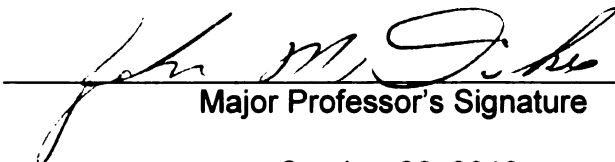This is to certify that the
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LEARNING TO LEAD AS LEARNING TO LEARN:
EXPERIENCES OF MALAY WOMEN IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Norseha Unin

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
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ABSTRACT

LEARNING TO LEAD AS LEARNING TO LEARN:
EXPERIENCES OF MALAY WOMEN IN MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

Norseha Unin

This study examined how Malay women learn to lead in institutions of higher education within a Malaysian socio-cultural context. The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how Malay women learn to lead within institutions of Malaysian higher education. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with four deans and two directors from Malaysian public universities. The findings demonstrate the paradoxical contexts that these women faced in learning to lead in higher education, and how they learned to navigate the multiple tensions and contradictions they faced in assuming leadership positions within Malaysian society. For these women, learning to *lead* is about learning to *learn* from and through these tensions and contradictions.

The learning of these women was essentially self-directed, experience-based, and both intentional and unintentional. Tacit learning (Schugurensky, 2000) was clearly evident in their acknowledgement and acceptance of their society's traditions, and the ways in which they learned to navigate the values that placed more emphasis on their roles as mothers and wives, than it did on their roles as educational leaders. While considerable emphasis has been placed on the role of reflection within informal learning, their stories revealed limited instances of the explicit use of reflective learning.

Central to the processes by which these Malay women learn to *lead* was their commitment to learning to *learn*. The women in this study learn to *lead* by living through and learning about paradoxes that characterize their roles as leaders within the particular socio-cultural context in which they were living. The socio-cultural contexts in which they worked were described by the participants as largely patriarchal and quite hierarchical. While the women were not actively discouraged from assuming leadership positions, they experienced little explicit and direct support for their roles as leaders. Nonetheless, they still flourished as higher education leaders. Their stories reflected a process of learning to lead that involved powerful social and emotional processes.

These women learned to hold the blatant tensions and work around the contradictions surrounding their professional roles as leaders in higher education. Their accounts of emerging as mid-level leaders in higher education reflected a process of learning to *learn* from working through these tensions and contradictions rather than a process of learning about what constitutes good and effective leaders. This emphasis on learning to *learn* contributed to their ability to navigate the complex social roles in which they found themselves as women leaders in a male-dominated and hierarchical society. While much research and theory regarding informal learning has been focused on explicit structures and functional processes, this study supports greater attention to the more tacit and paradoxical qualities of everyday experience, and the importance they play in our learning from and through these experiences.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this academic work to my daughters; Feeqa, Fifi, and Effa, and I hope they will benefit from the learning experiences of these exceptional Malay women in the academy. This empirical work is also dedicated to my late father, Abang Unin bin Haji Kontan, who instilled a strong desire for me to pursue, thrive, and succeed higher education.

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I would like to express my great appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee; Dr. Marilyn Amey, Dr. Kristen Renn, Dr. Julie Brockman, and Dr. Susan Printy. They brought in value-added perspectives to my research. Dr. Amey's expertise in higher education leadership kept me reassured that this study was worth pursuing. Her far-reaching support in terms of assistantships and fellowships throughout, as program coordinator and eventually the department chair, convinced me that I can complete this

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The literature about women leaders as learners (Astin & Leland, 1991; Brandt, 1992; Helgesen, 1990; Miller, 1986; Van & Hughes, 1990) suggests that women experience ongoing learning from a variety of sources. Such learning can be informal in nature and the value of such unstructured experiences has been significantly acknowledged in the leadership development literature (Day, 2001; McCauley, 2001; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). The themes about women leaders as learners – students about themselves, their organizations, their process and practice of leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991; Helgesen, 1990; Sergiovanni cited in Brandt, 1992; Van & Hughes, 1990) are consistent with some aspects of informal learning theory that are experiential, less-structured, and non-institutional (Burns & Schaefer, 2003, Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

This study examines the experiences of Malay women learning to lead in higher education. The research explores how they learn within their social context. It seeks to develop an understanding of how women at mid-level administration, such as deans and directors, develop their leadership skills and abilities. In this study, deans are leaders of degree-granting units and directors are leaders of other specialized centers for teaching, research, and academic support. They are middle managers who usually rise from within the ranks of faculty. They operate in the unique context of higher education institutions, often referred as "loosely coupled systems," which are uncoordinated and have greater differentiation among components (Weick, 1976). "Leading from the middle" (Lindholm, 1999) means they operate within multiple power and authority structures (Kezar, 2001).

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In general, women are more pressured to prove themselves than their male counterparts to be promoted as leaders in an organization. This is because women need to negotiate the internal and social expectations that create role conflict (Indvik, 2001). Within the Malay community, women are encouraged to pursue advancement in their professional career as long as their conventional duties are not neglected, and their traditional roles as mothers and wives remain a priority. It is commonly understood that while women can hold top positions of leadership, their number one priority will always be the family. Noor (2001) revealed that, given a choice between work and family, 89.9% of the working women studied chose the family.

The presence of Malay women as deans and directors in Malaysian higher education provides a unique opportunity for exploring the influence of traditional norms on the learning and development of leadership skills. Within the higher education setting in Malaysia, it is reassuring to see more and more women assuming leadership positions. However, these positive developments can be personally challenging for Malay women because they are still subject to social conditions that affect their roles and behaviors (Syed Hassan, 1998). A recent study (Abdullah, Noor, and Wok, 2008) finds that Malay women still closely adhere to their traditional cultural values in which they are expected to be strong as a mother, while remaining effeminate and subservient as a wife.

The Malay *adat* or cultural norms emphasize "proper conduct" (Mohamad, 1970). The *adat* is paramount in all social spheres within the Malay culture. The Malay societal norms for rising to and holding leadership positions have largely favored males (Ong, 1990) because of the patriarchal influence that reflects male dominance in the society. It is, therefore, more "natural" for men than it is for women to hold leadership positions,

such as in a higher education setting. Malay women who choose to become leaders within an organizational setting are usually working against the grain of social norms and values that exert a very strong influence on women's proper roles (Ariffin, 1992; Ng & Yong, 1990, Raja Mamat, 1991).

Research Problem

Learning to lead in higher education means Malay women must also learn to negotiate and balance their professional roles as leaders and traditional roles as wives and mothers. Women deans and directors in this study constantly need to engage themselves in a process of learning to lead. Within the higher education setting, individuals in these roles are increasingly faced with levels of organizational complexity and leadership issues for which they may have little experience or formal preparation (Gmelch, 2002; Wilson, 1999). Their ability to lead effectively, therefore, must derive from sources other than that of positional authority (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). With little or no recourse to formal training, learning to lead in higher education is often a process of learning on the job through everyday experiences. In the literature on adult learning, learning through everyday experiences is referred as "informal learning" (Davies, 2008; Garrick, 1998; Hager & Halliday, 2006; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007).

As middle managers within higher education, their roles include academic, administrative, and leadership tasks (McLaughlin, Montgomery, & Malpass, 1975). Within their roles as leaders, their responsibilities include leading administrative tasks, action planning and operational decision-making (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993). They

provide clear goals, manage people and resources, develop human resources, inspire academic and non-academic staff, and continually listen to their staff in order to learn how to improve their own performance (Ramsden, 1998, p. 120). Additionally, they have significant impact on higher education. In fact, eighty percent of decisions in universities take place within the department (Dyer & Miller, 1999; Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999; Wolverton, Gmelch & Sorenson, 1998). However, this population of middle managers "may be the least studied and most misunderstood management position anywhere in the world" (Gmelch, 2002a, p.1). At the same time, there is little understanding of the experiences of Malay women learning to lead in higher education. Learning to lead within their social context requires Malay women not only to be cognizant of their professional roles, but also their traditional roles.

For Malay women to be leaders, they have to tread carefully and not upset the norms of a gendered society (Mohamad, 1994). For many of them, learning to lead within their unique social context is a challenging experience. At the same time, there is little understanding of their learning experiences. According to Gosetti and Rusch (1995), women as leaders experience a different reality and interpret this reality differently than the traditional dominant group. There have been relatively few studies about Malaysian women academics and how they come to know and understand the world (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Gilligan 1982). While scholars have studied them in terms of career progression (Lunn, 2007), career mobility (Maimunah & Roziah, 2006), globalization and women in academia (Luke, 2002) and as managers in higher education (Asmah, 1993), we have little understanding of how they learn to become leaders within their social and institutional settings.

There is much to explore about learning to lead from the perspectives of Malay women, particularly the ways in which social norms and values shape or influence their learning experiences. One of the ways to enhance our understanding is to study the experiences of Malay women deans and directors in the Malaysian context, which has strong emphasis on women's proper roles (Ariffin, 1992; Ng & Yong, 1990, Raja Mamat, 1991). With social conditions that are deeply rooted in traditional values, where the social expectations for women to remain conventional are highly regarded, and leadership has not been a traditional role for Malay women, how do they learn to lead and become leaders in higher education?

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

This study hopes to generate a deeper understanding of learning to lead by studying how Malay women deans and directors at Malaysian public universities learn within their social contexts. There is an implicit assumption that Malay social values influence their learning experiences. However, there is little understanding of their unique experiences (Harding, 1993). The study explores, from the perspectives of Malay women, how their traditional values influence their learning and development as women leaders. Their experiences of negotiating and balancing the traditional and professional roles serve as a point of reference for capturing their learning processes in this study. The purpose is to better understand their learning and development as women leaders. A broad research question for this study is: How do Malay women learn to lead in higher education? More specifically: How does the socio-cultural context influence or manifest

itself in the informal learning of Malay women leaders in higher education? By focusing on the influence of Malay social values, the study hopes to shed light on adult learning from a socio-cultural perspective.

Background and Rationale

Socio-cultural theories posit that learning is an active process, and that the context has an important role in learning. Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning is not just an individual matter, but that it develops within social environment and social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky's basic idea is that human behavior is the end product of socialization, and that it is too complex to isolate, dissect, and study in a vacuum. Malay women often face challenges and social pressures to rise to, or remain in leadership positions. Exploring the Malay social context provides a way to explain that there are certain characteristics of their traditional values that are not necessarily consistent with the way people learn and understand the meaning and significance of actions.

Within the Malay community, *"adat"* as a social concept defines traditional values pertaining to individuals' actions or behaviors. They are described as either *"halus"* –soft or refined – or *"kasar"* – rough or coarse (Wilson, 1967). *Halus* is one of the norms for correct or acceptable behavior with other people. *Halus* is also reflected in one's speech or *"bahasa."* The importance of *bahasa* to proper conduct is evident, because it has a secondary meaning of courtesy or politeness. For Malay women, conforming to social expectations as leaders is a delicate act of maintaining graceful

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halus manners. *Kasar* means to go against the norms, and cause unpleasantness to others. Although a woman is otherwise professionally effective, if her behaviors and actions were perceived as *kasar*, her leadership may not be well-received. Being inconsiderate toward the feelings of others, or causing shame is not well-received in a Malay community. In sum, *halus* behavior is an adherence to the normal standards, and *kasar* behavior a lack of respect. Therefore, *halus* and *kasar* define the norms for proper conduct, and these values can influence how Malay women learn to become leaders.

A sense of *"malu"* or shame is fundamental to the Malays. *Malu* is essentially a negative reaction to the idea that one's words, actions, or gestures bring shame, leading people to think ill of others; all of which are powerfully unpleasant to Malay sensibilities (Goddard, 1997). Shame is, however, a positive social value. For instance, one is *malu*, or embarrassed when one feels that other people can think, say, or know something bad about him or her. A person who is conscious of traditional values, keeping others in mind when deciding on how to behave is "good Malay." *Malu*, which is the primary force for social cohesion, is described as the hypersensitivity to how other people view your behaviors (Swift, 1965). The desire to avoid *malu* contributes to upholding *halus* behaviors. *Malu* is a social good, because it refers to a sense of softness, politeness, or appropriateness. In sum, *malu* further defines the extent of proper conduct, which can influence how Malay women learn to act and behave as women leaders.

A person's *"maruah,"* which exemplifies a sense of dignity, self-respect, and pride, is another dominant social concept. Goddard (1997) describes *maruah* as a wholesome confidence in one's moral standing in the eyes of others. Malays generally cooperate to assist in the safeguarding of each other's *maruah*, and to steer away from the

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possibility of inducing *malu*. Goddard (1997) observes that, this "cultural ideology" of social relations is constituted in moral and ethical terms, rather than in terms of freedom, constraints, and social possibilities. How, then, do Malay women as leaders negotiate this cultural ideology?

Conflict avoidance, especially in public, is one of the key characteristics of Malay culture. When there is conflict, it is usually driven by notions of *maruah, malu,* etc. The difference in values underlying the Malay social norms provides a rich context for studying its influence on informal learning. With such deeply rooted cultural values, some existing perspectives on informal learning may not be sufficient for understanding the learning experiences of Malay women. This study attempts to examine their learning experiences within a social context. Knowing their social values and understanding how they influence learning are important aspects of this study. Informal learning provides a useful framework for examining their learning experiences. Although informal learning is recognized as a way for them to learn, little is known about the influence of social context on their learning.

Conceptual Framework

Informal learning is widely recognized as one of the most pervasive and dominant forms of learning in the workplace (Leslie, Aring & Brand, 1998; Lohman, 2000, Livingstone, 2001). As a kind of learning that transpires within the context of the participants' social and cultural values (Boud, Cohen, and Walker, 1996), informal learning provides a theoretical framework for this study. The learning processes are

viewed as intentional and unintentional. When an individual has a set and defined

purpose for learning (Schugurensky, 2000), the process is intentional. Some processes are

unintentional, which is learning by "bumping into things" (Dirkx & Lavin, 1991), where

the individual does not realize that learning is occurring, but later realized that something

was learned.

Informal learning also includes self-directed (Knowles, 1970), reflective

(Mezirow, 1991), experiential (Boud, 1996), incidental (Marsick & Watkins, 1990), and

tacit (Schugurensky, 2000) forms of learning. While both self-directed and reflective

learning tend to be intentional; experiential, incidental, and tacit learning are rather

unintentional. Self-directed learning is a form of learning where individuals use their own

initiative for learning. Self-directed individuals often take responsibility for their own

learning, instead of waiting for an organization to tell them what and how to learn

(Merriam and Caffarella, 1991; James-Gordon and Bal, 2003). Adult learners become

increasingly self-directed as they mature (Knowles, 1970). In self-directed learning, the

individual has a set and defined purpose for learning (intentional) and the individual is

aware that learning has occurred (conscious) (Schugurensky, 2000).

Reflective learning is the ability to reflect upon one's life experience (Boud,

Keogh, and Walker, 1985). Schön (1983) describes the processes of learning from

experience, as they occur for those in professional practice, as reflection-in-action and

reflection-on-action. While reflection-in-action refers to the process of thinking about

practice *during* action, reflection-on-action involves thinking about a situation *after* it has

happened. Reflective learning also describes how meaning is derived. The process

involves evaluating currently-held assumptions to determine their relevance in current

situations (Mezirow, 1991). A reflective process, which occupies a crucial role in the process of learning from experience (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Dirkx & Lavin, 1991; Merriam, et. al., 2007), tends to focus on the individual learner and the subjective meaning of his or her experience (Dirkx and Lavin, 1991).

Experiential learning involves people making sense of and learning from their own experience in the context of their social and cultural values (Boud, Cohen, and Walker, 1996). Experience is at the heart of any discussion about informal learning in adulthood and learning from experience is a central tenet of Marsick and Watkins' (1990) informal learning theory. In experiential learning, an individual becomes aware of the learning after undergoing a process of "retrospective recognition" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p.6), which can be internally generated or externally led (Schugurensky, 2000).

Incidental learning, on the other hand, occurs when an individual did not have the intention of learning something, but becomes aware that some learning has taken place *after* the experience (Schugurensky, 2000). Marsick and Watkins (1990) describe incidental learning within the workplace as a natural offshoot of engaging in professional work, and the learning is defined as a spontaneous transaction that increases a particular knowledge, skill, or understanding. This includes learning from mistakes, learning by doing, and learning through networking.

Tacit learning, which is part of socialization, refers to the internalization of the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to an individual's social position. Socialization is a process in which individuals acquire the social skills necessary to conform to the explicit and implicit rules of behavior required for integration into a group or community (Schugurensky, 2000). Tacit learning is a combination of both self and

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externally-imposed rules, because the individual wants to conform and comply with the expectations of others (Schugurensky, 2000). By having a conversation with someone about his or her learning experiences or after being exposed to a different social environment, an individual can be prompted to recognize that he or she has certain biases internalized from primary socialization (Schugurensky, 2000). Conformity becomes the principal reason for learning.

In summary, informal learning is conceptualized as transactions that can arise from daily experiences, which can be intentional or unintentional. Self-directed, reflective, incidental, experiential, and tacit learning are five of the many facets of informal learning that provide an understanding of adult learning for this study. These perspectives, however, reflect an emphasis on the individual, and often do not adequately address the influence of the broader socio-cultural context on the informal learning process. Relatively few studies of this complex process have examined how adults might learn through informal processes in non-western cultures in which traditional values significantly influence the structuring of social roles and norms.

Significance of Study

This exploratory empirical study has both theoretical and practical importance. Theoretically, this study addresses the cultural nuances that shape informal learning within a social context. The research generates insights on the socio-cultural dimensions of learning for Malay women in higher education leadership roles. It reveals certain shortcomings of the existing theory on informal learning, and helps to address unresolved

issues of informal learning from a cultural perspective. Adult learning scholars may use findings from this study to re-examine the implications for informal learning from a cultural perspective, and the assumptions about informal learning in the workplace.

Practically, this study enhances our understanding of the cultural norms and values that contributed to adult learning within a social context. Knowing how the embedded values influence the experiences of Malay women learning to lead is important for two reasons. First, Malay women in higher education administration shall benefit from the recognition that their cultural norms can influence their learning experiences. Such recognition shall contribute to a conscious effort toward a process of "retrospective recognition" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p.6). By having conversations about their experiences of learning, these Malay women can be prompted to recognize that primary socialization contribute to an internalization particular biases. Second, this study provided a meaningful space for these women to discuss their experiences of learning to lead, which helps them to define what they learned within their social context. By recognizing the contribution of women in knowledge production and utilization, this study shall compensate the missing past, which has marginalized the role of Malay women in nation building.

In addition, understanding how they learned to become a leader shall pave the way for aspiring women leaders in higher education. This is a significant study for encouraging more qualified, and experienced Malay women to assume positions of influence in higher education. Otherwise, Malay women's continued reluctance to penetrate the glass ceiling will only result in a "potential loss" (Nidiffer, 2001) to the nation's future for higher education leadership. For Malay women to hold formal

positions of leadership, they must be willing to employ strategies that will help them to navigate their leadership roles within their specific social context. Without such willingness, many well-educated and highly-experienced Malay women will become less receptive to opportunities for formal leadership.

This line of inquiry and the suggestions put forth in this study for encouraging female leadership in the educational arena may also have implications that go beyond the educational field and permeate society at large. Many educators, scholars, and grassroots leaders have argued that education for young women and girls is the best strategy to fight poverty and to strengthen community and nation building. To this end, female leadership and female mentorship is absolutely vital. A heavily patriarchal leadership system has little impact in empowering young women and girls. Furthermore, in conservative patriarchal societies, female empowerment is seldom on the social and political agenda and, as a result, fails to become a priority for the community. There is a need to break this cycle of suppression of women's potential. It becomes vital that female leadership and how it can be maximized in a specific cultural context be analyzed, understood, encouraged and applied. All aspects of learning are important in order to achieve these goals, and open, honest dialogue among scholars and intellectuals on this subject can help drive both the study of this subject and its practical, real-world implications.

Scope and Limitations

In the context of this study, informal learning refers to the concepts of adult learning that is both intentional and unintentional, and based on their lived experiences. The scope of this study is limited to the context of learning to lead in Malaysian higher education. This qualitative study uses the narrative inquiry approach to focus on personal stories as told by a small number of participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 55). Two in-depth interviews with six Malay women served as the primary method of data collection. The study utilized life stories and the critical incidents approach for collecting interview data. The focus was on the experiences of Malay women negotiating their traditional and professional roles to capture the critical incidents that contributed to their learning and development as women leaders. The six participants for this study were from established public universities in Malaysia. The small sample size was purposefully selected, and was deemed appropriate for a narrative inquiry approach. However, the results cannot be generalized to other women leaders who may have different socio-cultural conditions. Nevertheless, they provide an instructive window into the personal experiences of Malay women learning to lead in higher education.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores how Malay women learn to lead in higher education within their social context. There is an assumption that their societal norms play a significant role in the lives of Malay women and their social values may influence their learning experiences. Knowing the values provides the basis for understanding how women learn to become leaders. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section sets out the context with a brief description of Malaysia, its higher education setting, a glimpse of Malay traditional values, and some insights on gender norms. The second section reviews the literature on informal learning.

Setting the Context: A Brief Demography of Malaysia

Malaysia is an advanced developing country (US Department of State, 2002) that gained independence from British rule in 1957. Located in Southeast Asia, the bordering countries are Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Malaysia is a federation of 13 states; 11 states are on the peninsula (West Malaysia) and the two states of Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia) are located on Borneo Island. The total land area is 127,355 square miles; West Malaysia has approximately 51,000 square miles (about the size of Michigan). Although West Malaysia covers less than 40% of the land area, 80% of the population is concentrated in West Malaysia because it is more developed than East Malaysia. The capital city of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya – the seat of the federal government – are also located in West Malaysia.

Malaysia has a population of 28.31 million people (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2009). The labor force participation rate is 62.8 percent (Malaysia Labor Force Statistics, 2008), with a higher rate of participation among males (79.9% of all males) as compared to females (46.1% of all females). Interestingly, only 22.4 percent of the workforce has higher education. About half (54.9 %) of the workforce has secondary education, 18.2 percent possess elementary education, and 4.5% are without formal education. During the late 20th century, Malaysia experienced an economic boom and underwent rapid development. Economic growth during the 1980s and 1990s, averaging 8% from 1991 to 1997, has transformed Malaysia into a newly industrialized country (Bozyk, 2006).

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual country with a distinct mix of three major races; Malays, Chinese, and Indians. The Malays, together with other indigenous natives, make up the largest ethnic group (65.1%) called *Bumiputra* or "people of the soil" in Malaysia, followed by the Chinese (25.8%), Indians (7.7 %) and other ethnic minorities (1.3%). The three main ethnic groups in Malaysia are from three regions of Asia; the Chinese are immigrants from East Asia, the Indians from South Asia, and the Malays are indigenous to Southeast Asia. The Malays themselves form the largest community (85%) of the indigenous *bumiputra* and they play a dominant role in the country's politics. While Malay or *Bahasa Melayu* is the national and official language in Malaysia, English is the second, un-official language of the country. The third languages are Mandarin, Tamil and Arabic. Native languages like Kadazan and Iban are specifically prominent in East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak).

