

HOW WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS DESCRIBE THEIR CAREER  
PATHWAYS

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my number one fan, my husband, Robert Sampson, Jr. You have loved and supported me unconditionally throughout this journey. For that I am forever grateful. I could not have done it without you. Also, to my “Daddy”, Thedroe Roosevelt White, Jr., you taught me to read the newspaper at 3 years old. At least I thought I was reading the newspaper. You told me that I could be anything I wanted to be and to never let anyone tell me any different. I only wish you could have been here to see me accomplish the “anything that I wanted to be.” Until we meet again...

## **ABSTRACT**

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### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was two-fold: (a) to determine the barriers women encounter as they pursue becoming a community college president; and (b) to identify the supports and career paths that are described as assisting women in obtaining the position of community college president. More specifically, emergent themes regarding the career paths, barriers and obstacles related to female presidents' professional roles and responsibilities, and their strategies for success were sought in this study. This study is informative and inspirational to other women within the community college system who aspire to presidency positions as well as those who serve in leadership roles in all types of institutions. It is believed that the information that is gathered and shared will be used to inspire and assist women to continue along the path to become community college presidents.

### **Method**

A phenomenological research design was used to explore participants' experiences in Texas. The process was meant to explore the phenomenon related to the experiences of female presidents. Data were collected through individual face-to face and phone interviews. A qualitative method of analysis was used to analyze the data collected around the experiences of the presidents as described to the researcher by the participants.

## **Findings**

Findings from this study were explanations of experiences of community college presidents as they related to their own unique career pathways. Results included barriers and supports that the women encountered along the way, as well as the career paths they followed. Although every woman who participated in this study had a unique journey to and experience in the presidency, several similarities or themes were identified that bind these women together.

Aspiring women presidents need to be more open minded about relocating, sometimes out of state, to move into a college presidency. Although not always easy for some women, particularly those women who are part of dual career marriages, or who have children who have not yet graduated from high school, more women need to become open minded about the possibility of relocating if they are to attain the office of presidency.

**KEY WORDS:** Community college presidents, Female college presidents, Women in higher education leadership, Female community college presidents in Texas

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

Women continue to be in the minority at the presidential level at colleges and universities, even though they outnumber men in terms of undergraduate enrollment and graduation rates in higher education (American Council on Education [ACE], 2012). According to the ACE (2012), the role of the president, in particular, has been a male dominated position at colleges and universities and may be perceived as an option for men only. Because the majority of presidents are male, this situation may influence what females, in particular, consider a career option in higher education. This perception can have an influence on campus climate; and, therefore, influence the attitudes women have about career advancement opportunities in higher education (Martinez Aleman, & Renn, 2002).

The role of the president is the highest level of leadership in the academy. Together with faculty, senior leadership, the board, and other stakeholders, the president must be able to maintain the support and commitment necessary to fulfill the mission of its institution (Morrill, 2010). Though the job description may have changed over the years, the characteristics of the president have not. The position of president at colleges and universities is still historically held by middle-aged, White men (ACE, 2012). In the 80's, Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) described the typical college president, as being a White male in his 50's. Additionally, his average tenure was six years, he held a doctorate degree, and was usually married with children.

Although the composition of the presidency (mostly White males) has remained the same over the years, the responsibilities of the presidency have changed. Nowadays,

most higher education institutions resemble large corporations that consist of large budgets and staffs and a constantly changing customer base. With the changing times, presidents spend most of their time fundraising, building relationships, planning for the future, and dealing with personnel issues (ACE, 2007). The role of the president continues to grow and the individuals responsible for the hiring of the position have to expand their reach. They have to explore other avenues to widen the pool of candidates for the position of president. The pool of candidates needs to include not only women in the academy, but women who have taken nontraditional paths within higher education as well as women who may have acquired the skills necessary to fulfill the role via alternate career routes.

Women are managing their roles and responsibilities in addition to making major strides in stunting the negative effects of demographic characteristics including gender, race, and ethnicity on leadership (Northouse, 2007). The participation of women in the labor force rose rapidly between 1960 and 1980, reaching its peak in 1999 with a near 60% participation. The participation of women in the workforce has since declined to 57.2% in 2013, which is relatively high in comparison to historical standards (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). At community colleges, women comprise 49.5% of the full-time faculty and administrative leadership compared to only 30.1% at public research universities. Women also hold approximately 28.8% of presidencies at public 2- year colleges, 23.2% at comprehensive baccalaureate colleges, and 13.8% at doctorate- granting institutions (Eddy, 2010).

With an increasing presence of women in leadership positions in educational institutions throughout the country, a need exists for “college and universities to bring

about a more diverse women faculty with structured mentoring activities and professional development programs that will help to prepare these women for ascension to upper-level administrative leadership” (Ballenger, 2010, p. 17). To investigation in more detail the career success of females in community colleges, the career paths, barriers and challenges, and supports of female administrators employed in community colleges were the focus points of this dissertation.

According to the ACE (2012), females are underrepresented in all levels of leadership within higher education. Women have made some progress in obtaining positions within higher education over the years, yet the number of female administrators in senior leadership positions has only gradually risen. The percentage of women presidents increased from 23% in 2006 to 26% in 2011 (ACE, 2012). According to Eddy (2009), community colleges have the largest foothold of women in senior academic leadership positions, with 27% of presidential posts being held by women. Although indicated in the most recent report from the American Council on Education (2012), *The American College President*, that community colleges continue to have the largest percentage of women presidents in higher education, the percentage increase since 2006 has slowed substantially. This slowing progress mirrors cessation of progress by women in reaching the top levels of management nationally.

Women have made steady progress in obtaining senior positions in higher education administration; however, most of the progress has been at community colleges and other smaller institutions (Lively, 2000) than at 4-year institutions. It is at the community college level that women have held positions such as department chairs, deans, assistant deans, directors, vice-presidents, and ultimately presidents. The roles of

women as department chairs are difficult to track because they often retain their faculty titles as well (Eddy, 2010). Eddy (2010) also stated that the future does look promising for female leaders and the most critical position leading to “the corner office” is the Chief Academic Officer. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2011) membership database, females hold only about 28% of the total number of college Chief Executive Officer positions, indicating that women have yet to be accepted for their unique leadership abilities.

Community colleges pride themselves as colleges of the community and strive to be representative of the communities they serve. Although diversity on community college campuses has increased among the student body over the last decade, diversity among the faculty, staff and administration has progressed at a slower rate (Eddy, 2010). This situation is particularly true within the academic leadership ranks. Women are currently earning the majority of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees; however, they continue to populate primarily entry-level and mid-level management positions (Eddy, 2010; Sandberg, 2013; VanDerLinden, 2004). Women actually dominate in mid-level management positions in the community college, and because these positions serve as the prime pathway to the presidency, it is very likely that the future will yield more women leading community colleges (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). Despite the majority of women on community college campuses, they are still underrepresented in the upper academic leadership in comparison to other positions women hold along the administrative pipeline (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002.)

Numerous studies have been conducted to uncover the characteristics, career paths and professional activities that have contributed to the success of women who

received presidential appointments (Kampel, 2010; Madsen, 2007, 2008; VanDerLinden, 2004). By exploring and understanding the career paths and experiences of current women leaders, aspiring women leaders can be better informed by past experiences and accelerate their promotion within the academy (Amey et al., 2002; Kampel, 2010; Madsen, 2007). In a number of studies, women presidents have reported that their gender was a persistent influence on their ascension to the presidency and on their leadership style (Amey et al., 2002; Kampel, 2010; Madsen, 2007). Gender and ethnicity/race potentially marginalize women's access to leadership positions and influence their leadership styles because those positions and styles have male-norms deeply embedded within them (Coleman, 2007; Loder, 2005; Wilkinson & Blackmore, 2008; Zucker & Stewart, 2007).

Some of the barriers women have faced when pursuing the position of presidency as well as the supports they identified as being important to their success are important when analyzing the characteristics of women pursuing the position of college president. Women have long played an active role in the American higher education system. They have held several positions including, but not limited, to faculty, directors, coordinators, and advisors. All are roles that have often placed them in the background in leadership positions, but not necessarily at the top of the decision-making track. Knowing how to leverage a top administrative position from these roles has been challenging. An examination of the history of women in higher education will now be provided, regarding some of the challenges women have faced in higher education.

## **Women in Higher Education**

According to Branch-Brioso (2009), the enrollment of women in institutions of higher education has surpassed the number of men enrolling in college for more than 30 years. Even with the high number of women obtaining degrees, women still lag behind in the number of tenure-track faculty positions they hold. Women account for 45% of tenure-track faculty positions and 31% of tenured positions (Branch-Brioso, 2009). Women are still behind their male counterparts in obtaining senior level faculty and administrative positions in higher education even though they outnumber men in the undergraduate student population. With more and more women not only attending institutions of higher education, but earning masters and doctorate degrees, the numbers are not indicative of the number of women obtaining the position of the president or other senior level positions.

Women have no difficulties obtaining entry and mid-level positions; however, they are not as successful in obtaining senior-level administrative positions including the position of president (Bengiveno, 2000). A possible reason for this situation is because women are in the minority on the institutional boards, and these boards have the final approval when it relates to the hiring of the president. For women to have representation in executive leadership, representation also needs to be present on the presidential search committees, otherwise women will not be able to advance at the same rates as her male counterparts (Kampel, 2006).

## **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The theoretical perspective used to frame this study is the Feminist Standpoint Theory (FST). Creswell (2009) stated that the feminist perspectives view is problematic



to women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations. Females in community colleges were asked to share their career pathways to the position of president. The participants described their career advancement as it relates to gender disparities, aspirations/characteristics and qualities of female community college presidents, as well as barriers to their success.

Three claims are made by feminist standpoint theorists: (a) Knowledge is socially situated; (b) Marginalized groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of things and ask questions than it is for non-marginalized groups; and (c) Research should begin with the lives of the marginalized. A central principle of FST is the experience of oppression itself, which possibly privileges people in terms of their knowledge. As it relates to women, this principle is expressed in several ways, whether in terms of one's everyday practice having been excluded from analysis, through a feminist rewriting of object relations theory, through the gendered division of labor, through relations of care, and so on (Mosedale, 2014, p. 1117).

Feminist standpoint theorists and philosopher of science Sandra Harding reframed the idea of the standpoint. "Their principal claim regarding feminist standpoint theories is that certain socio-political positions occupied by women can become sites of epistemic privilege and thus productive starting points for enquiry into questions about not only those who are socially and politically marginalized, but also by those who occupy the positions of oppressors" ("Feminist Standpoint Theory," n.d., para. 2 ). This assertion was captured by Sandra Harding: "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives, but also of men's lives and the whole social order" (Feminist Standpoint Theory, n.d., para. 5).

This theoretical perspective is often used to improve the lives of women from a sociological position.

Building knowledge from women's actual or concrete life experiences is acutely important, feminist standpoint scholars argue, if we hope to repair the historical trend of women's misrepresentation and exclusion from the dominant knowledge canons. And only by making women's concrete life experiences the primary source of our investigations can we succeed in constructing knowledge that accurately reflects and represents women. (Brooks, 2007, p. 56).

The FST has been cited in other narratives and case studies to include Tullos (2011) and Drury (2010). Tullos (2011) used the theory as the theoretical foundation for the possible selves theory. In Drury's study, three women discussed the barriers they overcame in pursuing their positions as Chief Information Officers.

The findings for this study show the most significant barriers experienced were stereotypic attitudes and beliefs from others; a lack of recognition, support, and trust from others; marginalization; and narrowed pathways combined with "glass ceiling" effects. The methods used to overcome or eliminate the barriers, include support groups; perseverance; education, experience, and skills; behavior adaptations; and selling talents and expertise. (Drury, 2010, pp. 70-73)

### **Statement of the Problem**

The specific problem addressed in this qualitative study is the gap in the literature associated with the barriers women encounter as they pursue becoming a community college president and the supports they describe as being available as they ascended to the presidency of a higher education institution. A small number of women are in the

position of president at institutions of higher education. It is believed that by exploring some of the reasons why women do not obtain the presidency position that this information will contribute to the advancement of women seeking this role in the future.

Qualified women are currently in the pipeline to become presidents, yet they are not being selected for the positions in higher education (Allan, 2011). Still, a shortage of women continues in leadership positions in academia (Madsen et al., 2012).

Additionally, gaps exist in the literature explaining the support and professional development processes required to achieve these leadership positions (Madsen, 2007).

Women aspiring to obtain senior administrative positions in academic administration often face issues of inadequate self-promotion, the lack of mentorships, and hiring decisions that are usually based on gender preferences (Baltodano, Carlson, Jackson, & Mitchell, 2012).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was two-fold: (a) to determine the barriers women encounter as they pursue becoming a community college president; and (b) to identify the supports and career paths that are described as assisting women in obtaining the position of community college president. More specifically, emergent themes regarding the career paths, barriers and obstacles related to female presidents' professional roles and responsibilities, and their strategies for success were sought in this study. This study is informative and inspirational to other women within the community college system who aspire to presidency positions as well as those who serve in leadership roles in all types of institutions. It is believed that the information that is

gathered and shared will be used to inspire and assist women to continue along the path to become community college presidents.

### **Significance of the Study**

The need for this study was based on the fact that women at institutions of higher education are underrepresented in the college and university presidency and their stories remain largely absent from scholarly literature. This study is important because it may have an influence on women as future leaders in higher education. It is meant to provide current higher education leaders, aspiring women presidents, and search committees with information to help close the gap in the numbers of men to women in leadership. Every time a new group of students embarks upon earning a degree in higher education, it brings a new group of diverse individuals and it is necessary to also employ a diverse group of faculty, educators and leaders. When a lack of diversity is present in senior leadership positions in higher education, such as the presidency, students do not see those positions as opportunities to them. According to Pierce (2011), the increasing number of women enrolled in higher education has not translated to women earning senior-level leadership positions. More research needs to be undertaken to aid female candidates in attaining these positions.

### **Research Questions**

One central research question and three sub-questions are used to guide this study. The central question is how do community college women presidents describe their experiences leading to the presidency?

The following sub-questions further define the direction of this study:

1. What barriers do women encounter as they pursue their goal of becoming a community college president?
2. What supports do women describe as assisting them in obtaining their positions as community college presidents?
3. What are the characteristics of career paths that women presidents followed in their journey to becoming president at a community college?

### **Definition of Terms**

**Barriers.** Refer to individual factors that influence the success of people. Obstacles that prevent people functioning in society based on race, gender, sex, discrimination, and stereotypic attitudes (Shakeshaft, 1989).

**Gender bias.** The behavioral, cultural, or psychological characteristics typically associated with one sex (Merriam-Webster, 2012b). Bias, as defined by the Merriam-Webster (2012a) Dictionary, is the tendency or inclination to favor one over another. Therefore, gender is the tendency to favor one gender above another.

**College presidents.** Chief Executive Officer of public community colleges and 4-year public institutions.

**Currently sitting.** Any president who was identified by the researcher through an internet search in July 2016.

**Glass Ceiling.** The invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching senior levels of management (Boseman, 2008). These could include the notion of motherhood being a hindrance, the lack of the opportunity to develop social networks, the label of women being too nurturing and in some cases too assertive (Boseman, 2008).

**Pathways.** Career choices; professional positions; and/or job titles held prior to becoming college president.

**Underrepresentation.** To contain a disproportionately small number of representatives of something (e.g., a population group). Example: Reported women were under-represented at senior levels (Webster, 2010).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations refer to the boundaries of the study. This study was delimited to a study of current female presidents at community colleges within Texas. In addition, the study was limited to participants who had been president for at least one year. The delimitations of this study were the researcher's decision to focus only on community college presidents in the state of Texas and not the entire United States.

Limitations describe the potential weaknesses of a study (Creswell, 2009). A limitation to this study is the ability to generalize the results to the true population. Also, the interpretations of the successes and experiences could be different for each participant. To that end, the experiences of the participants in this study are not representative of all female presidents; therefore, the results cannot be generalized. The research is meant to be exploratory in nature to determine commonalities and emerging themes.

### **Assumptions**

The purpose of this study is to explore certain aspects, such as the barriers, and supports to women obtaining the position of community college president. Assumed in this study are the following:

1. Women are capable of being a community college president.

2. Participants in this study will respond openly and candidly.
3. Women are less likely than men to become community college presidents.
4. Female community college presidents may provide assistance to other females in overcoming barriers to advancing to the presidency.

In addition to the preceding statements, it cannot be assumed that the information presented here would be the same as for other states.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study consists of five chapters. In Chapter 1, I introduce the problem, the background, problem statement, purpose, and significance of the study, theoretical framework, research questions, definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, and the nature of the study. In Chapter 2, I provide an in-depth review of the related literature. I provide the research methodology and design in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 consists of the data analysis of the research questions and a summary of the findings for this study. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the research, findings, discussion, summary, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Review of Literature**

Explored in this review of the literature is how community college women presidents have experienced the career path leading to their current position. The barriers they have encountered in the past and continue to experience along the way to obtaining the position of college president are explored here. By focusing on the experiences of the women who have successfully navigated through and obtained the position of the president, it is hoped the information will help others in the future.

Gender discrimination is one reason why women fail to obtain administrative positions (McGrath, 1992). Women wanting to obtain leadership roles usually have to have more certifications than their male counterparts. According to Gotwalt and Towns (1986), female leaders in education often exhibit some of the same characteristics such as being from small towns and they are usually first born or only children. Gotwalt and Towns determined that women in leadership know the unwritten rules about certain accepted behaviors and experiences within the system.

Kellerman and Rhode (2007) explored the many challenges that women encountered in leadership roles. They collected information from various scholars from many different disciplines to review why women are consistently underrepresented in leadership roles, the reasons why it should be concerning, and what should occur about it. Additionally, Kellerman and Rhode (2007) searched for the reasons behind how women gain leadership positions and what barriers hinder them.

Strong leadership qualities are the key ingredient in overcoming challenges that institutions currently face (Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2008). Based on the social view



of women, Gregg (2004) stated “attaining leadership positions has been a problematic issue for women” (p. 42). Society sometimes associates women as being the homemakers, the teachers, or the nurturers, whereas men are the providers for the family (Gregg, 2004).

### **The Community College**

**The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890.** The Morrill Acts of 1862 and of 1890, also referred to as the Land Grant College Acts, boosted higher education in the United States (Boning, 2007). Prior to the 1860s, only wealthy European American men were college students. “The purpose of the Morrill Land Grant Act was to ensure the availability of education would be offered to those in all social classes, and not just the wealthy” (Pucciarelli, 2009, p. 106). J. S. Morrill, a Vermont congressman, saw the need for diversity in colleges. Pucciarelli (2009) stated, “The grant was originally set up to establish institutions in each state, which would educate people in agriculture, home economics, mechanical arts, and other professions, which were practical occupations at the time” (p. 106). The bill signed in 1862, entitled “each state an award of 30,000 acres of public land for each senator and representative—a number based on the Census of 1860” (p. 106). An endowment fund was established based on the earnings from the sale of the land, it was to provide support for colleges in each state. However, the initial grant presented barriers, as it included a separation of race and gender (Pucciarelli, 2009). The original land grant institutions did not allow African Americans to attend, and a woman’s place was still considered to be in the home. The nation’s male community was essentially being educated by uneducated women. Eventually, this inconsistency in thought fueled a strong argument to promoting diversity in education. Despite its slow

beginning, educators soon acknowledged the need for the proper schooling for parents, realizing it would result in better-educated children (Farnham, 1994, p. 16). With the passage of the second Land Grant Act in 1890, an influx occurred of students attending college. This second bill allowed women, Blacks, immigrants and the working class greater access to higher education; as such, there were more colleges with increased student enrollment (Cross, 1999). Diversity became an integral part of student college life.

**Brief History of Community Colleges.** Community colleges have been in existence in the United States since the early 20th century. Cohen and Brawer (2008) considered the community college to be a U.S. innovation. The vision for the first community college in the United States resulted from discussions between the Joliet superintendent of schools, J. S. Brown, and the president of the University of Chicago, W. R. Harper. Harper's dream advocated for a 2+2 approach to higher education, whereas undergraduates would focus on general education coursework during the first two years of college and then specialize in a chosen field of study the following two years. As a result, Harper recommended the use of the moniker *junior college*, which was used to recognize the first two years in academia (Pedersen, 1997). These colleges were accessible to students who would have ordinarily been unable to attend more traditional or privileged institutions. By 1901, six students enrolled at Joliet Junior College. The name was formalized in 1916 and a year later, it received its first accreditation. Through a formal contract Harper agreed to honor those courses students had taken their first two years of college and apply them to a baccalaureate degree at the university. This resulted in the role of the two-year colleges becoming the general and

vocational education to students, whereas “the universities were responsible for the higher order scholarship” (Ratcliff, 1994, p. 6).

**Role of College President.** The position of president is more complex than it has ever been before. Among the many tasks presidents are tasked with doing are cultivating donors, expanding curriculums and overseeing construction projects. The complexities of the job have placed greater demands on their time, changed the focus to more external activities for the improvement of the institutions and have become more competitive amongst other institutions of the same size, all the while receiving less funding from the government (ACE, 2007). The position of the president is more than just the chief executive officer of the institution.

Since the beginning of higher education, community college presidents have played an important role in the many changes that have occurred within higher education. Thelin (2004) provided a written history of American higher education and provided insight into how leadership within institutions of higher education has evolved from when it first began. Part of the research was about the struggle of early college presidents and how they were required to be entrepreneurs in order for their institutions to survive. Early on the president served as both the primary fundraiser as well as the chief academic officer. To expand their presence, presidents assumed more active roles to bring a greater awareness and visibility to their campuses.

In the early 1900s, as athletic teams, alumni associations and active student bodies became the norm, the responsibilities of the leadership became more complex. Years later nonacademic presidents brought fresh leadership styles to thriving universities (Thelin, 2004). Nonacademic presidents brought a certain type of business expertise that

was different from a president that had always been part of higher education. For hundreds of years the nonacademic route had been a pathway to the presidency; approximately 11% of current sitting presidents pursued the nonacademic path (ACE, 2012).

Even though the challenges facing community college leaders are many, an overwhelming percentage apparently would still choose to be an administrator if they could start all over again (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002) explaining they enjoy their work and find their jobs to be rewarding and fulfilling. Reflecting on his first year as a community college president, McCarthy (2003) stated that his new experiences serving as the voice of the college, working with trustees, serving as a liaison with the community, becoming involved with the political process, and initiating a major bond campaign had given him an enormous sense of satisfaction. Even with an overwhelming feeling of under-preparedness, Paneitz (2005) described the presidency as the most exhilarating experience one could have.

