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In Line for the Presidency: The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Leadership Competencies and the Career Development of Women Leaders in Community College Administration

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

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Abstract

Though women make up the majority of community college students, faculty and staff, only 36% of community college presidents nationwide are female. With a significant number of presidential retirements on the horizon, there could be many opportunities for women in line for a community college presidency to take the next step along their career paths. This study was designed to explore how women in senior-level community college administration have acquired the American Association of Community Colleges leadership competencies throughout their careers and what other influences had impacted their career development. A qualitative, phenomenological design was chosen, and results were examined through the systems theory framework of career development. Interviews with 12 women serving in senior-level administration at community colleges throughout one Midwestern state were conducted. Through the process of reduction, five common themes emerged from the experiences of participants: (a) of the five AACC leadership competencies, communication was most significant; (b) relationships matter; (c) women lead differently; (d) perceived realities of the presidency are not appealing to women leaders, and; (e) the existence of a superwoman complex. These findings were consistent with previous research relating to women in leadership, particularly those women in higher education leadership.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The impending mass retirement of community college presidents across the United States is a phenomenon which has garnered much attention from researchers throughout the last decade (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2013, 2014; Boggs, 2012; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Lennon, Lindemann Spotts & Mitchell, 2013; Ottenritter, 2012). For women in senior-level community college administration or those who currently report directly to a college president, the immediate need for qualified leaders could mean having an opportunity to close the gender gap which still exists in community college executive leadership (AACC, 2014, 2016b; Boggs, 2012). Men continue to be disproportionately represented among current community college chief executives, as nearly two-thirds of sitting presidents are male (AACC, 2014; Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). Women make up more than half of the student population, and a majority of faculty and administrative staff, on community college campuses (AACC, 2016a, 2016b). Given the proportional representation of women in all other aspects of life on community college campuses, the path to the presidency is one which has been traveled by far too few of them.

The role of community college president is a challenging one which requires a unique set of professional and interpersonal skills (Boggs, 2012; Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; Sanderson, 2014; Tekniepe, 2014). Recognizing the professional challenges associated with the role of community college president, the AACC created a framework of five leadership competencies through which potential community college presidents may develop the requisite skills to lead institutions successfully (AACC, 2013). Researchers have explored how these competencies are

interpreted and utilized on a daily basis by a variety of current community college presidents and have identified key recommendations for future leaders to develop the AACC leadership competencies (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012a; McNair & Phelan, 2012). However, previous studies often included a majority of men, and at best were gender neutral (Boggs, 2012; Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; Eddy, 2009; 2012b; Sullivan, 2009). Additional research is needed to identify specifically how women in senior-level community college administration view the AACC leadership competencies regarding the impact on their career progression and how the skills are helping to shape their further development as future chief executive officers, or CEOs, on campus.

Background of the Study

The unmistakable absence of women in executive leadership roles has been well documented across many industries, including higher education (AACC, 2014; Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Boggs, 2012; Cook & Glass, 2014; Eddy, 2012b; Rhode, 2012; Woloch, 2011; Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2015). Researchers have explored the causes of the gender homogeneity of top leadership positions, including theories relating to a number of external factors which may keep women from assuming a presidency or CEO position (Dean 2009; Ely & Rhode, 2010; Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2014; Rhode, 2012; Sandberg, 2013; Sullivan 2009). Some research has presented a supposition that women leaders will struggle to be successful until they are able to adapt to stereotypical male leadership styles which permeate gendered organizational structures (Christman & McClellan, 2012; Davies, Broekema, Nordling, & Furnham, 2017; Eddy, 2009; O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2013; Sulpizio,

2014). However, extensive research has provided evidence which suggests there can be negative career impacts for women who deviate from more stereotypical female relational, communal leadership styles (Catalyst, 2007; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014; Rhode, 2012; Sandberg, 2013; Wolverton et al., 2009).

The research focused on the perceptions of women by supervisors, coworkers, employees, and even other women, has also surfaced in the vast collection of literature relating to leadership and career development (Hoobler et al., 2014; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Literature relating to gendered organizational structures have examined the "glass cliff" phenomenon in which women leaders are more likely to be promoted during difficult circumstances, then vilified when they are not able to single-handedly turn the business or organization around (Cook & Glass, 2014; Patton & Haynes, 2014). In another study, both men and women managers were found to hold perceptions of female employees as less ambitious and less career-ready than male coworkers (Hoobler et al., 2014). Such perceptions have the potential for negative impacts on opportunities for promotion or inclusion in leadership development programs for women despite often being rated by coworkers, employees, and the general public as being more effective than male managers (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Pew Research Center, 2015).