Education in Malaysia

The Malaysian government plays a major role in providing affordable education to Malaysians. Education is a priority of the Federal Government of Malaysia. About 21% of the country's budget, with a total of RM 40.3 billion, has been allocated for the expenditure of education, training and lifelong learning under the Ninth Malaysian Plan (9MP) from 2006 to 2010. The national education system is divided into pre-university and higher education. The Government provides more than 95% of primary and secondary education as well as about 60% of the higher education, with the private sector providing the balance. The government provides 11 years of free primary and secondary education. At the higher education level, public universities offer courses leading to the awards of certificate, diploma, and undergraduate as well as postgraduate qualifications in academic and professional fields.

Previously, the Ministry of Education (MOE) had the authority to regulate all sectors of education in Malaysia. Since the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in March 2004, pre-university education (i.e. from pre-school to secondary education and teacher education) has been under the jurisdiction of the MOE and higher education is now the responsibility of the MOHE. The Department of Higher Education is one of the four departments within the MOHE that regulates the nation's higher educational affairs at both public and private institutions. The department has several divisions that play significant roles in improving the quality of education services, and ensuring that programs offered by public universities and private institutions in Malaysia are of high quality and international standards.

Public Universities in Malaysia

There are 20 public universities in Malaysia, and the number is constantly growing. All public universities in Malaysia are large and complex organizations that are heavily funded by the government. The oldest public university was established in 1962, five years after the country's independence.

Table 1: *Public Universities in Malaysia as of 2010*

	University	Year Established
1	Universiti Malaya (UM) **	1962
2	Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) **	1969
3	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) **	1970
4	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) **	1971
5	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)	1972
6	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)	1983
7	Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)	1984
8	Universiti Sarawak Malaysia (Unimas)	1992
9	Universiti Sabah Malaysia (UMS)	1994
10	Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris (UPSI)	1997
11	Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)	1998
12	Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia (UiTM)	1999
13	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)	1999
14	Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM)	2000
15	Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM)	2000
16	Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP)	2002
17	Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP)	2002
18	Universiti Darul Iman Malaysia (UDM)	2005
19	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)	2006
20	Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM)	2006

** Achieved Research Status in 2006

With the inception of the MOHE, higher education in Malaysia continues to experience rapid changes. In 2006, as part of the Ninth Malaysia Plan, the stress on excellence and innovations in higher education has led to the declaration of four public universities, namely USM, UPM, UM, and UKM, as research universities (RUs). Each RU has an additional allocation of RM 153 million for research, development, and commercialization activities. USM uses the additional grant to build a research park, to set up an international school within the campus in order to attract international staff with children, to provide emphasis on the arts, culture, and heritage, and to support research students. UPM invests the incentive money to hire top international professors for short visits, to offer assistantships and fellowships to research students, and to create post-doctoral opportunities for conducting research with the university.

While UM focuses its funding on graduate programs and efforts to build a critical mass of international and local talents, UKM seeks to focus more on research areas such as renewable energy, brain science and educational research that will inform education. In addition, UKM seeks to create an innovation center that will help researchers with pre-testing of technology, safety and efficiency of products, and will match technologies with companies and communities that require them. The RU status sets out to help these four established universities to emerge as vibrant internationalized campuses that are actively engaged in emerging research areas within the next 10 to 15 years.

In 2007, university management has been reorganized to include the appointment of specially-designated Deputy Vice Chancellors to monitor and boost industry-university linkages. Public universities have also increased their capacities to meet the

demands of the market in terms of enrollment at different levels of post-graduate courses and industry relevant disciplines. In 2008, USM was accorded the "apex university" status, which the government identified as a university with the greatest potential among Malaysian universities to be world-class and as such, to be given additional assistance to compete with top-ranking global institutions. The Federal Government has allocated RM830 million for the development of the Accelerated Program for Excellence (Apex) initiatives by USM (The Star, March 4, 2009).

As public universities become involved in providing education services abroad as well as to students from abroad, and act in tandem with the government's effort to corporatize public universities, the government's funding will eventually be reduced from the existing 90 percent to 70 percent. Public universities will operate towards a more enterprising mode, become more autonomous and less dependent on government funds. All these new developments, rapid changes, and the recruitment of students from neighboring countries seek to realize Malaysia's aspiration to position the country as a hub for higher education excellence in the region. In such dynamic environment, learning to lead for deans and directors often involves a process of learning on the job through everyday experiences.

Deans and Directors as Leaders

Leaders must have the skills to help people do a better job through coaching, facilitating and by creating environments that serve the members of the organization. Deans and directors as leaders in higher education have the opportunity to set new

directions for their academic units. They have the responsibility to students and faculty

for the administration of academic programs across campus. In good times, leaders strive

for greater heights to get to some place better than where they already are. In difficult and

challenging times, leaders reinforce their organizational units from falling further than

they need to. One common aspect to deanship and directorship is the relative brevity of

their tenures. The average term is less than four years. This awareness of being temporary

occupants of the office, without any assurance that one's appointment will run longer

than the initial term, leads them to a great urgency to identify priorities, develop plans,

and achieve results (Bright and Richards, 2001) .

Deans and directors as academic leaders stand at the three-way crossroads

between (1) the world external to the university, (2) the people who constitute top-

management within the university, and (3) the academic and support staff (Ramsden,

1998). As chief administrators of their departments, they must plan, organize, and control

all available resources such as capital, facilities, equipments, faculty, staff, and students.

Their duties have gone beyond student-focused to include managing, planning,

budgeting, advocating, fundraising and cultural representation (Wolverton et al., 2001).

As leaders, they set direction, align people and group, and motivate and inspire people to

create impact that produce change (Kotter, 1990) within academic settings.

Academic leaders such as deans and directors usually ascend from academic

positions. In Malaysian higher education, of the total of 23,567 academic staff at the 20

Malaysian public universities (Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education Statistics, 2007),

women tend to dominate the lower rank of tutors (55%) and lecturers (53%). Of all the

academic staff, men and women, 66 percent are lecturers, 15 percent are tutors, 13

percent are associate professors, and only 6 percent are professors. Women represent only 36 percent of the associate professors and 24 percent of the full professors. This low percentage of women professors seems to reflect the low number of women leaders in Malaysian higher education. As in other organizations, women are also under-represented in academic leadership positions. Despite the small number, this study chooses to focus on Malay women because they represent the majority of women leaders in Malaysian public universities. Malay women deans and directors are also mid-level administrators whose prominent roles include academic, administrative, and leadership (McLaughlin, Montgomery, & Malpass, 1975).

In sum, the gender gap that exists within employment positions at the decision-making levels is still large. The number of women leaders in Malaysia is extremely low. Malay women can help to close the gender gap that exists within positions of leadership, particularly within the higher education setting. By entering mid-level administration, Malay women stand a greater chance to move up the career ladder. But at the same time, Malay social norms and Islamic religious values also interact with the lives of Malay women. The norms and values may contribute to certain expectations and gender norms in society. A historical perspective on Malay women in Malaysia is discussed below.

Malay Women – A Historical Perspective

The different periods of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Malaysia have influenced the lives of Malay women and their roles in family and society (Ariffin, 1992; Ng & Yong, 1990; Raja Mamat, 1991). During the pre-colonial period, when the Portuguese ruled Malacca in Malaya (West Malaysia) from 1511 to 1641 and the Dutch

ruled from 1641 until 1824, the local Malay community continued to practice Islamic laws and Malay customs. The first colonial period began with the British colonization of Malaya from 1826 to 1942. From 1942 to 1945, during World War II, Malaya was briefly occupied by the Japanese. The Second colonial period was during British rule from 1946 to 1957. The post-colonial period started from the year 1957, when Malaya gained independence from British rule. In 1963, Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo Island joined the Federation of Malaysia that included Singapore. By 1965, Singapore left Malaysia to become a country by itself.

Each historical period has significant impact on the lives of Malay women. During the pre-colonial period, the roles of Malay women were defined by two distinct classes of the aristocrats and the peasants (Ariffin, 1992). The aristocratic women were the wives and family members of the royals and the Malay rulers. Their major role was to care for and socialize their children to fit into social fabrics of the upper-class. The peasant women, besides their roles as housewives and mothers, were involved in subsistence agriculture (vegetable gardening, rice cultivation, and animal husbandry). Most upper-class women were involved in charitable activities and they did not participate in the economic activities that were carried out by the working class.

During the first colonial period (1826 to 1942), the roles of women began to change as a result of British colonial rule. The colonial ruler introduced English schools, Western capitalism, and modernization, which reformed the Malay community and subsequently changed the roles of Malay women (Ariffin, 1992). Many elite Malay women became educated and played a new role in the public domain. In 1929, they formed the Malay Women Teachers Union, which was one of the earliest women's

groups devoted to encouraging Malay women to attend formal education. Although Malaysian girls were granted access to formal education, English schools set up for girls were actually training them to become suitable wives for their husbands-to-be, and the learning activities were related to the roles of women as wives and mothers (Ariffin, 1992). The type of education for girls, which reinforced the nurturing and domestic roles of women, was later criticized for producing gender inequality (Ng & Yong, 1990).

During the second colonial period of 1946 through 1957, Malay women began active involvement in politics, and by 1949 they formed the women's wing of UMNO, or United Malay National Organization – a political organization formed in 1946 by educated elite Malay men. As the sense of nationalism began to grow, Malay women engaged in political demonstrations, public rallies, and awareness campaigns to oppose the proposals of the Malayan Union, a colonial-sponsored organization. That era historically marks the beginning of a new role for Malay women in the public sphere. In the political process, although women have exercised their voting rights and become involved in political parties, they mostly played a supportive role to men (Othman, 2009) except in the women's wings of political parties, where women elect and choose their own leaders. Othman (2009) observes that women's wings in political parties remain secondary to men despite their ability to fulfill crucial grass-root roles during the campaign period of each general election. While men in the party's youth wings can "climb up" the party hierarchy into the mainstream party, according to Othman (2009), women seem to be constrained within their respective wing, perpetually playing a secondary role to their male counterparts. Modern Malaysian politics proved insufficient or incapable of providing women with the necessary platform to become leaders in

society at large. Confined only to "women's wing" politics, Malay women did not branch out and become mainstream political leaders.

Nevertheless, during the post-colonial period, which began in 1957, apart from managing their families, educated Malay women continued to be involved in social, political, and economic development of the newly independent country. With the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1970, Malay women gained greater access to higher education. The NEP, implemented from 1970 to 1990, was part of a comprehensive policy framework (de Micheaux, 1997) to eradicate poverty and restructure the society. It was developed in response to a racial riot that erupted on May 13, 1969. The historic riot was prompted by a deep sense of dissatisfaction because the ownership of wealth in the country was concentrated in the hands of immigrants and foreigners, while the Malays and other indigenous races were confined to subsistence economy and remained in poverty (de Micheaux, 1997). One significant impact of the NEP was that, with better education, Malay women began to enter the workforce. However, women were mainly involved in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors as well as the wholesale and retail trade. The proportion of women serving as senior officials and managers was very low (only 5.4 percent in 2005). On the contrary, female enrollment in public universities increased significantly to 63.7 percent in 2005. t the graduate level, 48.8 percent at the masters' level and 35.7 percent at the PhD level were female students.

The historical development of Malaysia has shaped the activities and opportunities for Malay women. As a policy framework to restructure the society (de Micheaux, 1997), the NEP has provided opportunities for Malay women to achieve

considerable progress; their participation in higher education and in the workforce has increased over the years.

However, within the contemporary context, women as leaders are under-represented in Malaysia because of their low participation in politics and employment positions at the decision-making levels. Historically, Malaysian women were granted the right to vote and to stand for election at the same time as men i.e. in 1957; and women were also elected to parliament at the same time as men in 1959 (Othman, 2009). Despite that, the number of women leaders in Malaysian politics is comparatively very low. By April 2009, only two of the 33 federal ministers are women ministers. In other areas, women as board of directors in government-linked companies make up only 14 percent, and only 18 percent of the top management positions in the public sector are held by women (Malaysia Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, 2004). Women leaders are less prevalent in Malaysia's male-dominated culture, particularly within work organizations (Westwood and Leung, 1999; Ng and Chakrabarty, 2005). Although labor laws in Malaysia do not discriminate against women, culturally speaking, women in Malaysia are still perceived as subordinate to men, and employment is an extra, added-on role, not the primary role (Abdullah, Noor, & Wok, 2008).

Within the higher education settings in Malaysia, leadership positions have always been traditionally male-dominated and the number of women leaders in higher education is still very low. Eighteen of Malaysia's 20 public universities are in West Malaysia; nine of the 20 are now established universities. Yet after 50 years of independence, not one of those public universities was led by a woman until 2006, when Malaysia saw its first female vice chancellor, who is the equivalent of a university

president in American and other Western universities. By 2009, only three public universities have been led by women VCs. All three are Malay women.

Malay Women and Gender Norms

Malay women in Malaysia generally conform to Malay customs and gender norms. Gender norms among Malay women are typically shaped by two distinctive forces: The Malay customs called *adat* and the Islamic values of gender relations. In rural Malay society where two distinct traditions of gender norms co-exist, Hanami (2002) found that not only women were actors of their own decision and choice; they were also social partners of men and were located at the center of family life and kinship. With that finding, Hanami (2002) argues that by conforming in full respect to Islam in the formal dimension of their lives, villagers successfully preserved the traditional and informal dimension of their lives based on "adat" values. Anthropological studies (Karim, 1992; Peletz, 1996; and Hanami, 2002) on gender relations among Malays often concentrated on the rural areas and the less educated population. Often missing from the literature are voices from highly educated Malay women and the social dimensions of their professional lives as women leaders in the public spheres.

Malay women leaders in higher education often face challenges of negotiating highly gendered social norms within their work and family lives. Malays in Malaysia are typically Muslims, with Islamic principles influencing Malay culture to a large extent. Within Muslim families, men are typically leaders, and one traditional religious view suggests that the leadership of women is not allowed in Islam. Such suggestion may

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influence the societal views of women as leaders. For women to be leaders, especially in politics and within work organizations, they have to face the challenges of traditional religious values (Abdullah, Noor, & Wok, 2008). It is assumed that those challenges may shape their learning experiences, particularly within the context of learning to lead in higher education.

Although the patriarchal norms of Muslim societies are influential within the Malay community, with the strong view that women leadership is not allowed in Islam, Malay traditional norms tend to conform to matrilineal practices (De Moubray, 1931). Matrilineal practices are typically shaped by Malay traditional values. In describing Malay social values, Abdullah (1996, p.19) draws attention to the idea of social sensitivity and feeling *malu* (shame) is related to a social expectation for individual actions and behaviors. The social expectation puts emphasis on a high context form of communication where both the verbal and the surrounding circumstances are taken into consideration. Malay culture also prescribes that Malays should preserve modesty and humility, be non-confrontational, and be able to maintain an attitude of tolerance in society. Abdullah (1996) adds that Malays are generally accommodative to hierarchical relationship, in which respect for elders and authority figures is very well-observed, and they build relationships based on morality and trust. Toward this end, Abdullah (1996) asserts that the sense of harmonious relationship, emotional interdependence, and loyalty to the group provide the meaning for one's existence in a social context.

Abdullah (1996) also highlights the influence of Islamic teachings on Malay social values. First, the observed traits or *zahir* and the unseen inner qualities or *batin* are equally important for Malays as both traits can influence conduct and shape personal and

professional qualities. Second, Malays look at development of the individual or group in a holistic manner in which the material and spiritual dimensions are equally important. As Muslims, the Malays believe in the concept of *Allah the Almighty* as a Supreme Being and they believe in the Holy Quran as a divine source of knowledge. Malays believe in Islam as a way of life and their daily commitments are punctuated with regular prayers and shared rituals to comply with their responsibility in Islam. In summary, the pursuit of knowledge and conforming to the teachings of Islam are important to Malays.

In a Malay society, Aihwa Ong (1990) observes that while woman's roles as mothers and wives are strengthened according to Islamic tenets in ways that women should first and foremost serve their husbands and adhere to the Islamic version of male authority (p. 268), she also notes that Malay women neither simply "resist" nor become "passive". In a study about the experiences of women academics at selected Malaysian public universities, Ismail and Rasdi (2006) uncover a non-conventional theme: an adherence to religiosity (p. 251). The theme shows that the women studied cited religion as one of the anchor points in maintaining their career goal (p. 252). For Muslims, male and female, learning is a sacred duty. Islam's view of learning as duty, calling to seek knowledge for the benefit of the *ummah* or society, is pertinent for Malays. As Muslims, Malays are encouraged to conform to their lifelong obligation for learning and seeking knowledge "from cradle to grave" (Hashim, 2008). Religious obligations, in that sense, can influence the ways in which Malay women learn to become leaders.

As Malay women leaders – be it in politics or at mid-level administration as deans and directors in higher education – these women carry a strong voice in society. However, the small number of women leaders in Malaysia makes them less visible and

their compelling stories become under-represented. There is an implicit assumption that for Malay women to hold formal positions of leadership, they must be willing to employ strategies that will help them to negotiate their roles according to social and religious conventions. Without such willingness, many well-educated and highly-experienced Malay women may become less receptive to opportunities for formal leadership. There is an essential need to promote women as leaders in Malaysian politics and work organizations, so that their powerful voices can influence national policies that support and recognize the importance of women's participation in nation building.

This study will provide a meaningful space for Malay women leaders to reflect on their experiences of learning to become a leader, which will allow them to define for themselves what they have learned. Understanding Malay women's ideas of learning to become leaders will pave the way for aspiring women leaders. It is important to understand how they learn, in order to inspire more and more Malaysian women to become leaders. As Malay women represent the majority of women leaders in higher education, it becomes necessary to understand how they learn within their social context. The idea of learning as a religious obligation among Malays will provide a unique background for understanding the socio-cultural imperatives that may influence or shape the concept of informal learning.

Informal Learning

The term informal learning was introduced in the 1950s by Malcolm Knowles in his pioneer work on informal adult education. Following Knowles's work during the 1950's, the role of informal learning has emerged in the workplace learning literature.

Boud and Garrick (1999) have acknowledged informal interaction with work colleagues as a predominant way of learning in the workplace; however, it is often considered 'part of the job' and not acknowledged as formal learning (Boud and Middleton, 2003). Earlier, Marsick and Watkins (1997) suggested that, not only is informal learning unique to the individual, but control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Informal learning draws attention to the learning that takes place in the spaces surrounding people, activities, and events in the workplace. It can also be considered as a complementary to learning from everyday experience. Since then many authors have written about informal learning. This includes learning that is implicit, unintended, opportunistic and unstructured (Eraut, 2004). In sum, informal learning is by nature highly contextual (Ellinger and Cseh, 2007; Marsick *et al.,* 2008).

Informal learning is represented by a range of strategies including conversation, social interaction, team work, and mentoring. Informal learning involves interaction between people and is not limited to a predefined body of knowledge. This had led authors like Coffield (1999) and Hagar and Halliday (2006) to advocate informal learning as an important form of learning. Other authors have suggested that informal learning can be successful if used in conjunction with formal learning (Bell, 1997; Bell and Dale, 1999). The informal learning literature (e.g. Coffield, 1999; Cofer, 2000; Bell and Dale, 1999; Marsick and Volpe, 1999; Marsick and Watkins, 1990, 1999) represents informal learning as the way "...in which people construct meaning in their... shared organizational life" (Marsick, 1987, p. 4). Additionally, people learn in the workplace through interactions with others in their daily work environments (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 4). Most of this learning is situated within social situations and is also referred to

as incidental learning (Marsick and Watkins, 1990). According to Marsick and Volpe, informal learning involve both action and reflection which involves "looking back on what we have done, measuring it against what we wanted to achieve, and assessing the consequences" (1999, p. 7). The problem, however, is that reflection is difficult to recognize (Marsick and Volpe, 1999) and so co-workers and their organizations may not recognize or be able to identify informal learning experiences in the workplace. Despite this difficulty, examining how informal learning occurs has the potential to contribute to current debates surrounding the notion of informal learning.

A review of the informal learning literature shows that informal learning is commonly studied in a western context. This literature review draws on western perspectives of informal learning. In recent years, western studies often draw on various disciplines and areas of practice. For example, Hoekstra *et al.* (2009) focus on informal learning of teachers by looking at the school environment. Jurasaite-Harbison (2009) adopts a socio-cultural perspective to see how different cultural contexts shape teachers' workplace learning in three different schools – a Lithuanian school, a Russian school, and a US school. In another workplace context, Gola's (2009) research uses narrative inquiry to better understand the informal learning of social workers in Italy. The above three examples of western studies show how the learning of individuals is situated within organizational and social contexts, where people work, bringing about a clearer understanding of the phenomenon conceptually. Informal learning among adult learners is generally best situated in workplaces, where individuals can make a difference in what and how they learn (Marsick, 2009).

These three studies rely on qualitative research designs to understand the informal learning phenomenon in various western countries. Hoekstra *et al.* (2009) ground their study in research on teacher learning. They define informal workplace learning, based on the work of Eraut (2004) and Straka (2004), as "learning that lacks systematic support explicitly organized to foster teacher learning." They also draw on Lohman's (2006) study of factors that facilitate or impede informal teacher learning. Hoekstra and her colleagues develop a conceptual framework that examines learning processes (learning by doing) and environmental conditions (shared norms). They call attention to the difference between action-oriented and meaning-oriented reflection, and to the lack of research that links research to learning outcomes. Two teachers are purposely selected from a larger quantitative sample of 32, in order to trace in-depth differences in learning activities, outcomes, and the influence of environmental conditions. The in-depth profiles of these two teachers shed light on factors that influence how teachers learn in the face of similar challenges posed by school change mandates. Both teachers were confronted with educational reform focused on active and self-regulated learning for students.

The profiles show how individual preferences interact with school leadership, structure, and culture. One teacher, Melissa, scored above average on beliefs that knowledge is co-constructed, and after a year, scored significantly higher in beliefs about students' self-regulated learning. She sought new teaching materials, ideas, and methods; and was often involved in meaning-oriented reflection. The second teacher, Paul, by contrast, scored lower than average on beliefs about self-regulated learning, and focused on achieving acceptable students result. He only experimented with new teaching if it did not affect control of student results; and engaged more often in action-oriented reflection.

The study shows how environmental conditions, sometimes shared, differently impeded or affected each teacher's approach to learning. While environmental conditions matter, belief systems influenced ways that Melissa and Paul interpret and manage their environments. The above findings provide insights on how informal learning of individual Malay women might differ despite them sharing similar social conditions.