Significant information about the college presidency has been collected over the years. Since 1986, ACE has distributed surveys to all sitting college presidents every five years; the survey was meant to collect data about various things such as career paths, their roles as the president, and certain demographic information. A special meeting was held to celebrate the 20th anniversary edition of the survey. Presidents who had been in their position for 10 years or more, were invited to participate in a roundtable discussion to compare and contrast the experiences and how things had changed at each of the institutions since they had become president. Seventeen presidents met the criteria and agreed to participate. The challenges of fundraising, accountability, and assessment of

student learning and budgeting issues were the most common items that were discussed. Further, the group identified and discussed trends that had influenced their roles during their tenure. A decrease in state funding was a trend identified by the presidents of public colleges and universities; on the other hand, competition among schools was a trend identified by private college and university presidents.

Bornstein (2007) wrote that women were more than qualified to serve as presidents in this climate. In an article, Bornstein stated, "In the new competitive, fast-moving, global economy, institutions must be innovative, entrepreneurial, nimble, and flexible. These characteristics depend on collaborative and consultative leadership, qualities that women bring to the table" (2007, p. 21). According to Bornstein, women make excellent presidents because they are accustomed to balancing several tasks and demands at the same time. Further, Bornstein suggested that among other things, women have collaboration and active listening skills, both of which are an advantage in higher education today. To that end, the ability of women to be both empathetic and a good listener are evidence that women make effective leaders (Corcoran, 2008; Madsen, 2008). Corcoran (2008) conducted a qualitative study, which included 11 female presidents at certain 4-year institutions to obtain an idea of some of the responsibilities the presidents took on. As part of the study, they were asked to identify the skills and strengths that influenced their obtaining the role of president. The skills mentioned by most of the women were skills such as planning, budgeting, and fundraising. However, the most important skills were being able to relate well to various constituents and more importantly being a good listener (Corcoran, 2008).

**Current Demographics.** Community colleges enroll and employ more women than 4-year colleges (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2011). Shavlik, Touchton, and Pearson (1996) wrote a report for the ACE about a new agenda for women in higher education which called attention to the fact that the goals for women in higher education had not been met. The researchers also expressed the need for institutions to educate women for leadership roles. To maintain a focus on the importance of women's roles in the future of higher education, institutions should have taken several steps including correcting the inner policies for hiring, promotion, tenure, and salary of women faculty and administrators and staff; providing a supportive campus climate for women; and making leadership development opportunities for women a priority of the institution (AACC, 2011).

The ACE (2010) conducted a survey of regionally accredited, degree-granting institutions to find out the demographics of who was on track to be a college president and whether that pipeline was more diverse than the leaders who were retiring. Newly appointed college presidents were coming from within higher education, with 40% having served as chief academic officers or provosts. Senior administrators were younger than college presidents and more likely to be female. Only 19% of senior administrators (male and female) were 61 years old or older and 45% of all senior administrators were women. Unfortunately, women held only 38% of the chief academic officer positions, which are usually the positions held prior to attaining a college presidency (ACE, 2010). If women reached a critical mass in managerial (mid-level administration) positions, women would have equal access to senior management positions (Swiss, 1996).

## **Implications for Women**

Leatherwood and Williams (2008) determined that women reached the position of president later in life than men. Women earned doctoral degrees more often than men because it was considered a necessary credential for women in the role of the president. Both the men and women had different opinions on what were barriers; women were in agreement on the lack of family support and the access to mentors and networks whereas men did not mention either as barriers for them. It is important to examine the paths that women thought were easily accessible as well as the obstacles they identified.

Most female college presidents have followed academic career paths. Hartley and Godin (2009) conducted a study and determined that women were more likely to come from academics and to be an internal hire. Based on their research, about two-thirds of female presidents had followed the academic path, whereas, half of all male presidents had followed the academic path.

King and Gomez (2008) also confirmed that many presidential candidates were internal hires. Based on this information, they suggested institutions use this information to do more succession planning and therefore, search for women and minorities from within the institutions for leadership positions. Similarly, Hartley and Godin (2009) stressed the importance of searching within the institutions for women and minorities who were already present and who might already be qualified for the role of president.

According to King and Gomez (2008), women held 45% of senior leadership positions, which included 38% of provost or academic officer roles. However, even with the large number of women in senior leadership positions that did not necessarily mean they would translate to large numbers of female presidents. Moreover, women are likely

to serve in all other senior leadership positions within higher education more often than the presidency. The information is indicative that women do not have a problem reaching leadership positions immediately below the presidency, however, they do have difficulties in advancing to the presidential level.

According to Crocker and Canvello (2011), one of the roles of a good education should be to equip individuals with knowledge and skills to empower and promote a positive self- image (p. 236). Education, however, has had a history of teaching women to accept and practice only what society has expected of them (Mathipa & Tsoka, 2001) at the expense of what they could ultimately aspire to. For example, in the late 1800s, many believed women were unable to withstand the stresses of both reproduction and the intellectual stimulation of school (Pope & Miller, 2005). One such supporter of this thought was Dr. E. H. Clarke, a respected professor at Harvard Medical School, who added, women were too frail and delicate to handle the combination of stressors (Pope & Miller, 2005). He concluded if a woman attended college during her childbearing years, she would either become insane or sterile, or die.

Despite Dr. Clarke's argument of a woman's fragile mental and physical state, the participation of women in higher education has only increased since his presentation in 1873 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011a). From 1976 to 2009, the percentage of female full-time, post baccalaureate students increased from 36% to 63%. According to the NCES (2011a), the number of women in community colleges increased twofold. As women became more involved in the labor force, community colleges were respected for training and development. From 2008 to 2009, more women than men earned college degrees at all levels, even given different racial and ethnic groups. During



that time the percent of women earning their masters degree increased from 58% to 60%, and those women earning doctoral degrees increased from 43% to 52 % (NCES, 2011a, Table 26).

As more women enrolled in 2-year colleges, their employment opportunities broadened as well. Townsend (2008) conducted a study to examine faculty satisfaction. “For the majority of women in the study, employment in the community college was ‘ideal,’ because it fit their needs” (p. 5). Wolgemuth, Kees, and Safarik (2003) later corroborated Townsend’s remark by stating, “A community college was an ideal access point for women, whether attending school or seeking employment” (p. 762). Both Townsend and Twombly (2007) and Twombly and Townsend (2008) claimed the substantial increase in minority students attending community colleges in the 20th and 21st centuries suggested a shift in gender diversity. Despite this claim, Amey and Vander Linden (2002), Pearson and Trent (2004), and Kinzie et al. (2004) noted that although women have made great strides in academia, women still continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions, especially as college presidents. Eddy and Cox (2008) agreed, suggesting that community colleges are seen as hierarchical organizations, with traditional structures still favoring men.

Kolb, Williams, and Frohlinger (2004) conducted a double-blind test questioning if women could be both a leader and a woman. They concluded leadership has continued to be seen through the masculine lens with qualities such as, charisma, strength, and aggression still being seen as the necessary to be a leader. Further, women who emulated those qualities were seen as uncaring and, ultimately, ineffective. Deemer and Fredericks (2002) suggested women must tap into their own feminine leadership qualities to be

successful. This result was evident in another study, conducted by Goffee and Jones (2006), in which they focused on gender differences. The researchers determined women were prone to be stereotyped according to differences. Labels such as *helper*, *nurturer*, or *seductress* often prevented women from defining their own differences. Collective resistance to stereotypes was and still remains a challenge when women are busy just trying to survive.

Because women now have embraced the opportunity to differentiate themselves, they recognized their intrinsic behaviors in order to gain confidence, and now lead with intuition and creativity. This prompted the researcher to question, if the idea of leading through a new lens of differentiation rather than emulation was now known and utilized, why has the gap of female community college president not closed? In the next section, information continued as the literature was reviewed to provide the background knowledge for community colleges career pathways of women.

### **Tenure for Female Faculty**

Inconsistencies are present in women faculty in the ranks of tenured faculty in higher education. Obtaining tenure is one of the many obstacles based by women. The procedure for achieving tenure first starts with obtaining a position as faculty at an institution of higher education. According to Grose (2005), tenure rates are lower for women than they are for men. Women are less likely to obtain these positions because they often times fall behind in their workload due to the extra job demands of being on committees, heavier teaching loads, and advising demands. In addition, Aleman and Renn (2002) noted that women also have less access to mentors and networks. Together these reasons contribute to the disadvantage that women have in obtaining tenure.

The typical path to the presidency begins with a full-time faculty position, which leads to a tenured faculty position, followed by full professorship, department chair, dean, provost, and then president (Riggs, 2009). Some college and university departments are often considered to be hostile working environments, because of being mostly male, thus making it difficult to recruit women into the department (Sherman et al., 2010). Because women usually follow the traditional career path, they sometimes feel there is not enough time to reach the presidency (Riggs, 2009).

The diversity among the faculty and the administration at institutions of higher education has remained unchanged, whereas the student populations have become more diverse each year (Jenkins, 2009). The lack of diversity at these institutions can have a negative influence on the student population (Davis, 2007). Women who do manage to obtain certain positions that could lead them to the position of president often feel like they have to work harder than men to earn the same positions (Dahlen-Zelechowski, Bilimoria, & Haug, 2006). Further, some women reported being viewed differently when receiving promotions to some senior level administration positions. The reason for this situation is because they were sometimes considered unqualified for the positions, yet given the promotion because they were members of a certain racial or ethnic group (Dolan, 2010).

### **Career Pathways**

Based upon a review of the literature, it is clear that women take many different paths to the presidency, often following non-traditional career paths. Their career moves result from diverse priorities and motives (Madsen, 2008; Walton, 1996; Waring, 2003). Madsen (2008) conducted an in-depth study of 10 high-profile women college presidents.

Of the 10 women interviewed, six had academic careers, whereas four followed non-academic routes related to finance and budgets, community and government relations, non-educational appointments, and boards of regents or commission positions.

Walton (1996), in her study of American and British college and university presidents, contended that professorships are often not natural breeding grounds for women college presidents. To begin with, so few women are in senior positions in colleges and universities that the presidency attracts very few female applicants. Furthermore, women professors tend to earn less than their male counterparts in all the disciplines. Hence, to develop a pool of candidates, presidential search committees in her study had to search in Who's Who, use headhunters, networking, nominations from friends and colleagues of the candidates, and seek self-nominations. In turn, the women nominated into presidential positions had to rely on their heightened visibility through committee work, Foreign Service, other government posts, among other activities, to enhance their likelihood of being nominated or requested to apply for the presidency.

Many important, strategic career decisions lead to the community college presidency. Academic leadership traditionally came from the faculty through department leadership, such as division chair, rather than through student services (Strathe & Wilson, 2006). Forty-five percent of community college presidents reported that they previously taught full-time at a community college (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). If the faculty member served well as department chair, then he or she was often encouraged to seek a position as dean where he or she gained budget and other institutional administrative experiences (Strathe & Wilson, 2006). Faculty members had many of the desirable characteristics of good leadership; they worked long hours, served on committees, were

attentive to schedules and deadlines, worked well in a collaborative setting, and were committed to student success (Strathe & Wilson, 2006).

Another aspect of the career pathway was educational background. When preparing for a community college presidency, earning the doctorate was strongly recommended (Moore & Salimbene, 1980; VanDerLinden, 2004; Vaughan, 2001; Wallin, 2006). In 2002, Weisman and Vaughan reported that 88% of college presidents had doctoral degrees. When considering strategies for career advancement, candidates gained credibility through experiences by teaching, serving on crucial committees at the institution, and conducting community service (Anderson, 1993; Falconer, 1995). When examining the typical employment path for community college presidents, women obviously could not simply achieve presidencies by following the typical path.

It is important to explore the pathway women take to obtain the role of college presidency when examining how women attain the position. No set path exists for college and university presidents to take, however, different options are present that have historically led to the position. The most frequently traveled career path to the position of college president is the academic route (Pierce, 2011). In fact, women hold more part-time, adjunct, and non-tenure track positions than their male counterparts (Martinez Aleman & Renn, 2002). The requirements for an individual to obtain tenure consist of having a demonstrated track record of research, teaching, and service. Women co-author publications more often than their male colleagues and are less likely to appear as the lead author (Martinez Aleman & Renn, 2002). All of these factors influence tenure promotions and has an effect on a woman's career track. Women are involved in committees at their institutions more often than their male colleagues (Fitzgerald, 2014).

Women are asked more often than men to be on service committees, yet service has the least amount of weight in the tenure process; women find they are met with more challenges than their male counterparts when trying to achieve tenure (Pierce, 2011). Most women indicate that regardless of the discipline, they are expected to volunteer their time on service-related tasks in order to appear nurturing and supportive (Martinez Aleman & Renn, 2002).

Women are more likely than men to hold a doctorate degree in education, and they have spent more time than men in the classroom. Almost one fifth of presidents were presidents prior to their current presidency position, and more than one third were either a provost or some other chief academic officer prior to their current presidency. Several presidents came from positions outside of higher education, although this is more prevalent at private institutions. This fact translates to the fact that institutions are hiring leaders that have more senior executive experience, which therefore limits the opportunities for women and people of color (Cook, 2012).

Women usually follow a traditional career path. First, they establish themselves as scholars and then rise through the ranks to senior academic positions. Men follow a similar path, but they more often than not are drawn from outside of higher education. It also seems that search committees will to take more risks with a male candidate, whereas, women are examined more closely and are frequently asked to demonstrate their qualifications and abilities. Further, Cook (2012) stated that women who took time to start families or to adapt to their spouses' career needs hindered their ability to establish their credentials, therefore, effecting their career progression. More often than not women are usually hired based on their past experiences, whereas, men are hired based

on their potential (Cook, 2012). To understand the experiences of the few women who have obtained the position of the president it is important to understand their professional experiences and how they have shaped their leadership.

A possible hindrance to women gaining access to higher education leadership roles is the pathway taken the most to get to the presidency. Being a faculty member is usually the first step in the pathway to the presidency. The hiring process can be blamed for part of the reason women are not hired into these positions. Most of the committees consist of male professors. These committees usually revert to stereotypes and hire applicants similar to themselves (Wilson, 2004). For this reason, if women are not hired as faculty, this situation has a direct effect on the inability of women to progress through the ranks to obtain leadership positions and ultimately the position of president.

Viable pathways for female college president have been described in several studies such as McNair, Duree, and Ebberts (2011); McNair (2010); Strom, Sanchez, and Downey-Schilling (2011); and Amey, VanDerLinden, and Brown (2002). Amey et al. (2002) replicated a survey conducted in 1985. In both studies the career pathways of administrators at community colleges were examined. By focusing on upper level administrative positions, the surveys looked at positions, which traditionally led to the presidency. Questions were also raised in the surveys about developing alternative pathways to leadership roles at community colleges. These researchers questioned whether diverse community colleges could still traditionally define *leadership* given the number of retirees in upper level positions.

Amey et al. (2002) examined if new career paths existed for college administrators, compared to what was seen in 1985. The 2002 study had the highest

percentage (25%) of female presidents having the same position as in the past, with 37% having been provost and 15% as either associate and assistant dean, academic dean, or dean of instruction. A significant difference was not present in career routes for men and women, with 26% of men previously in community college president positions, compared to 23% of women (Amey et al., 2002). Results of the study were that the steppingstone to the presidency was from chief academic officer position. Although this is still common, it is not actively practiced. In 1985, 65% of female college presidents established themselves through traditional paths whereas in the 2002 study patterns were determined to be changing. Promotions to college president were now seen emerging from positions such as: similar senior position (8%); associate, assistant, or interim chief academic officer (8%); associate or assistant dean of instruction (31%); or department chair (4%), for a total of 51% (Amey et al., 2002, p. 579).

Amey et al. (2002) also indicated women had a stronghold in community colleges by way of student affairs positions. In the 1985 Moore (as cited in Amey et al., 2002) study, women represented 41.3% of the senior student affairs officers, whereas an increase was observed representing 54.8% in the year 2000 (Amey et al., 2002). According to these statistics, the move to presidency from student affairs is not a traditional pathway, although there is greater leadership diversity within the student affairs arena. Amey et al. (2002) stated organizations do not often consider how administrative positions evolve, or what alternative strategies might be appropriate for advancement. They also questioned whether community colleges could continue to maintain their narrow definition of leadership, their limited criteria of “acceptable experiences,” and their “traditional professional construction of leadership” (p. 574). In



concluding remarks, it was suggested with institutional support, more promotion opportunities might be present for women to senior-level or the college presidency positions.

In a quantitative study, Pope and Miller (2005) examined faculty senate governance involvement as a pathway to becoming a college president. Empirical data were collected through the work of the National Community College Chair Academy. This sample included 150 randomly selected community college presidents and 150 randomly selected community college faculty senate leaders. Miller and Pope indicated, “Participation [in faculty governance] provides neither a direct pathway nor a debilitating roadblock to the presidential position” (p. 127), suggesting the presence of multiple paths to pursuing high-level positions in higher education. The ACE (2007) stated the primary route to presidency is through a series of promotions within the college, confirming 34% of female college presidents initially held chief academic officer positions, and 26% held a previous presidency position. In the next section, documented barriers were examined.

In more recent literature (e.g., Turner, 2007), institutions of higher learning are becoming more intentional about preparing women for the college presidency. Institutional support is an important key to the growth and development of women leaders. Examples of institutional support that Turner (2007) provided include hiring more women, establishing and strengthening programs that support women’s educational pursuits for terminal degrees and programs that support research, publication, travel and service. Other avenues for professional development include workshops, conferences, institutes as well as consultants and speakers. Women at many institutions are being assigned leadership roles such as chairing university committees, chairing academic

departments, and managing research or service projects so that they gain experience in developing leadership skills. Partnering with other women in research projects or making presentations at professional meetings are additional examples of how leaders are helping women develop leadership skills that will enable them to later occupy senior administrative positions.

**Academic Path.** Most current presidents spent their entire careers in higher education, beginning with holding a position as a full-time faculty member. Cohen and March (1974) identified the academic path as being the most common route to the presidency. Most presidents began their careers as faculty (both non-tenure and tenure track), then advanced through various leadership positions within the institution. Female faculty members encounter some of the same barriers as women who take the administrative path; they are presented with some of the same challenges. Several years of formal education is typically required when ascending to the higher levels of administration. An important requirement of becoming president is a terminal degree in a specific area of study. The professors will also have taught for several years and have obtained tenure.

Many authors (Guth & Wright, 2009; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; White, 2005) implied how difficult it is for mothers to progress through the ranks in an academic career. In most cases women usually chose to opt out of the tenure track because of their family obligations. White (2005) explored women's experiences in tenure-track positions and reported that women who started families within five years of earning their Ph.D. were less likely to achieve a tenured faculty position than men who started families within the same timeframe. In addition, White (2005) noted no differences were present

in the rate in which women achieved tenure for those women who postponed having children and women who opted not to have children at all. However, neither group of women earned tenure at the same rate as that of men.

**Administrative Path.** The second most common path to obtaining the role of the college president is the administrative path. Individuals who take this path, spend their careers in administrative positions in areas such as human resources, finance, student affairs, enrollment management, development, or other administrative functions of higher education. Individuals who pursue the administrative path have extensive training as an administrator, and no experience as a faculty member. They usually rise through the ranks of administration over the years and some eventually obtain the position of the president. Women encounter some of the same barriers along the administrative path as they do when following the academic path.

Women experience challenges along the way because their path may not be what is considered normal in relation to the paths of men. Women are prone to take breaks along the way, work reduced hours, and even change careers as opposed to men (Thomas, Bireme, & Landau, 2004). Men typically enter the workforce and continue to work without interruption until they retire. According to Thomas et al. (2004), alternative career paths to the presidency were common for minority women. Women are met with several challenges along the way when following the administrative path. In particular, inequality in compensation, lack of role models, and male-dominated search committees all play a role in slowing the advancement of women on the administrative path. This path does require a similar educational background to a faculty member, even though the various employment opportunities differ. The administrative path often

begins with an entry-level position, it then progresses to mid-level management, senior level management, and then executive leadership position. Presidents are expected to have a terminal degree in their field (Lively, 2000). In 2011, 23% of presidents came from a non- academic position within the university (Pierce, 2011).

**Differences Between the Academic Path and the Administrative Path.** The academic path is different from the administrative path in that the academic path or traditional path is followed when an individual begins their career as tenured faculty and is then promoted through the administrative ranks before eventually becoming president. Alternatively, when following the administrative route, individuals will work in higher education departments such as enrollment management, student affairs, finance or some other administrative role at the institution. In this role, their responsibilities increase at every level that they hold and they eventually become president.

**Corporate Route.** A third option to the role of president can result from a corporate professional being hired. This option has happened more recently due to the demands of institutions wanting to hire someone with more of a business background (Pierce, 2011). To follow this path, individuals have worked most of their career in a non-academic setting and chooses to make a career change (Pierce, 2011). Usually, these candidates have a background in their field that will translate to the position of presidency such as, fundraising skills, budget management and oversight, and sometimes even political experience (Lively, 2000). They will also hold an advanced degree such as J.D. or master's degree. In 2011, 17% of new college presidents came from outside of higher education (Pierce, 2011).

The path to the presidency is not carved in stone, however, these three models describe the most common paths to obtaining the position. Each of the paths requires substantial work experience in addition to advanced degrees. No single type of experience or background qualifies a person more than any other type of experience or background.

### **Barriers to the Presidency**

Emphasized in the research literature was the presence of several pipeline inadequacies that impede women's advancement to the college presidency (Bornstein, 2008; DiCroce, 1995; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Fobbs, 1988; Giannini, 2001; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Quina, Cotter, & Romenesko, 1998; Townsend, 1995). Bornstein (2008) and Giannini (2001) stated that women are underrepresented in senior faculty and administrative positions, implying that fewer women than men are in candidate pools for presidencies.

Research has been conducted on the effects of stereotyping on the performance of individuals who are subjected to widely known stereotypes. In their study, Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, and Master (2006) established that once the negative stereotypes are known by members of the group, they tend to impinge on the intelligence of these individuals, creating chronic stress arising from the psychological threat not experienced by those outside the group. Merrill-Sands, Holvino, and Cumming (2000) described stereotyping as the process of making generalizations about a person or group based on perceived difference and little information about them. This process of categorizing is often subtle and unconscious, based on the individuals' past experience with members of a specific identity group.

Several researchers (e.g., Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Rainbird, 2007; Townsend, 1995) have determined that the primary explanation for women being stuck in the lower rungs of the institutional hierarchy is structural in nature. Senior positions in the academy are mostly occupied by men, who tend to use their structural power to create or maintain existing structural barriers that inhibit women's acquisition of power.