Several barriers along the path to community college executive leadership are not unique to higher education. Studies focused on women in leadership across industries have consistently demonstrated women perceive difficulty in continuing to move up in the leadership ranks after having children (Eddy, 2009; Ely & Rhode, 2010; Hoobler et al., 2014; Kellerman & Rhode, 2014; Khan, Garcia-Manglano & Bianchi, 2014). The income disparity which women have faced as a result of temporary exits from the

workforce has been linked to the decision to opt out of positions of greater responsibility (Khan et al., 2014; Lennon et al., 2013). Likewise, overcoming the challenges presented by altered, circuitous career paths for women returning to the workforce after temporary exits for familial demands has been cited as a reason for women to opt out of leadership opportunities (Eddy, 2009; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Marcus, 2016; Sandberg, 2013).

Much of the current literature can paint a bleak picture for women leaders who have their sights set on occupying the executive suite on a community college campus (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2014). However, the identification of common barriers, as well as practical recommendations for overcoming challenges, can help identify steps needed for women to finally close the gender gap which exists among community college presidencies (Sandberg, 2013; Wilson & Cox-Brand, 2012; Wolverton et al., 2009). As Sandberg (2013) recommended, "The more women help one another, the more we help ourselves" (p. 175).

In recognizing community colleges would soon face a significant number of retirements among presidents nationwide, the AACC committed two years and $1.9 million to the development of its *AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders* (2013). The five leadership competencies are representative of the essential skills and traits needed to become an effective community college president (Ottenritter, 2012). The five AACC (2013) leadership competencies include "organizational strategy" (p. 6), "institutional finance, research, fundraising and resource management" (p. 8), "communication" (p. 9), "collaboration" (p. 10), and "community college advocacy" (p. 11). The competencies offer "real-world illustrations" (AACC, 2013, p. 6) of each of the leadership competencies based on the progression of a community college president's

time in office. Each of the competencies offers suggestions for new community college presidents and more seasoned leaders (AACC, 2013).

From the development of the leadership competencies in 2005 to their most recent revision in 2013, researchers have delved into how current and former community college presidents rank the competencies in order of importance in their daily routines (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Cejda & Jolley, 2013). Other research has focused on how community college leaders rate themselves as effective leaders within the parameters of the AACC leadership competencies (Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; Garza-Mitchell, 2012). Numerous studies have examined which of the AACC leadership competencies are perceived by community college leaders as most important based on a variety of factors. Researchers have explored the perceptions of top campus executives based on the geographic location of their institutions, their respective career pathways, and length of tenure (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; Eddy, 2012b; McNair & Phelan, 2012).

One piece which was missing from the current body of literature was how women in community college leadership roles were preparing themselves to, eventually, assume the presidency. A greater understanding was needed of how women in senior-level community college administration were applying the recommendations within the leadership competencies in their career paths and in which areas they perceived need for additional professional development. For women to "hit the ground leading" (AACC, 2013, p. 3), and serve as effective community college presidents, they need access to key professional experiences and opportunities, as outlined in the AACC leadership competencies (Sullivan, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The present study was conducted using a qualitative approach and was developed around two primary frameworks. First, the systems theory framework (STF) of career development was used as the theoretical framework through which an understanding of the career development patterns of women in leadership positions at community colleges was viewed (Patton & McMahon, 2014). The traditional concept of a career path which was seen as linear and progressed in a predictable manner throughout a single organization is a thing of the past, and does not take into consideration the numerous influences which directly impact a woman's career path (Etaugh, 2013; Patton & McMahon, 2014; Savickas, 2012). The old metaphor of a career ladder may well be replaced with more appropriate imagery of a jungle gym, or labyrinth, for women, with many twists, turns, obstacles, and diverse pathways (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sandberg, 2013). The STF of career development was previously identified as well-suited for allowing themes to emerge among the various influences which shaped the career paths of women (McMahon & Watson, 2012; McMahon, Watson, & Bimrose, 2013; Tajili, 2014; Whitson, Feldwisch, Evans, Blackman, & Gilman, 2015). This study used the STF as a means to interpret the career paths of women in senior-level community college administration.