In another study, Jurasaite-Harbison's (2009) in-depth ethnographic study of teachers learning in three different schools highlight the role that leadership, culture, and environment play in shaping and supporting or impeding the learning. She uses discourse analysis of interviews and reflective journal, along with interactional ethnography and observational data, to examine the learning of teachers in these three schools. The study unpacks the interactive dynamic between individual preferences and school environmental factors. The use of a socio-cultural approach enables the readers to see how strongly environmental influences informal learning patterns, and how individual learning preferences may be accommodated, shaped, or rejected by strong cultures and leadership patterns. The study reveals how teachers as agents learn through interactions, constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it – a socio-cultural perspective, which pays less attention to learning methods and processes, and more attention to relationships as wells as to organizational climate and norms that stimulate learning. This socio-cultural perspective study provides an insightful lens for examining how Malay women learn to become leaders, particularly with regard to social norms that may stimulate or inhibit learning.

Gola's (2009) study of social workers in Italy is another qualitative study that adds to an understanding of informal learning. It looks at how 30 in-service social

workers in different settings learned their skills, what stories or situations have influenced their personal attitude and professional values. He defines informal learning based on John Dewey (1938) and Schon (1983). He also draws on the work of Eraut (2004), Straka (2004), Schugurensky (2000), and Marsick & Watkins (1990) in fleshing out the many concepts of informal learning. He then profiles the tacit, experienced-based, context-dependent nature of informal learning and describes the various typologies, e.g. self-directed, accidental, incidental, and socialization-based. Through this literature, he calls attention to the tacit nature of informal learning and the ways in which learning can be enhanced through an individual's intentionality and consciousness, as well as the supportiveness of the environment for learning.

Gola collects and analyzes the life histories of a volunteer sample of 30 social workers to capture how they learn. He explains the many ways that social workers learn within three categories: deliberative learning, reactive learning, and implicit learning. Gola's work shows how elusive the concept of informal learning can be, and how difficult it is to capture details when learning is so intertwined with work in ways that are tacit and not proactively engaged (Marsick, 2009). Gola notes "the participants don't really understand their implicit learning completely, nor are they aware of the actions and the activities related to implicit mechanisms." Gola points out a challenge in studying implicit learning - that it is not highly conscious even when learning is motivated by values and goals that are consciously understood and espoused. His mapping of deliberative, reactive, and implicit learning in studies of social workers uncovers variables that can be used to examine informal learning in other settings, including within the Malay social setting. While implicit learning adds to the nature of informal learning,

the deliberative and reactive learning concepts add to an understanding of the informal learning process.

The three recent studies (Hoekstra *et al.*, 2009; Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009; Gola, 2009) have examined informal learning across cultures and national boundaries: Italy, Lithuania, Russia and the USA, which help to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon within the western contexts. The studies demonstrate that informal learning can be studied by examining activities and processes, for example, examining one's own practices, getting ideas from others, learning from mistakes, or having conversations with colleagues. Informal learning can be linked with the way that beliefs affect choices and actions taken. The studies support earlier theories that individual strategies for learning are mediated by their beliefs, values, and prior socialization, which affect the nature of learning. The cross-cultures study also re-emphasize the idea that context greatly affects learning practices and choices, including triggers for learning, resources, and environmental influences.

On that note, informal learning is a complex phenomenon which may be better understood through a socio-cultural lens (Marsick, 2009) that examines the interaction of people and their social and cultural context. Marsick (2009) asserts that studies of informal learning have yet to factor culture explicitly into learning in ways that account for cultural influences. This study of how Malay women learn to become leaders will specifically focus on the Malay cultural influences on informal learning. The study will address culture explicitly into learning in ways that account for cultural influences in the highly contextual process. Tacit learning is a form of informal learning that will be used to capture the internalization of the norms, values, behavior, and social skills. It will

generate a better understanding for the ways in which Malay women learn within their social context. Socialization is a process in which individuals acquire the necessary social skills to conform to the explicit and implicit rules of behavior, which can greatly influence tacit learning. Exploring tacit learning and drawing from the tacit knowledge literature will provide a scope for this study that will purposely consider the influence of social norms into learning.

Tacit Knowledge and Tacit Learning

The term tacit knowledge as it applies to western context appeared in the 1960's as the kind of knowledge that is personal, context-specific, and difficult to write down (Polanyi, 1966). Wagner and Sternberg (1986) define tacit knowledge as work-related practical knowledge learned informally on the job. Knowing the notion of tacit knowledge provides a way to understand the idea of tacit learning. Rebernik and Sirec (2007) assert that tacit knowledge is obtained by internal individual processes, such as through experience, reflection, or internalization. People experience tacit knowledge mostly as intuition, rather than as body of facts that an individual is conscious of having and can explain to others. For that reason, tacit knowledge is difficult to express, formalize and share (Rebernik and Sirec, 2007). It stands in contrast to explicit knowledge, which is conscious, can be documented and put into words. Durrance (1998) states that western culture likes explicit knowledge such as the quantifiable and definable information that makes up the reports, memos, manuals, and instructional materials. Tacit knowledge, however, cannot be delivered in lectures and found in books or manuals. It

knowledge has to be internalized in the human body and soul (Haldin-Herrgard, 2000, p. 358).

There are four kinds of tacit knowledge (Lubit, 2001, p. 166). First, the "Know-how" skills, which refer to tacit knowledge that people need to repeatedly practice, receive feedback and get a feel for them. Second, the Mental Models, which represent tacit knowledge that determine how individuals understand and analyse situations and make sense of a situation. Third, the ways of approaching problems have to do with the tacit knowledge that underlies the individual's decision-making process. Fourth, the organizational routines produce tacit knowledge that is embedded in the routines that remain as a legacy of the individual's knowledge. Studies of tacit knowledge are commonly situated within work organizations. Durrance (1998) points out these four processes to describe the ways in which people cultivate the sharing of tacit knowledge within a western organization: (a) watch, (b) create an environment of trust, respect, and commitment, (c) let people learn by doing, (d) in any training exercise, allow time for reflection and interpersonal exchange. The kinds of tacit knowledge (Lubit, 2001) and the processes of sharing tacit knowledge (Durrance, 1998) provide a useful framework for understanding the ideas behind tacit learning.

Tacit learning, according to Schugurensky (2000), is a combination of both self-imposed and externally-imposed rules because the individual wants to conform (self-imposed) and comply with the expectations of others (externally-imposed). The presence and absence of nurturing socio-cultural conditions may influence tacit learning. It is often shaped by the social context (Schugurensky, 2000). Studies of informal learning frequently focus on individual learning, which is often implicit and incidental in nature.

These are two important tenets of tacit learning which are known from western context. Yi (2006) defines tacit knowledge as personal, difficult to communicate to others, problematic, and contextual. Yi (2006), however, maintains that tacit knowledge is more mysterious and harder to talk about and it exists more in eastern-culture. When exploring how tacit knowledge is externalized in online environments, Yi (2006) finds that sharing one's own experience is the most effective way for people to share their tacit knowledge. When reiterating a Chinese proverb "What I hear, I forget. What I see, I remember," Lam (2000) explains that tacit knowledge is experience-based: it can only be revealed through practice in a particular context and transmitted through social networks. Tacit knowledge, therefore, generates a way for capturing the process of tacit learning using the socio-cultural lens that examines the interaction of people and their social and cultural context (Marsick, 2009).

In the context of this study that explores the processes of learning to lead within a social context, their learning may be easily understood by exploring the tacit learning. One of the ways to understand how Malay women learn to become leaders is to explore their tacit knowledge, which may be culturally shaped by their social norms and values. Tacit learning related to the tacit knowledge of being women leaders within their social contexts becomes a way to explain how they learn to become leaders. There is an assumption that the women's tacit knowledge may be heavily influenced by the social norms. This study explores tacit knowledge that is shaped by the social values and that has potential influence on the process of learning to become a woman leader. In summary, tacit knowledge and tacit learning are useful and appropriate for depicting the ways in which Malay women learn informally within their social context.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter illustrates the research design, approach, and methodology that were used to study informal learning of Malay women leaders in higher education. A qualitative research design was chosen for this study, because it has the ability to capture a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 1998), and to understand the processes that people use to construct meanings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). A qualitative interview procedure (Chell, 1998) called the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) guided the data collection method. A narrative inquiry approach was utilized to address both the broad and specific research questions. Broad question; How do Malay women learn to become leaders in the Malaysian context? Specific question; How does the socio-cultural context influence or manifest itself in the informal learning of Malay women leaders in higher education? The following sections include the reasons for using a qualitative design, a description of the narrative inquiry as a research approach, and an overview of the CIT as a method for data collection.

Research Design

A research design can influence the process of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data. Researchers use the qualitative research approach to gain a complex, detailed understanding of the issue; to develop theories when inadequate theories exist for

the population; or when existing theories do not adequately address the complexity involved (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Maxwell (1996) proposes the use of qualitative research design to understand the meaning of certain situations, actions, or events for participants, and to understand the unique context in which those circumstances occur. This study can benefit from a qualitative research design that provides a way to establish a new line of thinking (Creswell, 2007, p.102) about informal learning within a social context.

A research design is "the action plan" that enables the researcher to move from research questions to valid conclusions through the collection and analysis of data (Yin, 1994 p. 19), and the strategy for undertaking a systematic exploration of the phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 62). By attending to the research design, researchers seek to assure that the results of their studies produce valid and accurate results (Macmillan & Schumacher, 1997, pp. 34-35). In sum, a research design is like a roadmap that guides the research processes. The qualitative research design influenced the processes for data collection, data analyses, and drawing conclusions.

There are five common characteristics of a qualitative approach (Bogdan and Biklen's, 1998). The first feature is qualitative research as naturalistic, which uses the participants' natural setting as the direct source of data, and the researcher is the key instrument. Second, qualitative research is descriptive. Data is collected through interviews, observations and document analysis. The data collected takes the rich form of words or pictures. Third, qualitative research focuses more on processes rather than products. It is more about how people negotiate meaning rather than the outcomes. Fourth, qualitative research is inductive, in that the theory emerges from the data

collected. It does not require a hypothesis before entering the study. Finally, the fifth feature, meaning, is the primary concern to the qualitative approach because qualitative researchers are interested in the "participant perspectives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The emphasis on processes rather than products, as well as meaning rather than the outcomes, provides a strong reason for choosing a qualitative research design. This study seeks to understand the ways in which the Malay social norms influence the informal learning of women leaders in higher education. A qualitative research design has become useful for understanding how the social values shaped the processes of learning to become a leader. This qualitative research provides a wealth of information about a relatively small sample, and it reveals a more detailed picture of individual experiences. As an empirical research, this study identifies what meaning the subjects attribute to their experiences, their actions, and whether these meanings represent learning already acquired by the subjects (Gola, 2008). By using a qualitative approach, this study focused on the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of the participants (Patton, 2002). A qualitative approach can also be used to present data for its descriptive value and to analyze the data for emerging themes (Patton, 2002).

One of the prime advantages of using the qualitative approach for this study is that the design provides a better understanding of the participants' perspectives within the socio-cultural context (Merriam, 1998). However, the data analysis may be largely affected by the researchers' interpretations, because they are the key instrument for analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, Merriam, 1998, Stake, 1995). All the data is filtered through the researchers' perspectives, values, and worldviews. This qualitative study responded to processes and functions related to interpretative theories (Gola, 2008), and

benefited from the use of a narrative inquiry approach. It is a strategy that supports an analysis of knowledge development starting from subjective stories (Gola, 2008). For this study, a narrative inquiry approach was used to support an action plan for establishing a qualitative research that focused on process rather than products. The study also focused on meaning rather than the outcomes. The next section describes the narrative approach used in the study.

Narrative Inquiry

This study draws on Riessman's (1993), as well as Clandinin's and Connelly's (2000) idea, that narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Narrative is about understanding the complexities of experience, honoring the subtleties of experience, and understanding the dynamics between individual experiences, and contexts that shape experience (Phillion, 2002, p. 20). The narrative form reflects the effort to re-establish a sense of order and meaning in the human experience: the stories are ways of organizing experience, interpreting the events and creating meaning, while maintaining a sense of continuity (Gola, 2008). Narrative has become identified with stories, and from this point of view, narrative inquiry is one way to make sense of life as lived (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). A narrative inquiry approach was used for understanding how Malay women leaders learn within their social context, because it allowed for a deeper sense of understanding the complexities of their learning and development as women leaders.

The scientific position on the narrative approach, which has been developed in recent years, has focused on the theme of narrations as objects and research tools in the social sciences (Josselson and Lieblich, 1995). While qualitative researchers are concerned with everyday data, narrative inquirers focus on a more specific type of story. Stories are commonly used to make sense of the individual's experience and the interpretation of life experiences. In this case, when examining the relationship between narrative and life experiences, Widdershoven (1993) asserts that stories are based on life, and life is expressed, articulated, manifested, and modified in stories. This study, in particular, focused on the theme of narrations as objects. Narrative stories were used as a way to develop a deeper understanding of informal learning from the perspectives of Malay women. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) as a qualitative interview procedure (Chell & Pittaway, 1998) was used as a way to investigate the learning processes within the narrative stories.

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT)

A critical incident is described as one that makes a significant contribution, either positively or negatively, to an activity or phenomenon (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990; Grove & Fisk 1997). This study used the CIT as a way to collect, analyze, and interpret narrative stories of Malay women learning to lead within their social context. The CIT is a method that relies on a set of procedures to collect, analyze content, and classify (Gremler, 2004) critical incidents.

The CIT method was first introduced to the social sciences by Flanagan (1954). The technique grew from studies carried out in the Aviation Psychology Program of the

Army Air Forces in World War II. The U.S. Air Force wanted to know why potential pilot candidates were failing the program, and why pilots were becoming disoriented during flight. Initially, Flanagan conducted a series of studies focusing on differentiating effective and ineffective work behaviors. From those studies, a specific set of procedures were developed into what is now called the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Flanagan's (1954) CIT includes five steps: (a) Determination of the general aim of the activity; (b) Development of plans and specifications for collecting factual incidents regarding the activity; (c) Collection of data; (d) Analysis of data; (e) Interpretation and reporting of the activity.

The purpose of using the CIT method is to gain an understanding of the critical incidents from the perspective of the individual (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). Since its introduction, the CIT method has been used in a wide range of disciplines, and very few changes have been suggested to the processes. For example, one way to gather critical incidents is by asking respondents to tell a story about an experience they have had (Gremler, 2004), particularly a kind of learning that occurs within everyday experiences (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). During the interviews, respondents were asked to recall specific events (Stauss and Weinlich 1997). In doing so, the CIT allowed the participants to respond with as free a range of responses as possible, within an overall research framework (Gabbott and Hogg 1996). Chell & Pittaway (1998) described the CIT as a qualitative interview procedure which facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences (critical incidents) identified by the respondents, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects. The interview data was collected from the respondent's perspective in his or her own words (Edvardsson, 1992) and the context is

developed entirely from the respondent's perspective (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). The CIT method, therefore, provided a rich source of data by allowing respondents to determine which incidents were the most relevant to them for the phenomenon being investigated (Gremler, 2004).

One particular reason for using a CIT method in this study is that this type of research is inductive in nature (Edvardsson, 1992). The main categories of classification can either be deduced from theoretical models or formed on the basis of inductive interpretation (Stauss 1993). The CIT method has a rather flexible set of rules that can be modified to meet the requirements of the topic being studied (Burns, Williams, and Maxham 2000; Hopkinson and Hogarth-Scott 2001; Neuhaus 1996). Consequently, the CIT method is especially useful for this study which explored the processes of informal learning within a social context because, (a) the topic being researched has been sparingly documented (Grove and Fisk 1997), (b) it was an exploratory method to increase knowledge about a little-known phenomenon, and (c) a thorough understanding is needed to describe or explain a phenomenon (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990). In summary, the CIT method was chosen for this study because it is an inductive method that requires no hypotheses, and where patterns are formed as they emerge from the responses (Gremler 2004). Such inductive methods allowed the researcher to generate concepts and theories (Olsen and Thomasson 1992) as they emerged.

Participant Selection

The six participants were Malay women deans and directors from Malaysian public universities. They were selected from 15 potential participants with whom the

researcher established contact during pre-dissertation visits in summer 2008 and winter 2009. The criteria for selections were:

✓ Malay women who have served as deans or directors for at least two years at established public universities in Malaysia

✓ They were available for a series of in-depth interviews during the data collection period from February through April 2010.

During contact visits, five public universities located in the Klang Valley (Midwest) area of Peninsular Malaysia were chosen because of their established research status and their close proximity, only 2-3 hours driving distance from each other. Potential participants were contacted based on their administrative positions as listed on the university websites. Initial contacts were established via emails and phone calls. Respondents were also encouraged to suggest potential participants who met the selection criteria. This study ended with only six participants because a complete set of interviews could only be obtained from these six women during the limited data collection period.

Data Collection

The primary source of data for this study came from a series of in-depth phone interviews via Skype. The open-ended interviews were conducted with six participants; four deans and two directors. Each participant was interviewed at least twice, and each interview lasted for about an hour. All interviews were taped on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed. The development of instruments and procedures for collecting data are further explained below.

Development of Instruments

Two sets of interview protocols were developed to facilitate two-phase interviews. The preliminary protocols are attached as Appendixes C and D. The first interview was a traditional narrative inquiry, a life story interview, focusing on the participant's career in higher education administration. The goal of this first interview was to gather a brief story of family background with some insights about the beginning of the participant's personal life and career in higher education. The follow-up interviews focused on critical incidents seeking clarification for questions that arose from the first interview. Basically, these are follow-up questions that have a reason from the initial analysis of the first interview. The CIT interviews usually seek specific incidents that relate to exemplary or poor performance.

For this study, the CIT interviews focused on instances that related to the participants' perception of whether they felt encouraged or discouraged to pursue and further their career as higher education leaders. The two protocols may look like separate and distinct interviews, but the actual interviews were rolled together. At times, participants referred to incidents in their lives and the initial interview provided a guide for specific questions in the follow-up interview. With the CIT questions blended together as part of the follow-up interviews, participants were asked to be more specific about incidents that became encouraging and discouraging moments in their learning and development as women leaders.

A preliminary set of interview protocols that resembled Appendix C and D were piloted on several potential participants who were identified through contact visits made

possible by the Spencer Research Training Grant, including a two-week pre-dissertation trip to Malaysia during summer 2008. The pilot interviews generated an initial insight on the development of the literature review for this study. As a result of the contact visits, it became clear that this study should focus on informal learning as a way to understand how Malay women learn to become leaders within their social context.

Procedures for Collecting Data

The data collection was planned as face-to-face interviews. However, since the IRB approval came as late as February 2010, there was limited time for international travel during spring break in March 2010. Furthermore, there was no funding available for data collection in Malaysia. Consequently, the series of phone interviews were conducted via Skype from February through April 2010. All 15 potential participants were initially contacted prior to the IRB approval. However, only six participants were available for Skype interviews. During the initial contact via email or phone, the potential participants were informed of my interest in capturing their story of learning to become a woman leader for this study (Appendix A). Those who agreed to participate were asked to fill in the demographic data sheet (Appendix B). The initial and the follow-up interview dates were set, allowing 60-90 minutes for each interview.

Although all interviews were conducted in English, some Malay phrases were used explain or describe certain cultural images or meanings such as *kampong* [village] leadership, *guru besar* [school principal], and *sama juga macam kita jaga suami kat rumah* [it is like how we take care of our husband at home]. The interviews were done

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mostly after midnight Eastern Time in the US to accommodate for participants' availability. For instance, the interviews with Dr. Sabrina and Prof. Mariani (both pseudonyms) were conducted from 2 to 4 am which is 2 to 4pm in Malaysia. Prior to any interviews, participants were asked to provide consent for tape-recorded interviews. The initial interview began as a traditional narrative inquiry (Appendix C) focusing primarily on gathering background information. The second interview or third interview followed with questions to clarify incidents, meanings, or matters that were not clear from the first interview. That was purposely done to gather specific incidents of encouraging and discouraging moments. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, making a gradual and subtle shift to the CIT, asking specific incident questions. The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. The first interviews were mostly transcribed by an assistant transcriber, and the second interviews were mostly transcribed by the researcher. For every ten minutes of audio, the researcher spent about an hour to transcribe. Interviews for each participant resulted in 20-25 pages of transcription, typed in single-spacing.

Data Analysis

The conceptual procedure for data analysis was drawn on the narrative stories and the critical incidents technique. Within the scope of narrative analysis, the content analysis approach that concentrates on the social function of the narrative (Elliot, 2005) became appropriate for this study. It was used as a way of viewing the narrative in its completeness (Lieblich et al., 1998). Content analysis was applied to a series of narratives

(Holloway and Freshwater, 2007). Data analysis at this stage involved moving from one story to the next, checking for main features; confirming previous accounts; identifying common elements; and developing a collective story (Holloway and Freshwater, 2007).

A holistic analysis approach helped to identify the direction and intention of the plot (Holloway and Freshwater, 2007), which was used to gather themes for the processes of learning. For this study, Gergen and Gergen's (1987) holistic analysis was used to describe the progress of learning to lead in terms of the leadership skills acquired. At this stage of data analysis, the researcher was open to the analytic process, reporting not only the narrative and plot, but also the researcher's responses to it (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). A reflection on the process included prompts like: Why do you notice what you notice? How can you interpret what you notice? How can you know that your interpretation is the right one? These are some prompts suggested by Holloway and Jefferson (2002).

During the initial stage of data analysis, the transcripts were read multiple times to get a sense of their life stories and learning experiences. At this stage, the chair of my committee, Prof. Dirkx, became an independent set of eyes in guiding, challenging, and refining my understanding of the raw data. Actual interview statements were grouped into several themes for each participant on a word file. From those general themes, for example a theme on being a woman leader, the statements were further analyzed to generate sub-themes such multiple roles and societal expectations. A thematic approach was used as a way for deepening the understanding of the data, in which smaller sections of text were classified into categories (Lieblich et al., 1998). Each theme carries stories and representations of experience that stays very close to the data. Ultimately, the

analysis generated an understanding of the influence of social values, such as paternal influence on the processes of learning to become a leader. In sum, this study supports Cobley's (2001) idea that narrative can help to ground some people in a given community. For example, the women's learning experiences were studied within their social context.

