most salient of the identities that I hold for myself. I think that I look at things much differently after having children than I did before and it’s really easy to put my own child into the space of any of these things. How would I want someone to offer help, or support or be available to my student really changes that lens for me.*

At least four others gave similar descriptions, sharing examples of decisions they made and how they thought about their own child potentially being in the circumstances of the student in question. They further identified several internal and external identity factors that impacted their decision making. While they didn’t explicitly lead

with their identities, they still recognized the impact of these multiple identities when making decisions. For example, Remy reflected on the ways she subliminally considered race in decision making:

> *I don't think I lead with my identities. But I think the environment that I am in makes me more aware and conscious of them than what I've been in predominantly White environments. And so, I think I've always thought of my career, and when we have crises . . . how do we caretake for the students and our staff?*

Skye, a recently hired director with close to 20 years of experience in the field, had a similar reflection based on racial identity, considering how her identity influences her decision-making process for individuals who are different than her:

> *I'm always aware of how my identity may play into folks' assumptions about why I'm saying what I'm saying and what I'm doing, responding the way I'm responding. I try really hard to always consider identity and ask who's not in the room when I'm making a decision, no matter what the crisis is, because I feel like there's always the extra 5 seconds to stop and think for a second to make sure we're considering all angles.*

Skye raises an important point about pausing to consider who the decision is being made for and about. Crises often require a lightning speed decision, but in the world of the student experience, leaders must possess the emotional intelligence and acumen to pause (Čaluk et al., 2025). According to what the women leaders articulated about the convergence of their identity and decision-making process, the two cannot be separated.

Institutional Culture

Participants also described how their identities intersect with institutional culture in decision-making spaces. We observed a deep sense of care, particularly the use of words such as "student-centered," "human," and "human-centric" throughout their responses. They discussed checking in with staff and setting new boundaries that prioritized their staff's health and personal needs. Jordan, a new executive director of a mid-size housing department, shared an example of one way she is intentional about prioritizing staff's needs:

> *During staff retreats I will put brakes on the schedule, and staff know that, okay, well, that break's going be a little bit longer, or Jordan's intentionally built out time for someone to eat and go pump [referencing a staff member who was breastfeeding]. Even though they may want to get out of the retreat early, you know, they're like, okay . . . we need to care for the team, right?*

While this human-centric approach was welcomed by most within their departments, several participants described the tension and friction sometimes associated with this leadership style—often within the context of their predecessor's leadership style—resulting in staff expectations for a transactional environment. Of our eight participants, five noted that they had a male predecessor and that the work inherited from

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this person required them to adapt, flex, and shift within the norms of the departmental environment. This dynamic demanded that they modify their behavior, particularly if they were entering decision-making spaces knowing they would be the only woman in the room (McCluney et al., 2021). They described their need to think about the ways that they show up, from their behavior, choice of words, and tone, down to non-verbal cues in their attire. Remy commented on how attentive she was to her clothing:

> *I'm very conscious of how I dress in the workplace, and what meetings I go to. My boss wears shorts every day. He puts pants on to go to meetings across campus. I wouldn't do that. I mean, I might have a casual day. Today's a casual day where I have capris on. I normally am wearing skirts or dresses, because I think that that gives me more credibility.*

Roz, a housing and residence life director at a smaller school in the Midwest, shared her experience being the "silent director," explicitly stating that she was the one doing all the heavy lifting behind the scenes, while her male supervisor was taking the credit for her work. She told us about the "million-dollar meetings" where unit leaders would gather in a space to make decisions, a space she was not a part of:

> *Whenever there was what I call a "million-dollar meeting," which is all the deans, directors, and VPs, I was not in the room. So, my director at the time would be texting me throughout it, trying to get answers. I had the director of DPS [Department of Public Safety] texting me, trying to get answers. Basically, everyone in the room, except for the VP that was running it, who went off titles, was under the understanding I should have been in the room. Thankfully, the VP did figure that out and started inviting me to the table to have that equal voice.*