According to Bornstein (2008), although most search committees today are 50% male and 50% female, boards of trustees which are generally charged with the task of hiring college presidents are male dominated. On a more positive note, indicated in the 2012 ACE report was that search consultants have been used in 60% of recent presidential hiring (up from 49% in 2006). Schools that employ search consultants are more likely to engage a diverse pool of candidates so that women have better chances of being nominated (Cook, 2012).

Madsen (2008) asserted that many women's attitudes are a serious barrier to the presidency. Such attitudes include the fear of failure, lack of confidence in their own skills, abilities and risk-taking, and a self-concept that is linked to internalized stereotypical views of women's limited leadership ability. Moreover, women tend to be more modest about their achievements than men; hence they often do not see themselves as qualified for top leadership positions as men, even when their credentials are equivalent or superior. Bornstein (2007) wrote that women often refrain from applying for administrative positions until they feel very prepared, for fear of failure, which delays their advancement to higher positions. Furthermore, women sometimes find the all encompassing nature of the presidency, with its demands for "friend and funds", unattractive. So even when they reach the level of vice-president, they are reluctant to

push on to the presidency.

Bornstein (2008) noted that many women presidents experience difficulty in gaining acceptance and legitimacy from their constituents, who expect them to measure up to values and expectations based on male norms, because these constituents have little experience working with women in top leadership positions. And once at the top, women have to deal with the twin problems of “pioneerism” and isolation, particularly in fields and leadership levels where they are underrepresented (Berkelaar, Pope, Sypher, & Cox (2011). Women administrators often find themselves being held to higher standards than men. As a result, they have to work extra hard at fitting into the institutional culture and exhibiting technical competencies that will enable them to overcome gender bias and gain top leadership positions.

Eddy and Cox (2008), who write on gendered leadership at community colleges, explained that women have to work harder to meet the expected work roles without appearing too tough, otherwise they will be penalized. In their article, they reported that some women presidents with really strong personas ended up being perceived negatively on campus. Not only are women presidents judged by the male norms of institutions, they are also measured against what other women prior to them did while in their position. This situation makes it difficult for them to be authentic in their leadership (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Steinke, 2007). Gerdes (2011) observed that the traditional male model of success was inappropriate for evaluating women leaders. Most men who achieve top ranks and pay achieve their success through bringing in money and receiving national recognition for scholarly activity. Women’s careers on the other hand are mostly motivated by a commitment to serving, helping, or producing positive change. Thus,

they view men as self-interested and more competitive than women. To evaluate women using male criteria of success will push women to become self-concerned, causing them to become less devoted to the other aspects of university life. Bornstein (2007) noted that because women presidents experience difficulty in gaining acceptance from their constituency, some of them suffer from the “imposter syndrome” – the fear that they are not up to the job.

Some of the literature shows how work by women administrators is often devalued when it is compared to similar work completed by men (Fobbs, 1988; Quina et al., 1998; Yoder, 2002). Quina et al. (1998) determined that women administrators were rated lower, given poorer evaluations and were less likely to be hired or promoted than men. In her study on tokenism and how it influenced women at the workplace, Yoder (2002) pointed out that although women formed 46% of the American workforce in 2000, their earning power averaged only about 67-72 cents for every dollar earned by men. She explained that occupational segregation accounts for the gap between women and men's wages. Quina et al. (1998) asserted that because most people tend to have lower expectations for women, they are likely to attribute men's success to high ability, whereas women's success is likely to be explained by factors such as luck, ease of task or high effort.

According to Berkelaar et al. (2011), a marked absence of formal leadership training is present in which women are prepared for senior positions in institutions of higher learning. This situation is often coupled with a lack of access to key line positions that open the door to experiential learning, experience and social networks that build the confidence of women and help prepare them for leadership development and promotion.



When women are unable to receive leadership training and exposure, smooth transition into leadership careers is greatly hampered.

Additional issues were addressed in the literature related to family that limit women's advancement to the presidency. According to Dominici, Fried, and Zegar (2009), women have to work on resolving the conflict between biological and career clocks, when the timing of tenure decisions coincides with their optimal childbearing years. This process slows their advancement into administrative and academic positions. Additionally, women with children often shoulder the majority of domestic responsibilities.

In their study, Eddy and Cox (2008) analyzed and transcribed interviews with six women community college presidents. All of the women were married. For each of these women, family played a major role in determining their career choices and professional advancement. They chose to work at colleges that were close to their places of residences and which were a good fit for their families. They turned down opportunities that required them to relocate. Some of the women refrained from applying for the presidency until after their children were older or grown. At times, they had to deal with dual career issues in the family; they only took on advanced administrative positions when their husband's careers could accommodate the move. Two of the women were appointed to the presidency by the chancellor of the system in which they worked. This not only gave them the advantage of being insiders, but also meant that they did not have to relocate their families. In contrast, Dominici et al. (2009) observed that men continue to move up the academic ladder after their early post-doctorate years, even after

having children, in fact, marriage and family tends to increase the likelihood of men advancing in an academic career.

Women encountered specific barriers related to advancement in the workplace in general. To support women in their quest to obtain leadership positions, it is important to identify and recognize the barriers that affect the structures, policies and the hiring processes (Pierce, 2011). Family obligations, the “glass ceiling”, and lack of mentors and sponsors, are some of the barriers that have been identified. Limited access to leadership positions (Guth & Wright, 2009), pay inequity (Thomas et al., 2004), an academic culture based on a male tradition (Fletcher, 2007; Guth & Wright, 2009; Kjeldal, Rindfleish, & Sheridan, 2005), and balancing work and family commitments (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; White, 2005) are just a few challenges for female academics. It is important to identify these barriers to determine other pathways by which women can attain the position of college or university president.

Almost all barriers can be either directly or indirectly related to stereotyped values within American society, when exploring the individual barriers that women leaders encounter. There are certain qualities, which are required of male leaders such as separation, assertion, and control of environment, competition, and rationality, whereas others qualities such as meekness, connection, cooperation, compassion, and sensitivity are what are, expected qualities of female leaders (Kimmel, 2004).

Researchers (Alba, 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2008) acknowledge that women have been an integral part of the workforce for many years. In spite of this, barriers still exist for women in comparison to their male counterparts. The review of literature

regarding women in leadership positions ultimately clarified for all: to benefit, female administrators must work together.

Shakeshaft (1989) identified several models to help explain why women were systematically denied leadership positions. The models include (a) the women's place model, (b) the discrimination model, and (c) the meritocracy model. The women's place model assumes that women belong in the home whereas the discrimination model assumes that men conspire to keep them out of college leadership positions and the meritocracy model suggests that only men have the abilities to be successful in administrative roles. She continued, stating that certain barriers for women in the field of education are both internal and external, whereas psychological factors (like motivation and self-esteem) only confound the problem, suggesting the need for further research.

Madsen (2008) used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of female college presidents. Examined in this study were their lives, experiences, and perceptions, moving beyond what they accomplished in order to gain an understanding of how the lived experiences influenced their ascension (p. 7). Madsen concluded the contrast of gender equity in professional development still continues, suggesting gender stereotyping and discrimination influence a women's lack of 34 representation in leadership positions. Madsen highlighted the importance of a woman's mentoring for professional development. Though the central problems were identified suggestions have gone unanswered. The present researcher is interested in learning what lived experiences contributed to female presidents' leadership development.

Suggested in the literature was that women of color who are college presidents often face unique leadership challenges which are in addition to the challenges faced by

White women presidents (Carroll, 1982; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Turner, 2007; Valverde, 2003; Waring, 2003; Wilsons, 1989; Witt, 1991). In the following section, the glass ceiling, the *good old boy network*, family obligations, as well as role model and support system issues were examined to better understand these ongoing barriers.

**Family Obligations.** The main obstacle identified by women leaders are family obligations (Fochtman, 2011; Kampel, 2006; Madsen, 2007). It is widely known that some of the job functions of women seeking senior leadership positions may not always allow for women to balance work and being a mother (Basinger, 2001). For this reason, women sometimes decide not to advance into positions that require them to take on more responsibilities. The hours that are required are not always what are considered the normal working hours. Some are required to be present for evening or late night meetings or even to attend school events (Basinger, 2001). After hours work activities tend to leave less time for professionals to spend time with their families; women are often forced to choose between work and time with their families (Keohane, 2010). The hours required for the job can also place an increased strain on their relationships if women have a partner who works (Bornstein, 2005). In 2011, 71.6% of women presidents were married, compared to 90.1% of male presidents (ACE, 2012). Based on these data, women who are being promoted to the position of president may be more inclined to get there if they do not have the added responsibility of a partner. This does not appear to be a barrier for men.

Many researchers (Buell, Schroth, & DeFelice, 2002; Glass, 2000; Harris, 2006; Harris, Arnold, Lowery, & Crocker, 2002; Hildebrand, 2007) have reported that women continue to enter administrative positions later in their careers due to family obligations.

According to Harris et al. (2002), although having the proper credentials and experience increased a woman's chances of advancing to leadership positions, strong prejudices decreased a woman's chance of advancing as an administrator. In addition, Watkins, Herrin, and McDonald (1998) saw parenting was a cause for conflict for most mothers who sought employment outside the home depending on their educational level and geographical location.

Heilman and Okimoto (2007) suggested several reasons why a woman's advancement in higher education administrative positions was often restricted. These barriers included: (a) lack of geographic mobility (b) limited bargaining power for advanced positions, (c) nepotism and related policies thus marginalizing women; and (d) time off due to family obligations, viewing women as being less dependable. Heilman and Okimoto expounded on these challenges, stating this way of thinking resulted in employers' belief that hiring women would be disadvantageous to the organization as she would not be as flexible and reliable as a man.

**Lack of Support Systems.** In addition to family obligations, the lack of support systems has also acted as a barrier for women seeking leadership positions. Hildebrand (2007) stated because women often had no one to turn to for advice and men feared that a business relationships would be perceived as romantic, the lack of support systems undermined women's chances for advancement. Researchers (Farrell, 1997; Funk, 2004; Hastie, n.d.) noted this non-supportive behavior as *horizontal violence*. Horizontal violence is a term often used when referring to the harm women can inflict on other women in the workplace (Farrell, 1997; Funk, 2004) but is also visible between women teachers and their male superintendents (Funk, 2004; Hastie, n.d.; Wells & Corner Brook,

n.d.). Freire (1993) used the concept of horizontal violence in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when referring to the behavior of oppressed groups who lashed out at peers instead of standing up to them. Freire also noted individuals often took out their anger on other women, in order to reduce feeling powerless and devalued. Funk (2004) and Hastie (n.d.) further supported this belief.

Intergroup conflict was often manifested by other behavior, noting, which may have been conscious or unconscious responses to the situation (Freshwater, 2000; Hastie, n.d.). Freshwater (2000) examined the group behavior of those individuals who felt oppressed, noting horizontal violence was often displayed when there was little respect for privacy or confidentiality, an unwillingness to help, feelings of being undermined, or the lack of support. Both Freshwater (2000) and Hastie (n.d.) viewed horizontal violence as typically being nonphysical, but could be considered physical when it included gossiping, name calling, threatening behavior, belittling gestures, raised eyebrows, snide remarks, and withholding information. Baron and Neuman (1996) indicated nonphysical acts of aggression were the most difficult to manage. Although physical aspects of horizontal violence (e.g., shoving, hitting, or throwing objects) were noticed, this usually resulted from a build-up of tension and stress (Funk, 2004; Hastie, n.d.). Farrell (1997) described that behavior as “professional terrorism” (p. 503).

### **Mentoring and Sponsorship**

Research has validated mentoring as an essential catalyst for advancement (Hubbard & Robinson, 1998), in an ultracompetitive world (DeLong, Gabarro, & Lees, 2008). Women often do not seek out leadership positions, because they may or may not know it is even possible for them to advance, and secondly, they may not know whom to

ask for help. The key to this is mentoring. Mentoring occurs when a senior person takes personal interest in the career development of a junior person, offering both career guidance and emotional support (Anderson & Ramey, 1990; Blake-Beard, 2003; Chao, 1997; Cullen & Luna, 1993; Eliasson, Berggren, & Bondestam, 2000; Kram, 1988; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Moore & Salimbene, 1980; Ragins & Cotton, 1993). Some influences of mentoring were explained by Kram (1988), who stated that enhancing professional competency (i.e., career development) and psychosocial function were the two main benefits of mentoring and help the mentor and protégé. In addition, learning was central to mentoring, experienced by both parties; furthermore, learning was a consequence of the interchange (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2001). Finally, mentoring, which is an important part of career development and advancement, was critical for women because of barriers to promotion based on gender (Blake-Beard, 2003; Hunt & Michael, 1983; Moore & Salimbene, 1980).

Because more than 50% of college presidents reported having a mentor, current community college presidents must invest in potential future presidents by establishing mentoring relationships (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002; Vaughan, 2001). Each community college president should identify one person on his or her campus who shows potential for the presidency, paying special attention to minorities and women, and prepare him or her for leadership; this person did not have to be self-selected and could be working at any level of the institution. Mentoring relationships were established when community college presidents began programs on their campuses. Serious mentoring required more than occasional interactions (Vaughan, 2001).

Swiss (1996) determined that men in mentoring relationships with women may have been resistant to help someone who may leave work to have a family, may take on a fatherly role, or may fear the relationship may seem inappropriate to those outside the relationship. The higher the women's positions were in the corporation, the more difficult it was to find a mentor, male or female. The benefits of mentoring included, having an informal network for advice when responding to a difficult situation, receiving important business assignments from the mentor, and receiving valuable advice on the organizational climate or history. Mentoring and networks were conduits for highlighting women and minorities in leadership positions.

Mentoring is important early in a woman's career because it encourages mentoring someone else later on (Brown, Van Ummersen, & Sturnick, 2001; Vaughan, 2001). Falconer (1995) described how women reported that encouraging each other through mentoring and networking was the most used technique for career advancement. Female mentors increased their protégé's' knowledge and experience base by helping them network within and outside of an organization. Additionally, female mentors helped overcome gender and Sturnick (2001) "women must think strategically about their careers and actively seek mentors" (p. 9).

Smith, Smith, and Markham (2000) conducted a study of 226 university faculty who had been involved in mentoring relationships to find out how effective the mentoring relationships were to women and minority faculty. Discovered in the study was that more men were mentored during their careers than women. In addition, when women and minorities received the same mentoring as their White male colleagues, they



felt more committed to the organization. This dynamic was particularly true if the organization stated policies and procedures to ensure that race and gender mattered.

Formal mentoring programs have benefits and challenges as well. Blake-Beard (2001) discussed formal mentoring programs as those that were approved by the organization, and mentors and protégés were usually assigned to each other or matched up according to some kind of process. Specifically, Blake-Beard pointed out, “There is an initiation phase when the protégé and mentor first meet and a separation phase when the program ends” (p. 333). One of the challenges for women in formal relationships was that the natural comfort-level with the mentor might be missing. Women looked beyond surface differences, such as gender, and instead looked for similarities in attitude, values, and knowledge. Finding an appropriate level of intimacy and trust, especially in cross-gender pairings, in a formal mentoring program was also difficult. Women reported that formal mentoring relationships offered less coaching, role modeling, and discrimination and acted as role models for their protégés (Vincent & Seymour, 1995).

Time restraints were an additional barrier to creating effective mentoring relationships. Many women did not mentor other women because they did not have time, or they were never mentored, so mentoring other women did not occur to them. Their lessons and talents went unlearned by future female leaders (LeBlanc, 1993). Not only did women currently seeking leadership positions need effective mentors, but these same women also needed to provide mentoring opportunities for those who were younger or less experienced. Moreover, fewer women in leadership positions also meant that there were fewer available mentoring relationships for inexperienced candidates (Haynes & Haynes, 2004; LeBlanc, 1993). Women worked harder to establish cross- gender,

hierarchical, and race relationships, yet they were more likely to be in cross-gender mentoring relationships because more men were at the top of most organizations. Male mentors helped women break into the inner circle of leadership.

Informal mentoring relationships had more benefits than the formal mentoring relationships (Blake-Beard, 2003). The mentors in informal mentoring relationships were described as more effective, and more supportive. Moreover, when a male mentor brought a woman into his network, he validated the women's skills and knowledge (Blake-Beard, 2003). Gardella and Haynes (2004) conducted focus groups to determine how women developed leadership skills through mentoring and networks. Overall, these women reported that "strong relationships with women" (p. 93) helped them learn to have confidence, resist prejudice and discrimination, and retain their integrity and goals as they advanced in their careers. Peer mentoring, formal and informal networks, and membership in professional associations aided in their attainment of these goals. Once in the leadership positions they desired, these same networks allowed them to mentor younger women, who were in the early stages of career development.

Current leaders must serve as mentors to promote leadership and guidance to other women on campus. The mentoring relationship is there to provide encouragement to the younger faculty members and to demonstrate there is no one path to obtaining a leadership position. Mentors can advise individuals about possible career opportunities. Mentors are also important to assisting with infiltrating informal networks or groups that may have not been accessible otherwise (Barsh & Cranston, 2011). More often than not women may miss out on some of these opportunities due to constraints related to responsibilities at home.

Social networks are crucial for women who may otherwise feel like they are isolated throughout their careers. This networking can be key for women looking to advance to the highest levels of leadership (Barsh & Cranston, 2011; Jablonski, 2000). When women are not being exposed to managers, social exclusion is regarded as being present and, as such, it often hinders women's careers (Keohane, 2010). Mentoring is responsible for creating a pathway for women to support each other as they ascend to the role of presidency. Relationships are important to this advancement. Many women also see the importance of gaining access to membership within certain networks of influential men, because these same networks have demonstrated to sometimes be the opening to positions that would have been closed to them otherwise.

Mentoring is necessary for women for career advancement and empowerment (Naber-Fisher, 2009). Mentoring occurs when a more experienced individual provides guidance, counsel and assistance to another person as a means to help the person to learn and develop new leadership skills that will help them to advance further in their career (Lanna-Lipton, 2007). For women, the mentoring relationship between both a mentor and a mentee can be beneficial to both, because most times they learn from each other (Johnson, 2002). Along with obtaining an advanced degree, mentoring is especially valuable to women and other minority groups aspiring to earn senior-level administrative positions (Luzebetak, 2010). It was once thought, that women may have a more difficult time than men finding a mentor, because more men than women were present in senior-level positions (Leck, Orser, & Riding, 2009; Ortiz-Walters, 2009).

Mentoring is important in career development of women and other minorities. Women usually encounter more challenges and barriers to advancement than men do,

hence the reason that mentoring plays such an important role in the advancement for women (Tharenou, 2005). The lack of mentors is a barrier for women at certain stages in their career. Women who are on track to become the president of a college or university need women mentors, who are usually difficult to find given there are so few women in this role (Basinger, 2001; Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009). As Barber (2007) noted, women are overextended in their work responsibilities. Women who are overextended have limited amounts of time to engage in mentoring relationships. Men are said to have better mentoring relationships than women (Eddy, 2008). Women also report difficulty in finding mentors because of lack of women having upper administrative positions (Bower, 2012).

Certain requirements exist of the president and the ability to be successful in navigating campus politics and constituents is crucial to the position. The lack of women to help prepare other women for the role of president means that women are stuck trying to figure out the best ways to manage it. Their male counterparts do not encounter this barrier because they have so many other resources, specifically other male presidents (Bornstein, 2005). Mentors are a necessity and they are very important to the career advancement for presidents (Barsh & Cranston, 2011; Basinger, 2001; Sandberg, 2013).

Effective informal mentoring relationships were also examined. Holmes (2005) analyzed workplace interactions to discover how people mentor and what qualities made a mentor effective. She determined that mentors used direct and indirect behavior (modeling desired behavior, delegating responsibilities, and providing advice) in order to be effective. Though most mentors were men, Holmes established that characteristics of effective mentors were aligned more with traditionally female behaviors, like nurturing

and motivating. Thus, it seemed natural for women to be in leadership roles where they could model and cultivate better performance among less-experienced employees into performing better (Holmes, 2005).

In a phenomenological study of nine women faculty members' mentoring experiences, Gibson (2006) attempted to discover what qualities characterized the mentoring experience and how to best facilitate mentoring relationships. In a series of interviews with the participants, five themes emerged related to the mentoring experience of women faculty: "Having someone care and act in one's best interest, feeling of connection, being affirmed of one's beliefs, not being alone, and politics are part of one's experience" (p. 68). Some gaps or barriers were also addressed. For instance, family and work balance could not be addressed with male mentors. Additionally, fewer women were in the profession; therefore, networks for women were limited. As a result of the research, the importance of cultivating a mentoring culture for faculty members, especially women, was noted (Gibson, 2006).

### **Glass Ceiling**

For more than 30 years, individuals have discussed the glass ceiling. The concept of the glass ceiling dates back some time before it was formally identified in 1986 and refers to the barriers that women faced while aspiring to obtain senior management positions. The glass ceiling persists across all industries and has often blocked women from achieving high numbers of leadership positions. The term cannot be located in any type of corporate handbook but refers to the phenomenon that executive level leadership positions should remain a mostly White male dominated position. Several reasons are present why this phrase was coined and why women did not obtain these positions. The

main arguments were that women suffered from not climbing the ladder into leadership positions because of their lack of education, experience, and maturity (McFadden, Eakin, & Beck-Frazier, 2005). Among other things the argument was made that women made a personal choice to stay at home and raise their families and therefore worked fewer hours than their male counterparts.

The government created the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission to oversee issues involved with and the effect of the Glass ceiling. The commission identified three types of barriers: societal, internal structural, and government, for women in top-level management positions. Societal barriers describe the availability of educated women for the positions. Internal Structural barriers are the lack of businesses looking to women for the open senior level leadership positions within the organizations, and Government barriers, describe a lack of enforcement by the government and the inadequate reporting on the existence of the glass ceiling.

Eagly and Carli (2004) also expressed that several of the barriers that women face stem from the inconsistencies in gender and leadership roles. Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vanneman (2001) defined four characteristics that should be present for the glass ceiling to exist. These four characteristics include:

1. A gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee.
2. A gender or racial difference that is greater at high levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome.

3. A gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels.
4. A gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career. (pp. 657-661)

The glass ceiling is a gender phenomenon, and both White and Black females encounter this barrier somewhere in the course of their career (Cotter et al., 2001).

Although women have increased visibility in the workplace, they have had to fight for this recognition (Fitzgerald, 2014; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). Researchers (Harris, 2006; Patton, 2006) have indicated that women have faced and continue to face many obstacles in their pursuit of leadership positions. Since 1986, one obstacle facing women in their search for gender parity was often referred to as the *glass ceiling effect* (Oakley, 2000). *Wall Street Journal* reporters, using the expression *glass ceiling*, described it as the artificial barriers women dealt with in achieving higher positions (Chaffins, Forbes, Fuqua, & Cangemi, 1995; Hildebrand, 2007). This also was suggestive of women and minorities not having equal access or opportunity, making it almost impossible to advance (Davidson, 1999; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Redwood, 1996). Chaffins et al. (1995) agreed, adding that discrimination was indeed a transparent barrier in dealing with management hierarchies.