The presentation of findings includes two parts. The first part provides a brief profile for each participant. Each profile provides readers with a sense of who the women participants are. A summary table is supplemented in the findings chapter to give an overview of all six participants. The second part of the findings includes presentation of themes that carried across the participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter describes the findings from an analysis of data gathered through a series of two in-depth interviews with six women, who are deans and directors at Malaysian public universities. The study was designed to seek and develop an understanding of how Malay women learn to lead in higher education. The first section begins with a brief profile for each participant. The second section elaborates on three specific themes. For the first section, each profile is written as a personal story of each participant. The stories of how participants learn to lead as women leaders in higher education are captured from the experiences of Mariani, Latifah, Azizah, Kamila, Sabrina, and Norizan. These names are Malay pseudonyms given to the six participants as a means to protect their anonymity and privacy. Prior experiences together with the notion of being a woman leader and the processes of learning in leadership are used to seek an understanding of how these Malay women learn to lead in higher education. The first section includes profiles that provide an overview of the participants' educational, professional, and family backgrounds. The information is presented in ways that reflect their present position, school, university, advanced degree, family backgrounds, where they were born and raised, and current family. The following table provides a brief summary of the participants' background.

Table 2: *Summary of Participants*

Profile	Pseudonym	Discipline	Age	Position	Years in position	Public University
1	Mariani	Educational Technology	57	Director	5	RU-West Coast
2	Latifah	English & Education	49	Director	4	RU-Urban Area
3	Azizah	Mathematics	51	Dean	3	RU-City Center
4	Kamila	Chemical Engineering	52	Dean	7	LU-Main Campus
5	Sabrina	Learning & Instruction	48	Dean	2	LU-Main Campus
6	Norizan	Applied Linguistics	62	Dean	3	LU-Main Campus

All six participants are from established public universities in Malaysia. Four are deans and two are directors. The women have been working at their current institutions from 23 to 36 years with an average of 26 years. They are all married, and have children. While three participants are from three different research universities (RUs), the other three are from the nation's largest public university. This large university (LU), with 15 branches in various locations throughout the nation, has a total of 170,000 students enrolled nationwide. Nearly 30,000 students are enrolled at the main campus located near the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. More than 15,000 people work at this large university, which offers more than 300 academic programs. The following section begins with a brief profile for each participant.

<center>**Profiles of Participants**</center>

Professor Mariani

Prof. Mariani, age 57, has been the director of a research center for five years. A research center is a specialized academic unit for the support of teaching, research, and scholarly work. She works at a major research university [RU-West Coast] in the northwest coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Prof. Mariani will retire in 2011 at age 58. The following is Prof. Mariani's personal narrative, written from her point of view, about her present position, school, university, advanced degree, where she was born and raised, and family background:

> I have been the director of this research center for the past five years. At this research center, anything that we do, any research that we carry out must have a policy implication that will promote gender equality. We focus on ways to generate policies that expand opportunities for women. As a woman leader, I often sense that my mission is two-fold, both professional as well as personal.

> I attained my undergraduate degree at the Science University of Malaysia, or Universiti Sains Malaysia [USM[, attending the institution from 1973 to 1976. The early to mid-1970s was a period of students' revolt in Malaysia, with many of us calling on the government to better address the issue of poverty. Like many of my contemporaries, we were driven then – as I continue to be today – by a sense of fair play, social justice and leveling the playing field, especially for those who lack opportunities.

> After graduating, I worked for a year in the public sector. Then I went on a Fulbright Hays Scholarship program to pursue a master's degree in Hawaii from 1977 to 1979. In 1983, I completed my doctorate at Michigan State University. I began as a lecturer here [RU-West Coast after returning with my PhD. With a background in instructional design, I was appointed as a Deputy Director for the Educational Technology Unit in 1984. Then, when I got married in 1985, I moved to a branch campus on the east coast, to be with my husband, a physician in the private sector. At around this time, we also started a family. My oldest son was born in 1986. Two years later, I had a pair of fraternal twins, a boy and a girl. In the West Coast, I served as an ordinary lecturer for many years.

> Later on, I began to get involved in various committees. From my engagement in many activities, I began to link myself with various non-government organizations. Then, I was appointed as the chair of a health-related NGO

<center>55</center>

program for about $1^1/_2$ years. During this time, I was also very active in women's health issues, mostly through my involvement with NGOs. I began to write prolifically on this subject. While I have always been active with NGOs since my return from the United States in the 1980s, I became even more active in the early 1990s, prompted in some measure by the international conference on population development in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994.

One morning, around 2005, I received a call out of the blue from the vice chancellor of the university asking me to serve as the director of the research center. I remember thinking that I would be making a major sacrifice if I were to accept the position. Yet, because I had not sought the position, I felt I was also in a position to bargain for an arrangement that would allow me to do the job well while still spending time with my family. After all, I would be on the main campus while my family would be 300 miles away on the coast.

For the first four or five years, I came home during weekends. I still teach at the branch campus, but for this year I negotiated with the vice chancellor to allow me to stay a week there and a week on the main campus. But that deal works only in theory. In practice, it is very difficult to take off for one week. I love teaching and so I still teach at the branch campus. Those are the courses I introduced, and I wanted to go back and teach. Sometimes I can be at the branch campus on the coast for the whole week.

My father is 89 years old now. He was a *guru besar*, or school principal, of a primary school in the *kampong*, or village. He was not just a school principal, but he was also active in community development. He was very sensitive to the needs of the community and he used to take me out into the community quite a lot. I am the third child of six siblings: four boys and two girls, but I am the oldest girl. I don't believe my older brothers had much of an impact on the rest of us. In effect, I became the "eldest brother" because I followed my father very closely with his community work.

My mom was a housewife. Nevertheless, she was a very strong woman in her own way. I only saw her strength much later when I came back from the United States and became more matured. She was a very determined, tenacious and principled woman who fought hard for the things she believed in. She died many years ago.

For Prof. Mariani, community engagement and activism began early in her life and appears to feature prominently in her later life. Her learning through activism was initially incidental. Community engagement and activism is a recurring theme that compels participants in the study to become leaders in higher education.

Dr. Latifah

Dr. Latifah, age 49, is the director of a research center. The research university
[RU-Urban Area] where she works is located about 15 miles south of the capital city,
Kuala Lumpur. The following is Dr. Latifah's personal narrative, written from her point
of her view, about her present position, school, university, advanced degree, where she
was born and raised, and family background:

> I've been the director of this research center for four years, now. Our activities are
> not just doing research. I believe the center and its staff should not limit ourselves
> to our own boundaries like a frog under a coconut shell, or as the Malays say,
> *macam katak di bawah tempurung*. We need to open up to a wider perspective.
> We may bring in people with expertise in specific fields and have them here for
> our lecture series or to support our research activities. Whatever it is, we want to
> encourage a multidisciplinary approach to research and this is what our center is
> focusing on. Before working at the center, I headed the university's English
> department and had a lot of experience running research groups, meetings,
> committees and other activities.
>
> I got my bachelor's degree from the University of Indiana in Bloomington in
> 1980, specializing in Testing of English as a Secondary Language, or TESL. I
> received my master's degree from Indiana in 1986. For my PhD, I decided to
> study locally in Malaysia because of my 4-year-old daughter.
>
> At the same time, I would have liked to have that experience overseas. So, I did
> six months attachment in Amsterdam and six months attachment at Illinois
> University. I did everything in six years [1994-2000]. My husband, a
> businessman, was with me on and off during my PhD abroad. We were both
> extremely busy during this period. He would visit for just a week or two]. It was
> quite difficult, but I think the most important thing is to feel secure knowing that
> my mother-in-law, my mother, and my husband were capable of taking care of
> my daughter. This was very helpful.
>
> I was born in Alor Star, the capital of the northern state of Kedah. Eventually, I
> made my home in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's federal capital. My mother was a
> teacher and was very supportive of my pursuits. My mother did not have a
> housemaid to help with chores around the house. Frequently, my brother and I
> helped out in the kitchen. When my brother was at a boarding school, he learned
> even more house chores. To this day, my brother remains self-reliant, washing
> and ironing his own clothes and cleaning his house.

My father, who is now deceased, was a senior police officer with the rank of Chief Police Officer. That meant we moved a lot as a family. Being the daughter of a policeman and always on the move meant I had to think on my feet all the time. And I made friends easily. Our family was small; my brother was my only sibling. For a Malay family, this was not typical. My father, for example, had nine siblings.

My mother-in-law was also a teacher. And my father-in-law was also a police officer. Both my mother and my mother-in-law have been working mothers, so they understand what it means to juggle family and career lives. I live with parents-in-law. I think it's a good thing. Yes, maybe it's the patience that I have. It's been since I got married, more than 20 years ago in KL. I have one child. My daughter is 20 now, and she is studying in Melbourne.

For Dr. Latifah, independence and self-reliance appear to be themes throughout her life, starting with her childhood and going on into adulthood. "We need to open up to a wider perspective," reflects that her learning is rather intentional.

Professor Azizah

Prof. Azizah, age 51, has been a dean for three years at another research university [RU-City Center] located in the heart of the capital city. The following is Prof. Azizah's personal narrative, written from her point of her view, about her present position, school, university, advanced degree, where she was born and raised, and family background:

> I am currently the dean for educational studies. Before that, I was the head of the department of mathematics and science for about five years. I graduated in 1982 with a bachelor's degree in mathematics from the University of Malaya. I was awarded a scholarship to complete my master's abroad, but life got in the way: I was just getting married, and later my husband's father passed away. Because of the tremendous demands on our time from these family commitments, I decided to postpone pursuing my master's. I became a school teacher, teaching mathematics and physics. I was also the head of the department in school, even though it was a very short service there. At that time, not many people were majoring in math and science. After two and half years of teaching in school, I applied to be a lecturer at a teachers' training college. I taught there for two years.

When I did get another scholarship to do my master's degree, the recession held me back. I could not go abroad. So, I had to do my master's in Malaysia, locally. My major was mathematics education. In the mid-1990's, I went to The Ohio State University for my PhD. When I was doing my PhD, my husband also came along to do his master's. My two children were also with us in Ohio; one was in second grade and the other was in fifth grade. I wanted both of them to be involved with the community. So, in order for them to get involved, I also had to be involved. At Ohio State, there's a requirement that we also had to do some community work. So, I was very involved, and I was appointed as the president for a community group in Columbus.

I am the oldest of six siblings. It's not easy because I had to look after my younger siblings. My family relies on me, being the eldest, the responsibility is there. After school, I had to help my mom in the kitchen and on weekends, of course, we had to wash clothes for the family. Everyone in our family works as a team. This ethic has influenced my work. If we could not work well with family members, I believe we may struggle to work well with our colleagues and with friends. My mom is a housewife, my father is an electrician. Even though they were not highly educated they really encouraged all of us to study and be involved in our community.

I was born in Negeri Sembilan but grew up in Singapore because my parents lived there before Singapore – up to then a state in Malaysia – separated from Malaysia and became its own sovereign nation. But in 1963, my father was given a choice: return to Malaysia and bring whatever money he had, or keep his job in Singapore and change his citizenship. So, my father said: *dah tua, rumah dah ada kat* [I am old, I have a house in] Singapore. So, he changed his citizenship. All my sisters and brothers were born in Singapore and they automatically became Singaporean. My mom also followed, except myself. I stayed with them in Singapore, but – as the eldest child – I retained my Malaysian citizenship. I had to travel to Johor Baru every three months, to cross the border and stamp my passport so I didn't violate the terms of my stay in Singapore.

Dr. Azizah's modest childhood was no impediment to her subsequent ambitions. Her parents instilled in her their values, which emphasize education and community engagement. Her learning is portrayed as incidental, "Everyone in our family works as a team. This ethic has influenced my work." She learned "team ethic" through her daily experiences as the oldest child in the family.

Professor Kamila

Prof. Kamila, age 52, has been a dean for seven years at a large public university [LU-Main Campus], about 15 miles west of the country's capital city, Kuala Lumpur. The following is Prof. Kamila's personal narrative, written from her point of her view, about her present position, school, university, advanced degree, where she was born and raised, and family background:

> I have been the dean for the engineering degree program since it was first launched on this campus. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from Salford University in the United Kingdom in 1981.
>
> After completing my degree, I was an assistant lecturer at another public university in 1983 and served there for two years. The university was preparing to move to a southern state. Coming from that southern state myself, I had no problem transferring there. But my husband is from an area near the capital city, so he prefers to be near where his mother lives. Deciding that it was more important for me to be with my husband, I left that university. And, it was a coincidence that the university where I now work (LU-Main Campus] was hiring engineering lecturers at the time. So, I got the job in 1985.
>
> In 1991, there was an opportunity for me to further my studies at the University of Leeds. When I returned to Malaysia with my PhD, the dean gave me a task. My first job was to develop a strategic plan for the department. So, as the secretary of the Strategic Planning committee, I worked my way up. And after that, I was the coordinator, and that is how I started to develop my leadership skills.
>
> When I went to the UK, I was actually supposed to do my masters. But the university offered me to undertake research to be converted to a PhD dissertation. During the first year, I was an unclassified student with undeclared degree status, and the university closely reviewed my performance. My husband was also pursuing his master's degree there. Since I had the opportunity to be transferred to a PhD program, I wrote to my employer requesting permission to pursue a PhD and the university gave me three conditions: First, my PhD is for three years but one year has been used, leaving me with only two years. Second, I could not extend my study leave beyond the third year. Third, I was contractually required to serve the university for 9 years after my PhD.
>
> An unforeseen situation forced my husband to return to Malaysia after he finished his master's. By this time, we already had five children. I convinced my husband that I really needed to complete my PhD. So, as a compromise, he went back to

Malaysia with three of our children and I stayed with the younger two – aged three and five. What an experience.

A week after he left for Malaysia, I suffered dizziness and other new signs that prompted me to go to the clinic. And true enough, it was confirmed that I was already expecting my sixth child. So, I said GOD wants to test me, "If you want this PhD, you must have this test first." The trial was very great at that time. I gave birth to my sixth child abroad. My husband was supposed to come, but then, he arrived a bit late. The baby was already delivered and I was, at that time I felt, I had all the strengths, *Alhamdulillah* (thanks to Allah)! I felt VERY strong. I believed at the time that I could face any challenge. It was not easy. My children were ill, including my newborn baby.

From the above narration, it is clear that Prof. Kamila faced daunting challenges from the beginning, yet she persevered. Her inner strength is inferred as deriving from a divine source, "I had all the strengths, *Alhamdulillah* (thanks to Allah)!" Her sense of perseverance is instrumental in influencing her leadership styles and her approach to problem solving. Prof. Kamila strikes one as the kind of individual who lowers her head and simply plows forward when faced with challenges. "I worked my way up," describes intentionality in her learning experiences.

Dr. Sabrina

Dr. Sabrina, age 48, had served as a dean at the school of education, for two years, at a large public university [LU-Main Campus]. The following is Dr. Sabrina's personal narrative, written from her point of her view, about her present position, school, university, advanced degree, where she was born and raised, and family background:

I am currently the director for an academic support unit. Before this, I was a dean for two years. I received my bachelor's degree in English education from the University of Indiana in Bloomington in 1981 and my master's in language education also from IU in 1983. After I received my degrees, I joined this university [LU-Main Campus] as a lecturer in July 1988, and worked for two-and-a-half years, before pursuing my PhD in learning and instruction from 1991 to

1995 at State University of New York in Buffalo. When I returned in 1996, I continued teaching as a lecturer. In 1998, when the school of education started, I was one of the pioneers involved in the teaching of the first class.

Then from 2001-2004, I was a research fellow and administrator at an institute within this university. For those three years, I conducted courses for academic staff on campus. I was still teaching one course at the school of education. By August 2004, when the former dean retired, I was nominated and asked to come back to the school to be a dean.

My husband works at another public university about 10 miles north of the capital city Kuala Lumpur. He was also a dean when I was a dean. So you can imagine having two academic deans in the house. We did our PhD at the same time when we were newlyweds. We started our family when we both completed our PhDs. As a result, we shared all our challenges together. Today, my husband and I have a 15-year-old son.

I come from a very big family of 11 children. I'm the second youngest. Because we were all about one year apart, all 11 of us – one boy and 10 girls – were very close when we were growing up. Until today, we maintain our closeness among the ten sisters. My parents were Malaysians but they happened to live in Singapore. My dad was a police sergeant in Singapore and my mom was a housewife. My mom has always been the backbone for us. Even though my mom was not educated, she could read and write, probably very minimally. I was born in Singapore and spent my early years and early education there.

Back then, when we were in Singapore, we would go back to our hometown in Alor Gajah, Melaka, almost like every weekend. Returning to our ancestral village – or "balik kampong" as the Malays say – is part of our tradition as a way to remain in touch with our grandparents, relatives and other extended family members. In fact, the whole village was like a family. Everyone knew everyone else. We knew who lived in the neighboring house and the one next to that and the one next to that, all the way to the edges of the village. There was a relative in nearly all those houses.

In 1974, our family moved back to Malaysia, where I completed my secondary education. That gave me two different education systems. In Malaysia, I was very active in sports. You could find me in almost every game. I was involved in track and field. I also played tennis and volleyball at the national level. In field hockey, I represented my state of Negeri Sembilan. Coming from Singapore, it was quite a change. There was culture shock but then I adapted accordingly.

Being active in sports and learning together portray that her learning is more

relational. In addition to being outgoing and actively engaged in sports of hockey, tennis,

and volleyball, Dr. Sabrina also appears to have transitioned from one cultural background to another. "Adaptability" describes her character trait. In other words she appears to have moved from Singapore to Malaysia with ease, and have enjoyed both experiences as she herself acknowledges.

Professor Norizan

Prof. Norizan, age 62, had been a dean for three years at a large public university [LU-Main Campus]. She was the dean for Language Studies. Prof. Norizan retired at age 58 and currently serves as an adjunct faculty on the same university campus. The following is Prof. Norizan's personal narrative, written from her point of her view, about her present position, school, university, advanced degree, where she was born and raised, and family background:

> I graduated in 1971. My bachelor's degree was from UM [Universiti Malaya -a local public university] and I had served as a tutor there for two years before joining this university as a teaching staff. I have been a faculty member here since 1974. After six years, I went to pursue my masters in applied linguistics at the University of Essex, UK. I started my career as an academic administrator as soon as I came back in 1982. At that time, I became a coordinator without the benefit of training. So, for me, it was like being thrown into the act of managing and leading with little formal preparation. But I've always attributed my success to my previous department chair, who was my mentor. She was the one who made my job easier. Eventually I became the department chair myself.
>
> After six years as an academic administrator, I pursued my PhD at age 38 at the University of Birmingham in the UK. With three children, it was hard. I brought my eldest daughter with me. She was 12 years old then. I did not bring along my husband, an architect, and two younger children. Part of the reason, I thought, was I would not have been able to cope with the full range of domestic chores while pursuing my PhD at the same time. I've always had the benefit of domestic help around the home. In Birmingham, I would be on my own. I could cope with one child. Add a husband and two additional children, and I worried it would be too much.

My PhD took 3 years. When I came back in 1990, I was heading another department relinquished by my mentor. She had developed a new program. She had already left and retired but her legacy remained. In July 1997, this faculty was established. By November 1997, I was appointed its first dean. As a new academic unit, we had a structure. We were given a secretary and clerk – but no space. We had a temporary location but we started including other academic programs. We managed to get the cooperation of other deans.

I come from a small village in Pahang. I am the third child of five siblings. My father was an engineer, but my mom was a housewife. Mom was not formally educated. She did not participate in our formal education. But she provided us with lots of love, support and motivation. My father was the one who tutored us, but only in mathematics. I developed my English language skills through my love for reading at the age of 10. During my childhood years, I really enjoyed our village adventures with my siblings and cousins exploring unchartered territories and taking part in activities like fishing in the backyard river, climbing trees, and the occasional holidays with the family. An eventful moment was when the royal town of Pekan in Pahang was flooded. Because my father was an engineer and considered important in the community, I was treated to a helicopter ride to take me from Pekan to Kuantan, all so I could register for school in Grade 12.

Like other participants, Prof. Norizan has a strong connection to family. One distinguishing aspect is her preference for pragmatic solutions, despite emotional factors, such as when she pursued her PhD with only one child in tow, not all three. Her reasons are pragmatic and the solution appears to have worked for her. She also cites a mentor as a guiding influence in her development as a leader, which represents her learning as relational.

Profile Summary

In summary, all six participants had acquired PhD degrees prior to assuming their leadership positions as deans or directors. All have studied abroad, either in the UK or the US. Although they were trained abroad at the graduate level, there was little acknowledgement of the contribution of this training to their learning to lead. All women

are married with children, or at least a child. How their roles as wives and mothers influenced their learning and development is explored within the theme of being women leaders in their cultural context.

Generally speaking, while the learning descriptions for Prof. Mariani and Prof. Azzizah are more consistent with the characteristics of incidental or unintentional learning, the learning described by Dr. Latifah and Prof. Kamila are more coherent with intentional learning. For Dr. Sabrina and Prof. Norizan, their stories represent more of relational learning. In summary, participants describe some forms of learning that are not necessarily inconsistent with the literature on informal learning. However, their learning is deeply intertwined with cultural nuances.

From the findings, the researcher concludes that these Malay women deans or directors are well-educated with prior administrative experiences. They are professional women whose mothers are mostly housewives, who are not well-educated – except for Dr. Latifah, whose mother was a school teacher. All their husbands are working professionals too. All women have previous administrative experiences either as coordinators or heads of department. The next section discusses the following three themes, which seem to continually morph throughout their lives as: (1) influence of past experiences, (2) being a woman leader, and (3) learning in leadership.

The first main theme that describes the influence of past experiences is divided into three sub-themes: (a) parental influence and the emergence of leadership opportunities, (b) community engagement and the development of leadership potential, and (c) mentoring and leadership development. The second theme that explains the

notion of a being woman leader within the Malay social context is expanded into three inter-connected sub-categories: (a) Patriarchy and Unwritten Rules, (b) Managing Multiple Roles and Societal Expectations, and (c) Leadership Styles and Commitments. Finally, the third theme that explores the processes of learning in leadership is further sub-divided into three categories: (a) Lessons from Experience: What and how they learn, (b) Motivation to Learn, and (c) Emotionality.

Theme 1: INFLUENCE OF PAST EXPERIENCES

The first theme relates to the influence of past experiences, which refers to the participants' experiences prior to becoming a dean or director. The theme is defined as experiences associated with the emergence of leadership opportunities, leadership potential, and leadership development— an accumulation of experience over the years; within the context of participation as children, students, and working adults. In their stories of learning to lead, leadership is framed as a developmental process. Their personal stories highlight the "influence of past experiences" as an important theme for informal learning.

The theme is further divided into three sub-themes: (a) parental influence and the emergence of leadership opportunities, (b) community engagement, and (c) the development of leadership potential, and mentoring and leadership development.

(a) Parental Influence and the Emergence of Leadership Opportunities

Parental influence and how it helps in providing leadership opportunities during childhood appeared in the interviews with three of the participants [Dr. Latifah, Prof. Azizah, and Prof. Mariani]. The findings suggest that parental influence plays a significant role in the development of these women's leadership disposition. While Dr. Latifah [director at RU-Urban Area] spoke of learning to be independent and acquiring a coping skill, Prof. Azizah [dean at RU-City Center] mentioned the benefits of her responsibility as the oldest child of six siblings and teamwork with her siblings. Additionally, Prof. Mariani [director at RU-West Coast] credited her father for instilling and nurturing her interests in activism and NGO work. The paragraphs below describe the ways parental influence shaped the emergence of leadership opportunities for each of the three participants.