As Roz shared this frustration, we saw a clear tension between internal and external perceptions of leadership. Everyone, including her, knew that she was the primary driver of decisions, but her supervisor had to be the one to deliver the insight and was permitted to take up space in the decision-making room. Similar sentiments were shared by other participants, including Bee:

> *Sometimes I am not even invited to be a part of the decision making because of those factors [credentials, identity, worldview]. Something happens where the right point of contact should be me, but instead they are contacting the male executive director of housing who then is needing to refer back to me in these situations. I am clearly able to identify that this is about gender. This is about how you perceive my competence.*

The unfortunate reality of predecessors and current supervisors leading in this way is that women leaders transitioning into their roles are seen as underprepared or unaware of institutional politics. Participants recognized the lack of formal mentorship in their departments, though their male predecessors could often take advantage

of informal mentorship in the form of "golf course negotiations." For example, Jordan went on to describe how her male colleagues were onboarded to new positions:

> *I think that there are politics at play at our institution around well-established relationships. The good old boys club, in terms of negotiating on the golf course, things of that nature that I have not been privy to that my predecessor was a part of. And now, I'm not in those spaces, and so a lot of decisions and conversations are happening more in formal spaces. And feeling like . . . there's something that I'm missing?*

In order to transition into their SHO roles and the existing culture of the units they are entering, women must consider their identity in new ways when making critical decisions. In some instances, this involves hyper-focused attention to the external perceptions of their identity or constant internal consideration of ways to ensure that their voice is heard in decision-making spaces.

Mentorship and Role Modeling

One of the most important factors for participants' comfort in the workplace was the availability of mentorship and role modeling opportunities. Many of them identified mentorship as an important factor shaping their decision-making heuristics and discussed connecting with mentors during turbulent transitions into leadership roles, utilizing them as sounding boards during difficult decision-making moments, and regularly connecting with them for personal and professional check-ins. Identity was a crucial component in the development of these relationships. In the context of this research, women leaders like Skye often reached out to women mentors to rally support.

> *It's really important to have a village? A little council of folks. I think that I'm probably as confident as I am today, because I spend time talking to my village and my council. Even if I don't necessarily talk to them before the decisions are made, I'm processing with them after the fact. And processing allows me to feel more confident the next time I have to make a decision.*

This underscores the importance of having a group of individuals that you can call when you need advice or need to debrief and take note of lessons learned from a decision. Skye highlights the importance of trust: a crucial component of mentorship and professional development.

In further discussions, participants described how their mentors encouraged them to break stereotypical female leadership paradigms and recommended strategies for amplifying their voices. Unfortunately, these strategies often also had the potential to perpetuate the stereotypes because women mentors would encourage mentees to push the boundaries often bestowed upon them as "strong women leaders"—but not too much. Roz recalled a conversation with her female mentor when she was directed to smile more in leadership meetings with male colleagues.

> *She flat out told me, "You just need to smile more. Trust me." And I was like, "What?" And she's like, "I don't give a shit if you fake it or not, just walk in that room and smile, and you're gonna get more done."*

We observed evidence of cognitive dissonance when participants talked about these strategies; Roz described "feeling gross," Morgan admitted that she didn't "know exactly why I do that, but that's just how I have done that," and Mara acknowledged that "maybe leaving it [Black female identity] at the door is not the right way, but I feel like I have to." This dissonance points to how women leaders are often trained to behave in a certain way in order to achieve a goal. They fully know and understand that they have to show up in certain ways to receive the seal of approval or support behind their decisions.

Participants also discussed how they role modeled for their female staff and shared the challenges of balancing their identity with learned behaviors in order to legitimize the decisions being made. Recognizing that women's voices are sometimes too small and too quiet, Roz recommended amplifying them:

> *It absolutely sucks, especially when I'm working with younger women that want to be leaders in this field. It's very much helping them to understand our voice is never going to be 100% equal at that table, so you need to figure out ways to amplify your voice, to amplify your confidence, and to ensure that you feel comfortable in that space. The world, and especially the university setting, has very much put an emphasis on that even though we don't like to admit it. That women have to work twice as hard.*

Participants made clear that women leaders feel confident in the decisions they are making during uncertainty but are often navigating the ways they can best communicate those decisions for them to be regarded as credible. This is what Roz refers to as working twice as hard. In these situations, mentors are essential for processing, advice, and input. Tatum, an associate director, recognized how much women need to support each other in the workplace: "I think networking and relationship development is super, super important in leadership, especially for women. Because in leadership, I think women are challenged more than men are. We need to have each other's backs, right?"