Armed with the Civil Rights Act of 1991, U.S. Labor Secretary L. Martin called attention to the scarcity of women and minorities in management positions, which she stated affected individuals and society as a whole (Klenke, 1996). This legislation created a commission to identify related problems, and to develop solutions for them; it

also implemented policies to increase opportunities for everyone (Dingell & Maloney, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2014; Tai & Sims, 2005; U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) identified three distinct barriers to advancement for women and minorities in the corporate world: societal barriers, internal structural barriers, and governmental barriers. Secretary Martin explained how the glass ceiling deprived the economy of the best leaders (Klenke, 1996) and undermined pay levels as well (Chaffins et al., 1995).

Barriers related to educational opportunity include stereotyping and bias about gender, race and ethnicity (U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Internal and structural barriers are related to the climate of the organization, its recruitment practices, and its pipeline barriers. Governmental barriers outlined by the U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) demonstrated that failures existed to monitor and enforce laws, and to collect and disaggregate employment-related data into working components. Despite the work of the U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, hidden barriers still restrict passage beyond a certain point. Highly educated women, with bachelors and graduate degrees, have the necessary tools to crack the glass ceiling but cannot seem to eliminate obstacles in upper ranks of the administration (Redwood, 1996; Velasquez, n.d.). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005), women are receiving doctoral degrees at record rates, but their representation in higher education remains an issue.

According to Young (2004), affirmative action was designed in part to support women and minorities to achieve parity in the workplace. West and Curtis (2006) stated that although it had been almost 50 years since Congress passed Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, sex discrimination is still present in educational programs receiving federal



funding, including private institutions. As such, women still struggle for top faculty positions in colleges and universities (West & Curtis, 2006).

In 2004, Wirth reported, according to the International Labor Office, men statistically had the majority of managerial positions. In 2003, Global Employment Trends announced women had lower labor participation rates, higher unemployment rates, and significant pay differences compared to their male counterparts (Wall, 2000; Wirth, 2004). Also indicated in the report was that although women represent over 40% of the world's labor force, occupational segregation exists (Wirth, 2004). This tends to categorize professions as being either feminine or masculine, which limits advancement in one's field (U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; Wirth, 2004). However, occupational segregation is outside the control of business (Chaffins et al., 1995; U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). A report issued by the International Labor Office discussed similar barriers (Wirth, 2004).

According to a study conducted by Catalyst (2003, 2008), corporations did and still have not implemented policies to promote leadership positions for women. As such, barriers encountered by women in the business world have not changed. Women in the Catalyst study cited problems with career development, which included the lack of career and succession planning, management experience, mentors or role models, flexibility in work schedules, and the exclusion from informal networks, as well as stereotyping, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment and tokenism (Wirth, 2004).

### **The Glass Ceiling in Higher Education**

The glass ceiling is evident in higher education as well. It has been called a glass ceiling, glass wall, or even a glass floor; however, whatever the name for it, there appears

to be a barrier blocking senior women leaders in higher education from ascending to the presidency (Clark, 2006). Women have made some advances into senior leadership positions within higher education (e.g., Vice Presidency), but have all too often encountered some of the same barriers that women face in corporate America when they tried to reach the very top. In addition, Institutions of higher education operate on a slower calendar than corporations and have been even slower to expand opportunities for women to enter senior leadership (ACE, 2007). Some organizations argue that attitudes and biases within the organization against women in higher education are what exclude women from obtaining senior-level leadership positions.

The commission stated that women were not leaking from the pipeline; instead they were met with various obstacles in the pipeline that hindered their advancement. To understand how pipeline issues may influence gender diversity in the college presidency, the pipelines to the presidency and barriers must be examined. Specific pipeline issues at the faculty level have been identified. According to Fitzgerald (2014), few women obtain tenure-track positions, which means women do not have job security. It is a fact that women are in the majority when it comes to adjunct positions, which do not offer any type of benefits, and does not translate to a long-term position for anyone (Kampel, 2006; Pierce, 2011). The wrong message is sent to students and other women who aspire to be in leadership positions in academe when most women are not given or even offered tenure- track positions (Basinger, 2001).

Although women have increased visibility in the workplace, they have had to fight for this recognition (Fitzgerald, 2014; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). Researchers have noted that women have faced and continue to face many obstacles in

their pursuit of leadership positions (Harris, 2006; Patton, 2006). Since 1986, one obstacle facing women in their search for gender parity is often referred to as the *glass ceiling effect* (Oakley, 2000). *Wall Street Journal* reporters, using the expression *glass ceiling*, described it as the artificial barriers women dealt with in achieving higher positions (Chaffins, Forbes, Fuqua, & Cangemi, 1995; Hildebrand, 2007). This also was suggestive of women and minorities not having equal access or opportunity, making it almost impossible to advance (Davidson, 1999; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Redwood, 1996). Chaffins et al. (1995) agreed, adding that discrimination was indeed a transparent barrier in dealing with management hierarchies.

Armed with the Civil Rights Act of 1991, U.S. Labor Secretary L. Martin called attention to the scarcity of women and minorities in management positions, which she stated affected individuals and society as a whole (Klenke, 1996). This legislation created a commission to identify related problems, and to develop solutions for them; it also implemented policies to increase opportunities for everyone (Dingell & Maloney, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2014; Tai & Sims, 2005; U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) identified three distinct barriers to advancement for women and minorities in the corporate world: societal barriers, internal structural barriers, and governmental barriers. Secretary Martin explained how the glass ceiling deprived the economy of the best leaders (Klenke, 1996) and undermined pay levels as well (Chaffins et al., 1995).

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### **Women Leaders in Higher Education**

As the number of women who earn bachelor's degrees increases, a gap continues to exist between the number of female students and the low number of women in senior level leadership positions within colleges and universities (Fitzgerald, 2014). It continues to be the norm for women to be employed as administrative staff and entry-level jobs as opposed to executive level leadership according to Reynolds (2002). Dominici et al. (2009) stated that women currently in leadership roles are not well recognized or rewarded within their institutions the same as men. Because women do not have designated leadership positions they are less respected as leaders even though they provide leadership within their institutions. Participants reported that women leaders have developed centers or programs that address important needs at their institutions and

have often implemented these centers or programs without support from either their departments or universities (Dominici et al., 2009).

According to the ACE (2012), in 2011 women presidents spent less time than did their male colleagues in their current positions; the average for women was 6.5 years compared to 7.2 years for men. Although women are less likely than are men to have been presidents in their prior positions, they were more likely to have served as provosts or chief academic officers (CAO) prior to assuming the presidency. Two areas where women rank higher in percentage is Chief academic officer or provost and work experience outside of higher education.

Ouston (2003) suggested that men still remain the prime barrier to women's advancement to administrative positions. Despite some progress, the old-fashioned sexist attitudes still remain common and represent a "real, not imagined" (p. 5) barrier to the progress of women. Hildebrand (2007) identified four specific categories as to why a woman lacked advancement parity in the workplace: (a) exclusion, (b) commitment, (c) wage gap issues, and (d) lack of role models. Exclusion included the negative stereotyping from the *good old' boy network* suggesting that positions continue to be filled with friends or protégés instead of considering the most qualified individual (Chaffins et al., 1995;). Davidson (1999) noted traditional stereotyping continues; stating the belief women were supposed to teach and men were supposed to manage continues to persist. Research regarding women as leaders was abundant (Bay-Cheng & Zucker, 2007; McCabe, 2005; Reid & Purcell, 2004; Roy, Weibust, & Miller, 2007; Rudman & Fairchild, 2007; C. A. Smith, 1999; Suter & Toller, 2006; Zucker, 2004). Ropers-Huilman (1998) suggested most women desired a professional environment in which they

can participate and make a difference without giving up what it means for them to be a woman (p. 9). Until recently, feminist leadership traits were considered negative, resulting in many women being reluctant to identify themselves as a feminist (Hurt, Nelso, Turner, Haines, Ramsey, Erchull, & Liss, 2007). Zucker (2004) defined these women as *egalitarians*.

Valian's (1998) work on women and leadership examined the disparity between genders in career advancement. She discovered both men and women held a negative preconception of women as leaders. Valian's surprising results were that female students, in general, rated a woman lower than a man at being a capable and successful leader. Determined in the study was that gender had early disadvantages, beginning with women graduating from a less prestigious institution, resulting in fewer promotions, no tenure, and the obvious less earnings. Valian reported in all areas studied, that men fared better.

A clear need exists to diversify senior level leadership, primarily amongst the presidency. Student populations in higher education are the "most racially and ethnically diverse in U.S. history...it is time for the leadership of American higher education to reflect the population" (Tatum, 2008, p. 11). Research in higher education over the last decade has shown that the demographic pendulum has shifted with regard to females obtaining executive leadership roles. According to the American Council on Education (2012), in 1991, women represented approximately 11% of community college presidents. The percentage has more than doubled over the past 10 years swelling to approximately 26.4%.

## **Experiences and Barriers**

The career/work experiences and barriers located in the literature include interpersonal relationships, lack of opportunity and support to move to leadership positions, and balancing professional and personal responsibilities. It has been implied that women have historically banded together to promote women's rights—to vote and to work outside the home. Their efforts can be continuously seen in campaigns for breast cancer awareness and research and Mothers Against Drunk Driving. However, they are not joining together to help move females into greater positions of authority in professional environments, including the world of higher education. Until women can join together instead of fighting with one another, they as a whole, will struggle to move forward (Jones & Palmer, 2011).

In a study conducted by Drury (2010), women in higher education information technology organizations shared their barriers or obstacles which included classifications of internal barriers created by the individual, external barriers stemming from societal or institutional practices and beliefs, and those rooted in an androcentric male-centered society. More specifically, participants encountered barriers such as stereotypical attitudes; stereotypical comments and preconceived notions; fear, denial and credibility; lack of trust; attributes male leaders tend to possess; narrowed pathways and glass ceilings; jealousy; isolationism; tokenism; good old boy network; family commitments; and salary inequities (Drury, 2010).

A common barrier/experience within the literature includes family responsibilities/situations (Jacks, 2009; Nibbelink-Struck, 2013). A majority of the presidents in Jacks' (2009) study indicated they had family support with one sharing



direct family responsibilities, one indicated having children in the home and child care being a big issue and another president indicated having aging parents. Others in the study were married or, divorced; one president had never been married.

Nibbelink-Struck (2013) noted in her study that female presidents were faced with choices based on family situations. One participant discussed how she had to make sure her spouse or significant other had to have the same values and be supportive. The participants also discussed child care and being married, living in different communities and maintaining real property. One participant shared about even delaying her college experience until her child was of school age.

Researchers acknowledge that women have been an integral part of the workforce for many years (Alba, 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). In spite of this, barriers still exist for women in comparison to their male counterparts. The review of literature regarding women in leadership positions ultimately clarified for all: to benefit, female administrators must work together. Shakeshaft (1989) identified several models to help explain why women were systematically denied leadership positions. The models include (a) the women's place model, (b) the discrimination model, and (c) the meritocracy model. The women's place model assumes that women belong in the home whereas the discrimination model assumes that men conspire to keep them out of college leadership positions and the meritocracy model suggests that only men have the abilities to be successful in administrative roles. She continued, stating that certain barriers for women in the field of education are both internal and external, whereas psychological factors (like motivation and self-esteem) only confound the problem, suggesting the need for further research.

Madsen (2008) used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of female college presidents. Madsen examined their lives, experiences, and perceptions, moving beyond what they accomplished in order to gain an understanding of how the lived experiences influenced their ascension (p. 7). Madsen concluded the contrast of gender equity in professional development still continues, suggesting gender stereotyping and discrimination influence a women's lack of representation in leadership positions. Madsen highlighted the importance of a woman's mentoring for professional development. Though the central problems were identified suggestions have gone unanswered. The present researcher is interested in learning what lived experiences contributed to female presidents' leadership development.

### **Summary of the Literature**

Throughout this chapter the roles of women in higher education have been addressed. Women participating in all levels of higher education have faced obstacles that have prevented them from being on a level playing field with their male counterparts. Women in leadership in higher education and the leadership gap that exists between male and female college presidents were addressed in this review of the literature. The barriers to leadership advancement were also discussed. In addition, this chapter presented information about the role of career pathways, mentoring, and professional development as well as the current demographics of women in leadership roles in higher education. As a result of this literature review, a clearer understanding of the roles of, mentoring, and professional development of women in higher education preparing to fill the gender leadership gap in colleges is possible.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

This chapter will provide a detailed description of the method used to conduct this research study. The chapter will include a restatement of the purpose of the study and research questions, along with the research design, sampling procedures, data collection methods, and analysis procedures. Explored in this study were the experiences of women who have served as presidents of community colleges within the State of Texas to gain an understanding of the challenges they have faced while trying to obtain the role of president

Women are underrepresented in leadership positions at institutions of higher education in the United States (Cook, 2014). For many women, the pathway to community college presidency, in particular, has been challenging and in some cases unattainable. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to investigate what current community college women presidents experienced along their career paths leading to their current positions. Specifically, knowing the barriers and supports these women faced in their journey to the presidency may assist other women who aspire to these positions.

#### **Research Questions**

One central question and three sub-questions were used to guide this study. The central question is “How do community college women presidents describe their experiences leading to the presidency?”

The following sub-questions further define the direction of this study:

1. What barriers do women encounter as they pursue their goal of becoming a community college president?
2. What supports do women describe as assisting them in obtaining their positions as community college presidents?
3. What are the characteristics of career paths that women presidents followed in their journey to becoming president at a community college?

### **Research Design**

I used a phenomenological research design for this study. A phenomenological design is used to detail a phenomenon that relates directly to human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is considered a philosophic perspective and seeks to find the meaning of an event, a role, a process, a policy, a social status, or a specific viewpoint from an individual or group of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, & McSpadden, 2011). When using the phenomenological approach to research the common lived experiences is the focus, not the individuals themselves (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative method of analysis was used to analyze the data collected around the experiences of the presidents as described to the researcher by the participants.

The basic premise of any phenomenological study is that reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1967) as when individuals reflect on their own experiences and beliefs. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge and a better understanding of the lived experiences of a specific population, that of women who obtained positions as community college presidents. According to Creswell (2003), a study that intends to understand a phenomenon about a topic should use the qualitative

approach. Qualitative research relies on non-statistical methods for inquiry and analysis (Giorgi, 1989). Further, qualitative research uses detailed descriptions from the research participants themselves to examine specific issues and problems that are uncovered during the research process. For this study, a qualitative design was chosen because the research questions required me to delve into the real-life experiences of the participants related to the phenomenon of interest, their pathways to the presidency.

### **Epoche**

Epoche requires the researcher to set aside any biases that may arise related to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Any preconceived notions or ideas should be removed to allow for new ideas and thoughts of the experiences of the participants. Prior to collecting and analyzing any data, I had to take a look at my own experiences and beliefs. While completing the study, it was important that I separate myself from any presumptions, prejudices, or biases that may have influenced my view of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). For example, as an African-American woman currently in a leadership position, I have experienced obstacles to earning promotions and receiving equal pay to males in the same position within current and prior organizations. To that end, I have also been looked at as an inferior individual and not considered qualified for positions when they became available because it was thought that others would not respect me because I am a woman.

While completing this study, I also continued to work at a full-time job while raising a school-aged child. My own experiences with working and trying to climb the professional ladder in my own career are what made me similar to some of the women who participated in this study and yet different from others. However, I made every

effort to hold my personal views in check and not allow my own experiences and opinions to affect the outcome of the study.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge and comprehend the cultural paradigm that guides our belief system and ways of thinking (Merriam, 1998). Allowing my personal opinions to become part of the research may compromise the validity of the study. Therefore, the findings presented in this study came from the data and all interpretations of the findings came from the data collected.

In summary, as a woman who plans to pursue a career that will one day lead to the position of college or university president, it was important that I objectively listened and heard what was being said by the participants of this study so as not to influence or restrict the interpretation and analysis of their statements (Moustakas, 1994). I made every effort to accurately collect and record all information shared by the participants, including what I observed in their work setting. In addition, it was my intent to set aside my prejudgments as much as possible by using a systematic procedure to analyze the data.

### **Population**

A group of individuals that share the same characteristics are a population (Creswell, 2017). The population for this study included current female community college presidents in Texas. A president is defined as the chief executive officer of the institution or the person responsible for all operations of the institution. Based on the composition of the institution, the president reports to a board of regents or board of directors.

The target population for this study included women who have obtained the positions of the president at community colleges in the state of Texas. To determine whom this population was, I obtained a list of all community colleges in the State of Texas from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2016) lists 86 community colleges in the state of Texas.

Because the focus of my research was on women, I used two methods to determine which presidents of the 86 community colleges in Texas were female. Of these institutions, I was able to identify 28 presidents by what are considered traditional female first names. There were 2 names which were not traditionally gender specific, (for example, Kelly), and for these, I visited the institutions' websites to verify gender by photos. Of the 2 websites visited, one president was female. Therefore, my final population for this study included 29 female presidents currently at community colleges within the state of Texas. Recognizing that I may have by chance over-identified based on names or picture (for example, there may be presidents who identify themselves as male), questions on initial communications are aimed to catch these errors.

From the female presidents identified, a purposeful sample was selected using the following criteria: (a) female, (b) a community college president in Texas, (c) have been president for at least one year, and (d) located within a 200-mile radius of my home. The 200-mile radius was an estimate of what would be a reasonable driving distance for a single-day visit. In selecting this sample, I identified 14 female presidents who were located within a 200-mile radius of my home. All initial contact information was sent to those presidents to determine further whether they had (a) been president for at least one

year and (b) felt they meet the other qualifications for the study, and (c) were willing to participate in my study. From this purposeful sample, seven participants consented to participate in the study. In the end, six interviews were conducted.

### **Sample Size**

Patton (2002) asserted that “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 244). Sample size is determined by what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be implemented with available time and resources. Patton (2002) elucidated: “In-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information rich” (p. 244).

The final tally of participants meeting the criteria of the study and who were willing to participate was narrowed down to six participants. The initial participant pool began with 86 purposively selected community college presidents from the state of Texas. The purposive sample was selected using the following criteria: (a) female, (b) a community college president in Texas, (c) president for at least one year, and (d) located within a 200-mile radius of my home. The 200-mile radius was an estimate of what would be a reasonable driving distance for a single-day visit. From this possible pool of 86 subjects, 34% (29) met the criterion of gender and 34%, or 29, met the criteria of being a community college president. Participants were required to meet all the criteria to participate in the study. The 29 women who met the criteria for participation in the study were initially contacted for an interview. Of the 29 women, seven of the women responded and agreed to participate in the study. Six of the women scheduled an



interview in person or via telephone. The seventh participant was unable to complete an interview due to scheduling conflicts.

Four participants completed the semi-structured interviews face-to-face and two interviews were conducted by phone due to the participant's time constraints. Both Rogers (1976) and de Leeuw (2005) determined neither face-to-face nor in-person interviews were superior over the other and a combination of the two in one study served to be an acceptable and reliable data collection method. From each participant's interview, transcripts were immediately transcribed; codes were developed, and common themes were identified. All the information, with added memos, served as a guide in the development of responses to each research question. This process provided myself with insight into the degree to which these presidents communicated their beliefs about the culture of the office of the president.

I conducted this study with the knowledge that the down-side to purposive sampling is that no way exists of knowing the extent to which the sample chosen is truly representative of the whole (Davis, 2007). Patton (2002) asserted that "the purpose of a small random sample is credibility, not representativeness" (p. 241) and does not permit statistical generalizations. Hence the findings from this study cannot necessarily be applicable to all woman presidents, and the conclusions drawn will need to be interpreted with caution when it comes to the experiences of other women presidents.

### **Context of the Study**

There are 86 community colleges in the state of Texas. Of this total number, only 34% or 29 of the institutions have female presidents. The research was based on the need to investigate the lack of women obtaining the position of community college president in

Texas. I was concerned with what the reasons were for this low number when compared to males in these same positions. The women who are presidents are mostly at 2-year institutions (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2016). Compounding this inequity is the fact that more women earn doctoral degrees than men (American Council on Education, 2012), indicating it is not that they do not have the credentials in many cases to become a president, but rather some other factors may be in play. This study was intended to determine the barriers women encounter, the supports that are in place, and the career paths that lead them to obtain their current positions as presidents of community colleges.

### **Data Collection**

In phenomenological research, interviews are used as the primary mode for collecting data (Moustakas, 1994). The interview was the main source of data for this study; however, because documents, audiovisual materials, and field notes are also considered part of the data collections process in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007), I also included other data sources. Prior to each interview, I conducted a thorough research of the background of the participants to familiarize myself with the individuals. To schedule the interviews, each individual from the sample was sent a letter via email soliciting their participation and explaining the purpose of the study. Written consent was obtained prior to conducting the interviews. Interviews were scheduled via email or telephone and were setup via the most convenient medium for the participant (i.e., telephone, in person, email, and Skype or some other video medium).

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study in the initial communication to them. Any questions or concerns were addressed via email or a

follow-up phone call. All participants were assured that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the study and subsequent publications. Ethical considerations of confidentiality were followed through the interview protocol described by Creswell (2005).

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. Two separate digital devices were used to record the interviews to anticipate equipment failure. A digital copy of the transcriptions was sent to each of the interviewees so they were able to perform member checking. Member checking involves the participants reading over the transcription to check the authenticity of the information provided (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997). Transcriptions of the interviews were stored on a password-protected computer that only the researcher had access to. Names of the participants and their institutions were removed from the responses. Approvals to conduct the interviews and collect data were obtained from the Sam Houston State University Institutional Review Board in October 2016.

Once the participants agreed to participate in the study, written consent was obtained and the interviews were scheduled. The interviews allowed for the researcher to obtain real life experiences and be able to probe deeper. To establish a comfortable atmosphere for the participant, each participating president was allowed to choose where they wished to have the interview take place. The preferred method of the interviews was face-to-face, however, when not possible the interviews were conducted via telephone.

### **Interview Protocol**

In qualitative research, interviews are conducted to elicit that which cannot be observed and to gain the participants' perspectives (Patton, 2002). The purpose of an

interview protocol is to familiarize the participant with the details of the interview and guide the interview to collect data. The interviews were conducted using interview questions that were directly related to the research questions and based on information learned through the review of the literature. Open-ended interview questions are used to gain meaning behind the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994); they tend to elicit conversation that are informal and create a meaningful interaction between both the researcher and the participant.