For Dr. Latifah, the manifestation of parental influence was situated within the context of her father as a police chief, who had to move regularly during her childhood. Dr.Latifah explained about the coping mechanism she had had to develop in the process of growing-up and moving to several states in Malaysia. In the words of Dr Latifah,

> I think my parents are a very strong [influence]; they nurture us [my brother and me] to be that way - very independent. We've always had a chance to be on our own. When I was in school, *kadang-kadang* [at times] I expect my mom [a school teacher] would be at home, suddenly, she called to say *malam ni mommy nak kena pergi dinner party dengan daddy* [mommy has to go for a dinner party with daddy]. I became strong because of my father. Being a CPO [Chief Police Officer]; we had to move a lot. Suddenly he tells you, I'm sorry but we've got to move [transfer to another state] again. I have to be like that, be prepared to move on. *Macam kat* [Like to] Melaka, Alor Star, or Penang.

Dr Latifah continued by saying, "What do you do? Rather than mourn, grumble, and things like that, I have to develop that coping skill; maybe sometimes I developed too

much of it." She feels that way, because sometimes shortly after making new friends, "and then I have to leave them again." But, she believes that "the coping mechanism has been there to help" in her job. In describing her job, she says "my job is like a potluck and anything can happen. You know suddenly tomorrow someone tells me that there is a grant, so we have to, straight away, go right in." She argues that "these are the things that" she cannot afford to "let them slip away because they come to you." So, in the end, she declares that, "I have to think on my feet all the time! But, I think, I have been trained to actually think on my feet a lot, which this job demands." In sum, Dr. Latifah learned to be "independent" from emerging situations inspired by both parents. As a result of having to deal with impromptu situations regularly during those years, Dr. Latifah eventually develops the "coping mechanism" she deemed as "necessary" for her job as the director of a research center at RU-Urban Area.

The way parental influence played out for Prof. Azizah appeared in her role as the first child. Prof. Azizah is the oldest of six siblings, whose parents and siblings are citizens of Singapore. As the first child, especially being the oldest girl in a Malay family, she has been socialized to assume the leading role for her younger siblings. Prof. Azizah reveals that "my experience being the oldest child has not been easy because my family relies [heavily] on me. But, I think the experience also helped in my work. It has helped me a lot in becoming a leader." For Prof. Azizah, helping 'my mom at the kitchen" and washing "clothes for the family" during "weekends" and of course, assuming the role of an oldest child helped tremendously in developing her leadership potentials. Meeting her family's expectations to lead the sibling's teamwork in doing house chores during childhood has become one of the foundational factors for building her leadership

abilities. In short, Prof. Azizah learned to develop her leadership potential through her lived experiences. Parental influence for Prof. Azizah emerged from her parents' expectations of her as the oldest child.

Parental influence for Prof. Mariani came mostly from her 89 year-old father. Prof. Mariani, who viewed herself as an academic activist, takes pride in commending her father for instilling that passion for social activism.

> The grounding of my consciousness about society, I think, was developed earlier on because my father was a *guru besar* [school principal] of a primary school in the *kampong* [village]. He was very sensitive to the needs of the community. So that childhood exposure, with my father who used to take me out into the community, is very fundamental to me. I must say that, the person I am now, is the result of early exposure to my father's values and strong grooming and grounding in those values.

Prof. Mariani then elaborates on how that passion for activism began to increase during her college years and was later intensified throughout her professional career in academics. It was back in the 70's, when there was students' revolt in Malaysia; she was part of that group of college students who brought up poverty issues to the government. She notes that "so, there was already a strong element of exposure." According to Prof. Mariani, "it was a very good exposure." In a sense, that has reinforced her disposition, which continued to "build-on the initial grounding by [her] father." In summary, for Prof. Mariani, a strong parental influence from her father has lead to an opportunity to strengthen and increase her leadership potential. Additionally, her "participation" in a summer program for women in development (WID) as a PhD student at Michigan State University became "another layer of reinforcement" for her leadership development.

Toward this end, parental influences emerged as a way to describe and define a person's past experiences. Parental influence helped in providing leadership opportunities

for Dr. Latifah, Prof. Azizah, and Prof. Mariani. Two of them spoke enthusiastically about influences from their fathers. For Dr. Latifah, "I became strong because of my father," and for Prof. Mariani, her father inspired "the grounding of" her "consciousness about society," which became "a strong element of exposure" that created leadership opportunities for her at a tender age. Additionally, Dr. Sabrina described her father, who was a police sergeant in Singapore, as "strict" but upon looking back at her family upbringing, she said, "that kind of upbringing, I think at that time, it was strict but, later in my life I think it actually shaped ... [and] I now see that as a positive thing."

In sum, three participants spoke kindly, warmly and gratefully of their father's influences on their formative years and the impact of such parental influence on them. Therefore, paternal influence emerged as a common theme for at least three of the participants to describe the ways their parents shape or influence their attitudes and disposition for leadership. For the other two participants who did not mention parental influence, they talked about mentoring and the ways it influence their leadership development. Mentoring is explained later, as the third sub-theme for the influence of past experiences. Mentoring is discussed in relation to the women's work, career, and professional development. The second sub-theme below focuses on community engagement as a way to describe the influence of past experiences.

(b)   **Community Engagement and the Development of Leadership Potential**

Community engagement and activism are recurring themes that have compelled the study participants to become women leaders. Participants were active in community organizations, advocacy groups, and community building or outreach projects. Both Dr.

Sabrina and Prof. Azizah were very active in community building and outreach projects as international graduate students at American universities. They both had a leading role within their international community organizations, which provides a great opportunity to develop their leadership potential. While Dr. Sabrina was actively involved in the Malaysian Student Association at SUNY Buffalo, Prof. Azizah was fully engaged in an outreach project she initiated as a PhD student at Ohio State University.

As the secretary of the Malaysian association, Dr. Sabrina did several community development projects with the international community. She helped put together events like the "International Night" and other activities for international events, as well as fund-raising projects for the international community. Dr. Sabrina says, "Suddenly, I became more involved in voluntary work. So that has impacted me so much." For Dr. Sabrina, community engagement provides "a lot of experience in terms of exposure" and she believes that "the exposure to the international community" was a "stepping stone" for interacting and connecting with "people from all around the world." To her, this community engagement experience was "one of the things that really left a mark on me." Ultimately, the exposure provides her with an opportunity for international "networking" and for developing her leadership potential.

Prof. Azizah acquired leadership opportunities and skills from her role as the oldest child. In addition, her role as the president for a community group in Columbus was a great way to develop her leadership potential. According to Prof. Azizah,

> I ran a young scholars program for students from middle and high schools — a lot of minorities, Asian, Black, and White students with poor academic performance. So, what I did was every Saturday, we gathered all these students and with the involvement of community [volunteers] we helped these students in their academics, especially in writing and mathematics. So, all these minority students,

some of them from Iran and Iraq didn't do well academically because nobody guided them.

Prof. Azizah performed her leadership role by sending out emails to her "colleagues to come and help." She then said, "One thing about them, they are very approachable and they like to help." With a lot of support from volunteers, the students were "doing pretty well" and Prof. Azizah received a diversity award for that accomplishment, which gave a significant boost for her leadership development.

Although she did not mention being active in community organizations while pursuing her PhD at Michigan State University (MSU), Prof. Mariani did elaborate on how her passion for activism began to take shape by saying, "And then, of course, I went to MSU. I got a fellowship from the Ford Foundation to participate in a summer program for Women in Development (WID)." The program, which brought together students from various countries for seminars and field work, became "another layer of reinforcement" for Prof. Mariani. The WID experience in many ways helped "the layering a little bit," and then when she came back from MSU, she became involved in various NGO projects.

Becoming involved in a regional organization and at the international level has brought Prof. Mariani "into contact with other academics as well." She argued that, "working with other professors from great teams also definitely helped." As a lecturer, she was engaged in an international study involving seven countries, which was also through her NGO work. She adds, "The international study experience was a strong one too, because it really exposed me to the international level network." When she saw other professors of various backgrounds talking about issues that she initially thought were merely NGO issues but which later turned out to be activism issues, she says, "So my whole views about NGOs began to change. Only then did I realize that there are many

types of NGOs, ranging from charity to those that carry out activism work on really solid grounds!" Toward this end, for Prof. Mariani, her interest in social activism becomes a way to build on her leadership potential.

All in all, community engagement related to an active participation in community organizations, community building, or outreach projects become a way to explain the influence of past experiences on the development of leadership potential. By joining a group, their learning was in some ways intentional. Incidental learning also occurred while participants were engaging themselves in community projects. The findings suggest that active participation in community development projects, by assuming certain leadership roles, contribute positively toward developing the participants' leadership potential.

In summary, for both Dr. Sabrina and Prof. Azizah, their past experiences with community building and outreach projects as international students in the United States have helped them not only in developing their leadership potential, but also in building personal connections and international networks. For Prof. Mariani, on the other hand, her leadership development was later intensified throughout her professional career in academics by way of NGO work. The next sub-theme describes the impact of mentoring on an individual's past experiences.

(c) Mentoring and Leadership Development

From the interviews, mentoring is perceived as referring to a process of "providing support" and "passing on" knowledge perceived by the "mentee" as relevant to her work, career, or professional development. Mentoring was described by

participants as a personal development "relationship" in which a "more experienced" person helps a "less experienced" person. Mentoring relationship provided participants with not only intentional, but also incidental learning that helped enhance their leadership development. For example, both Prof. Norizan and Prof. Kamila have had encouraging experiences with mentoring, which contributes positively toward their leadership development. While Prof. Norizan gives due credit to her previous department chair, Prof. Kamila explains how her leadership development has been inspired by both her chair and the dean.

Prof. Norizan became a coordinator "without the benefit of [formal] training." She considers having a mentor, who provides "support' and allows "autonomy," as very essential for her professional development. Prof. Norizan describes her "boss," who was "the first female chair," as a nurturing mentor. According to Prof. Norizan, "I've always attributed my success to my previous department chair. She had put the structure in place in terms of an organizational chart and so on. I did not realize that her plan was moving me into a position." Eventually, Prof. Norizan became the department chair herself. The female mentor "was the one who made my job easier." Prof. Norizan thinks that her "involvement in university administration can be said to have developed organically."

It all started when the mentor had asked her to coordinate the English Department. Prof. Norizan was barely 30 years old then, and had just acquired her master's degree in applied linguistics. Comically, she recounts, "So, I went headlong into it. I was not good at record keeping and she picked it up and told me to be meticulous in record keeping. I remember the first task that my boss gave me was to coordinate an exam committee from branch campuses, which I had no inkling of. I didn't know what I was supposed to do and

was too proud to ask. So, I went ahead and did my own things. She did not say that I did it wrong, and she continued to support me." In the end, Prof. Norizan declares that her greatest joy was when she was able to help her mentor and came up with a projection for the Language Center's needs in terms of human resources. It becomes encouraging to her, when the mentor granted "autonomy," which enabled her, "to grow without her breathing down my neck." From there, she learned to be more "self-directed; systematic." In a sense, the learning was intentional and the relationship that Prof. Norizan had established with a female "mentor" contributes positively toward her professional development.

Mentoring for Prof. Kamila came from both a female chair and a male dean. She "received a lot of encouragements" from the female chair. Her "first job was to do a strategic planning" for the engineering school. Prof. Kamila was glad that, "the chair was very open," and as the secretary of the strategic planning committee, she felt that she "can move" her ideas forward, because the [female] chair "accepted" her "ideas" quite well. Not long after that, Prof. Kamila "was the coordinator for a quality unit." Her learning through daily experiences as a coordinator emerged as incidental learning, in which learning occurred by "bumping into things."

According to Prof. Kamlila, that was when she "started to build up that leadership [potential]" and commends that, "I think, somehow, I [have] impressed the dean." So, within a year from that, the [male] dean "invited" Prof. Kamila "to be his *timbalan* [deputy]." She was the deputy dean for Students and Academic Affairs. "So, he gave me a task – he said the faculty needs someone like me to push things around, to make sure things move [on accordingly]. And I think I did live up to his expectations because what I

did was I had the curriculum reviewed." So, when "the dean gave [her] a task," she saw

that as an opportunity to move her ideas forward. So, "I worked my way up." In a way,

the incidental learning morphed into intentional learning for Prof. Kamila. She

successfully initiated a new academic program within the school of engineering. Prof.

Kamila's story of mentoring reveals that the female chair and the male dean provide

positive reinforcements for her leadership development— resulting in the inception of a

new academic program, which she views as "the fruits of my success."

That said, for both Prof. Norizan and Prof. Kamila, mentoring has been a

favorable past experience within their trajectory of being new academic administrators.

The mentoring process provides them with nurturing elements to further develop their

leadership potential. When her mentor "did not say" she "did it wrong," but instead the

mentor "continued to support" her, Prof. Norizan felt encouraged. For Prof. Kamila, her

two mentors not only provide "encouragements" and "support," but also grant her with

the mandate "to push things around," which makes her feel "well-received by

administrators." In the end, they were both inspired to move on professionally. However,

Dr. Sabrina was not as fortunate in the sense that a lack of mentoring was identified as a

discouraging moment when relating her transitioning experience as a new dean.

Dr. Sabrina points out that mentoring "is very important!" Arguably, she points

out that, "Maybe, I need a mentor. I believe people who have had the experience should

come forward." She argues that, "people who have held that [dean] post should be willing

to help," because she believes that "there are things that can be shared." She describes her

experience of not having a mentor as "quite a challenge," especially during the first year

of her deanship. According to Dr. Sabrina, "if there's a lot of mentoring from the

previous dean," things would have been different for her because, "it is always lonely at the top." In such situation, she wishes that she had a mentor, whom she "can actually talk to," and hoping that the mentor can help her identify "short circuits and not repeat the same mistakes that were done." Arguably, she reiterates that, "so, I was looking for those [kinds of mentoring]. But those were really hard to come by." Dr. Sabrina hints that she would like to hear "the experience of a previous dean" and ask "What has actually worked?" She also implies that, "So that can be a good segment between the outgoing and the incoming dean. Instead of the outgoing dean just leave and the incoming one observes and just learns from experience." Believing that the previous dean has been "in that challenging situation too, at one point," she imagines that, "when people leave their leadership position," they should not "just let the new person go at it," and assuming that the new person "knows what she has to do and all that and if she thinks she can do it, go ahead." Toward this end, it is clear that the lack of mentoring has been an issue for Dr. Sabrina during the initial year as a new dean.

In summary, the participants give anecdotal evidence of the value of mentoring as a process where a more experienced leader can provide valuable support and knowledge to the less experienced leader. Two participants who had personal development relationships with their mentors relate that particular past experience as encouraging. On the other hand, a participant who did not experience that kind of mentoring identified that past experience as challenging. To conclude, it becomes clear that mentoring can provide a way to enhance leadership development.

Summary for the Influence of Past Experiences

The above personal stories describe the influence of past experiences on the emergence of leadership opportunities, the development of leadership potential, and the broadening of leadership development. The influence of past experiences emanates from the participants' childhood, student, and initial working years. Parental influence came out as one of the elements from past experience that provided participants with significant opportunities for developing the necessary leadership traits during childhood. Specifically, their father's influence appeared to be a dominant form of parental influence contributing toward the emergence of leadership opportunities. In addition, the findings suggest that by assuming certain leadership roles as students and in community development projects, such past experiences contribute positively toward the development of leadership potential. Finally, the findings also suggest that leadership development can be enhanced by mentoring. In conclusion, the first theme explains how these women learn to lead from the influence of past experiences. In the process, participants have learned to develop attitudes, skills, knowledge, and dispositions that have helped them in becoming women leaders. The next section discusses the theme of being a woman leader.

Theme 2: BEING A WOMAN LEADER

The second theme describes what it meant for these women to be a leader within their social contexts. The openness and opportunities for women in leadership appears to be affected by the constraints represented by the patriarchal society. In the words of Dr.

Sabrina, "we have this value system" where "regardless of how highly qualified you are—you can be the prime minister of Malaysia and yet there's an expectation." She further elaborates, "because of that dualism" within the "value system [that] still exists." For example, the expectation is understood as "you are not a prime minister at home, why shouldn't you prepare dinner at home?" On that note, Dr Sabrina maintains that although access to formal leadership positions "is not a problem for women" in Malaysia because "the doors are wide open," she feels that "women tend to shy away." Toward this end, Dr. Sabrina reasons that some women would prefer to "have more time for family" than to assume a formal leadership position. Dr. Sabrina's descriptions seem to suggest the influence of a patriarchal society. Toward this end, the theme of being a woman leader covers three sub-categories: (a) Patriarchy and Unwritten Rules, (b) Managing Multiple Roles and Societal Expectations, and (c) Leadership Styles and Commitments. The next section explores the manifestation of patriarchy on their learning and development as women leaders.

(a)   Patriarchy and Unwritten Rules

Patriarchy and unwritten rules stood out in most interviews. While patriarchy refers to the dominance of male position within the family, unwritten rules refer to certain unspoken norms that these women must be cognizant of within their role as women leaders, wives, and mothers. Both patriarchy and hidden rules shape the ways women describe what it meant for them to be women leaders in their social contexts. Consequently, these women regularly need to "see" things from the man's perspective.

Prof. Mariani points out that "our society is a patriarchal society." She explains that, "the law that we make and the rules that we follow; who becomes the leader of the family, and who becomes the prime minister" these are all shaped by "our patriarchal values—aren't they?" Patriarchy seems to define the ways these women talk about being a woman dean or director in higher education. On that same cue, Prof. Azizah relates, "it's not easy because we are still in a male dominant world. When I go for the dean's meeting, the majority is still men." In that regard, Dr. Latifah asserts that "leadership in higher education has always been male dominated." She admits that "not many women" can get "a chance to lead in formal positions." Accordingly, she declares that "for us women, we may take a longer time" to acquire formal positions. She also says that a woman often has to work doubly hard or accomplish twice as much compared to men to be considered – let alone appointed – a dean or department director. In a patriarchal system, women simply must do more to prove that they should even be given a chance, the women say.

At the same time, Dr. Latifah admits that women are more likely to be "given a chance" to lead within informal frameworks and positions. For example, women are often asked to "lead a *jawatankuasa* [committee]." In that case, she says "it's either you want it or you don't want it." She laments that "many women shy [away]" from such opportunities, which indicates "a mark" on their readiness for learning and eventually acquiring a "chance to lead in formal positions." When women are ready to lead, Prof. Norizan observes that "men are more comfortable working with men. So, basically they choose leaders who can tic-tac [get along] with them peacefully – on the same wavelength." With that, Prof. Norizan asserts that the "constraint of a patriarchal society"

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is still there—after all. It appears that, when learning to lead, they also need to negotiate the terrain of a patriarchal society. To become a leader, these women participants illuminate the learning processes that occur largely within a patriarchal context. The following discussion provides participants' understanding of patriarchy and some of the unwritten rules arising from the patriarchal context.

Prof. Mariani states that a patriarchal society is one where "men are the decision-makers." In a patriarchal society, men not only hold "positions of power" and prestige, they also own "the power to define reality". So, when "we wanted to initiate the sexual harassment policy," on campus, there were some "resistance" and "misunderstandings." There is "this typical thinking of why men rape women." It is because "they [women] dress inappropriately." She interprets such a remark as "telling that it's all women's fault basically." Such descriptions provide an insight into her view of patriarchy, especially within "a university environment, [where] people should be thinking differently." She adds that, among intellectuals "you would expect a different kind of discourse, a different kind of discussion," but she explains "the initial remarks were almost reflective of the society outside." Some people were not happy with the terms or choice of words used – sexual harassment, because "they think this is actually a very western concept." From Prof. Mariani's explanations, it becomes clear that patriarchy is not only dominant in the society, but also within a higher education setting.

When describing the challenges of being a woman leader in a higher education setting, Prof. Azizah affirms that, "it's not that easy" because it is "a male dominant world." On that note, Prof. Kamila adds, "Some males may not like a female as their leader." But, a "lady boss," she argues "*mesti pandai* [must be able to] sort of play the

game." In that regard, she explains *"sama juga macam kita jaga suami kat rumah* [it is like how we take care of our husband at home], which might mean more than said to reflect the manifestation of patriarchy in what it meant to be a woman leader for her. Tacit learning became evident in her acknowledgement and acceptance of their society's traditions. She eventually learned to navigate the values that placed more emphasis on her roles as mother and wife, rather than on her roles as educational leader.

Prof. Azizah further exemplifies the power of patriarchy with an example from her personal experience as a woman dean, "when we have a conference meeting with the minister, let's say the ministry wanted to meet with a certain number of deans from public universities —I see many [males] in black coats, [and there were] very few of us." When "the majority is still men," according to Prof. Azizah, "the challenge is [right] there," because "sometimes, when we [women] want to push certain ideas, we have to make sure that the ideas that we propose are really practical" or beneficial as seen from a patriarchal point of view. Only then, "we are able to get support from the males." Without their strong support, "the ideas will just stay like that," especially when it comes to ones that are not seen as beneficial to men. When that happens, women leaders will not have the mandate to "go any further with their ideas."

Prof. Azizah recalls when she was at Ohio State, she did not "feel the difference" because *"kalau idea bagus,* [if the idea is great] they will support it." She adds that, "It did not matter [if the ideas came from a] male or female." Prof. Azizah's explanations seem to suggest a depiction of patriarchal values within her experience as a woman dean. In a case where women deans are outnumbered, their voices become less influential. The manifestation of patriarchy as portrayed by Prof. Kamila when she says that, "a lady

boss" must be able to "sort of play the game," implies that when learning to lead in higher education, these women also need to know the unwritten rules. The next section discusses some unspoken rules as conveyed by the participants.

On a similar note, Prof. Norizan explains how masculine attributes such as being "competitive" or "aggressive" can be unacceptable for women leaders in her societal context. In a society where gracefulness is highly valued for Malay women, Prof. Norizan reasons that, "I think you must not show that you are competing with men. And, that is the hidden rule." She adds that, "the minute you become visible and deemed as competitive to men," that's when "the glass ceiling" stops. In learning the "hidden rules," Prof. Norizan suggests, "it all boils down to, try not to think like them [male], but try to walk in their shoes as well." In addition, she says, "try to see how they look at things, and how things are looked at from their perspectives. So, in a way, it is at peace – we are not competing." On that note, she maintains that,

> Most women are self-effacing in the sense that they are good workers. They are the winds under the wings of the men. So, you [women] push the men forward. Women are good workers and I think just taking the backseat will not make you visible, unless they are very aggressive. You don't have to be THAT aggressive, I mean visible or aggressive in a nice way.