Skye described how she met the women who have become her village and how those connections were sustained even beyond the job:

> *While I was early in my career we just connected for whatever reason. And now we've stayed connected. I think that I've done a pretty good job of staying connected to certain women who I just naturally have felt attached to for one reason or another. And even when I've left the role as they've left the role we've continued to connect, and make sure that we're checking in with each other.*

Similarly, Mara, a new director for a mid-size housing department, described her approach to creating a circle of trusted advisors that she labeled her Board of Directors:

> *I think of my . . . what I say board of directors. I have folks at varying levels, so whether it's a VP all the way at the top, I flat out will ask somebody, will you be my mentor? But those are the people I call when I'm navigating this decision.*

> One of the most important factors for participants' comfort in the workplace was the availability of mentorship and role modeling opportunities.

> Our participants said they felt competent and confident in their internal decision-making process but recognized that they needed to modify their approach to make sure that their decisions and approach had credibility.

She described the importance of representation and appreciated the fact that she has a circle of other Black women she turns to in consultation for important decisions: "There is a group, particularly of Black women, that I connect [with]. I was able to find my way to get into that group." These experiences and narratives offer a glimpse into everyday life for women SHOs, highlighting the strength and confidence of women leaders when nurtured in a healthy working environment.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As we reviewed these narratives and began to hear similar experiences across participants, we asked each one a direct question: How do internal and external perceptions such as credentials, worldview, age, professional longevity, and other factors influence your decision-making potential? This question served to be the key to rewriting the narrative, as this article is titled. Our participants said they felt competent and confident in their internal decision-making process but recognized that they needed to modify their approach to make sure that their decisions and approach had credibility. They further explained how this dissonance required them to balance pushing against stereotyped and gendered boundaries while also implementing decisions with fidelity. The women leaders we heard from clearly wanted to rewrite this narrative in ways that empower women leaders to shed the imposter phenomenon, the code switching, and the exhausting emotional labor it takes to exist in so many decision-making spaces, especially during times of uncertainty when decisions are made frequently and with haste.

Our participants described how identity impacts their decision making in a variety of ways, often influenced by institutional culture. Mentorship created relationships that could be leveraged in times of role transition. So what do these findings mean for women leaders in housing who are trying to make complex decisions but are often ruled by a backdrop of constant crises? We analyzed and amplified the narratives of our participants to better understand a segment of student affairs services: senior housing officer roles held by women.

Participants described many ways that they modify their behaviors in decision-making spaces and acknowledged how difficult it was to take this step; it made them "feel gross" (Roz) or seemed inexplicable even to themselves: "I don't know exactly why I do that, but that's just how I have done that" (Morgan). These statements parallel much of what Parkman (2016) revealed about imposter syndrome, what McCluney and colleagues (2021) observed about code switching, and what Manongsong and Ghosh (2021) revealed about intersectional identities: "Maybe leaving it [Black female identity] at the door is not the right way, but I feel like I have to" (Mara). In these instances,

participants shared clear examples of deploying self-monitoring behaviors in order to conform to the dominant context or system or to exert leadership decision-making skills and still be credible decision makers.

When asked to list their identities, nearly all of the participants selected social identity, such as being a mom or a woman, first, which illuminates the centrality of nurturing characteristics in how they understand themselves and their leadership practice. According to a *Chronicle of Higher Education* special publication on women's leadership, women are more likely to involve others in their decision making: "Women more often than men favor a style of leadership that builds trust with and empowers subordinates [and are also more likely to] display more communal, less self-centered behavior than men" (Gardner, 2023, p. 40).

Being a parent or partner shapes decision making by prompting women leaders to prioritize the people affected by a decision rather than defaulting to institutional systems and processes, which are often the primary focus of scrutiny. In the context of student housing, where leaders bear significant responsibility for the well-being of others, this orientation becomes particularly important and requires a distinct approach, one that acknowledges the relational and caretaking dimensions of the work, as Bee suggested.