For this study, the interview questions were semi-structured to allow each individual's own personal experiences to emerge. Each interview lasted at least 45 minutes, but some lasted longer depending on the participant. The interviews allowed me to explore how the participants made sense of their experiences. In addition, I hoped the participants would share additional information and insights they felt were important to the research, which may not have been addressed in the initial interview questions.

Each of the individuals signed and informed consent prior to the beginning of the interviews. The written consent described the study in detail including their rights as human research participants. In addition, the consent reminded the participants all responses and information shared would remain confidential, including the participants right to break off their participation at any time during the study. Because the study was limited to female community college presidents from the state of Texas, I assigned a pseudonym to each woman to aid in storytelling and referred to the participants only as *administrator* or *president* in the results to maintain confidentiality of the participants. The size of the population could make identifying the community college presidents possible in some cases; therefore, referring to the participants as community college

*president or participant* also created a global reference and preserved their anonymity.

### Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview was conducted utilizing the interview guide, which consisted of open-ended questions to minimize one-word answers. The interview guide presumed that common information would be obtained for each participant in the study (Patton, 1990). Although initial exchanges were the focus in the interview guide, recognized was that additional questions and responses may arise as the interview progressed.

### Researcher as an Instrument

As the researcher, I am the primary data collection instrument in this phenomenological study. Therefore, it was important to acknowledge all possible biases when conducting this study. The findings from the data as well as the interpretations must be conveyed without bias. Merriam (1998) discussed the importance of the researcher recognizing their personal biases when collecting data. Qualitative researchers must understand their roles and how they can influence the findings of a study. Therefore, reflexivity is a tool that I used to guard against this type of bias in my study. Creswell (2007) described reflexivity as the awareness of personal biases, values, and experiences that may affect the study. By being aware of personal biases, experiences and any other reflections that may be present as the researcher, I am engaged in reflexivity.

As such, I recognized that I am female and aspire to attain the position of the president at either a college or university. In addition, I earned my bachelor's degree (Texas Southern University) and my master's degree (Texas Women's University) from

institutions that had female presidents. I am currently seeking my doctoral degree from an institution (Sam Houston State University) with a female president. To that end, I may have a bias that I constantly had to check when analyzing the data. I did acknowledge that my professional experience was limited to corporate America and the non-profit sector where I have worked for the past 15 years as an accountant.

This study is important to me, personally, in that I plan to pursue a path to obtaining a presidency position at a college or university. Therefore, I wanted to understand the issues that these women have experienced in their career paths. The interviews and the information gathered are of particular help to my clarifying and obtaining my future career goals. However, as a leader, I also want to see these opportunities spread to all women, especially those future women leaders who come after and alongside me.

While trying to advance my career, I have encountered challenges such as sexism and racism. My experience with these issues is what inspired this particular study. My curiosity was only heightened as I began to read the literature and realized that I would probably encounter some of the same issues when I pursue a career path in higher education administration. With this in mind, I have made a conscious decision to make every effort to ensure that my own experiences, opinions, and observations did not interfere or influence the data that were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, as well as reported in this study. Further, I noted that I would be reporting only on the specific experiences of the participants, because the study was about their career journeys.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a component of qualitative research; it is used to validate the authenticity of the study. A study that can be defended requires credibility, trustworthiness, and plausibility (Johnson, 2002). In this study, steps used to address and describe trustworthiness were triangulation and member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that validity and trustworthiness must be established in any research study to determine the integrity of the research findings.

**Ethical Considerations**

To ensure that all ethical standards are followed, I explained in the initial contact with the participants: (a) the purpose of the study, (b) how participation is voluntary, (c) the minimal risks involved, (d) how each participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and (e) that questions are allowed at any time during the study. Due to the small sample size, confidentiality was essential to the study, therefore the data were not reported individually with real names but rather included the use of pseudonyms. Each participant was given a unique pseudonym to protect her identity while collecting data. In addition, after the data were reviewed and analyzed it was reported based on the common themes that emerged from all the interviews using pseudonyms or archetypes.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the method of searching and organizing interview transcripts, filed notes, documents and other data collected to produce findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Merriam (2002) stated that data analysis is the process of reviewing the data and assigning meaning to the information I collected from the participants.

Once the interviews were completed, the data were organized and prepared for analysis. According to Creswell (2007), data analysis has three components: (a) description and classification of the data; (b) arrangement and abbreviation of the data, by organizing it into themes and coding it; and (c) presentation of the data. Analysis of the data involved finding meaning to the information that is collected from the participants. The interviews were transcribed, the documents were electronically scanned, and all of the other data that had been collected, such as biographies, resumes, press releases or announcements, and speeches was reviewed.

Upon completion of the transcribing of the data and the review of all the other data collected, the interviews were coded. Creswell (2009) described coding as “the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information.” I was able to generate similar themes in the interviews through this process. During the coding process, I assigned tags to words or phrases. The codes were then entered into an Excel spreadsheet along with brief descriptions of the codes for future reference. This process allowed me to identify similarities and differences across each of the interviews. This step is where common themes were identifiable from the data.

I followed Creswell’s (2009) suggested steps in the coding process that engage a researcher in a systematic process of analyzing textual data:

1. I got a sense of the whole by reading all the transcripts carefully and jotting down ideas that came to mind.
2. I examined one interview at a time with the goal of discovering what it was all about and then writing down my thoughts about it.



3. I made a list of all the topics that came up, clustered similar topics together and then decided which were the major topics and the unique topics.
4. I then went back over my data to see if I could observe new categories and codes emerging.
5. I found the most descriptive wording for the broad topics that emerged and then turned them into categories. By grouping topics that related to each other, I was able to come up with themes and look for interrelationships between and among the different categories.
6. I assembled the data material belonging to each category in one place and performed a preliminary analysis.

Creswell further suggested that codes could be based on past literature, common sense, data that are surprising, data that are not anticipated, data that are unusual, and data that addresses a larger theoretical perspective.

### **Triangulation**

I also employed triangulation to ensure the trustworthiness and ethics of the data collected. Triangulation included collecting information from individuals by using a variety of methods. The primary data source for this study was the participants' interviews. However, I did also utilize data from a combination of data sources including published articles, university websites, background information and vitas of the participants as I analyzed the data for themes and supporting examples.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is an internal validity tool used to enhance the credibility of the research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is a crucial

technique used to establish credibility in qualitative research. Member checking is a process that involves and checks and balance system of the information (Merriam, 1998). This process allowed for the participants to verify the data and its interpretation of it. Allowing for member checking provided the participants the opportunity to make corrections to the data and/or the interpretations and it assisted in establishing an accurate representation of the participant's experience.

### **Reporting Results**

According to Creswell (2002), at the time of reporting the results of a qualitative study, the researcher should develop and report descriptions and themes from the data. The following writing strategies helped make this possible for me:

1. I used quotes, varying their length from short to long embedded passages.
2. In some instances, I used the wording from participants to form codes and theme labels.
3. I intertwined quotations with my own interpretations.
4. I used indents or other special formatting of the manuscript to call attention to quotations from participants.
5. I used the first person "I" or collective "we" in the narrative form.
6. I used metaphors and analogies.

I used the narrative approach typically used within a qualitative strategy of inquiry (e.g. description in case studies and ethnographies, a detailed story in narrative research).

**Summary**

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate how college/university women presidents experienced the career path leading to their current position.

Qualitative methods were used in this phenomenological study to analyze and interpret the data from the experiences of female college presidents. The steps that were employed were meant to explore the phenomenon related to the experiences of the female presidents. The ultimate goal of this research was to give future women leaders the necessary tools to seek out these positions.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) was to examine the lived experiences motivating select women who aspired to the presidency of a community college. Due to the underrepresentation of women as community college presidents, research regarding the success factors of these women who do obtain these positions remains largely unanswered and unclear (Valian, 1998). By better understanding these women's experiences, the researcher hoped to learn about the challenges and barriers, supports, and career pathways these women encountered along the way to obtaining the position of community college president.

Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2000) added the benefit from this type of qualitative research would not only assist in understanding social situations and certain roles, but events, groups and interactions. Miles and Huberman (1994) additionally, stated qualitative research was an investigative process allowing researchers to gain a better understanding of social situations by making comparisons of the information, by replicating, cataloguing, and classifying the object of the study. Thus, this type of research was determined to be the most applicable in answering the research questions for this study.

Interviews as well as a document analysis review were used to gather data for this study. Of the six interviews conducted, four were face to face and two occurred via conference call. Using the questions from an interview guide (See Appendix A) as a launching point, the researcher asked and delved to glean each participant's experiences while pursuing the role of community college president. Each of the participants was

given the interview questions ahead of time by request. The questions themselves were brief and to the point. Some of the answers provided by the participants were planned ahead of time and some were spontaneous. I was intentional about allowing the presidents to do most of the talking. In keeping the role of an active listener, I used probes when appropriate to get the participants to elaborate on their responses.

Each administrator spoke freely as they shared their stories. All the participants spoke in great detail about their life experiences and backgrounds. The women exhibited a level of comfort, which gave way to the fact that they believed that the stories they shared needed to be told. Each participant approached the interview and follow-up questions in different ways, based on their different backgrounds and experiences. Many of the women shared intimate details of their life, whereas some kept their responses limited to their professional life. The information presented in this chapter is an analysis of the data gleaned from each individual interview as well as the systematic review of data of each of the presidents as posted on the website and links of their respective institutions and other professional websites.

### **Interview Environment**

Each woman I interviewed had an executive assistant and support staff whom were very helpful in securing the interviews and making the visits comfortable. For instance, assistants made sure I had adequate directions to the college and made sure they provided appropriate parking instructions. They also provided refreshments and various pieces of literature for each of their presidents and campuses. Each office I visited was well organized with a professional atmosphere and a strong executive presence.

During the interviews, the presidents were warm, helpful, confident and respectful

to me as a doctoral student researcher. While each participant in this study is highly accomplished and clearly has a strong sense of self, each woman was supportive of the research topic and most expressed an interest in the results. Based on the information collected during the interview, it was clear that each of the administrator's commitment to her institution often took precedence over her own personal agenda. These women were very busy with relatively full calendars, yet they each made time to meet because they valued the topic of research and thought the findings from this study would help many other women advance to and succeed in the presidency. The presidents appeared to enjoy describing their experiences in the presidency and reminiscing about their unique individual journeys. At the conclusion of the interviews, several of them expressed to me what a pleasure it had been for them to participate in this study and expressed their willingness to be of further help in the future as needed.

Analysis of the data from this study resulted in answers to one grand research question and three sub-questions as well as the emergence of themes regarding the personal and professional factors current community college presidents considered important to succeed. The grand question was "How do community college women presidents describe their experiences leading to the presidency?"

The following sub-questions further define the direction of this study:

1. What barriers do women encounter as they pursue their goal of becoming a community college president?
2. What supports do women describe as assisting them in obtaining their positions as community college presidents?

3. How do women presidents describe their journey or career paths to becoming president at a community college?

Each of the women also had varying degrees of experience in the presidency role. Four of the women presidents were in their first presidency, one of the women presidents was in her second presidency, and one of the women was in her third presidency. Just prior to becoming president at their current institution, two of the women presidents held the position of college president elsewhere, and four of them were senior executives in academics. Four of the women moved through the ranks to president by changing institutions. Two of the women moved through the ranks to president while staying at one institution. In summary, the participants' past work history showed an array of career pathways and rich employment experiences. Represented were a variety of positions within higher education. Each participant had worked in administrative positions, and more than half had work experience in academic administrative positions (such as dean or provost). All six participants interviewed were current presidents of their respective community college. These positions specifically dealt with the management of staff, budget, and strategic planning for their units. The dialogue between the researcher and each participant revealed the different experiences and interests of the women who all obtained the position of community college president through different career paths. Table 1 reflects a summary of some of the characteristics of the participants in this study as revealed by the participants regarding their career paths.

Table 1

## Summary of Participant Demographics

Participant	# of Years President	Institution Size	Degree Type	Marital Status	Number of Children	Birth Order in Family
Jennifer	9	12,000+	Ph.D	Married	3	2 <sup>nd</sup> of 5
Carolyn	10	18,000+	Ph.D	Divorced	1	2 <sup>nd</sup> of 5
Elise	2	14,000+	Ed.D	Married	2	Oldest of 3
Julie	2 1/2	9,000+	Ed.D	Married	2	Oldest of 2
Michelle	2	20,000+	Ed.D	Married	3	2 <sup>nd</sup> of 3
Helen	2	20,000+	Ed.D	Single	2	Oldest of 2

**Participants' Individual Journeys**

**Jennifer.** Jennifer has been in her current role for nine years. Her educational background includes both a Bachelor of Science degree and a Master of Science degree in Biology, and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration. She is married with three grown children. Her current position is her second presidency position. Jennifer is the second oldest of five children. Her father was an immigrant from Hungary and did not speak English when he first came to the United States. He did however earn his doctorate the year after she was born. Her mother was the first woman to earn her Master's degree in Geology at Indiana University in the early 1940's. She says that from an early age her siblings said that she was a take-charge person, always trying to direct things in each of their lives.

Jennifer's journey to administrator of a higher education institution did not begin with her wanting to be an administrator in education. In fact, it was the last thing she



thought she would do, mostly because both her parents were educators and she had no desire to pursue that career field. Jennifer wanted to be an innovator in cancer research. Her first job was as a medical research assistant after earning a degree in biology. However, she soon determined that she did not want to do that either. From there she went into teaching part-time at a local community college. The position eventually became a full-time position and she climbed the ranks as faculty, dean, academic vice president, and then headed student services. She secured her first presidency in another state and moved away from Texas for 2 ½ years, before coming back to Texas to work at her current institution as president. Jennifer did not have a desire to become president, but had a mentor that encouraged her.

According to Jennifer, she credits hiring good people and always supporting them as being why she is so successful in her current role. Part of her pathway to the presidency, included enrolling in a Community College Leadership Program. The head professor happened to be her mentor and he encouraged all of the students in the program to aim to become presidents. She also made note that her journey would not have been possible without the support of her family members. Jennifer went from being an elected school board trustee to moving away to take her first presidency position.

Jennifer gives credit to serving on numerous committees and boards in her area and gaining the respect of the others that she served with as a basis for her continued success as president. She meets with some of the major decision makers of some of the biggest businesses and has working relationships with many of the elected officials, who keep her updated on major developments in her service area. Personal and professional networks have also played an important role in her career. As far as support goes from

her family, they support her completely. She stressed that the job is definitely not an 8-5 job. Her husband realizes that she is going to get dressed up even if she is only going to the hardware store, because undoubtedly, she is going to see someone that she knows or someone will recognize her because of her position.

As far as campus life goes, Jennifer was personally involved in at least 100 of the 140 hires at her campus. She does not tolerate unprofessionalism and expects everyone to be respectful to each other including students. That is a huge part of the culture at the institution. To anyone even considering becoming president, she suggested that one be a good conflict resolution person, and finally she is a firm believer in good leaders are made along the way, not born that way.

**Carolyn.** Carolyn has been in her current role for 10 years. Her current position is her third community college presidency. Her educational background includes a Bachelors' degree in Science and both a Master's degree and Doctor of Philosophy degree. She has an adult son and is the second of five children. Her father was a master plumber and her mother was a registered nurse. Carolyn grew up in the segregated South. She was not involved in an integrated academic setting until she started working on her master's degree in 1973. She grew up in a household where her parents instilled in her that each of them had to go to college and have a trade. She became a seamstress at a young age. She started sewing for other people, and this was how she earned money. Her parents said that no one could ever take away her education or her trade.

Carolyn is unique in that every job she ever held until the current position, she was the first Black in that position. Her first job was as an instructor, however, from that position she went into an accountant position. From there she went back to school to

work on her Ph.D. After completing her degree, she returned to her hometown where she taught at the community college, eventually being promoted to supervisor. The path that followed took her to several different states. She continued to teach, however, she eventually got the role of dean of professional programs, college executive dean, and then provost. Her path again brought her back to her hometown where she took her first presidency position. Soon after becoming president she was appointed to a job at a government agency as their chief education officer. During her tenure with the organization, she was the highest-ranking African American Female in the agency.

Carolyn did not always know that she wanted to be a college president. In fact, she remembers being in a seminar class, and the professor saying that he had once been a college president. She says that all at once a light bulb went off and she said, “Oh my god, if he was a college president, I know I can be a college president.” That is when she started working on her PhD. “That’s how it started, even just the possibilities of thinking about it.”

Carolyn stated that being the first or only in positions were important highlights in her career. However, she always felt like she was in a fishbowl. Every job has presented its own unique challenge and therefore has given her the chance to demonstrate her leadership skills. She said that “I have always had to be twice as smart, work twice as hard, to get where I needed to.” She remembers being the first Black female instructor at an institution and walking into an auditorium full of people. There was a hush across the room. There was absolute silence when she walked in.

In one of her roles as president, she described being given the largest of three campuses in her district, but yet having to fight for funding that was being given to the

smaller campuses that were being headed by male presidents. She described that as more of a cultural battle. She also describes being invited to meetings and people immediately thinking that they would be meeting with a man. Carolyn is the only one of the participants to have had experience with the good old' boy network. She said that when she encounters it "I deal with it openly, honestly, and I call people out about it." Her experience makes people very uncomfortable and uncomfortable with her, but she speaks boldly about it even sometimes saying, "If you're going to make me feel uncomfortable, I'm going to do the same." Family is a huge influence in her life. Her older sister has been inspiring her all of her life. She did not have a tough decision when it came to choosing where to go to college, because she always knew she would go where her older sister went. She even decided on the same major. A turning point in her following in her older sister's footsteps was when she was allowed to sit in on her sister's middle school classroom. She stated that was there point of departure. She knew that after sitting in on the class all day that she was not going to teach middle school kids. She thought "No way." She said, "I'm not doing it. I can't do it, will not do it. "That was the end of following in her sister's footsteps.

**Elise.** Elise has been in her current role for two years. This is her first presidency after having been the finalist in four community college searches. Her educational background includes a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Fine Arts and a doctoral degree in higher education leadership. She is married with adult children. Elise is the oldest of three girls. Both of her parents have bachelor degrees. Her mother was a teacher and her father was in agriculture. Her first choice in life was to be an artist.

She stated her path to community college president was via “the academic side of the house.” She has been an instructor, a program coordinator, dean, and vice president prior to becoming president. By her sister’s account of their childhoods the kids in the neighborhood considered her to be the “organizer” or as they playfully called it “bossy.” Elise began her teaching career as a kindergarten teacher. It wasn’t until her kids were older that she started teaching at the community colleges. She was candid in her response “I loved teaching, I still love teaching.”

She gives credit to her parents in that they lived in a college town, so everyone was expected to go to college. It was expected that you will graduate; you will get your teaching certificate, because if you are ever single you need to be able to make a living. They instilled that if she worked hard that she could do whatever she wanted to do. Elise credits her successes in her career, to having really good work karma. She believes that she imposes most challenges on herself, often second-guessing herself and making comments like “Do I really have any business doing this job?” Some of her biggest challenges as both a college professor and then administrator has been difficult personnel issues. The workplace that Elise is a part of is free from all kinds of prejudices in her opinion. She credits her success to her network of friends and colleagues.

Elise says that one of her mentors always told her not to sweat the small stuff. Her professional network consists of other community college presidents, who often share information. As far as her personal network is concerned, it is limited in that she does not have much time outside of work to do things. However, she does have support from both of her parents and her sisters.

**Julie.** Julie has been in her current role for two years. This is her first presidency. Her educational background includes a Bachelor's degree in business administration, and both a Master's degree and a doctorate degree in higher education administration. Julie is unique in that she earned her bachelors, masters and doctorate degrees all from the same university. Julie is the older of two girls and she is married with two children. She was raised by her grandparents in a small industrial town. Her grandfather was a pharmacist.

The interview with Julie began completely different from the first three interviews. Interestingly, Julie took control of the interview from the start. By me asking "tell me a little bit about yourself", Julie went all the way back to when she was 12 years old. She was so excited to tell the story of how she arrived at her current position. Her reasoning for this is because she said that she believed it was fundamental to whom she is today.

Initially when she enrolled in college, she enrolled in business management courses because they were general and could be applied to anything. She liked management and leadership stuff, but hated the accounting and finance stuff. She never even imagined she would go to graduate school. She set a goal for herself, of not getting married until she had received her bachelor's degree. She got married exactly one week after graduating with her bachelor's degree. At this point her husband returned to school to work on his doctorate and she got a job that involved her hiring adjunct faculty. She was exposed to many different aspects of college business, such as strategic planning and room scheduling and she absolutely loved it. She said to herself " Maybe I've found a niche. This is really...there's just something here." She then started working on her master's degree.

While working on her doctorate, she taught part-time at a university in her area. She taught statistics and research of all things. Currently as president, she still teaches statistics as needed. Later in her career she taught a leadership class in order to stay connected to the classroom. She had not had any other experience teaching and assumed that not having taught full-time would be a weak link in her resume. Her career path was what she considered non-traditional. Julie purposely waited to have kids. She and her husband did not have their first child until she was 37 and their second when she was 39.

While considering becoming president after completing her doctorate and then working as vice president of instruction, Julie had made a rule for herself. Her rule was “I will not chase it. It has to be the right place. I am not moving us all over the country just to chase a presidency, and if it never happens, it never happens, and I am okay with that, but if the right opportunity comes, that would be fantastic.” During a trip to the SACS conference, she met a president of a community college in Texas. They talked and before their conversation was over he was trying to sell her on coming to his institution as the vice president of instruction. She talked to her husband and decided to contact the recruiter that had already reached out to her. She was later offered the job. Even though it was a lateral move it opened up other doors. She served in that position for a couple of years and was then appointed as acting president and later became the permanent president of her campus now. Julie attributes her success in the presidency more to her work experiences, than to her education experiences. She elaborates: “I think my education, sort of prepared me by helping me develop the undergraduate skills that you need to be successful in any kind of leadership position.”

Julie credits her family for being her support along the way to obtaining the presidency. Her husband encouraged her along the way and made it possible for her to pursue her career even when he was trying to pursue his own. Her extended family were helpful as well. She also credits some of her past supervisors in the role they played in encouraging her to continue her education and to possibly look at positions in leadership.

**Michelle.** Michelle's was interviewed by telephone due to time constraints. Michelle has been in her current role for two years. This is her first presidency. Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Science degree, a Master of Arts degree and a doctor of education degree. She is the middle child of three children. To that end, she is the oldest of twins. She is married with three children. Her mother has a high school diploma and her father has a bachelor's degree.

Michelle began her career as an elementary school teacher, then counselor, assistant principal at a middle school, high school principal, and director of secondary education, assistant superintendent, and deputy superintendent in three different school districts before moving into higher education. She then moved up through the ranks in higher education while serving at two different institutions.