On that note, she is saying that, "it is all about visibility" by being assertive, but not necessarily being "aggressive." Toward this end, Prof. Norizan reveals how that works for her. "Being in administration, they [men] have to be comfortable with you." For instance, it has to be intentional in ways that "you have to adapt to them, not the other way round. You have to wear pants. Yes, you have to wear pants in order to be a leader." She is suggesting that women deans have to see the way things look from men's perspectives too. In the end, she admits, "That's how

I win, I guess - you know." In conclusion, learning to lead for Prof. Norizan

means that she also needs to know the "hidden rules." For example, when dealing

with her male counterparts, she needs to be seen as assertive, but not as

"competitive" or "aggressive." More importantly, she needs to understand how

men "look at things."

For instance, when a "complex" situation came about for Prof. Kamila, she chose

to quit her teaching position when that particular university was moving to its new

campus in the southern state. She relates that, "Being a married person," she "left" the

previous university because her husband "prefers to be near his mother," who lives near

the capital city. The scenario reflects how patriarchy unfolds when Prof. Kamila, whose

parents live in the southern state, willingly accepts her duty as a wife by abiding to her

husband's preference. The findings suggest that patriarchy plays out remarkably in the

process of learning to become women leaders. When learning to lead in a Malay societal

context, these women not only need to accommodate the demands of "hidden rules"

related to patriarchal values, where their duty as wives take precedence, but they also

need to manage multiple roles and societal expectations. The next section discusses the

how the participants manage the multitude of roles and expectations for women.

(b)   Managing Multiple Roles and Societal Expectations

An understanding of how married Malay women leaders manage the multitude of

roles and society's expectations of them can also offer useful insights on how the

participants learned to become leaders. Participants describe the roles and expectations in

ways that reflect their strong commitment to the family.

Dr. Sabrina explains "it's that managing" of multiple roles as "a mother, wife, or woman in the house" that makes it risky for woman deans. She explains the risk this way: A woman dean who makes leadership in education her chosen path runs the very real risk of failing both at work and at home. The findings suggest that, as "a married person" a woman's duty as a wife takes precedence. According to Dr. Sabrina, "as a woman dean" leading in a patriarchal society, one needs to be cognizant that "when you go home, you are not a dean." In essence, Dr. Sabrina points out the importance of recognizing the "unspoken rules" of being a woman dean [reads as a woman leader] at home such as "knowing when to stop working and not drag yourself" into working late hours "like until it is 10 o'clock." She cautions that this leadership position "is not without risk," because people tend to overwork themselves. She often sighs, "Oh my, I haven't finished my work." So it is that "juggling of the professional" and "your situation in life" that makes it [being a woman dean] becomes "risky." The "risk" involves that "keeping your antennae scanning all over" because "I have a husband to take care of." So, that responsibility toward one's husband together with societal expectations, such as the family always comes first for a married woman, may lead to "a very difficult and complex situation."

Participants describe the roles and expectations in ways that express a strong commitment for the family. Dr. Sabrina provides an example that if a woman makes deanship as "a career path," but could not "do a good job here [as a dean] and not a good job there [at home]," then she "will be in trouble." Social expectation has it that a married woman's priority is at home and for the family. So, for a woman to assume a formal leadership role in the public sphere, she must ensure that her family situation is not at

"risk." For example, in order not to cause "risk" for her family, Prof. Kamila chose to stay with her husband rather than to transfer to a state in the south where her parents live. In that regard, Dr. Sabrina asserts that "it is important" for a married woman to know that "if work is your life," then it becomes "a problem."

However, if a woman can juggle social expectations while providing quality time for the family, Dr. Sabrina promises that "you will be OK." This scenario applied to Prof. Mariani when she accepted the directorship on the west coast. In that regard, she said she had to "sacrifice" her family life because her family lives in the east coast. Ultimately, these women's experiences speak to the idea that being a women dean means one must manage her multiple roles within the realms of societal expectations for married women.

Prof. Kamila adds that, "When you accept a task" or when a woman agrees to become a dean, she advises that, "You take the role positively." She also reminds, "Don't forget that you are also a family member." She seems to acknowledge that "as a married person," a woman dean cannot afford to neglect the "roles" she has "to play at home." She believes that "being a wife and a mother," a woman dean shoulders no lesser "responsibilities" at home. On that note, she posits that "it may be family expectations" or it could be that the society's expectation for women is "different." She wonders if higher expectations for women are deep-rooted "in our culture." Often times she has to "stay back" and work late in the office. Occasionally, a deep-seated feeling that "some people would think that I have to be back [by then] because my children are waiting [at home]" crops up. "That's one thing that challenges me." When society's expectation is "different" for women, it suggests that it can be more challenging for women to stay as a dean. She thinks that, "men will not agree with this," but she argues that, "I do not see

that we [women] have any weaknesses as compared to men," which implies that women deans are as capable as any "married person." The findings suggest that in such a cultural environment, it can be more "challenging" for women to become or stay as a dean. In sum, Prof. Kamila's explanations reaffirm the notion that a Malay woman not only needs to manage the multitude of roles but also align her behaviors as a dean, wife, and a mother with society's expectations.

Therefore, learning how to negotiate the multiple roles and to meet the societal demands became critical for these women participants. According to Prof. Norizan, being a dean is "sometimes a 24-hour job," and at times "you have to go out and attend formal functions at night." She cordially justifies, "you make up with your family in some other ways." Recognizing that the society expects married women to focus their priorities on the family, Prof. Norizan suggests that "you should not be neglecting [your family], but you sort of downplay your family a bit." In this scenario, she adds, "of course, you have to have a supportive husband, a person who shares your passion." An understanding that spouse can provide the kind of support that she describes as "a bumper." In that regard, Prof. Norizan maintains that, "You need a bumper, as well." If an automobile bumper is designed to help it withstand the impact of a collision, the "bumper" here is "a supportive husband" who provides a layer of support when the wife has to "downplay the family a bit," but not in a way that can be viewed as "neglecting" the family. Therefore, while learning to lead, having "a supportive husband" appeared as helpful for Prof. Norizan in coping with societal expectations.

Having "a supportive husband" appeared as a common theme for becoming women deans or directors with their demanding roles and the underlying expectations. In

addition, "family support" comes out consistently during the interviews. For Prof.

Mariani, "the greatest family support has been from my own husband. Or else, I would

not have been able to do what I have been doing. Never! " She used to travel a lot. In

1989, when she was away "for seven months to do [her] sabbatical in Ontario, Canada,"

she says, "the twins were barely two-years-old." Eventually, there was "a lot of

[international] travel" at a time when her "children were still small." Prof Mariani used to

serve on the "international women advisory" panel for an international federation in

London for a few years. She used to fly regularly to London from Malaysia. In her words,

"I used to commute there." After that, she served on "the gender advisory panel" in

Geneva for two terms—a total of six years, "which meant every year I had to travel for

meetings." Prof. Mariani insists that, "Without support and belief from my husband, that

[frequent travels and being away from family regularly] would have been very, very

tough." She adds that, "not only support from your own intimate partner, but also from

other family members [is equally important]. Like who can take care of the children and

all that." To this, she reveals that her mother "helped every now and then during that

time, before she died." Prof. Mariani's stories suggest that, with continuous support from

her husband and the help she received from her late mother, she was able to thrive as

"academic activist" as well as a woman leader in higher education.

The advantages of having family support and strong support from spouses also

resonate with Dr. Sabrina and Dr. Latifah. These kinds of support are extremely

"important" for Dr. Sabrina. She says, "My family is my strong supporter." Her husband,

who was also a dean at another public university, truly understands if she has to work

"late hours" in order "to meet deadlines." She considers that having "a house maid" to

help with the domestic chores as a good "external support system," because it provides "a stable home environment" when both of them are equally busy at the same time. Similarly, Dr. Latifah says, "My husband has always been very supportive." She recalls the support she received when she was working on her PhD. She reasons that, without strong support from her husband, family, and in-laws, she could not have embarked on her PhD, in 1994, when her daughter was four years old. She reiterates that "My husband helped me to take care of my daughter." She further elaborates that things became "easier," because "they support [her] tremendously" during the PhD study that took six years. Family support appeared as a key factor for the continued success of these women.

Family support can appear in different form. As a woman dean, family support for Prof. Kamila means that, "you have the blessing from your family" to take up the challenges and handle the multitude of responsibilities for sitting "here" [on the dean's chair]. She deliberately mentions that, "I think as long as you're capable, and you're not neglecting the family" it would be fine "to sacrifice certain things, but as long as my family gives blessing." That said, the "sacrifices" that Prof. Mariani had to endure during her time away from family, either during those regular international travels or while serving as director at the west coast campus, became possible due to strong spousal support, which she described as "family blessing." For Dr. Latifah, spousal and familial supports provided encouraging environment to pursue her PhD and to become a woman leader in higher education. Dr. Sabrina received the kind of support that provided her with a "home environment" that was conducive for her to meet the demands of her role as a woman dean. All in all, the kinds of support that these women receive have enabled them to build on their leadership styles and focus on their commitments as women

leaders. The next section elaborates on the third sub-theme grouped as leadership styles and commitments within the theme of being a woman leader.

(c)   Leadership Styles and Commitments

As women deans and directors, the participants have their own ways of leading and commitments for leading. Their ways of leading are indicative of their leadership styles and commitments as women leaders. The interviews bring to light some elements that are consistent with the facilitative, relational, and transformative leadership styles. Of the six participants, one participant exhibits the characteristics of a facilitative leader. In this study, a facilitative leader provides the kinds of support and encouragements needed "to help people with their research ideas." While four participants portray the relational leadership style that emphasizes the importance of "winning the hearts of the people," one other participant illustrates the transformative leadership style. A distinctive feature of a transformative leader in this study is "being strategic" in "gathering support" for the agenda of "social change." Uncovering their leadership styles may generate an understanding of their leadership development. The following discussion further presents both the leadership styles as well as the commitments associated with being a woman leader. The discussion begins with Dr. Latifah, who exhibits features of a facilitative leader.

As a facilitative leader, Dr. Latifah encourages the development of "research ideas" and new research projects. She does that by eliciting insights, creativity, and wisdom from colleagues who seek assistance from the research center that she directs. The purpose of the center is "the support of doing research." She also sees her role as an

"opportunity to help these people with their research ideas," as well as "getting them interested" in pursuing "multidisciplinary kinds of research" within the social sciences. In doing so, she hopes "to help the university" and "to help our country" in addressing some "social issues." She describes her facilitative role for "lending support" and "helping out" people as "*penting* [important]." She notes that it is important "to keep [up to] the standard" of research so that it "corresponds with ethical standards." She describes how that effort has led to a reputation that "*orang kata kita ada* standard *yang tinggi* [people say we have set a high standard]." She has a commitment "to maintain a high standard" and to see that "when people do their research, they really do it well" because she views it "like a brand." To her, "a brand" is like "Coke," where people "recognize the brand" anywhere they go. And "*bila pergi mana-mana, orang akan kata* [wherever you go, people will say]" that they are "satisfied" with the product. She comments "that is the first thing I want." Toward this end, the progression of her leadership development as a facilitative leader has been further fostered by "the university's aspiration" of expanding one of the "seven niche areas" for research and development. From being an "independent" and self-reliant person, Dr. Latifah has been thrust into the role of a facilitative leader to "head" a research center that is grouped into one big "*kelompok* [cluster]" to promote the "multidisciplinary kinds of research" within the field of social sciences.

A relational leadership style that comprises elements such as "family," "like *kampong* [village] leadership," where "people matters," and includes "nurturing" appeared in the interviews with four of the six participants: Prof. Kamila, Prof. Azizah, Dr. Sabrina, and Prof. Norizan. The first relational element that Prof. Kamila describes is

similar to building a familial "relationship." When explaining her way of leading, Prof. Kamila depicts the process of "giving advice" and "providing guidance" such "as living in a family." She reiterates, "So, those are the family values that I bring to the office—by encouraging participation." On that note, she posits that, if a "leader *tak pernah kahwin* [has never been married]" the person may not have the experience of raising "a happy family." She believes that it is "important" to "give advice" and to "guide people who just started their work, just started their career." She sees her commitment as a dean is "not to say that you are the boss, but you lead people and you bring them along with you. And that's exactly what I did." The commitment reveals that Prof. Kamila cares more about promoting a family-like relationship rather than maintaining the status quo of being a "boss." Being a "lady boss" with a relational leadership style in a patriarchal setting appears to work well for Prof. Kamila. She is now into her seventh year as a dean—the longest serving dean in this study.

The second relational depiction of leadership is what Prof. Azizah terms as "like a *kampong* or village." According to Prof. Azizah, it is a way of leading where, "*kita sama-sama singsing lengan, singsing kain,* [we are in it together]." Her emphasis is on building a positive and productive relationship for the *"kampong."* She further describes, "It's an open door system," where people who "have urgent things" to discuss "can come in" in order to make sure that "things move fast." When explaining how she builds rapport with the staff, she says "Sometimes, I would go to the deputy dean's room." There are times when, "I would walk to the main office just to say hello," where "I would sit down" and "chat with them." In the main office, she reminds them that, "you can walk in to my office anytime." At other times, she would "call them to her office" for follow-up

conversations. She reveals a commitment to groom potential leaders and "to create opportunities for others" as well. For example, she "took the deputy dean and the head of a department to Beijing" in order "to expose them" to international "networking" and to encourage them "grab opportunities" presented to them. She tells these potential leaders that "we are doing this not only for our own good and for our university but also for Malaysia." To this end, Prof. Azizah, who has been prepared to lead in her role as the oldest child, feels that as a woman dean at RU-City Center she needs to stretch her relational attributes in ways that can potentially groom others in the process.

The third relational leadership style, as mentioned by Dr. Sabrina, is where "people matter the most." She describes relational in terms of "interaction with colleagues" while "making sure that things get done." She believes in "participating rather than directing." In doing so, she says, "I participate first … like being a role model. It's more of—this is how we can win the hearts of the people." She goes about it by having "any first meeting" as more of "a discussion" rather than coming out with "instruction" right away. She prefers "brainstorming" and "sharing of ideas first" over "just immediate instruction." That to her is, "really like giving them the big picture of things" to generate "more questions" like, "Where do we start?" and "How do we go about it?" By having all those initial thoughts "ironed out" earlier, she believes "people will have a concrete direction." Dr. Sabrina's explanations reveal how "the openness of communication" allows her to avoid "micro-managing" and offer "empowerment," but at the same time, she hopes to "come back and talk about it" later. That way, Dr. Sabrina is able to show her commitment in upholding the essence of "collegiality" by way of

"participation," "open communication," and "winning the hearts of the people." All of which are consistent with a relational style of leadership.

The fourth, and the final, aspect of the relational style comes from Prof. Norizan who believes in "nurturing...young people." As a dean, she believes that it is "important" for these "enthusiastic and good workers" to know "where they are going" in terms of their career progression. When she first became a dean, she helped them to identify "what they are good at" and "to plan a career path." In doing so, she not only looked at their "training needs," but also "when they should be doing their PhD," and "when we [senior administrators] should be retiring." She knows that some of them "may have ambitions, but you have to facilitate them." She is glad that, "so far, the planning has been accurate," because some people "have benefited" from that "projection." She is happy that, "it gives them a sense of direction. Now, when you see them coming back [from their PhDs], a lot of them are motivated." To her, being a "senior member" on staff, she is "not a threat" and there are "no competing priorities." She eloquently describes this in saying, "Hey! Look, I'm already there. I'm not competing with you. I want you to go with me. I will be here to facilitate your goal." She believes that her role as a dean is "to nurture, to make sure – given the experience in administration that I have – that they achieve their potential." In summing, it is clear that Prof. Norizan is delighted to play the "role of a more nurturing leader." Her "nurturing" quality is a signature of her relational leadership style.

In contrast to the facilitative and relational style, the transformative style in this study reveals that the participant is committed towards "social change." Prof. Mariani, who articulates that, "the law that we make and the rules that we follow" are all shaped

by "our patriarchal values—aren't they?" As a transformative leader she is "being strategic" in "gathering support" for the debates on "sensitive" and "controversial" issues like "domestic violence" and "sexual harassment." For example, she helped in mobilizing "the community to talk about domestic violence" in order to "challenge" the perception that domestic violence is a "private matter" and there should not be any open debate on the topic. But she is delighted that, "by lobbying and disseminating ideas" together with several NGOs in the joint action group, they "managed to get the domestic violence act— approved and implemented." In addition, due to her commitment and leadership as the director of a research center that promotes "gender equality," a ban on sexual harassment has become a policy on the campus. However, the law makers are "still trying to push for a sexual harassment act, which at the moment, we do not have in this country" as a national policy. In summary, Prof. Mariani's transformative style allows her to commit her leadership toward "social justice," not only to benefit the campus community, but also "for the community outside."

In summary, the findings for the sub-theme of leadership styles suggest that participants in this study are women leaders who possess attributes that are associated with the facilitative, relational, and transformative leadership styles. In her facilitative role, Dr. Latifah is able to develop her strength as an independent and self-reliant person to push for the "multidisciplinary kinds of research" within the social sciences field. With a strong "social consciousness" instilled by her father, Prof. Mariani exhibits a transformative style to "move the agenda for social justice." Finally, the relational style as portrayed by Dr. Sabrina, Prof. Azizah, Prof. Kamila and Prof. Norizan suggest a strong element of relationship building, where village and family values matter the most.

The findings also suggest that these relational leaders speak of themselves not as a "boss" but rather as "role model" who provide "guidance" and "nurture young people."

Summary for the Theme of being a Woman Leader

Within this second theme, the participants described what it meant for them to be women leaders. When learning to lead in the Malay social context, these women not only must negotiate the demands of and understand "hidden rules" related to patriarchal values where their duty as wives take precedence, but they also need to manage multiple roles and societal expectations. They face great risks in juggling both their roles as wives and mothers, and as leaders at their respective institutes. Despite the pressures, which are evident in the recounting of their experiences and of pivotal moments in the lives, these women participants display a resilience and report feeling encouraged by the kinds of spousal and familial support they receive. With encouraging support, the participants are able to build on their leadership styles and focus on their commitments as women leaders. When patriarchy seems to have great influence their essence of being a woman leader, how do these women learn to become women leaders? The next section describes these learning processes.

Theme 3: PROCESSES OF LEARNING IN LEADERSHIP

This third theme that relates to the processes of learning in leadership refers to how these women participants learned the skills that impel them to move along the

journey of leadership development. Despite all the cultural nuances and the challenges they faced, these women seemed to appreciate the opportunities for learning. The critical incidents they described provided them with learning instances that reflected the learning processes. The processes of learning in leadership are further divided into the three sub-themes: (a) Lessons from Experience: What and how they learn, (b) Motivation to Learn, and (c) Emotionality.

(a)   Lessons from Experience: What and how they learn

This section describes what is learned about being a leader. Where and how they learned emerged from instances that triggered not only the need to learn, but also fostered their attitude towards learning. Their learning is inferred as primarily social and emotional. In this study, the development of specific competencies related to leadership arises from specific events, challenges, or opportunities. What and how they learned from those instances came out as ways to gather insights on how they have learned to become women leaders. Being in their leadership positions, participants learned to develop competencies such as "lobbying," "negotiating," "networking," and "collaborating." The following discussion offers further explanations for what impelled them into learning and what lessons arise in situations where learning was not the main aim. The following discussion describes how Prof. Miariani learned to develop her skills in lobbying and strategizing.

Leadership abilities such as knowing "how you negotiate the terrain," "when to speak to whom," "how do you gather support," according to Prof Mariani "are questions of strategies." She considers her work with the regional NGO as "a watershed" in her life,

because "these NGOs are trying to challenge certain norms in the society." She became

"aware" of "the kinds of discourse" and "the sophisticated level of discussion that goes

around certain issues." She asserts that it was the NGO experience that "helped" in

developing those skills. From the NGO experience, Prof. Mariani learns to "look for a

window of opportunity," a situation she describes as one that will "allow you to move

your agenda forward." She says, "if I learned about strategy, negotiation, lobbying, how

to move my agenda within campus," and in the academic world, those were actually

things that "I learned from the NGO connections and processes and not through the

university." She begins her "agenda" by looking "at the environment external to the

university." Then she identifies the kind of "social changes" needed that would allow her

"to move" her agenda forward. As an "academic activist," she learns "the need to link"

her academic work "with real life in the community." What really "struck" her was that

her NGO work "is not a typical NGO *kaum ibu* [association of mothers] anymore." To

her, in many ways, her NGO work "it is also very academic." She further explains,

> So you become very strategic in the choice of the research topic, you become very
> strategic in planning for the utilization of data that you want to gather, and what
> happens to this data, you become very strategic in the choice of funding that you
> want to get, because you have certain principles that you have to hold on to.

To her, "What is the point of writing something that has little meaning to the

community?" In summary, Prof. Mariani picks up certain leadership competencies from

instances within her NGO work that provided her with "learning opportunities." She

becomes "strategic" in her move. As a transformative leader, she makes every effort to

"slowly lobby and advocate" for "academic work that has implications for society." In

doing so, she was able to "convince top people" and identify "the silent majority." These

are people who actually agree with her, but they seldom say anything. While "lobbying" becomes one of the necessary skills to develop for a transformative leader like Prof. Mariani, "negotiating" appears as a necessary skill to develop for a relational leader like Prof. Kamila.

The development of leadership skills for Prof. Kamila arises from an instance when she had to be "brave and bold" within the context of developing her "negotiating" skill. The instance came about when she was the deputy dean, and there "was a strong demand for a chemical engineering program." The dean wanted her "to work on a chemical engineering degree [program]." In 1996 she "made a careful study" to justify that for the "year 2000, they were only two thousand [chemical engineers] but the country requires twelve thousand." She came up with a proposed "curriculum" and presented it "to the university senate" in 1998. She "designed the curriculum to be different" from any other Chemical Engineering programs offered in the country. The curriculum includes courses like "Business Law, Financial and Managerial Accounting, Production Management, and Principals and Practice of Marketing." She thinks that, "the uniqueness of the program" relies more on its management emphasis, which is "non-conventional in any engineering institute."

However, the new academic program was then offered within the applied science department. Prof. Kamila argues that, "Chemical Engineering is an engineering program." To her, "it's not a Science program," and "it cannot be offered from a non-engineering school." Prof. Kamila approached the Vice Chancellor to inform him that the proposed engineering program was "approved by the ministry" and "somewhat approved by the board" with a suggestion that "we have to move out from Applied Science." When

the new academic program eventually expanded to become a new school of engineering, she became the first dean. The experience of developing a new academic program appears to have provided her with the learning opportunity to further develop the persuasive skills required for making "brave and bold" moves in the future.