> *I am trying to process . . . how do I use that female identity? Because it shapes who I am, it's just in the decision, whether I want it to be or not, and I couldn't measure that out in a way—like I couldn't say, well if I was a man I would have handled this differently, but I think [I] would have. The levels of empathy or components of care that I prioritize are closely linked to my identity as female in my mind. That does play out in the decision.*

For women leaders, the interplay of their multiple lived experiences and nurturing orientation adds important layers of complexity within the Ecosystem Decision-Making Framework and reveal valuable insights into this dimension of leadership practice. Women leaders often consider these variables in the context of departmental norms, campus culture, the higher education landscape, and socio-political influences, but they are often also modifying their behavior for the sake of external legitimacy and credibility. These insights underscore the need for higher education systems to evolve and to create structures, norms, and processes that are inclusive of women's decision-making approach in times of crisis and allow them to meet the critical needs of residential students.

> The participants' identity as women required additional labor, both internally and externally, to ensure that their decisions and leadership approach were being respected.

> In the same way that student services has reframed the student achievement gap as an opportunity gap—centering the fault in systems and not as deficiencies in students—we suggest reframing the conversation about women leaders in a similar way: These are faults in longstanding systems that were never built with women SHOs in mind.

LIMITATIONS

This study highlights the narratives of women who chose to participate in this study, but there are hundreds of stories and narratives across the country and the world that are still untold. This study sought participants who identified as women at the time of the study, and most of them mentioned men as predecessors; few mentioned them as mentors, and many mentioned them as the majority of individuals in decision-making rooms. As such, one limitation of this study is that little is known beyond the fact that gender designations related to the topic were essentially binary. In order to contextualize this research, we suggest utilizing this protocol in future work with male participants as a way of offering a comparative analysis.

CONCLUSION

This study found that identity has a significant impact on women leaders' decision making in student housing. The participants' identity as women required additional labor, both internally and externally, to ensure that their decisions and leadership approach were being respected. In the same way that student services has reframed the student achievement gap as an opportunity gap—centering the fault in systems and not as deficiencies in students—we suggest reframing the conversation about women leaders in a similar way: These are faults in longstanding systems that were never built with women SHOs in mind.

We call on readers to create, enhance, and empower structures that allow women to lead in communal ways, even within the confines of individualistic leadership structures. To support women in SHO roles, institutions should consider how all leaders are onboarded into executive leadership roles. At the unit level, this is especially relevant to male leaders exiting positions that are being filled by women. Additionally, women entering SHO roles should consider how they can include formal mentorship in their contract negotiations to ensure that they have a formal network to support their decision-making processes.

Based on findings in this study, we changed the title of this article, "Persisting Through Adversity: The Untold Stories of Women Leaders in Housing Navigating Decision Making During Uncertainty," to "Rewriting the Narrative: Women Leaders in Housing Navigating Decision Making." We felt it necessary to highlight the strength and leadership of women, rather than continuing to perpetuate the narrative that

being a woman leader is often characterized by the need to continuously persist through systems not designed to support them. The new title comes from a place of empowerment rather than limitation, calling on readers to rewrite the narratives that we have consciously or subconsciously written about ourselves or women around us. ■

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do women leaders describe the relationship between identity and decision making, particularly in moments of uncertainty?
2. How does identity shape the ways senior housing officers navigate authority, credibility, and recognition in high-stakes decision-making spaces?
3. The article suggests decision making in housing is non-linear and deeply contextual. How does this challenge traditional notions of leadership and "good" decision making in higher education?
4. In what ways does institutional culture influence who is invited into decision-making spaces and whose expertise is trusted?
5. Mentorship is described as both supportive and normative. How might mentorship relationships be leveraged to disrupt, rather than reproduce, existing leadership expectations?
6. What does it cost women leaders to manage perception or adapt aspects of their identity in order to be seen as credible in decision-making spaces?

Discussion questions were developed by Crystal Lay, California State University Monterey Bay.