Michelle did not have any teaching experience in higher education. All of her experience in higher education was via administration. She did not expect to become a community college president, but achieved the position as a natural progression of her moving up in her career. Each supervisor along the way encouraged her and was very supportive of her as she moved to the next positions. She does not credit one individual with mentoring her, yet everyone she has ever come in contact with was instrumental in



her success. She also said that she enjoyed working for every president she ever worked for.

As she has prepared for positions in the past she likes to think that she was well prepared for each of the positions. She said that she “she walked the walk” and that she understood numerous areas of higher education, because she either worked for them or supervised them herself. She also credits her success to having had the opportunity to work with the communities that are served by her college. “When you are a president, I think part of your role is to lead the college, but you are also the face of the college.”

Michelle spoke about her experience with the ‘good old’ boy’ network. She has no doubt that it exist, but said that she has not experienced any issues. She said that she was a product of the sixties, and when she came through she was probably the only woman at the time in her position. There were times when she was the only woman working with all men. They were her colleagues, and “I found them to be wonderful.” They were great supporters. “I was never ostracized or left out of the group.” Michelle said that she has been building networks since the late sixties. She relies on other women in similar positions as her own. She also has a network of individuals in the community from the various boards that she sits on. She credits having a close-knit family as being a blessing. They are very supportive. Michelle noted that although her education helped provide a great foundation, it was work experience that helped prepare her more.

**Helen.** Helen’s interview was also conducted via telephone due to time constraints. Helen has been in her current role for 18 months. This is her first presidency. She is the youngest of two children and the first in her family to attend college. She has two adult children. Her educational background includes a Bachelor’s

degree in economics, a Master's degree in organizational management, and a Doctorate in educational leadership. Her father was an immigrant from Spain and made their home in Puerto Rico. English is her second language. After obtaining her bachelor's degree she moved to the United States. She was unable to enroll in graduate school because she discovered just how poor her English was and had to enroll in ESL (English as a second language) classes. She did not have a job and needed to make a living, so she swallowed her pride and cleaned houses.

She was able to secure a job after eight months at a local university as the receptionist in the financial aid office, eventually becoming a financial aid counselor. From there she went to work for a proprietary school (for-profit school) for some years. She left the proprietary school and went to work for a bank. She said it made sense because she had a bachelor's degree in economics. She worked at the bank for 9-½ years but was miserable. She went back to work at the proprietary school.

She eventually obtained a job at a community college, heading up the corporate training division. From there she went on to obtain a job at a different college in the area heading the corporate training and continuing education division in 1999. She remained at that campus until she was appointed interim college president at a sister campus in her district and the appointed permanent president.

She credits having several different mentors along the way for her success. When she earned her master's degree, she said "it was a huge accomplishment for me, because I never felt that I was going to finish that master's degree." Her mentor at the time told her that in order to become a dean she would still need to earn her doctorate degree. From there she enrolled in her doctoral program. Along the way, she has learned that it is

okay not to have the answers, you can either find someone that can help you or research the information and find out for yourself.

All of the presidents were very busy and were gracious with scheduling their time. Due to scheduling conflicts Michelle and Helen both opted for telephone interviews. Although the interactive telephone interview allowed both involved to speak freely to one another, there were still certain aspects (i.e. environmental observations) of the interview that could not be captured because the meeting was being held via telephone instead of in person.

Each research question was answered based on the responses from each of the participants. At least two themes emerged for each question. Table 2 displays a summary of the research questions and each related theme.

Table 2

Themes Associated with Relevant Research Questions

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Themes</b>
What barriers do women encounter as they pursue their goal of becoming a community college president?	Time Commitments Privacy Role of Spouses Family and Friends
What supports do women describe as assisting them in obtaining their positions as community college presidents?	Mentoring Family Informal Support Networks Formal Networks

(continued)

Research Questions	Themes
What are the characteristics of career paths that women presidents followed in their journey to becoming a president at a community college?	Employment Pathways Educational Pathways

### Research Sub-Question 1: Barriers to the presidency

The researcher identified some barriers or challenges that these women had to continually work with while attaining a measure of balance between work and their personal lives. These women described some of the factors that influence their ability to attain balance, such as: time commitments at work, privacy issues, role of spouses, and the importance of family and friends. The researcher described each of these four issues in this chapter.

**Time Commitments.** Results from this study reflected that the college presidency requires serious time commitment if one is to do a good job. The women in my study said they averaged about 60 hours per week performing duties related to their work. Of course, this varies depending on the time of year. The office of the president comes with so many responsibilities and demands, such as attending evening and weekend events as well as frequent travel in addition to the regular work hours. Many of these presidents said their typical work day starts as early as 6.30 in the morning prior to their leaving for work, with them checking and responding to emails, for example, and ends late in the evening with a social event or a work-related dinner they need to attend to represent the college. For many of these women, this has resulted in challenges related to work/life balance.

Many of the women in this study described how difficult it is to maintain a consistent work/life balance and how they continually have to take measures to recalibrate so as to regain a measure of balance in their lives. This was observed when Elise shared this information: “My social life is somewhat limited. It’s more work related than anything else.” Developing strategies to cope with this “imbalance” was something that many of the women learned to do.

The women in this study shared strategies that have worked for them in helping them regularly recalibrate and build reasonable balance into their lives. Some presidents talked about prioritizing their activities and determining ahead of time which kind of events they should get involved in. They recognized they could not be at everything that takes place in connection to their colleges. Jennifer said, “The president’s job is not an 8-5 job. I am going to dress up even though I just have to go to the hardware store, because undoubtedly I will see someone.” Other women presidents mentioned realizing they could not please all their college constituents all of the time and meet all the demands of their families at the same time. Helen talked about the importance of knowing what is important to you, not only as president but also as an individual, prioritizing and then following through with your priorities, fully expecting that no one else would understand all your choices. She explains: “If you are away with your family, someone will always criticize that you are not at an event that took place.”

**Privacy.** Another challenge that affects women’s ability to attain a reasonable balance between their personal lives and their professional lives is the absence of adequate privacy while in the presidency. Inadequate privacy forces many women to take aspects of their professional life into their private life. For instance, they will be out

in public places with their families and meet people who want to discuss work-related matters, thus interrupting family time, and frustrating their attempt to give their families quality time.

The lack of adequate privacy affects women presidents to varying degrees, depending on the institution size, community size, the president's personality and priorities, the expectations of the constituents, and whether or not the president lives on the college campus. Some of the women participants explained that when the college is small or in a small community, it is hard to go anywhere without being recognized by somebody and they always have to be ready to have people talk to them in public settings. This can be quite frustrating when the president is out conducting personal business or out with friends in a casual setting. Because of this, some of these women have had to take creative measures to protect their personal privacy and the privacy of those closely connected to them. One president shared her dilemma: "No longer can I go to the supermarket in my shorts and a t-shirt...I realize that more people recognize who I am than I recognize who they are." Another president described her experience as: "Having a personal life is challenging. Personal life with the demands of this job. Last week or in the next three weeks I have an event every Friday and Saturday night." The president is a very public figure, and depending on the place, the institution size, the community size, it can even be more public.

Some of these women told how they had to constantly make decisions regarding which parts of their lives they would like to keep private, such as: how much information about their families are they willing to divulge in conversations? They controlled and protected those aspects of their privacy that they could, but recognized that being

president means being a public figure and, therefore, there are some aspects of your privacy that you have little control over. These include children, significant others, and spouses.

**Role of Spouses.** While talking about the challenges they face as married women, some women described the specific issues pertaining to dual career marriages that made balancing work and family life a challenge. For many of them, it was important that they succeeded in their careers, and it was equally important to them that their spouses flourished professionally as well. They told how they had made alterations in their career plans in order for their spouses to progress career-wise. One of these women in particular, left her job because of her spouse's career progression. Julie shares her experience: "While working on my dissertation we moved away to another state for my husband's journey...it was the first time since I was 16 I didn't have a job."

Then there is the challenge that comes with having a male spouse instead of the traditional female spouse, that have a bearing on how well women can balance their lives. The presidents explained how, traditionally, being the wife of a president comes with built-in responsibilities, such as being expected to be at events, traveling with her husband, and organizing all the entertaining, especially that which takes place in the president's home. With a male spouse, it is different. Generally speaking, male spouses are not expected to organize, host, and entertain for women presidents. The president's staff handles this. The presidents told how their husbands usually decide how involved they want to be in college activities and events and they were not always willing or able to be available to attend all college functions.

**Family and friends.** It is interesting to note, though, despite the demands of family on these presidents' time, many of the presidents felt that family was important in terms of keeping them grounded. The fact they had families of their own was important in that it helped them be more empathetic and compassionate when dealing with the employees of the college, because they are constantly reminded that other people at the college have families, too, and a life outside of work. One of the women who participated in this study made this comment:

It wasn't always easy being a wife and a mother and a full-time professional, but my husband was a professional. Our children were hard-working and went to school, graduated from universities, and are now in their own professional worlds. We just all pulled from one another.

Another president who is currently divorced and does not live with her adult children described how not having a family to go back home to every evening has affected her life. She noted that although there are many stresses that come with having a family while in the presidency, family has a way of drawing a leader's attention to those aspects of their lives that bring wholeness.

Women presidents without family, therefore, have to keep reminding themselves to attend to important aspects of their personal lives that they would otherwise easily neglect because of working too hard:

Because you don't have anything to go home to, you tend to work more. Because you don't need to, you don't have anyone pressing you, saying, you need to come home to dinner, or you need to be home for something. So, I have to watch



myself and say, you know what, you need to be heading home now, because what's on my desk is going to be there tomorrow, and so I leave.

Several participants, as discussed prior, made decisions about their career in higher education because of the stability it would afford them while raising a family. Several of them also discussed taking time away from career in order to raise children or looking for a flexible schedule so that they could prioritize their families while maintaining a career. Spending times with spouses or partners was also added into discussions about balancing time at work and at home. Interestingly one woman described a flip in the standard for women.

### **Research Sub-Question 2: Supports for the presidency**

In addition to barriers, each woman in the study expounded upon supports to her being able to attain (and continue in) the college presidency. All the participants expressed that the presidential post was not one to which they aspired to initially. They described what helped them throughout their journey. These supports included: mentoring, family and friends, as well as informal and formal support networks. Mentoring, however, emerged as being one of the most relevant to the career choices and development of the women in this study.

**Mentoring.** Each of the participants reported having mentors that provided guidance and support throughout their careers. Helen and Julie both mentioned various supervisors who served as mentors throughout their careers. Carolyn emphasized the mentoring she received from family members, however, she did mention certain superiors along the way who were and are her mentors. Anyone she interacted with served as a potential mentor according to Elise. All of the participants agreed the

mentors encouraged them to further their education, develop their skills to full potential, and apply for next level positions. The participants attributed much of their successes to some of the people they had met along the way in their journey to the presidency.

I noticed that many of the mentors these women presidents had were women and a couple of the women presidents voiced the opinion that women mentors tended to be better and perhaps more accessible than male ones. Elise had this to say regarding the gender of mentors:

I find that women are more helpful than men, in terms of the colleague to colleague mentoring. Maybe we are more natural at it... I think there is a strong maternal link to mentoring woman to woman... I just think we are more verbal individuals. Maybe it's not as natural for men to be in mentoring roles with women, I don't know but I think there's a strong maternal feel. If you've had kids, you kind of mom people... I think that especially the women whose shoulders I stand on, because of what they've gone through, they can look back and help me avoid some of the things that they did. And I think women might be more willing to share their struggles.

Although several of these women had successful mentoring relationships with female mentors, other women mentioned having had successful mentoring relationships with men. Michelle talked about an exceptional relationship she had with her male mentor: "I've had one mentor who was just the most exceptional person and I will forever be grateful to his mentorship to me... We spent a lot of time together. He continues to be someone I go to for advice. I haven't had a mentor since then who was

quite like that since coming here, so I have to say when I came here, it's not for not looking for one, it's just that I never found one."

Similarly, Helen speaks about an informal mentoring relationship she had with a male boss, which did a great job of preparing her for the presidency, and continues to inspire her:

Earlier on, I looked to a boss of mine as a mentor. He was constantly telling me how I needed to go on and get a doctorate degree. Constantly telling me you could do this, you could do that. And he and I are still in contact, and he is someone that I will pick up the phone when I have a tough situation or need a boost and call him and say, this is what is going on. What do you think? Or I need to tell you what's happening or a decision or career move and usually, I'll get advice from him. It's like great advice.

From this study, it appears that the gender of the mentor is not as important as what they bring to the table in terms of helping the individual mentee reach her career goals. Successful mentorship relationships also have a lot to do with how comfortable the mentee is with their mentor and the extent to which they value their mentor's input over the course of their career. The gender of the mentor therefore takes a secondary position of importance. It appears that men and women mentors have different strengths and the choice of a mentor depends on what the mentee is trying to accomplish. Helen brought out this perspective well when she explained that male mentors are better at parting the way for an individual to move forward while female mentors tend to be really good at talking things over and helping to clarify issues. In her own words, she elaborates:

I am involved in mentoring others. You know people will ask me questions. We'll have a dialogue, sit down and talk through cases, situations, issues, staff members here, staff members and faculty members from my former institutions. I love that. I think mentoring is critical to our success. Men have a different approach to mentoring than I think women. Again, I don't have any data to support this. But I think men in the good old boys' network are about protecting and parting the ways for someone to move forward. I don't know that women do that as much as they should, but we are much better about having conversations and kind of talking, bouncing of ideas and thinking about how to support each other. It is not clear to me that we have effectively developed the parting of the pathway to bring someone up through the ranks.

Several participants stated that they looked to their current direct supervisors as mentors. Most participants identified specific ways in which their mentors helped them.

**Family.** Three participants stated how their families had influenced their development, as well as mentoring them. One participant spoke at great lengths regarding the lessons her father taught her. "He taught me how to do business and deal with business." "You don't turn away from business. You just learn how to deal with it." Other participants continued this theme suggesting, "It's definitely easy to identify members of my family structure who influenced the way I operate, in general and professionally."

Families were an important element for each of the women presidents. Families were often described as the basic support system that each of the women interviewed talked about in their interviews. Each of them spoke extensively about how they would

not be where they were today if not for some type of support from the families. When it comes to family support, the majority of these women spoke of having spouses who have been so supportive, that they have helped with housework, shopping, raising their kids, and even made adjustments in their own careers, including giving up jobs that they loved, in order to relocate with their wives so as to support their wives' advancement up the leadership ladder. Some of the spouses have shown support by attending events with their wives after hours and on weekends, whenever the president needs to be present representing her college. Several of the presidents told how their spouses have always been very encouraging, how they have served as confidants and sounding boards and how because they know their wives so well, they could often provide unique perspective to tough issues. Elise described how supportive her husband has been throughout her career: "My husband is the one who takes care of the house, and the cars, and the laundry, and the cooking, and everything else, and it's a nice thing. It's a wonderful thing, and he is perfectly happy with that too. He is my primary support network." Another president told about the supportive role that her family has played in her life: "I'm truly blessed. I have a wonderful family, a husband and three children. They have been enormously supportive. Close-knit family." Other presidents also talked about having mothers who have helped with babysitting over the years, siblings whom they are close to, adult children who are very supportive, as part of their social support networks.

**Informal Support networks.** The women who participated in this study have strong formal and informal support networks that help them address the challenges of the presidency. Their informal support networks comprised of close friends and other relationships. Jennifer had both as indicated by her statement, "I have close friends, some

of them are still working in the college, and I also have several women leaders and CEOs of some major businesses in the area.” Some participants felt well supported throughout the progression of their careers. One participant emphasized the importance of being connected to others on campus, “It is important to your job progression to know people everywhere.” It is from these connections that she indicated the well-received encouragement and guidance, pointing her in the right direction. Further, Elise commented on some advice from one of her trusted mentors: “She taught me to not sweat the small stuff, and stay focused on stuff that really matters.” Informal relationships influenced their pathways and any bias that they may have encountered due to their gender. Most felt like they were given the necessary tools from colleagues and other relationships. One participant said that most of her colleagues were males and she found them to be wonderful, “They showed me how to lead and did everything they could to help me to be successful.”

**Formal Networks.** The researcher determined that the participant’s formal networks comprised of other presidents, administrative support staff, members of their senior teams and executive coaches. All of the women are currently involved in professional organizations or have been involved in them in the past. These networks help to broaden some of the presidents’ support systems by exposing them to additional people they know and can call when they need advice on an issue. Also, the networks have helped some of the presidents understand broad educational issues to a greater depth than they would have had they not been involved in these organization.

Furthermore, the women presidents told how being on different boards of professional organizations created opportunities for benchmarking best practices.

Jennifer explained it this way, “I chair a local planning council, we meet quarterly and it really is a closed meeting. It is the major decision makers in the biggest businesses in the area, we basically meet up to inform each other and to collectively and proactively plan in terms of development in the area.” But, participants emphasized that it was not about the number of organizations one gets involved in. It had more to do with what organizations were most relevant and meaningful for the individual president’s own professional development and institutional advancement. Carolyn stated that her institution alone was a pillar in the community. “I’m heavily involved in the community. Honestly, it’s working seven days a week. I am constantly being drawn into the community and the different community activities, events, neighborhood associations, the chambers.” Another key area was creating networks and meeting people beyond their normal social circles. The community college presidents suggested that being pulled into these opportunities gave them the chance to perform and demonstrate themselves to a broader audience.

Although most of the presidents deemed involvement in professional organizations important, they were selective about which organizations they were involved in. They were also particular about how many organizations they were part of and how actively involved in those networks they were, depending on the phase of their presidency and the priorities of their institutions.

The participant’s shared that in many instances, other individuals noted their leadership abilities even before they noticed their potential themselves. Good listening skills and development of good instincts are important traits for career advancement. These two skills were described as valuable and transferable to any occupation, not just to

college presidency. Many of the suggestions for aspiring leaders included listening carefully and seizing opportunities.

Some of the community college presidents in this study had male mentors in throughout their careers. Current community college presidents accepted the role model label and eagerly supported other female leaders. Although the community college presidents downplayed gender as a factor in their leadership role, they did acknowledge the socialization of women and its effect on women's career advancement.

The community college presidents in this study had high expectations of people they came in contact with, and as role models they provided mentoring as well as being mentored themselves. Mentoring was delivered through both formal and informal channels, and often resembled the mentorship method that the administrator received during her own career advancement. The community college presidents were enthusiastic and considered themselves life-long learners. Leadership development for the presidency included many unpleasant tasks; therefore, support from mentors, family, friends, and professional networks was helpful. The community college presidents in this study viewed workplace support as part of their responsibility. Each was willing to serve as mentor and supply opportunities conducive for the advancement of other people's careers, mainly due to the frustrations and self-doubt they experienced in their careers.



**Research Sub-Question 3: Leadership characteristics and career paths**

Professionally, the community college presidents in this study had unique backgrounds. Each of the women held doctorate degrees and four out of six came to their current administrative position through the faculty ranks. Participants in this study identified taking advantage of opportunities as they were presented to them as important catalyst in their career advancement. Participation on governing boards and service committees provide an overview of institution operations and it encourages networking across the many different campuses. Conferences within discipline areas or work areas expand the network of contacts that are so essential in career advancement.

The community college presidents believed that demonstrating support to faculty, staff, and the student body encouraged success of the whole institution. As pointed out by the participants, one factor that was influential to career advancement is taking advantage of all opportunities. They felt personal and institutional growth were both important and that administrations should offer opportunities to faculty and staff. The participants embraced their positions as role models and accepted the responsibility of being a role model to their subordinates.

The information that was discovered outside of the research questions lead to the development of five broad themes: Women presidents depict themselves as reluctant leaders, women presidents come across as collaborative leaders, women presidents come across as authentic but adaptable leaders, women who become college presidents have strong characters and women presidents are continuously working at maintaining balance.

### **Characteristics of Career Paths**

The focus of research question 3 was on the journey or career pathways of the presidents. In terms of work experience, the researcher established that the women in this study came to the presidency by following unique career paths. Some of them initially taught courses in their various fields of specialty as adjunct faculty for a number of years before gradually making their way into educational administration. They then rose through the ranks, occupying administrative positions such as department chair, dean, provost and vice president, before eventually becoming presidents. Each of the participant's employment pathways as well as education pathways are explained in detail.

There was a general sense of satisfaction and passion from the female community college presidents regarding their careers and their present positions. One participant jokingly said, "I think I've got awfully good work karma." She said that she feels like everything just falls into place and that she has always had good experiences on her jobs and with people. There was also a certain amount of shock or reluctance to be seen as the individual in the top position. As a participant recalls walking into an auditorium filled with people, lots of noise, lots of chatter, and then she created a silence just by walking in. A total hush went across the crowd. "I felt absolutely alone and all eyes were on me, nobody was talking everybody was just staring to see the Black woman." She said that she felt like she was in a fishbowl and all eyes were on her.

**Employment Pathways.** The career paths of each of the presidents were different. None of the presidents began their career with the goal of becoming the president of a community college. Most of the women did not even consider becoming a president until after being encouraged by others. Each of the president's paths was very

unique. Jennifer started out as a medical research assistant, before becoming a part-time teacher, then full-time faculty, dean, academic vice president, head of student services and then president. Carolyn started out as an instructor, however, she left that position and then took a job as an accountant. She eventually returned to teaching and was promoted to the head of the department, dean, provost and then president. Elise, started her career as a kindergarten teacher. Later becoming an instructor, program coordinator, dean, vice president, and then president. Julie held various jobs at local colleges eventually teaching part-time and then becoming the vice president of instruction, and then president. Michelle, started her career as an elementary school teacher and then counselor. She then went on to become an assistant principal at a middle school and then high school principal. Later she became the director of secondary education, the assistant superintendent, the deputy superintendent, before moving into higher education and moving up the ranks there and eventually obtaining the position of president. Helen, began her career as a receptionist in the financial aid office. She was then promoted to financial aid counselor. From there she went to work for a bank and then to a proprietary school before coming to work in higher education and then becoming president.

Of the six administrators interviewed, four advanced through faculty ranks. Within this group of four administrators, three began their career in higher education experience as a part-time adjunct and the remaining one began as an educator in a K-12 public school setting. The remaining participants interviewed began their higher education journey in administrative positions. It was interesting to note that two of the six administrators, held positions in a non-educational work sector prior to arriving to the world of academia. Their employment included jobs such as a medical research assistant

and a banker. Three of the six participants interviewed stated their journey was serendipitous; believing their advancement into administration was aided by a series of opportune events that presented themselves, being at the right place at the right time.

These women were able to navigate through their careers without necessarily having the goal of becoming president in their view but the idea of working hard and doing the best job possible while at the same time being a leader. Each of their leadership experiences helped the women to adjust to new challenges, opportunities, and tasks. Being able to accept the challenges and opportunities were beneficial to the women as presidents.