The interviews reveal that, in addition to the development of leadership competencies that are seen as "strategic, brave, and bold," there are also instances of learning that evoke the "person factor" necessary for leadership such as in "team work," "collaboration," "networking," and "partnership." As a dean, Prof. Norizan says she has to be "professional" and that person factor is "important" because she cannot "expect all staff to be good team players." On that note, she adds,

> You must get a team. People must be aligned to you. If they are not aligned to you, they won't do their job. They must see what is in it for them. They must see that their welfare is taken care of. Eventually you'll be rewarded. They need to see that. They must not feel as though they are doing your work. They must see that they are doing the deans work as part of grooming, not exploiting.

> This is what I always tell them. "You know, I am sending you to do this; this is all so you will learn. You'll learn to manage time. You'll learn to attend meetings. You will learn to learn." But they must be able to see that and they must be aligned to you. You don't expect to grow without learning. Of course, some individuals will give you a hard time. But, I would not let them get to my throat. I have to be professional. I try to reach out to them.

Instances like above provided the opportunity for Prof. Norizan to develop the "people skills" required for a relational leader who wants to emphasize on "nurturing."

For a relational leader like Dr. Sabrina, being a dean provided an opportunity to develop her skills as a "mediator." For Dr. Sabrina, being a dean is "a very difficult position," because a dean is "sandwiched" between top management and "people who are resisting change." When the top management came up with policies that may not be

well-received, but that have to be "disseminated and implemented," Dr. Sabrina

describes,

> When something is top-down, as a dean you go back to the lecturers, you mention and you listen, disseminate that information, but of course first level of reaction would be pockets of resistance. And then opening the channel of communication for them is important. And actually telling them you are welcome to walk-in and speak the VC himself who is more that willing to listen.

> But first, I share this information because I just came back from the management meeting and we actually have to inform the rest of the lecturers about this. For example, a policy on academic staff has to clock-in on campus for a number of hrs per week. So that was quite a challenge.

Being "sandwiched in the middle" became an instance for Dr. Sabrina to build on the

people skills necessary for the "negotiating" and "mediating" processes. All in all, these

instances fostered participants' attitude towards learning.

(b)   Motivation to Learn

Adults learn best when there is a reason to learn. "Social obligation" appears to be

a common theme that drives the learning and development of these women leaders.

Participants view the deanship as an opportunity to "gain leadership experience" and to

"make a difference" by "contributing to the country." Dr. Sabrina, who views her

deanship as an invaluable experience that "no money can buy," articulates that although it

is "not always a pleasant experience," she knows that "there's always this social

obligation that keeps reminding what we are here for." She was referring to her role as a

dean at a public university that implements the policy of affirmative action for a specific

target population. Her motivation for learning appears to align with the university's goal

for "social responsibilities."

The emergence of various opportunities for leadership development usually leads to a leadership appointment. For Prof. Kamila, when the new academic program was launched in year 2000, she reiterates that, "when you develop a program, the purpose is not for you to become the *Ketua* [Head of] Program." She elaborates that, "This is what the country needs." She reasons that her commitment means "contributing to the country." It is not merely for her personal goal and is not for her children either. She adds, "None of my children are studying here." Prof. Kamila views her leadership development as a means to step up to the plate "for what the country needs." Similarly, Prof. Azizah argues that her motivation to become a leader is not only for her "own good," but also for the university as well as for Malaysia. In addition, Dr. Latifah describes her directorship as an *"amanah"* or responsibility "to help people" with their research ideas and "to help the university" to maintain its research status.

Being in administration provides vast opportunities for learning as there are "always new things to learn." Prof. Norizan, who has been in administration for 26 years, points out that she "never stopped learning." Her learning is driven by a sense of "responsibility" to learn and grow. In the words of Prof. Norizan, "You can't expect to grow without learning." Similarly, Dr. Sabrina reiterates that the deanship experience involved a "learning curve" and was "an eye opener" for "growth and learning" that has prepared her for greater leadership "responsibilities." Similarly, Prof. Mariani describes, her informal learning "requires a lot of commitment" because "if you don't believe in gender equality, you cannot get involved in this kind of work." In sum, for all six participants, their motivations for learning point to only one direction, i.e. for social good.

The findings reflect that women in this study strongly uphold the value that it is their task or calling as well as their ethical responsibility or *amanah* to make a difference in the society. However, the processes of learning to lead "are not always a bed of rose" because "problems are bound to happen." Participants also learned from "unpleasant instances" that evoked certain emotions. The next section elaborates on the role of emotionality in learning.

(C)   The role of Emotions in their Learning

Participants are better able to recall stories or experiences when they are attached to strong emotions. The participants spoke of negative emotions such as "frustrating," "discouraging," "challenging," "problematic," and "disappointing." For these women, the negative emotions triggered a prompt for learning. For example, Prof. Norizan conveys that being in administration "has its moments" and there are times when "some individual would give you a hard time." In such case she learned to "vent" her frustration by sharing the "grouses" with "friends" who could be "from outside your work realm," or "they could be part of the organization, but you can tic-tac [hang out] with them outside." For Dr. Sabrina, the learning involved dealing with "unpleasant news, unpleasant discussion," and "little incidences" where "big problems are bound to happen." For instance, resolving "staffing issues" was "a good learning experience." Both Prof. Norizan and Dr. Sabrina reflected upon difficult situations with people on staff.

Similarly, Prof Mariani expressed that, "it was discouraging" when academic staff as "people who are supposed to be intellectuals" and "should be thinking differently"

became part of the "resistances and misunderstandings" against sexual the harassment

policy initiative. It was "discouraging" because of the process. She explained,

> I did a lot of walking around to various groups, to communicate and talk about the issue; we did preliminary training so that people at the grass root level would not be frightened. When you discuss the issue with the staff you begin to find cases and you get to hear from them as well. If these cases are good, then you can use the case as evidence when you talk to people at the top.
>
> There's also a need to convince top people that this is good for the university rather than seeing how it could be damaging for the university. They are always concerned about the image of the university. People are always like that. They are worried that it could reflect that the university has a lot of cases of sexual harassment.
>
> But, then you have got to counter argue and convince them that if we have a good policy, if we have the policy on board, you can become a role model to other universities that do not have such policy. I think that kind of strategy of going around, lobbying, that's how it took time.

Although it was initially "frustrating" because it took so long, two years, "to get the issue

on board," it became encouraging to her when she realized that there was lots of learning

involved. From that instance, Prof. Mariani learned to "gather support" from "people at

the grass root level." She also learned to convince top management. While she feels

strongly about the process, she also uses these feelings to help foster a rational approach

to realizing the policy.

For Dr. Latifah, a strong emotion – or rather conflicting emotions – drove her

decision to accelerate the completion of her doctoral thesis. The emotions she wrestled

with forced her to make a decision that she viewed as the only reasonable and pragmatic

solution to her dilemma. Dr. Latifah's circumstances are not uncommon to Malay women

pursuing advanced academic degrees. She was pursuing her PhD at a Malaysian

university, a process that was taking her 6 years. At the time, she was also caring for a 4-

year-old daughter. Her responsibilities as a wife and mother compelled her to remain in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, recognizing that she could also deepen her academic pursuits and expand her horizons by enrolling in programs abroad, Dr. Latifah joined a program in Amsterdam for 6 months and another 6 months at the University of Illinois. During her enrollment abroad, her husband, mother and mother-in-law cared for her young daughter, a support system that gave her confidence and security. Her husband would visit her in brief 2-week stints, forcing her to rely on a reservoir of independence and self-reliance as she pursued her studies in Amsterdam and Illinois.

Dr. Latifah admits that this was a difficult phase in her life, full of the challenges that come with long separations from one's family, especially one's spouse and child. During this period, she grappled with conflicting emotions – of separation from family, isolation in foreign countries, anxiety about completing her PhD after more than 6 years. Her experience with these emotions is not uncommon among individuals who live in a kind of "exile" from their native lands, where distance provides both retrospective and perspective. In the case of Dr. Latifah, she learned that these emotions galvanized her into her ultimate decision.

In the meantime, she had to grapple with other realities that complicated the emotional landscape. Her teaching duties required her to commit more time in the classroom, taking away time that she could have used to write her dissertation, itself an ordeal that did not begin until the third year. Part of the blame for the delay, as she notes, is the continuous sense of flux and change in the focus of her dissertation. Depending on

to whom she spoke with, and which advisor happened to provide guidance, her thesis would correspondingly shift, further delaying the progress of her dissertation research.

Dr. Latifah's situation was challenging under any circumstances. She had to fulfill her duties as a mother and wife. She was committed to teaching 12 hours per week even as she had to carve time out to write her dissertation. No doubt, she learned in time to adapt in the face of these challenges. What is clear is that these emotions, and the internal pressures they created, forced her to act. Instead of surrendering, she made a decision to seclude herself at a friend's apartment in a coastal town in Malaysia. Without the demands of a family and her teaching, she completed her PhD dissertation in 3 short months. While seclusion in and of itself is highly conducive to completing projects requiring mental concentration and creativity, Dr. Latifah's decision came with sacrifices – separation from her family being the most obvious one – that she no doubt had factored into her calculations. Nevertheless, the pressure to complete what had been a 6-year ordeal forced her to forge some compromises with those closest to her in order to clarify and prioritize in order to achieve her goal. This could not have been an easy decision for Dr. Latifah or her family, yet it ultimately yielded the desired results.

In conclusion, it is clear that emotionality has played a role in the learning processes. The challenging or discouraging instances they encountered were taken as opportunities to learn, and develop essential competencies that have been imperative for success in their leadership positions. Instead of lamenting on those difficult situations, these women emerged by working hard and accepting offers of increased responsibilities and promotions. None of these women expressed regret in stepping up to the challenges of being female deans and directors. In fact, they are glad that their jobs provided them

with opportunities to accomplish and achieve, to make a difference and contribute, and to learn from the complexities of being women leaders in their social context.

Summary for the Processes of Learning

The processes of learning to lead in this study involved the development of specific competencies related to leadership. Participants learned to develop skills such as lobbying, gathering support, negotiating, and mediating the role of dean through specific events, challenges, or opportunities. Their learning motivations are largely driven by *amanah* or ethical responsibility toward the society. Negative emotions also played a role in the learning processes. However, the challenging moments they encountered seemed to be taken as opportunity to learn and further develop their leadership competencies.

Summary of Findings

In brief, there was an overwhelming emphasis that their learning processes have been shaped through early prior experiences, and the everyday process of work as a leader in higher education. While they all mentioned higher education and advanced degrees as the necessary prerequisites for becoming women deans and directors, none of them mentioned directly, or referred directly to the importance of formal education in their learning. In fact, participants acknowledged that it was through informal learning that they have acquired the essential skills for leadership. As one participant (Dr. Sabrina) mentioned, "I find that, it is on the job that this learning happens...These are

things that are not necessarily academic, not necessarily research-based, but things that can help in developing personal skills and all that." In conclusion, for these Malay women, informal learning was found to prevail in the processes of learning to lead.

Another key finding is the compelling influence of the cultural dimensions on their learning to become women leaders. Their shared norms and responsibility appeared as pivotal to the way new skills and knowledge are acquired within the learning processes. The findings revealed that, within their social context, parental influences, social participation, and mentoring emerged as dominant forms of encouragement in their learning and development. In addition to social context, their learning processes also seemed to have transpired from relationships and apprenticeships. Their experiences of learning to lead in higher education within their social contexts, through relationships and by way of apprenticeships are three lenses that can provide insights for interpreting the findings. The interpretation of findings is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined how Malay women learn to lead in Malaysian institutions of higher education. The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how these women learn to lead within their social context. The two research questions focused on how they learned to lead and how social context influenced their learning experiences. Two open-ended interviews were conducted with four deans and two directors from Malaysian public universities. The findings demonstrate the paradoxical circumstances these women faced in learning to lead in higher education, and how they learned to navigate the many tensions and contradictions they faced in assuming leadership positions within Malaysian society. For these women, learning to *lead* is about learning to *learn* from and through these tensions and contradictions.

From the perspective of the theoretical framework presented earlier, in Chapter One, learning for these women was essentially self-directed, experience-based, and both intentional and unintentional. Although most of them were trained abroad at the graduate level, there was little acknowledgement of the contribution of this training to their learning to lead. Tacit learning (Schugurensky, 2000) was clearly evident in their acknowledgement and acceptance of their society's traditions, and the ways in which they learned to navigate the values that placed more emphasis on their roles as mothers and wives than it did on their roles as educational leaders.

This chapter elaborates on the interpretation of findings, theoretical and practical implications of this study, and the recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

The commitment to learning to learn of these Malay women was central to the processes by which they learned to lead. The findings revealed that the study was more about learning to *learn* as opposed to learning to *lead*. The women in this study learned to lead by living through, and learning, about paradoxes that characterize their roles as leaders within the particular socio-cultural context in which they were living. The problems they encountered and the culture in which they encountered those problems are perceived as being paradoxical and contradictory. "Paradoxical" in this study means that the women were holding two things in contradictory relations to one another.

In many ways, learning to *learn* for the participants was a paradoxical phenomenon. There were obvious contradictions in what it meant for them as academic leaders, and what it meant for them as mothers and wives. These women were good, and sharp at balancing the tension of these opposites. Understanding and appreciating the paradoxes were significant to their learning processes. Learning from paradox and contradiction required them to hold both of these tensions the whole time. These women did not mention or talk about the strength of one tension and diminish the other. Both tensions were held to be true, even though they were of contradictory nature to one another.

Participants actually sustained and balanced the tensions; they did not go either way, as they learned to navigate and work through the paradox. For example, when referring to a paradox, Dr. Sabrina mentioned that being a dean was "risky" for her status as a wife, but used the word in an "imaginal" way. In her mind, there was an image or a

story associated with risk, which is not necessarily conceptual or rational. Therefore, it is difficult to analyze the situation in a rational way.

Additionally, the participants' stories reflected processes of learning that involved powerful relational and emotional processes shaped by their social context. Their experiences of learning to lead (a) as learning to learn, (b) as relational and emotional processes, and(c) the importance of cultural context related to their learning are discussed in more detail below.

(a)   Learning to Lead as Learning to Learn

Learning to *lead* for these Malay women means that they must also learn to negotiate and balance their professional roles as leaders, and traditional roles as wives and mothers. When navigating these roles, they are constantly learning to *learn*. The socio-cultural contexts in which they worked were described by the participants as largely patriarchal and quite hierarchical. Nonetheless, they still flourished as higher education leaders because they have learned to hold the paradoxical tensions, and work around the contradictions surrounding their professional roles as leaders. Prof Kamila stated, "Some males may not like a female as their leader." She argues, "a lady boss *mesti pandai* [must be able to] play the games." Her explanation, "*sama juga macam kita jaga suami kat rumah* [it is like how we take care of our husband at home]" illustrates the influence of patriarchal values, wherein males enjoy customary status in the family.

Participants learned to *lead* by learning about paradoxes that exist within their roles as leaders in a society where a male-dominated structure exists, and their duties as wives take precedence. Their accounts of emerging as mid-level leaders in higher

education reflected a process of learning to *learn* from working through these tensions and contradictions, rather than a process of learning about what constitutes good and effective leaders. For example, Dr. Sabrina articulates this idea clearly: "We have this value system, where regardless of how highly qualified you are—you can be the prime minister of Malaysia and yet there's an expectation." The expectation is understood as: "You are not a prime minister at home, why shouldn't you prepare dinner at home?" These women learned that as educated and professional women operating within their social fabrics, having exceptionally supportive husbands helped them thrive as women leaders.

These women learned that they constantly need to navigate "hidden rules" related to patriarchal values within their roles as leaders. Many of their stories referred to learning by "bumping into things" and making sense of it while they were "bumping" into it. For Prof. Norizan, tacit learning was clearly evident in her acknowledgement and acceptance of society's traditions. One hidden rule she pointed out was "to not show that you are competing with men." On a similar note, Prof. Azizah recognized that women deans are a minority, and for their voices to be acknowledged, their ideas must be "practical" and beneficial as viewed from a patriarchal perspective. This emphasis on learning to *learn* contributed to their ability to navigate the complex social roles in which they found themselves as women leaders in a male-dominated and hierarchical society. While the women were not actively discouraged from assuming leadership positions, they experienced little explicit or direct support for their roles as leaders.

These women participants were talking about leadership development as a *process* of learning rather than a *kind* of learning, which forms a major categorical claim

for this study. These Malay women were NOT acquiring a set body of leadership skills, but rather constructing skills that were useful in the context of learning to *lead*. As stated by Prof. Norizan, "I think you must not show that you are competing with men. And that is the hidden rule." Prof. Kamila, on the other hand, gave in to her husband who preferred "to be near his mother," as a way to accommodate the demand of the "hidden rule." Participants in this study were using concrete everyday experiences as locations and contexts for learning about what it means to lead and to be women leaders. They were talking about a particular process of learning using inquiry in developing themselves as leaders. To this end, their leadership development involved learning to *learn,* which is embedded in concrete daily aspects of their lives.

A concept of learning to lead that emerged from this study is consistent with the notion of lifelong learning (LLL). A significant part of LLL is learning to learn (Smith & Associates, 1990), and part of that learning is to foster skills of inquiry, which is a major process by which these women learned to *lead.* One of the key characteristics of LLL is rooted in concrete and everyday experiences. These women were precisely talking about their everyday experiences. They faced contradictions, and learned about paradoxes in the process. In her discussion about self authorship, Magolda (2004) describes this attitude of inquiry as "taking responsibility to explore what one does not understand, working to see the 'big picture,' realizing that knowledge evolves, and viewing learning as a lifelong process." This idea of learning to lead as *learning to learn* extended the findings to LLL, which is not inconsistent with the informal learning literature.

(b)   Learning to Lead as Relational and Emotional Processes

While relationships do not occupy a prominent role the existing informal learning literature, the women talked about the importance of relationships in the process of learning through everyday experiences. The participants described many of their learning experiences as being in relationships with individuals who were connected to them through situations, positions, or opportunities. The women mentioned their relationships with people in several roles: father, boss, mentor, role-model, and supervisor as having positive influences on their leadership development. These relationships helped them become prepared, aware, open, confident, and driven. Their spouses, families, and friends were all important components of support for their leadership development. For highly educated women from a societal background where males enjoy a more prominent social status in the family, exceptionally supportive husbands are often engaged as sources of encouragement for their wives to take up leadership at the administrative level in higher education.

Learning from mentoring was particularly evident in the experience of Prof. Norizan. The relationship provided opportunity for her to learn from mistakes. The mentor did not dwell on her errors, but continued to guide and support her as a new coordinator. From their descriptions of critical incidents, the women showed how their relational experiences were deeply emotional as well. Words describing detrimental emotions like "frustrating," "disappointing," "discouraging," "challenging," and "problematic" came out in the interviews, which showed that their learning was an emotional process as well. According to Clore (1994), emotions guide one's attention to things that are relevant to goals and concerns that are implicated in the emotional

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situation. Davies (2008) argues that emotions can also cause learners to prioritize. The priority would also take into account the social context. All six participants had issues with relational experiences that were deeply emotional, and caused them to prioritize. While Prof. Mariani, Prof. Norizan, Prof. Azizah, and Dr. Sabrina referred to difficult situations with people on staff, Prof. Kamila and Dr. Latifah recalled depressing episodes during their doctoral studies.

People who belong to a society rooted in rituals and traditions tend not to be analytic, conceptual, and rational. Their learning becomes highly emotional, connecting to the emotional dimension of one's being, but there are also transcendent or inspirational ideas emerging from the learning. The very nature of their rituals draws the person out of the individual self, into the collective soul (Dirkx, 1997). Within a Malay society, the norms and traditions of leadership as being associated with respecting authority served to remind participants, again and again, that they were all part of the collective norm. According to Boyd and Myers (1988), "imaginal knowing" is an intuitive and emotional process that provides an alternative way of understanding and making sense of the world. This kind of knowing does not necessarily emerge from reflecting, analyzing, or rationalizing. People get to know, in this alternate way, by experiencing and attending to the emotions of the images that are associated with their lived experiences. This alternative way of knowing is not necessarily irrational, but it is extra-rational (Boyd & Myers, 1988). When people are seeking to know in an "imaginal" way, people are not listening to their head, but to their ego, and listening to their heart (Drikx, 1997).

(c) The Limited Role of Reflection in Learning

Although self-reflection is a significant part of the informal learning literature, there were no clear descriptions of self-reflection in the participants' stories. The process of expressing or describing an event or a situation where learning occurred was itself a self-reflective activity on the part of the participants. The question remains: Were they reflecting on a process of self-reflection? Participants were obviously reflecting on incidents, but it was not clear if the participants were thinking about the self-reflection process. What is also clear is that the very nature of this research prompted self-reflection on the part of the participants who were looking back on particular incidents after the fact, thus providing examples of self-reflection in these stories.

The participants' learning experiences did not clearly provide explicit references to the reflective function, which could be a result of the kinds of questions asked. Although their descriptions of learning did not significantly emphasize on the processes of self-reflection, that did not necessarily mean reflection did not occur or happen. Dirkx and Lavin (1991) assert that a reflective process tends to focus on the individual learner and the subjective meaning of his or her experience. In their illustrations, self-reflection was not clearly evident in their descriptions of learning. This lack of clear evidence for the use of reflection suggested that their learning differs from a western concept of informal learning, which mainly focuses on the individual benefit (Merriam and Young, 2008). This study affirmed Merriam and Young's (2008) perspectives on non-western ways of knowing, which asserts that learning is a collective activity done with the community for the benefit of the community. This concept differs greatly from the

western notion of learning that focuses on the individual's reflective construction of knowledge (Merriam and Young, 2008).

During the interviews, there was no strong indication that participants were consciously aware of, or attending to, reflective processes in their learning. They were apparently reflecting on triggering events because the data gathering process required them to reflect on past incidents. While it was clear that participants were recalling incidents, they were NOT necessarily reflecting upon the experiences of the self-reflective process. Therefore, it was hard to determine if the reflection perceived during the data gathering process was a description of self-reflection. For these women, the reflective process was not evident in their conceptions of informal learning, which raises the question: Are these women talking about ways of learning that are substantively different from the existing informal literature?

(d) Learning to Lead and the Importance of Cultural Context

Informal learning scholars such as Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1996) acknowledge the importance of the participants' social and cultural values in the learning processes. However, studies of informal learning have yet to fully explore the importance of cultural context. Within the Malay cultural context, leadership is commonly understood as a male-oriented activity, and the concept of leadership is typically embedded in rules, norms, and traditions that reflect honoring and respecting male-authority. In a society where leadership and authority are embedded deeply in the social structure and typically unquestioned, leadership is viewed in positional, hierarchical, or power authority terms that support a top-down structure. This view of leadership differs from a western concept

of leadership (Cohen & March, 1974; Burns, 1978; Bensimon and Neumann, 1993; Bolman & Deal, 2003). Within the western perspective, authority is earned as a leader. There is institutional authority within the western context, but the real authority rests within an individual's capacity to earn the authority and respect of staff or employees. For these Malay women, their view of leadership reflected their traditional norms that are inherently social and relational, and their experiences of learning to *lead* demonstrated influences from social values.