**Educational Pathway.** The women presidents in this study all had advanced degrees, including both master's degrees and PhDs or EdDs. Four of the six women had PhDs and two of them had EdDs. Five of the six women had been intentional about getting degrees in the field of educational leadership and administration after receiving encouragement from others, a degree that equipped them with the specific skills and tools needed in the presidency.

So, although the majority of the women who participated in this study said their education was not highly focused in terms of giving them the job-specific skill sets and training necessary to help them succeed as college presidents, some of them pointed out that their education enabled them to acquire critical thinking skills, research skills, evidence based decision making skills, writing skills and other general skills that have application in almost any discipline, including college leadership. But when it comes down to the skills that are pertinent to and critical for college presidential leadership, anything from public speaking and governance issues to advancement management and

managing capital projects, the majority of them said that it was their work experiences that better prepared them in those areas.

Never-the-less having a Ph.D or an Ed.D continues to be a key requirement for being considered for the presidency. The fact that these women had distinguished themselves in their specific fields of specialization by acquiring their doctoral degrees, positioned them to be considered for the presidency. However, it is possible that their educational paths would have been different had they known for sure, earlier on in their lives that they would become college presidents someday.

As often occurs in qualitative research, the participants shared experiences and feelings beyond the three research sub-questions (Creswell, 2013). However, this information indirectly relates to the grand question: How do community college women presidents describe their experiences leading to the presidency? For example, these women discussed the skills they need on the job to be successful. Information such as this can help prepare those individuals seeking the community college presidency positions, and so was considered an important addition to this study. These data are described in terms of each participant's story using pseudonyms for their names. The researcher determined that reporting the journeys of each participant as shared by their individual voices helped to answer both the grand question and the three sub-questions.

### **Additional Themes**

As often occurs in qualitative research, the participants offered a wealth of information that expanded the grand question as it related to the community college presidency: How do community college women presidents describe their experiences leading to the presidency. Specifically, four themes emerged from my study about the

women presidents' current experiences in the college presidency: a) Women presidents describe themselves as reluctant leaders; b) Women presidents come across as collaborative leaders; and c) Women presidents tend to be authentic but adaptable leaders. Each of these three themes, while not specifically answering the three research sub-questions, give the readers insight into what skills and characteristics are needed in preparing for a pathway to the community college presidency.

### **Theme 1: Women Presidents Describe Themselves as Reluctant Leaders**

Under this theme, the researcher examined the factors that helped prepare the women in this study to become college presidents. These factors included key defining moments. As the researcher explored these factors, the common theme that was prevalent through all of them is the women in my study had not been very intentional about pursuing presidential leadership earlier on in their careers. None of them started their educational journeys or career paths with the ultimate goal in mind of leading an institution in the capacity of college president. In other words, they did not get into their present positions following a highly focused educational route. Neither did they follow a carefully planned career path, designed to get them into presidential leadership. They simply took on responsibilities and positions as they became available, did a good job, and in the process accumulated the experience and skills necessary to give them the recognition that got them identified by others as presidential material. In many ways, some of these women “stumbled” into the presidency because circumstances sort of propelled them in that direction, while others had to be encouraged and even persuaded to even consider the possibility of becoming a college president. It was during those moments that their aspirations for presidential leadership were activated and they became

focused and highly intentional about pursuing the presidency. The researcher further describes some of those key defining moments.

**Key defining moments.** Many of the women presidents told of how others helped identify leadership talent in them, before they themselves ever became aware of the fact that they were both ready and capable of becoming college presidents. They indicated that they probably would not have considered the presidency as an option available to them, if specific persons had not encouraged them to run for the presidency. These women were surprised when they were told by the presidents they worked for at that time, staff, faculty, and mentors that they were presidential material. It was only then that they began to consider the possibility and develop an interest in the presidency. It was from others that many of them received encouragement to attend leadership conferences, get their doctoral degrees and apply for administrative positions of increasing responsibility and greater visibility and eventually got the courage to submit their names to be considered in presidential search pools. Julie told how people around her inspired her to pursue the presidency. “I remember being on a trip to a conference and running into a president of my now sister campus and him putting the hard sale on me to come to work at his campus as a vice president of instruction. However, at the time I was not considering the position or the move for that matter.” Jennifer said that for her it took a lot of encouragement from different people. “I went through a community college leadership program and one of my mentors, was teaching one of the classes and he wanted all of his students to become college presidents. I was already an academic vice president when I started the program, but I had no desire to become a president. However, after serving under two different presidents I got a bit of an ego and thought

after a while that I could probably do things differently and do some things better... So, I considered it. Also, I had a boss that kind of pushed me into it.”

One president’s story was particularly interesting. During her tenure at another institution she was asked by her subordinate if they could recommend her to someone at another institution for a leadership position. The person said, “They’re desperately looking for good leaders and said will you allow me to mention your name to the president?” This person facilitated the meeting with the president and she eventually received a senior administrative position at another institution. It soon became clear to her that her next career position would be that of college president. For a couple of the presidents, the presidency seemed to be the only logical step forward. For example, after being in a senior administrative position for ten years, Elise, begun to ponder about what the next phase of her career would be. Would she remain in administration or go back into teaching? She reminisces, “I really liked the leadership positions, but I also enjoyed teaching,” So she began to apply for presidency positions and on her fourth try, was offered her current position. For another president, it was the growing feeling that it was just the next step in her career. She then decided to apply for a presidency and got it.

Several participants used the terms *you* or *we* instead of referring to their thoughts in the first person. These participants would consistently use phrases such as “*When dealing with conflict, you need to*” or “*We are leading when.*” These participants consistently avoided any reference of their own leadership by using the word *I*. The remaining participants used varying degrees of the pronouns *we*, *you*, *they*, and *I*, alternating the words intermittently through their interviews. Although all of the



participants embraced the role of being a leader, several felt a sincere pride and modesty being in top leadership positions.

One of the strongest themes among the participants as they defined aspects of being a leader was the ability to build and maintain relationships. The focus on other people and interpersonal interactions was mentioned as key in building support and moving initiatives forward. When asked how others perceived their leadership, participants had a variety of answers. Several presidents touched on the fact that they believed their reputation was built on relationships on campus. One participant in particular reflected, “For the most part, I work pretty hard to have good working relationship with not only those who report to me, but within other circles as well. It’s a ripple effect of people that you work with regularly.” There was awareness that relationships were far reaching and could influence how the participants were thought of across campus and beyond.

## **Theme 2: Women presidents come across as collaborative leaders**

**Women as collaborative leaders.** The women presidents I interviewed came across as individuals who placed a high premium on relationships and achieving results with and through the efforts and collaboration of others. They indicated that they lead by supporting and empowering their vice presidents, senate presidents, student leaders and other leaders to succeed at what they do, knowing that their own success was tied to the success of others. Jennifer explains this in her own words: “Making good hires and being able to assess people’s strengths and their areas that are still a challenge and place them in positions that favor their strengths while we work on some of the challenges together. I try to approach leadership from the perspective of being collaborative with others and

seeing the window of opportunity So I really try to empower individuals, especially those who report to me – the vice presidents. I try to empower them.”

As collaborative leaders, these women described how important people are to them and how much they valued the input and participation of their constituencies. Although skills in financial management, capital projects management skills, negotiation skills and skills in a range of other administrative areas matter, many of these presidents seemed to think that the most important skills that they brought to the table were their people management skills and their ability to weave their constituents’ expectations and values into their leadership plans and to use them in shaping the direction the college is going. Helen explains below:

“I think it’s just being open to other people, realizing you don’t have all the answers. It’s okay not to have all the answers. What’s not okay is to sit still and not do anything about it. You either find somebody who can help you or you research it and find the answer that you need committed to finding the solution for anything that we deal with every day.”

Carolyn noted that: “Communication. Being able to communicate. Connecting with students. Ensuring that people understand and know that there’s a value system. There are some things that are important to me that I hold absolutes.” Jennifer, in reference to her leadership style elaborates on this point: “I hire really good people and I support them, because this is not just a one person job, it takes a team and I have excellent vice presidents, most of them whether they know it or not will be presidents.”

Over and over, I heard these women tell how their greatest satisfaction came from putting in place structures that helped facilitate the success of others at their colleges, not

just students, but faculty and board members as well. When asked what the most rewarding aspect of their job was, the majority of these women said it was the people at the institution. They got deep satisfaction from facilitating student success and achievement. They enjoyed finding ways to help faculty do a good job, the benefits of which would trickle down to the students.

Although many of the presidents said that people are the most rewarding aspect of their work, some of them also admitted that people could sometimes be the most challenging aspect of their work. This is because valuing everyone's opinion and working on reaching consensus can sometimes be time consuming and cumbersome. When asked what their accomplishments in the presidential office were, several of the women presidents corrected me by saying that it was not their accomplishments but what had been accomplished through team work that they were highlighting.

When asked about dealing with conflict, participants had clear responses. Some of the participants listed conflicts with personnel as the one function of the job that they least desired. Regardless of being comfortable with conflict or not, almost all had clear steps for addressing it in the work environment. In many ways, their responses paralleled their descriptions of their general leadership style. The areas brought up in this section include taking time to collect information, communicating, listening, relationships, self-evaluation, negotiation and other tactics for dealing with conflict. Half of the community college presidents very clearly admitted that they did not enjoy dealing with conflict.

Of the community college presidents who indicated that they were familiar and ready to deal with conflict, there was a readiness to engage and work through it. One participant stated, "I'm not resistant to conflict. I think, in a lot of ways, it makes a

division stronger when you can work through that.” It was mentioned that sometimes initiating conflict, as well as helping to craft the dialogue to move through the dilemma was a necessary evil for many of the community college presidents. There was a general sense that conflict was something that could and should be worked through. Jennifer commented on an issue in particular that had to do with conflict. “One of my first...I’ve only had two major personnel issues I had to deal with. The first one was at a satellite campus and it was the kind where a decision was made that morning and that afternoon, a news crew walked in my office with cameras. I’m like Okay, so here we go. In the end, I knew I did the right thing. It was the right thing for the students. It was the right thing for the college, and it eventually went away and everybody was better off.”

Learning from others, especially from one’s ‘subordinates’ can be difficult for some people, but one quality that made many of these women stand out was their humility and emotional intelligence which allowed them to collaborate well with others on their team. According to these women, the college presidency is definitely not a job for weak individuals. For many of these women, it was their self-confidence, determination and personal drive that got them into office, but it was also their humility and emotional intelligence that has kept them in office and enabled so many of them to persist and advance their colleges to new levels, in spite of existing gaps in their experiences and the complex governance structures in place that often limit what can be accomplished and the different personalities they have to deal with on a daily basis.

Collaborative leadership not only empowers women presidents to get the input and collaboration of their students and staff, but it also makes it possible for them to earn their trust and loyalty. Through collaborative leadership, women presidents are able to

lead in a manner that takes into consideration the governance structures in place and that values the culture and history of their institutions. As a result, women's collaborative leadership style seems to be well suited for the effective management of colleges and universities.

**Women presidents as mentors.** All the women presidents who participated in my study are currently involved in or have been involved in both formal and informal mentoring relationships as mentors. These women worked closely with aspiring women presidents to help them identify gaps in their training and preparation and to help them navigate the barriers to the college presidency. ACE (American Council on Education) has a similar arrangement. The ACE Fellows Program enables participants to immerse themselves in the culture, policies, and decision-making processes of another institution, condensing years of on-the-job experience and skills development into a single year. ACE fellows who aspire to the presidency are assigned to current presidents to be mentored. As mentees, they are taught what being a college president is all about, and are assisted in discovering and addressing the gaps in their backgrounds that would prevent them from reaching the presidency. Their mentors work with them to put together a plan, involving addressing the gaps in their education, acquiring specific skill sets and getting the relevant work experience.

Participation in informal mentoring turned out to be more common among women presidents than involvement in formal mentoring relationships. Informal mentoring for these women has taken and continues to take the form of relationships with other individuals who have the capacity to advise or guide them regarding the presidency. For many of these women, informal mentors come in the form of individuals who are more

senior to them in terms of position held or who are more experienced or knowledge about specific issues. The presidents in this study explained how they would call up those individuals to discuss difficult situations as they came up. Such persons included former bosses/college presidents or individuals who had helped identify leadership talent in them in the past. These kinds of mentors may have at some point been involved in advising the president to go back to school for their doctorate, or pointed out the kind of leadership experience they needed to prepare for the presidency, or encouraged them to attend leadership conferences and seminars.

It was interesting to note that the majority of presidents, especially those who are more advanced in age and experience did not grow up seeing a lot of women in leadership roles. The dearth of women in administrative positions meant that there weren't many female mentors and role models to inspire or advise them at that time. Jennifer said it simply, "I never aspired [to the presidency] because I never knew anybody to aspire to. Over the years as I picked up mentors, most were men."

Another woman mentioned that she did not have any senior mentors earlier on simply because she never made an effort to reach out to them as she could have. "I haven't been mentored much. I wasn't mentored earlier on in my career. That I realized late. And some of it is my fault for not understanding that you can reach out and ask somebody to mentor you. I was waiting for somebody to choose me." Some of the women were more proactive and very creative about finding ways to get the mentoring and support that they needed to help them advance in the presidency. Julie shared how she has used "friending" or "friendship building" as a way of getting mentors not only within higher education but also outside the traditional academic circles. "I actually meet

people, and if I feel some kind of connection with them at some level, I will tell them that I am not only in need of networks, but I am in need of a friend who can help me understand better the county and the population I'm serving. And I actually have a lot of women friends who have become mentors to me about my own job and my own community."

Many of the women presidents are engaged in peer mentoring. They will reach out to other presidents as the need arises. This approach may take many forms, such as getting on the phone and calling another president when they have a problem to discuss or need some support regarding an issue. Jennifer talks about her peer mentoring relationships below: "Any mentoring I had, and I've certainly had mentors, were more informal. You know in some cases people I've respected and admired. And I've always had other people with whom I've consulted on a variety of issues and things that I've encountered along the way... Because I tend to be more extroverted, I do find that I get clarity literally by speaking through, talking about issues. It gives me great clarity. But I've also learned that if I do that around the table of my own [staff], it's often easy, at first until they get to know me, it is easy for them to interpret my seeking clarification to some sort of my wondering, looking for a particular pathway or solution. So sometimes I find it more helpful to talk through some issues with a trusted friend or a colleague, before I launch into something with my own executive team."

During the interviews, all of the community college presidents identified with at least one individual who had helped them along the way, mentioning their continued presence in their lives today as confidants. Even those who had created their own way professionally discussed those people who helped them develop insight, wisdom, and

connections. Most listed both men and women as mentors, with a few community college presidents reporting only females as specifically mentoring them.

### **Theme 3: Women Presidents Come Across as Authentic but Adaptable Leaders**

**Women as authentic leaders.** The women in this study told how important authenticity in leadership is to them – how vital it is that they lead in ways that are consistent with who they really are as women and as individuals. Some of the talk around authenticity comprised of their aversion to traditionally “masculine” approaches to leadership, such as the traditional command and control or authoritarian approach to leadership. These women tended to steer away from the “non- feminine” styles that required them to tell others what to do, instead preferring to operate through collegiality and collaboration. None of them felt the need to dress in a manner that was unfeminine in order to fit in with their male counterparts. They learned ways to perform as expected without hiding or losing what they thought of as their femininity.

For many of these women, being authentic meant living lives that were value driven. These women espoused and tried to live out values such as being ethical, having integrity, practicing excellence, honesty and openness. These values governed the way these women lead. Several of these women for instance, stressed the importance of putting ethics ahead of personal or professional gain, because as Helen put it, it is your integrity that will carry you through the tough times, when you hit a bumpy road and people do not agree with you about something. Jennifer observed that the presidency has made her aware of the importance of having a consistent moral compass. She said “You can’t have two conflicting personalities, the public you and a private you. You need to have a consistent ethos so that you are not thinking about whether you are now on or off



duty, in order to figure out which personality you are going to put on display.” Elise pointed out, you cannot compartmentalize your life as a college president; if you aren’t ethical in your private life, it has a way of spilling over into your professional life.

Some of the presidents told how personal commitment to their jobs was a value that governed their leadership and helped them be authentic as leaders. Carolyn explains it this way. She said that when you are president you need to: “Approach leadership from the perspective of being committed to it and that you are not going to short cut it. Give it the time it needs. Be involved. Very often people think that they are going to have the post, the position, the title, the money and status, but then they are not going to do things that go with it in terms of: be there late, be there early, go to the events, get out in the community, etc. So, it is important to be committed.”

Some of the women in the study stated that being authentic leaders to them meant exercising values such as fairness, equity and inclusion. Many of them were adept at managing diversity and including everyone, irrespective of race, gender, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation. Michelle who regularly exercises the value of equity in her leadership said she had developed the habit of constantly asking herself questions like “Is everyone in the room who needs to help make this decision? Are we disproportionately impacting someone whose voice is not here?” It appears that it is not just the individual presidents that appreciate authenticity in themselves. The constituents look for authenticity in their leaders. They want to connect with their leaders and have authentic conversations with them. According to Michelle: “If you have to be false to who you really are, I can’t imagine a worse way to live on the job, can you? ... My feeling is that

the people that you work with miss a lot of valuable conversation, authentic dialogue with you when you don't have a chance to be yourself.”

Some women noted how as a leader, you can't do one thing and say another. Duplicity is dangerous in leadership. There has to be consistency between what you believe and what you say, because what you believe, will ultimately speak louder than what you say. Apparently, it takes authenticity to deliver legitimate speeches, written messages and other communications. Moreover, at the time of hiring you for the job, people want to know that the person that they interviewed for the presidency is the person that will be in office in the years to come. It is authenticity in leadership that allows the staff, faculty and other people who are around the presidents to see them as being sincere. Helen had this to say about authenticity in her leadership: “I am authentic. I've learned that if you're not, you can't fake it. Your messages have to be real, and you have to really believe them, and then I am able to deliver them effectively... And I think people experience my style as number one authentic. I had a faculty member put it to me this way, he said, ‘You know one of the things we appreciate is the person we interviewed, is the person we hired, is the person who's still here four years later. It's the exact same person.’ The part about me still is to be myself... So, I think that people see me that way as sincere.”

Authenticity therefore plays an important role in women presidents' leadership experiences. Authenticity shapes how these women see themselves, it governs how they relate with their constituencies, and helps them set priorities in their leadership. For many of these women, remaining authentic has in some instances meant going against the grain of the existing college culture. However, their commitment to authenticity in

leadership has not made these women completely rigid and inflexible. They shared how they had learned creative ways of being authentic but adaptable; genuine but realistic.

**Women presidents as adaptable leaders.** During the interviews with these presidents, they described how, through years of experience and learning from others, they had become skillful at governance, adopting leadership approaches that work and changing the approaches that don't and continually studied their work environments to come up with strategies that enabled them to remain successful in the presidency. Some of the governance issues we talked about that demonstrate women's adaptability in leadership include college culture, board relations, decision making, faculty governance, change management and communication management.

**College Culture.** Each woman I interviewed, particularly those who were hired from outside the institution told how they had to make some adjustments after they got into the presidencies of their colleges in order to operate effectively in the cultures of their new environments. They pointed out that colleges varied by size, institutional control and institutional type. Because of these variations, larger colleges had different cultures from smaller ones. The women I interviewed generally became presidents at colleges that were very similar to those in which they had had the bulk of their work experiences. In other words, women who had worked in community college systems, ended up becoming presidents of community colleges.

A marked difference was observed in how each of the institutions included in this study represented their work culture and its responsiveness. On one hand, all of the participants contacted responded to the researcher within a week of initial contact. Most of these responses were accompanied by offers to meet for lunch, help with parking or

maps of the campus. During the interviews, collaboration and community were continually a part of the conversation. Four out of the six participants spoke highly of the leadership on campus and mentioned being inspired and being well taken care of. As one participant put it, “I’ve felt very enabled in this system as a woman, to advance as far as I wanted to advance.” Additionally, another participant stated that she believed that her campus, in particular, was relatively free of prejudices.

A couple of women noted that career experience does not translate well across institutional type (community colleges, liberal arts colleges, four year colleges and research universities) and institutional control (public or private). That is because different kinds of colleges have different cultures, foci, governance structures and priorities. A president can literally be thrust out of her comfort zone if she switches from one type of college to another and therefore she needs to do her research well and look for compatibility between her background and the college she wants to lead. One president who had worked at a large college and had taken on the presidency of a much smaller college, mentioned how different the two worlds were and the challenges that she had encountered trying to fit into the new culture. She said that if she were to relive the time when she still had a couple of different college options to pick from, she would have applied for the presidency of a larger college instead of the presidency of the small college she was at presently. That is how complex the transition from one college type to another can be.

**Communication.** The women who participated described how they had had to make adjustments in their communication approach in order to continue succeeding in the presidency. They had learned that good communication has to be continual – you can

never over-communicate - and that communication has to be clear, accurate, relevant and timely. For some of the presidents, one important issue that came up concerned their communication style. They said that they had to learn the hard way that a style of communication that had worked well for them at one institution did not work quite as well at their current institution.

Some of the presidents told how easy it is for constituents to misunderstand what the president is trying to convey. In such instances, it is important for the president to take time to clarify things when communicating in order to clear the air and improving how constituents perceive a given situation. One particular president shared an incident from her experience that illustrates how easy it is to be misunderstood as college president and your motives misjudged. She purchased a book for her faculty, because the individual who wrote it was going to be on campus and was going to be giving a talk to the board. She thought that it would be a good idea if he could meet with faculty. She purchased the book and sent it out. She tells in her own words what happened next: I didn't give them enough context for why that book. And some people were really upset about the book, because they felt that I was telling them what I thought they do.

The second most common skill that was discussed in this section was the ability to communicate directly and well. This was also closely tied to relationship building and stressed the ability to both share information as well as listen. Some people think that if you spend your time in meetings and on e-mails, that you're not getting anything done, but that's the majority of the job. Sharing information with others was discussed as key to successful communication. The community college presidents stated another tool used in effective communication included having a good sense of humor. Laughing at

themselves as well as finding humor in stressful situations was mentioned a number of times as being necessary components. In addition, keeping conversations short and to the point and discussing issues face-to-face were also prioritized. The importance of shared governance was the next common theme participants in this study engaged with others. Being collaborative and including others in decision making was seen as important, but also seen as having drawbacks. As a participant explained, I'm very collaborative. Sometimes that can be a strength but honestly it can also be a detriment. It may take us longer to agree on issues, because I'm often trying to see some type of consensus. But I think it's important that [we include] everybody involved in a particular development or a particular program, or whatever the case may be, and that I get a lot of input.

Being clear about when to ask and when to just make decisions independently was seen as an important distinction. Specifically speaking about working with others led many to outline their expectations and relationship with staff. Trusting the right people and supporting their decisions were discussed by almost all the community college presidents. Creating a work environment that was inclusive and learned ways to celebrate successes was also seen as important. A participant explained that, as a leader, she is always providing space for people to grow, and inspiring them, and providing vision.

Two of the women in my study were able to become college presidents because they were willing to relocate. Jennifer had this to say about one's willingness to relocate and how it has the potential to move more women into college presidencies: "My first presidency took me away for two and half years, I had to move away from my family and friends and the community that I had been an integral part of for at least 20 years, but

often for career advancement those are the best moves.” Being respectful of others and building positive relationships came up often in this section. Everything from not wasting time chit- chatting on the phone, to writing thank-you notes, and honoring each individual, and their contribution was brought up as ways to navigate work relationships from a place of respect and care. There were several community college presidents who commented that their job was to hire the right people, and then step back and trust them to do the right thing. One participant stated that she hired the right people “I hire really good people and I support them.”

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher reported the findings gathered from an analysis of the data and described how these data gathering methods were applied to the interview process. The findings from this study contained explanations of experiences of community college presidents as they related to their own unique career pathways. These included both the barriers and supports that the women encountered along the way, as well as those that they are currently experiencing.

Although every woman who participated in this study had a unique journey to and experience in the presidency, the researcher established the presence of several similarities that bind these women together which have emerged as themes in this study. These women presidents all started off as reluctant leaders, repeatedly drew on the strength of their characters in order to succeed as college presidents and continually worked to maintain balance in their lives. While there was no specific demographic question directed toward race or ethnic diversity or gender during the interview, this topic came up frequently by those who it affected. It was quite obvious that being female was

not the only obstacle that many of these community college presidents faced. Those women who were part of a minority population clearly expressed that these additional parts of who they are also took additional negotiations. As one participant clearly stated, “we always have to be twice as smart, work twice as hard, to get to where we need to.” In general, however, gender alone did not appear to be a specific issue for these women, and for the most part, the presidents described the culture of women on each of the respective campuses as a positive one.



## CHAPTER V

### Discussions, Implications, and Recommendations

In this chapter I present the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for this study. The chapter includes a discussion of the major findings, implications for women aspiring to become college presidents, and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to determine the barriers women encounter as they pursue becoming a community college president; and (b) to identify the supports and career paths that are described as assisting women in obtaining the position of community college president in the state of Texas.

Women have consistently dominated the workforce in the field of education. However, female presidents at colleges and universities remain in the minority. Women comprise 21% of college presidencies nationwide. Because the position of community college president serves as an influential role model to the entire college campus population, increasing the number of female presidents on college campuses could encourage more women to seek senior leadership positions within higher education. Data were collected in this study from current female community college presidents and investigated the barriers and supports that influenced their success. To study this phenomenon, I formulated the following research questions:

**Central Research Question:** How do women community college presidents describe their career pathways?

#### Research Sub-Questions

1. What barriers do women encounter as they pursue their goal of becoming a community college president?

2. What supports do women describe as assisting them in obtaining their positions as community college presidents?
3. How do women presidents describe their journey or career paths to becoming president at a community college?

The participants in this study each answered questions from semi-structured interview questions that were developed based on the research questions. The information gathered about the women's experiences is meant to assist women who are currently pursuing the presidency or who may be considering executive leadership positions in the future. In validating this information, feminist standpoint theory was used as the theoretical framework.

### **Feminist Standpoint Theory**

Feminist standpoint theory (FST) is often used to improve the lives of women from a sociological position.

Building knowledge from women's actual or concrete life experiences is acutely important, feminist standpoint scholars argue, if we hope to repair the historical trend of women's misrepresentation and exclusion from the dominant knowledge canons. By making women's life experiences the primary source of our investigations we succeed in constructing knowledge that accurately reflects and represents women. (Brooks, 2007, p. 56)

According to Wood (2005), the FST is different from other feminist theories in that other theories tend to draw attention to the minimizing of women's experiences. The FST aims to develop a method for understanding women's experiences and to learn from the knowledge that arises from women's social locations. Each of the presidents shared

unique experiences, however, there were some similarities between the stories. By using the feminist standpoint theory as the theoretical framework for this research, the experiences of the women were recorded, which in turn highlighted the “gender-based stereotypes and biases” the participants encountered (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 4). The FST also allowed me to grasp the world through their eyes, and endeavor to apply what was learned toward making changes at higher education institutions (Brooks, 2007). Focused upon in the research was participants’ past as well as their current everyday experiences to assist in gaining new information about these women (Brooks, 2007). Females in a variety of community college situations were asked to share their career pathways to the position of president. Creswell (2009) stated that the feminist standpoint theory could conflict with different situations.

Because feminist theoretical perspectives are critical of status quo, Calas and Smircich (2001) considered feminist theoretical perspectives as a critical and political discourse, thus further informing my study. Feminist politics aims to stop supremacy, to liberate women to live lives where peace is loved, and to provide women the opportunity to live in peace, because feminism is for everybody (Hooks, 2000). As Hooks (2000) alleged, women and men have made great strides in the direction of gender equality, and those strides toward freedom must give women strength, ability, and empowerment to go further. The push for empowerment in feminist theory made it an appropriate lens for this study.

### **Challenges and Barriers in the College Presidency**

Though no challenges or barriers to obtaining the college presidency were mentioned specifically by the women in this study, I was able to draw on some of the

comments that were made during the interviews to glean what some of the participants may have considered natural or expected challenges. The presidents did mention on several occasions about the lack of personal time and the job not being an 8am to 5pm job. They mentioned that it was a considerable time commitment and that their personal and professional lives intertwined with each other. All of the presidents had waited until their children were beyond school age before pursuing the position, which says they understood there would be some level of commitment needed for the job itself that they would not have otherwise been able to give if they had small children to raise.

### **Supports**

The participants in this study identified taking advantage of the opportunities that were presented to them as being the catalyst in their career advancement. Participation on various boards and committees served as an opportunity for networking across college campuses. By attending conferences within discipline areas or work areas, the networks of each of the participants were expanded which were essential in career advancement.

Mentorship assignments between experienced faculty/staff members and new hires on college campuses were described as valuable. Many times, a mentorship developed naturally between faculty members when a new faculty member is hired. This type of relationship gave the mentor experience and satisfaction in promoting growth in someone, and it gave the new faculty or staff member a much-needed contact during their first year on the job. The participants in this study cited good listening skills and the development of good instincts as important traits for career advancement. These two skills are valuable and transferable to any occupation. Another important point made by the participants was that, in many instances, other people noted their leadership abilities

before these women realized their own potential. Suggestions for aspiring leaders included listening carefully and seizing opportunities, being alert when other people point out one's own positive traits, and using verbal and written feedback to correct negative traits that may have an adverse effect on careers.

### **Career Pathways**

The specific pathways the participants followed in this study prior to obtaining the college presidency were varied. Because none of the women aspired to be college presidents at the beginning of their careers, they all started out in jobs that were not necessarily related to higher education. They all followed a mixed pathway that translated to different career experiences within and outside of academia. Despite how their careers may have started, each of the participants entered the presidency position after having a job within academia immediately prior to their appointment to college president. This finding in particular is consistent with past research that concludes that women ascend to the presidency from a senior level position in higher education.

### **Implications for Aspiring Women Presidents**

For most women, the importance they attach to family continues to take a place of priority when it comes to decisions about whether or not they should pursue a college presidency. This is because many women are the primary care providers in their families, a role they have been socialized to fill. Because this may be likely to continue being the case for many women, aspiring women presidents may need to carefully plan their families in terms of the number of children they want to have, how involved they want to be in their children's lives and the timing of each presidential appointment and how it fits in with their families. Furthermore, the presidents I interviewed said that spousal support

is very important if one is to succeed in the presidency. Successful women presidents are typically married to husbands who are very supportive in the sense that they can help with childcare, do not mind accompanying the president to certain college events, act as sounding boards and advisors to the presidency where possible and who are understanding and tolerant of the president's long work hours. Based on the women I interviewed, the president's spouses need to be the kind of individuals who are not easily intimidated by having a wife who is highly accomplished and respected in academic circles. According to these women, their spouses were aware that because of her position, as a family, female college presidents have to give up a measure of their privacy and sometimes their families'.

It became clear through this study that aspiring women presidents need to be more open minded about relocating, sometimes out of state, in order to move into a college presidency. Although it is not always easy for some women, particularly those women who are part of dual career marriages, or who have children who have not yet graduated from high school, more women (and their families) need to become open minded about the possibility of relocating if they are to attain the office of presidency.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study helped identify gaps in the research that may be bridged by future researchers so as to enrich the existing body of literature. To build on this body of existing literature, I recommend that future researchers further examine the experiences of women college presidents using a quantitative study based partially on the findings from the qualitative studies. A quantitative study would allow for a larger sample size than the one used in most qualitative studies. The findings from a study in which women

presidents' experiences were examined through a quantitative lens is likely to bring out some dimensions of women presidents' experiences that may not be captured using a qualitative approach alone.

Additionally, based on the results of this study, I recommend a comparative study of the experiences of men and women presidents while in the presidency. Whereas feminist theory and the challenges facing women were the focal points of this study, it may be that men face similar challenges. A nationwide study similar to this one may be beneficial as well. Even though higher education institutions have similar goals across the nation, there may be quantifiable differences in the positions and roles of female community college presidents from different regions of the United States and, if there are, asking how and why these figures fluctuate may be enlightening.

I also recommend that future researchers who examine the experiences of women college presidents explore the following specific areas in greater depth, because not much is documented on them in the literature:

- \* Privacy issues experienced by women college president
- \* Loneliness at the top from a woman president's perspective
- \* The experiences of women college presidents in dual career marriages
- \* The experiences of husbands of women presidents.

Similar to all scholarly research, this study, uncovered many additional questions during the research process. There are numerous ways in which additional investigations of this topic could contribute further to the discussion about higher education leadership. Future research could explore if women are deciding against pursuing or opting out altogether when considering the presidency. This is important because just as we want to

know how they arrived at the position, we want to know how and why some senior level administrators did not continue on to become presidents and what factors went into the decisions. These data may be useful because higher education practitioners could consider organizational changes that might make the role more desirable or attainable. The role of the president needs to be examined further to determine a more thorough understanding of what the position of the community college presidency requires. Many involved in filling an executive position could in higher education may benefit from having a better understanding of what is required and expected of the individual that takes on the position of president at colleges and universities.

### **Conclusion**

Currently community colleges face tremendous hurdles in regard to funding, increasing enrollments, positively influencing the completion rates of full- and part- time students, and supporting the community college faculty and staff that help achieve these goals. Hiring competent leaders to fill community college president vacancies as current leaders retire will continue to be important to addressing the current challenges facing community college nationally. Relying only on the male portion of the population to fulfill these challenges eliminates more than half of the leadership population. The current female community college presidents serve as role models and demonstrate to the female student populations career possibilities in executive leadership. The current female community college presidents, while providing successful effective examples, are limited in number. The female community college presidents in this study were not only to be devoted to their institutions, but to the mission of higher education, especially that of the community college. Collectively, their main objective was and remains to be



improving the quality and accessibility of higher education.

The information from this study further suggests the need to understand gender schemas and how they may hinder a woman's advancement in any leadership position. It is not guaranteed that understanding assures freedom from this happening nor does being unaware guarantee becoming a victim to it. However, it is more difficult to dispute views and attitudes we are unaware of than when we are fully informed. Unless men and women recognize how gender schemas affect women professionally, women may never receive the recognition their work merits, they may receive less than their fair share in salaries and benefits, and they be limited in advancement, equity, and parity to achieve their greatest potential.

Although the women presidents who participated in this study indicated they did not start their careers with the ultimate goal of becoming college presidents, each one of them could identify a key defining moment during their career when an individual or an event helped them realize they could and should become college presidents. They were able to achieve the increased levels of educational attainment with the support of family and friends. The attainment was, in many incidences, accomplished through a legacy of parents who valued education. The parental influence was strong for each participant. Each participant came from a two-parent household. The work of the parents ranged from homemaker to one parent who worked as a pharmacist. The theme of parental influence was unanimous. All the parents knew education was the key to excel beyond their educational levels, work and socioeconomic status.

One of the participants indicated that she wanted to be a teacher as job security if she ever was divorced and had to earn a living for her and her children. Along the

journey to the position of president, the participants learned to balance school, work and family. This was accomplished with the support of family and friends. Each of the females in the study had attended or attends a professional leadership training program or professional organization with leadership opportunities. They each noted personal attributes that were influential. These attributes included the ability to make smart decisions and to hire qualified staff.

Because women have typically not been socialized to have the same career goals and pursue the same career paths as most men in higher education, key defining moments may continue to play a significant role in helping women identify their potential for leadership. Therefore, women administrators who show leadership potential may benefit from having others affirm, encourage and advise them on what it takes to become good presidents. Top management is encouraged to actively seek out women in the institution and encourage them to achieve their full potential. Women need to be given feedback, included in all communications and information sharing, and should be encouraged and expected to take on senior leadership positions, based not only on their job performance in current roles, but on their leadership potential.

On identifying their leadership potential, many women tend to feel they need to perfect everything about leadership before they can ever put their names forth to be included in the pool of presidential hopefuls. Unlike most men who follow the shortest route to the top, many women stay in the same administrative position longer than they may need to. Hence, members of search committees, leadership development personnel and other individuals who are interested in seeing more women in college leadership would benefit from being more proactive about helping women administrators to develop

greater confidence in their acquired abilities and experiences so they recognize their potential to advance into the presidency. Furthermore, women need to be rotated through different administrative positions of increasing responsibility rather than being left in one position for too long, so as to develop different leadership skills and to get greater exposure to the different administrative units in higher education and thus demonstrate their abilities to lead. Finally, they need to be encouraged to attend leadership seminars so as to get additional training and preparation, and to more critically, network with other men and women who may mentor them.

Mentoring turned out to be a major contributor to women's success in educational leadership. Therefore, aspiring women presidents should be encouraged to connect with individuals who can advise, guide and encourage them regarding presidential leadership. It will benefit them as mentees to always have someone to turn to when facing tough issues and problems. It will benefit women, too, to mentor others, especially other women which will strengthen their leadership skills and abilities for the executive leadership position. Not only will this increase the number of women who advance into the presidency, it will allow the president who is mentoring to hone their skills in motivating and clarifying expectations for others, thus developing into a stronger more effective leader.

Mentor relationships were available to each of the participants in my study and each participant expressed gratitude for the presence of the bonds that were formed through their mentorships. The participants in my study admitted that along the way they have faced personal sacrifices and had to adapt their behavior. Each participant was grateful for the mentoring relationships that had been developed over time with former

bosses and other self-appointed mentors. They did not feel that gender alone had affected their mentor relationships. They each identified positive role models that influenced their career choice. The positive role models included family, other administrators with whom they have worked, former college instructors, and extended family.

In addition to mentoring, college communities interested in advancing women into the community college presidency may benefit from focusing their attention on attracting more women to serve on community college boards of trustees. Building a positive relationship with college boards of trustees may be a critical first step to a successful presidency. Additionally, colleges who desire to increase female participation may find that it is to their benefit to provide their potential leaders the opportunity to pursue a doctorate for credibility or accreditation purposes. While not required by all community colleges, the need for a doctorate may be more important for community colleges that are adjacent to 4-year universities where the doctorate degree does make a difference in credibility. It is hoped that policy makers and current community college leaders will work to ensure that community college systems are doing everything they can to prepare women and people of color to move into the community college presidency (Weisman & Vaughan, 2003).

In summary, attaining the role of college president is still a challenge for women. Although women across all types of institutions have become more equally represented in senior leadership positions (e.g., chief of staff, chief academic officer, dean, chief diversity officer, provost, senior administrative officer), fewer have fulfilled the position of college presidency (Cook & Young, 2012, King & Gomez, 2008). According to Cook and Young, while more women are in 2-year public institutions (33%), even less are

present in presidencies among all types of higher education institutions (26.4%). Women faculty and senior leaders continue to face challenges in attaining the community college presidency (Bracken & Allen, 2009; Dean, 2008; Green, 2008; Shultz, 2001; Vaughan & Weisman, 2003). In this study, I hoped to shed light on why and how women college presidents achieved their goals of becoming the executive leaders of community colleges. Through their openness and willingness to share their personal journeys, I was able to share their ideas with the educational community, expand the current research on this topic, and to open doors possibly for potential women leaders in the future.

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## APPENDIX A



Institutional Review Board  
 Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
 903 Bowers Blvd, Huntsville, TX 77341-2448  
 Phone: 936.294.4875  
 Fax: 936.294.3622  
[irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu)  
[www.shsu.edu/~rgs\\_www/irb/](http://www.shsu.edu/~rgs_www/irb/)

DATE: October 27, 2016

TO: Markisha Venzant [Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Barbara Polnick]

FROM: Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: *How Women College and University Presidents Describe Their Career Pathways [T/D]*

PROTOCOL #: 2016-10-29323

SUBMISSION TYPE: INITIAL REVIEW

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: October 27, 2016

EXEMPT REVIEW CATEGORY: 2—Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Thank you for your submission of Initial Review materials for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

**\* What should investigators do when considering changes to an exempt study that could make it nonexempt?**

It is the PI's responsibility to consult with the IRB whenever questions arise about whether planned changes to an exempt study might make that study nonexempt human subjects research. In this case, please make available sufficient information to the IRB so it can make a correct determination.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 936-294-4875 or [irb@shsu.edu](mailto:irb@shsu.edu). Please include your project title and protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,  
 Donna Desforges  
 IRB Chair, PHSC

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records.

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant/Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Date \_\_\_\_\_ Length of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Demographic Background**

1. Please share with me a little bit about your family background and how you grew up.

- ❖ What is your birth order?
- ❖ What is the highest education level of your parents? (mother, father)

#### **Career Path**

1. Describe your career path. How did you know you wanted to be a college/university president? How did you prepare for the position?

- ❖ What are some of the highlights of your career?
- ❖ What are some of the low points of your career?
- ❖ Please describe a few significant events in your career path.
- ❖ Who or what influenced you to become a college president?

#### **Current Role**

2. Please tell me about your current role as college/university president.

- ❖ How long have you been in higher education?
- ❖ How long have you been in this role?
- ❖ What do you consider your strengths in this position?
- ❖ What do you see as your greatest growth areas? How have you managed working through these?

- ❖ What has been the most rewarding experience in your career?
- ❖ What do you hope to accomplish as a college president?

### **Challenges/Barriers**

3. Describe any challenges and/or barriers that you have encountered on your career path and current role.

- ❖ How did you overcome the challenges/barriers you encountered along the way?
- ❖ Do you feel that there is a “Good Old Boy” network? If so, how have you managed to navigate it?

### **Support**

4. Describe your personal and professional networks.

- ❖ What are the things in your life that help you make it worth dealing with the challenges?
- ❖ What kind of support do you receive from family, spouse, and/or church?
- ❖ What is your connection to the community?

### **Institution**

5. Describe the culture of your institution

- ❖ How would you describe the climate and culture for women?

## APPENDIX C

### Invitation Letter to Participants

President Doe  
Community College  
5678 Street  
City, State, Zip

Dear President Doe,

You are part of a very small group of women. I have identified 36 women who currently serve as presidents at colleges and universities in the state of Texas. This population is the topic of my dissertation, and I hope you will agree to participate.

My name is Markisha Venzant-Sampson, and I have completed my coursework for my doctoral program at Sam Houston State University. I am currently working on my dissertation and I will be conducting a qualitative research study on female college and university presidents and their pathways to the presidency. This project is research that is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my dissertation.

I will conduct in-person interviews (approximately 60 minutes) over the next few months. It is my hope to be able to speak with you and have you agree to participate in my study. I would be happy to come to you at the location or setting of your choice to conduct the interview. No photographs, videos, or audiotape recordings will be used.

I do understand there are demands on your schedule. However, I would be very grateful if you would take the time to see me; I am happy to come at a date and time that is convenient for you.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation. Please contact me at your earliest convenience to let me know if you are willing to participate. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Markisha Venzant-Sampson  
Ed.D. Candidate

## VITA

### Markisha Venzant-Sampson

#### EDUCATION

Doctorate of Education – Educational Leadership, December 2017

*Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX*

Dissertation: How Women Community College Presidents Describe Their Career Pathways

Master of Business Administration in Business Administration (December 2011), Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas

Bachelor of Business Administration (May 2004) in Accounting, Texas Southern University, Houston, Texas

#### ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Internship, Honors College, LoneStar Community College, September 2014-December 2014. Responsibilities included developing an assessment to be distributed to the students at the completion of each semester and upon graduation from the program. Worked with the Honors college directors and Executive director to develop and implement the assessment and to determine the necessary components of the assessment.

#### PUBLICATIONS

Gonzales, V., Venzant-Sampson, M., & Valle, R. (2015). The doctoral challenge: Select student's experiences in a doctoral program. *International Journal of Education*, 7, 121-148. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ije.v7i3.7697>

#### PRESENTATIONS AT PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

Venzant-Sampson, M (2017, October). *How women community college presidents describe their career pathways*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Research on Women and Education (RWE), Salt Lake City, UT.

Venzant-Sampson, M. (2017, February). *How women college and university presidents describe their career pathways*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association (SERA), San Antonio, TX.

Polnick, B, Ballenger, J., Irby, B., **Venzant-Sampson, M.** (2016, November). Leadership and mentoring. Workshop presentation at the Research on Women and Education (RWE), Salt Lake City, UT.

Venzant-Sampson, M. (2015, February). *African American students and the factors influencing high school completion*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association (SERA), San Antonio, TX.

Gonzales, V., Venzant-Sampson, M., & Valle, R. (2015, February). *The doctoral challenge: Select student's experiences in a doctoral program*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association (SERA), San Antonio, TX.

Wilcox-Pereira, R., Valle, R., Gonzales, V., Venzant, M., Paitson, D. (2014, February). *The effect of faculty employment status on graduation rates among undergraduate students*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association (SERA), New Orleans, LA.

Parker, M., Wilcox, R., Gonzales, V., Jordan, J., LeBron, J., Paitson, D., Venzant-Sampson, M., Valle, R., Skidmore, S., Combs, J. P. (2015, February). *Secondary data analysis: Lessons learned in a doctoral course*. Workshop presentation at the Southwest Educational Research Association (SERA), San Antonio, TX.

#### **Service as Reviewer**

Southwest Educational Research Association Conference Proposals 2017

Southwest Educational Research Association Conference Proposals 2015

#### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

Research on Women and Education

Southwest Educational Research Association (SERA)

Sigma Beta Delta, Lifetime member

Phi Kappa Phi