Given that much of their learning was related to daily experiences, and meaning is defined through a cultural lens in which the experiences occurred, certain cultural values become essential considerations for their learning to lead. As a social concept, the Malay *adat* emphasizes proper behaviors with other people. The Malay *adat* is a body of implicit knowledge that promotes culturally positive values such as "*halus*" (soft or refined), "*malu*" (shame), and "*maruah*" (self-respect or dignity) (Swift, 1965; Wilson, 1967; Goddard, 1997). The influence of *adat* strongly exists in the research participants' stories. One of the principle characteristics of Malay culture is conflict avoidance, especially in public. When there is conflict, the notion of *maruah* or *malu* is almost always deployed to avoid disgrace or humiliation (Goddard, 1997). Given that these participants' learning involved relational processes, and defined by social values of *halus*, *malu*, and, *maruah,* their cultural considerations often directed them to draw on underlying values of softness, politeness, and appropriateness.

For example, in upholding a hierarchical and positional view of leadership that reflects both honoring and respecting authority, both Prof. Mariani and Kamila sought approval, endorsement, and support from their vice-chancellors in order to make their

"bold and brave" moves. For Prof. Kamila, her winning strategy was to approach the VC. She persuaded him to agree with her, using the endorsement from the ministry and the board of directors, that the newly approved chemical engineering program that she had initiated should not be placed within the applied science structure. In doing so, she made the most of the VC's institutional power to establish a new school of engineering, and she eventually became its first dean. In this story, honoring and respecting the authority of the VC was the key to her success story.

Prof. Mariani's success in making a "bold and brave" move was thought-provoking, especially within the existing cultural context. Instead of merely relying on grass-roots support from within the campus and its surrounding community, she used such bottom-up support to influence the top leadership to be on her side. Using the values of softness, politeness, and appropriateness, while "leading in the middle," Prof. Mariani was able to "strategically" convince both her superior and her subordinates to move forward with an agenda for a sexual harassment policy on campus. In that scenario, the power of softness, politeness, and appropriateness was effectively used to avoid conflict or friction that stemmed from the proposal of a culturally sensitive issue. Any "resistance" she experienced was only in the context of the patriarchal norms of the society. While honoring respect for authority and working around dominant values, Prof. Mariani successfully turned around the initial rejection to such a "controversial" policy.

Another good example of the social, relational, and cultural notions was *storied* by Dr. Sabrina. Through active participation in community engagement activities, especially within her role as a student leader at SUNY Buffalo, Dr. Sabrina recognized the importance of "collegiality." Both "village leadership" and "collegiality" described

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the locations in which their learning processes were embedded, more in terms of social and relational, rather than in terms of individual or psychological.

Summary for Interpretation of Findings

This study was purposefully designed to understand the participants' concept of learning to *lead* within a social context. To gain insights to their learning experiences, it was necessary to understand and conceptualize their social traditions, and their perception of norms and values. That understanding of what their learning to *lead* entailed, apparently involved deeply understanding the social context in which this leadership was expected to be exercised. The findings suggested that these women participants learned through the complexity of navigating their professional roles.

Participants in this study managed their roles differently to fit into the societal norms and expectations. Their stories brought to light a *process* of learning rather than a *kind* of learning, which emerged as a major categorical claim for this study. These women flourished as higher education leaders because they were smart and good at acquiring the skills for lifelong learning (LLL). They learned not only to navigate the many tensions of patriarchy and hidden rules, but also to weave through the many contradictions, and the paradoxical situations they found themselves in. A different notion of LLL emerged from this study. While the notion of LLL is typically understood as involving individual and psychological processes within the western perspective, this study revealed that these women's experiences of LLL were primarily social, relational, emotional, and cultural.

Implications for Theory

This study concluded that participants talked more about learning to *learn* as opposed to learning to *lead*. The findings, however, do not support the central role of reflection in informal learning, as suggested by much of the literature (Marsick and Watkins, 1999). While reflection occupies a crucial role in the process of learning from experience (Dirkx & Lavin, 1991, Merriam, et. al., 2007), the use of reflection is less evident in this study, and their learning was not primarily analytical. Within the informal learning literature, reflection seems over-rated in the systematic process of learning. However, as inferred from these women's stories, learning does occur outside the systematic process. Their learning was rooted in concreteness of their daily experience and their lives. The social context of their lives, and the ways they talked about learning were through the use of images and stories as opposed to concepts, ideas, and reasons.

Within the western perspective, the notion of LLL is typically understood as involving individual and psychological processes. There are some scholarly critiques that address the idea of LLL as being too psychological and individual, but the dominant assumptions remain as psychological and individualistic. However, this study revealed a different notion of LLL that involved social and relational processes. Many of the women's descriptions of learning did not reflect the assumptions of LLL as being psychological or individual, but rather as social, relational, and cultural. Prof. Azizah's story about "village leadership" was a powerful example of the social, relational, and cultural notion of LLL. She attributed her relational style of leadership to her role as the oldest of six children in her family. To her, "village leadership" was important to show others that *"kita sama-sama sinsing lengan, sinsing kain,* [we are in it together]."

The findings extended Young's (1997) conception of transformative learning (TL), in which transformation is not only something happening to individuals or societies, but it is transformation that occurs within self-and-other relationships. Such learning is always occurring within the context of the self-in-relation to the other, which could be a different dimension in the wide spectrum of TL. The field of transformative learning has been characterized as either psychological or social. Dirkx (2000), however, conceived a kind of transformation that involves the self engaging with society. He argues that people cannot understand individuals without also understanding situations or events in the society or vice-versa, which relates to the importance of social context to this study.

A significant process for learning that happened among Malay women in this study involved ways of navigating socio-cultural norms. Within these very complex norms, expectations of them as women, and definitions of what it means to be a woman in Malaysian society, and an academic leader, all contributed to their learning experiences. They learned all these skills of inquiry thoroughly, learned how to navigate the complexities, and succeeded in the end. There was a great deal of learning involved when participants learned to deal with these tensions. For example, Dr. Sabrina learned the importance of being a "mediator" in her role as a dean, by not telling or "instructing" people what to do in a meeting, but inviting them to a more collaborative and participatory discussion. As a woman leader, Dr. Sabrina learned that this was as a way to work within the patriarchal boundary.

Relationships appeared as one of the key attributes of the learning processes. However, the literature on informal learning offers limited discussion regarding the role

of relationships in learning. Women in this study learned about leadership from more experienced people, such as senior administrators, mentors, or supervisors. Their mentors also became their advocates, supporters and sponsors. From a cultural perspective, there is a Malay proverb that says people learn best from those who possess experience, or *sudah merasa garam* – literally "those who have tasted salt." Culturally, these are people who are older in age, higher in rank, and are considered much wiser in society. Therefore, learning from superiors is not only considered to be culturally appropriate, but also a way to show respect for those who *sudah merasa garam*. A suggestion related to this finding, about learning as a relational process, is to approach a study of adult learning using a socio-cultural framework.

A socio-cultural approach can also be utilized to study the role of emotionality in the learning processes. For example, in responding to the challenges of completing her PhD, Dr. Latifah provided a good example of how emotions can be focused on assessing her situation. She was prompted to act on what could be done to finish the dissertation in the last three months, after six year in the PhD program. In light of the importance of the PhD moment in the narrative of her adult and professional life, it is reasonable to assume that this moment – when she made a singular decision affecting her life, her family and her future – played an informative and important role in how she arrived at decision-making, especially in a leadership capacity. As a learning prompt, emotions led her to analyze her situation more critically, challenging her to take on new ideas, new ways of thinking, and new ways of behaving (Davies, 2008).

This study revealed that the social context played an important role in their learning from experience (Boyd and Fales, 1983). Their experiential learning involved

making sense of their own experience in the context of their social and cultural values (Boud, Cohen, and Walker, 1996). For example, in initiating the sexual harassment policy, Prof. Mariani learned a rational approach of convincing top management in ways that were appropriate within the context of the social and cultural values (Boud, Cohen, and Walker, 1996). Such an approach was culturally appropriate, because the society has greater respect for hierarchical authority. As an example for experience-based learning, Prof. Mariani became aware of the learning after going through a process of "retrospective recognition" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p.6) that was internally generated or externally led (Schugurensky, 2000). This study revealed that participants' learning involved "socially constructed and maintained norms" (Marsick & Watkins, 1987, p. 195) that have been internalized within each individual.

Tacit learning (Schugurensky, 2000) was clearly evident in the participants' acknowledgement and acceptance of their society's traditions, and the ways in which they learned to navigate the values that placed more emphasis on their roles as mothers and wives than it did on their roles as educational leaders. According to Schugurensky (2000), tacit learning is a combination of both self and externally-imposed rules. For Prof. Mariani, when she acquired the skills for "lobbying," "strategizing," and "advocating" through her international NGO work and collaboration, tacit learning was self-imposed because she wanted to advance her personal commitment to gender equality. Other participants mostly complied with the expectations of others (externally-imposed) when they learned to negotiate the unwritten rules of patriarchy. Prof. Norizan eloquently explained the idea that, "you must not show that you are competing with men. And, that is the hidden rules." She revealed a contradiction in her dean role. While she

needed to be "visible," she cannot be seen as "aggressive." She found her own ways of reducing or accommodating the tension by "seeing things from men's perspectives," or by adapting men's view, and "not the other way around."

In this study, the processes of learning occurred largely within a patriarchal context, which influenced the ways participants managed the many roles and societal expectations as women academic leaders. This study highlighted the complexity of their learning within a social context. The findings are consistent with the earlier work of Lave and Wenger (1991). They explained learning as a socio-cultural activity and introduced "situated learning" to describe learning that is contextual and embedded in a social and physical environment. Other scholars, including Engeström (1987; 2001), Rogoff (1990; 1995), Argyris and Schön (1996), Wertsch (1991), and Billett (2000; 2002; 2004; 2006) in relation to workplace learning have also adopted a socio-cultural perspective on learning.

These scholars emphasized the importance of participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities for development. For example, Engeström (1999; 2001) focused on the complex interrelationships that determine the types of activities individuals engage in, and argued that there is a link between the individual and the social structure in which they participate. For the women in this study, both the processes of learning and the knowledge attained through community engagement and mentoring are "a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used" (Brown et al., 1989, p. 32). These findings expand the work of Jurasaite-Harbison (2009) who also found a strong relationship between the cultural environment and informal learning, by drawing on a socio-cultural approach. Given that individuals are highly influenced by

the social context in which they learn, this study acknowledges that learning is deeply embedded within social contexts. These findings support socio-cultural theories derived from the work of Vygotsky (1978). These perspectives suggest that learning is not just an individual matter, but that it develops within social environments.

Implications for Practice

What participants had learned in leadership provides a glimpse into what they needed to learn in order to be successful in society. It was strikingly different from what women leaders need to learn in a western society. To be a successful leader in western context is almost the opposite, like day and night, to what it means to be a successful woman leader in the Malaysian context. It is important to point out that, what these participants were learning was a big lesson, and very critical for their success. For these Malay women, while realizing that they were mothers and wives at home, learning in leadership was an empowering process. They were becoming empowered to realize their alternate vision of society, but they were doing it within culturally patriarchal boundaries. They were neither being subversive, nor being radical. Their actions were consistent with liberal feminism, as opposes to radical feminism that usually overthrows the structure. The experiences of these women, working through and around contradictions and paradoxes, resemble the work of liberal feminists who would learn to work within the structure – in other words, learning to look and work for change within the structure. Their sense of empowerment represents an enactment of liberal feminism.

What is clear from the participants of this study is that despite the academic literature on the subject, the real-world practice of becoming a leader within cultural

constraints and boundaries appears fluid, more ad hoc and less structured, especially for women. Unlike their counterparts in Malaysia, women leaders in U.S. institutions of higher learning do not typically face the hurdles of social constraints and cultural expectations. While U.S. women leaders still juggle work, family and other obligations, patriarchy is far less of a factor in American society than it is in Malaysian society. As a result, U.S. men in the family have a far less elevated status compared with Malay men in the family.

In light of the societal differences, women leaders in U.S. higher education institutions are far less likely to be constrained by external pressures to conform, to avoid conflict and to navigate the same tensions that Malays women face. This trend toward greater egalitarianism in U.S. society for women compared with Malay society today has manifested itself in ways that are both informal as well as institutional. In the United States, pro-active gender equality is an ideal that has a tradition dating to the 19th century, resulting in the 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing voting rights for women, culminating in the adoption of laws in recent decades designed to level the playing field for women (the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act 2009 and Title IX of the 1972 Education Act), if not explicitly empower them (again, Title IX).

While this study will not attempt to recreate the rich history of the women's rights movement in the United States or its cognate, the wider civil rights movement, we should be under no illusion that the march for total equality for women leaders in the United States is complete. Nevertheless, informally and institutionally, women leaders in U.S. institutions function in a social and cultural context that does not view women leaders as exceptions to the rule. The absence of key cultural constraints in U.S. society that are

hallmarks of Malay society – shame, conflict avoidance, softness – means women leaders in the United States can play with a different set of rules compared with their Malay counterparts. This also means Malay women leaders must use different tools when it comes to developing their leadership styles.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that these differences are more differences in style rather than substance. For example, the Malay women participants mentioned earlier who appealed to grassroots support as a way to influence their own authority figures are no different from the U.S. female leader who must mobilize her own grassroots to demonstrate the strength of her prevailing opinion. Where the Malay women use grassroots to help their superiors "save face" and "avoid conflict," the U.S. female leader uses grassroots to validate the popularity and ultimately legitimacy of a given position. In a round-about way, both tactics help decision-makers save face, albeit in different cultural contexts.

A relevant question at this point is to ask how these women learn to deploy a specific tactic to succeed in their leadership position, using the grassroots incident as one example. As we have seen, the Malay women learned through informal learning, not through long-established organization structures set up specifically to address leadership issues. In light of the dual pressures to navigate the cultural paradoxes of Malay society, it is highly likely that they must continue learning in informal ways, despite the fact that there are leadership programs in Malaysia open to both men and women. The obstacle for Malay women, therefore, is not institutional or organizational, but cultural.

Such findings on the importance of culture illuminate how informal learning can "be best supported, encouraged, and developed" (Marsick and Volpe, 1999, p.3). The

findings further emphasize the importance of having a supportive mentor in the process of learning to become a leader. There is a growing need for practitioners in the field of adult learning to assist with the development of coaching and mentoring skills, so that aspiring leaders can play more pivotal roles in this process. Organizational infrastructure and resources that can stimulate informal learning are also important considerations. For example, open spaces and facilitating opportunities for women in higher education leadership to "meet, work, and socialize together, is fundamental to building networks and communities of practice that foster conditions for informal learning" (Ellinger, 2005, p. 412).

Insights from the findings suggested that participants learned from opportunities available to them from within their social contexts. Their processes of learning occurred primarily through relationships. The informal learning literature, however, often suggests a view of informal learning that is more orderly and systematic than the processes that are actually described by the women who participated in this study. The processes through which these women were learning to become leaders were more complex than what had been suggested in the informal learning literature. The findings implied that the participants entered into their responsibilities with very little formal preparation, which caused them to learn on the job and situated within their cultural context. While the description in the literature about experience-based learning is fairly systematic, participants in this study did not seem to reflect a real systematic description of the learning processes.

Another surprising finding is the lack of reference in the participants' narratives to the importance of formal preparation. While they all discussed graduate-level work, these

experiences are less prominent in their stories about how they learned to be leaders. These participants did not reveal that they learned leadership from books or formal courses of study, nor they indicate that they started with a conscious adherence to theoretical frameworks. One implication worth implementing is the idea of the apprenticeship, which means learning from people with extensive leadership experience. For example, learning with a mentor could be fostered through apprenticeships because the mentor would have presumably mastered the organization as well as the necessary components of leadership, not to mention the requisite experience, or "tasting of the salt." In the context of this study, learning through apprenticeship would be culturally appropriate within a society, which highly regards people with extensive knowledge and experience.

Conclusion

This study, which explored how six Malay women deans and directors at Malaysian public universities learn to lead within their social context, affirmed that the society's strong emphasis on patriarchal value appeared to influence their learning processes. In order to understand their learning that occurred within a social context, tacit dimensions of their informal learning was made explicit (Watkins and Marsick, 1992). This study affirmed the assumption that these Malay women needed to be cognizant of certain cultural norms and traditional roles, which can possibly influence an individual's perceptions of being a women leader. This study drew two major findings. First, informal learning was found to represent a natural process for learning. Second, the learning processes were influenced by the social system.

The first major finding was that informal learning did occur within everyday experiences and within the context of their social and cultural values (Boud, Cohen, and Walker, 1996). The informal learning that occurred was essentially incidental, self-directed, experience-based, and both intentional and unintentional. While participants were clearly aware that at times and in certain contexts they were learning, much of their learning appeared to go on beyond their level of awareness or in an unconscious manner. The findings highlighted that certain characteristics of informal learning were necessary for learning to become women leaders within their social context.

The second major finding that emerged from the study was that the learning processes were linked to their social system. Given that the socio-cultural context is central to the way new skills and knowledge is acquired, their learning through social participation and relationships was mainly shaped by the social context. The processes were influenced by who and how participants interacted. It was inferred that their tacit knowledge and opportunities for learning were potentially constrained or enabled by the social context. As previously discussed, paternal influences contributed positively towards leadership disposition. The findings also revealed that some participants were also inclined to comply with externally-imposed expectations that can impede their leadership progression. The findings support other research that suggested informal learning often begins with an internal or external jolt or triggering event and is an inductive process of reflection and action (Marsick and Volpe, 1999; Marsick and Watkins, 1997).

Recommendations for Future Research

While much research and theory regarding informal learning has been focused on explicit structures and functional processes, this study supports greater attention to the more tacit and paradoxical qualities of everyday experience, and the importance they play in our learning from and through these experiences. There are several limitations associated with this research that should be considered in future research that will explore informal learning in a social context. First, the qualitative study with a small sample size is a limitation because the findings are not intended to be generalized for other population. Second, use of self-report interview data is another limitation, as is recollection of critical informal learning incidents from memory. Finally, the number of critical incidents is relatively small, though sufficient for an exploratory study. However, this study served well as a foundation for future research to examine the processes of informal learning within a social context.

It is hoped that this study will stimulate future research on informal learning to explore different organizational settings as well as various cultural environment—so a more comprehensive understanding of how organizations and social contexts promote and impede informal learning can emerge. Research that continues to explore the contextual factors will enable practitioners and researchers to better assess settings for informal learning. Such research can also help in uncovering other social factors that positively and negatively influence such learning.

Theoretically, informal learning is grounded in experience-based learning. The description of experience-based learning in the literature is fairly systematic and the

literature describes such learning in a neat and tidy manner. The findings from this study, however, implied that the participants did not seem to reflect a real systematic description of reflections on informal learning. A way to help shape their learning is an implication for practice. Participants identified issues they have struggled with. How might practitioners in the field of adult learning help these women in practical ways? Certainly, making sure that they are paired with appropriate mentors would be one of them. Helping them identify and become members of a community of practice would help, too.

It appeared that relationships are very important as they learn to become leaders. Therefore, helping them to connect with a community so they can talk with other women leaders, learn more about their experiences and understand what they have learned — good or bad about learning to become a women leader— would be extremely beneficial. In their learning, even before they become leaders, relationships are really important. So it is important to cultivate and nurture that in their role as emerging leaders. How can we help these women make more effective use of relationships? How can the field of higher education be of assistance to women in these kinds of situations, not only in a Malay society, but also other societies in general? Even in other social contexts, what might practitioners do to support the journey that these women are making in becoming leaders in society? All these are practical issues of how to help women become leaders.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Guides

1. My name is Norseha Unin. I am a PhD student at Michigan State University in the College of Education. I am doing a dissertation research on the ways in which Malay women learn to lead within their social context. Particularly, I am interested in capturing your story of learning to become a woman leader.

2. As a researcher, I have a responsibility to keep your information as confidential. Your name will not appear in any transcript. As noted in the consent form, there will be two interviews. The interviews will be tape-recorded. Each interview will last about 60-90 minutes. The records of this study will be kept private and I have an obligation to destroy all tape recordings after transcribing them. Before you sign the consent form, do you have questions or any concern at this point?

3. Fill out the Demographic Data Sheet (see Appendix B)

APPENDIX B

Demographic Data Sheet

Personal

Name: _____

Year of birth: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Education

Year _____ Degree _____ University _____

Year _____ Degree _____ University _____

Year _____ Degree _____ _____ University _____

Job Experience

Year_____ Employer_____ Job _____

Year_____ Employer_____ Job _____

Year_____ Employer_____ Job _____

Year_____ Employer_____ Job _____

Interview Protocol One

<u>Research Title</u>
Learning to lead in higher education: Stories of Malay women at mid-level administration

Interview One:

I would like to learn about your career and specifically your development as a leader in higher education. My hope is that we will have more of a conversation rather than a traditional interview. My only expectation is that you will tell me your story in your own words. Do you have any question before we begin?

Focus on Life History

First of all, please describe for me about your job, your role, and what you do on a regular basis.

Tell me about how you came up to your administrative positions in higher education, up until the time of your current leadership position. Describe it to me as if you were telling me your life story.

<u>NOTE</u>: Where she starts her story and how she tells it will reveal what immediately strikes her as important. If certain details seem important, use these open-ended questions to probe for more information:

And then what happened?

What did you do after that?

How did you feel about that?

What did you think about that at the time?

Please describe your childhood, school, university and your family.

What has been important to you about your roles at home and at work?

What has your career been like over the years?

Interview Protocol Two

Research Title

Learning to lead in higher education: Stories of Malay women at mid-level administration

Interview Two:

I would like to ask you to think about a recent incident that you encountered while enacting your leadership role at work and what you have learned from that experiences. Again, I would like you to tell me your story in your own words. Do you have any question at this time?

Focus on Critical Incidents

Please think of an incident in which you felt encouraged to pursue and further your career as a higher education leader? Think about a recent time this happened, tell me about that.

- *What happened, who were involved, who did what, describe for me where and when it happened.*

- *What did you learn from that incident?*

- *What in particular about this incident that made you feel encouraged in pursuing and furthering your career in higher education?*

Think of another incident in which you also felt encouraged. What did you learn from that incident? (Repeat questions if necessary)

Now tell me an incident where you felt discouraged to pursue and further your career as a higher education leader.

- *What happened? Describe for me where and when it happened, who were involved? What did you learn from that discouraging incident?*

- *What in particular about this incident that made you feel discouraged?*

- *Think of another incident in which you also felt discouraged? What did you learn from that incident? (Repeat questions if necessary)*

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