Second, the concept of preparing for a potential position as a community college president was understood through the framework of the AACC's leadership competencies (AACC, 2013). The five competencies provided a context in terms of which skills and experiences women in the study had developed to this point in their careers, and what additional goals they had for themselves before taking the next step along their respective

professional path. Additionally, the insights provided in the revised list of competencies helped women better identify the next steps needed in their professional development to prepare for a community college presidency (AACC, 2013).

Stepping into the job of community college president can be a daunting career move. The AACC leadership competencies were developed to serve as a guideline for the professional development of future community college presidents (Ottenritter, 2012). Previous studies have provided insights into what current community college presidents wish they would have known before accepting the job (Duree & Ebbers, 2012; McNair & Phelan, 2012). Other organizations and professional development programs have been examined to understand how they are using the competencies to prepare future community college leaders (Boggs, 2012; Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; Dean, 2009; Wallin, 2012). However, such studies largely focused on a generalized experience of community college leaders, not on women leaders in particular (Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; Wilson & Cox-Brand, 2012). Many current community college presidents who participated in previous studies discussed the opportunities and experiences throughout the course of their careers which helped them develop many of the AACC leadership competencies, thus providing a starting point for engaging women leaders on campus in similar evaluative dialogues (Boswell & Imroz, 2012; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; McNair & Phelan, 2012).

The STF, which takes into consideration a number of influences on an individual's career development, was the best-suited framework for gaining insight into which career experiences shaped the careers of women in senior-level community college

administration (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Likewise, the AACC leadership competencies provided a road map for becoming an effective community college president (AACC, 2013). An interwoven approach, which employed both the STF of career development and the AACC leadership competencies, provided an informative perspective with regards to how women in senior-level community college administration had reached their current status on campus and how they are planned to continue their professional development in the future. A discussion of the development and applicability of both the STF and the AACC leadership competencies for this study are included in this chapter.

STF of career development. The STF of career development was developed as a means of synthesizing the vast number of existing theories in the field of career development and career counseling, with a focus on the individual rather than the theory itself (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Additionally, the STF is reflective of the "dynamic and complex nature of career development" (McMahon, 2011, p. 170). Building on the general systems theory premise that nothing, and no one, exists completely separate and independent of the world around them, Patton and McMahon (2014) theorized the influences impacting an individual's career decision-making can be generalized into two groups; content influences and process influences (Patton & McMahon, 2014).

Content influences on career development can involve systems or factors relating directly to the individual, including age, gender, skills, family, and geographic location (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Additionally, social networks, or groups to which an individual belongs or associates, and larger environmental-societal influences can impact an individual's career decisions (McMahon, 2011). For instance, a woman whose goal is

to reach a leadership position within a community college may choose not to apply for a department chair or program director position during a time when she has small children at home (Eddy & Ward, 2015; Wolverton et al., 2009). Her responsibilities as a parent, the age of her children, and larger economic structures such as the cost and availability of childcare, may all directly influence her decision to either pursue or postpone a significant job change or career advancement (McMahon et al., 2013).

Process influences can provide context for how an individual interacts with the various content influences throughout life, or how the content influences relate to each other (Patton & McMahon, 2014). It is not uncommon for process influences to also include changes over time and chance (Patton & McMahon, 2014). The significance of different influences in an individual's life and career often change over one's lifespan, and career development is inevitably impacted by factors and situations which cannot be predicted or controlled (Patton & McMahon, 2014).

AACC leadership competencies. In anticipation of what has been predicted to be "a leadership vacuum as the Baby Boomer cohort began to retire" (Ottenritter, 2012, p. 8) from community college presidency positions nationwide, the AACC worked with its board of directors and member institutions to develop a "competency-based approach" (Ottenritter, 2012, p. 8) for identifying the leadership qualities needed by future presidents. A board-led task force, series of leadership summits, and a national survey established a list of six competencies which were deemed "essential to community college leadership" (Ottenritter, 2012, p. 13). The original list of leadership competencies, which were revised in 2013, have been narrowed to a set of five qualities (AACC, n.d.; 2013). In addition, the revised leadership competencies include

descriptions of how each competency is reflected in the work performance for new community college presidents, those leaders in their first three years on the job, and community college presidents who have been in their positions for more than three years (AACC, 2013). This progression in leadership development was intended to help individual leaders identify areas for professional growth, as well as advise the development of both localized leadership development programs and university-based graduate studies in community college leadership (Wallin, 2012).

More than a decade since the leadership competencies were first approved by the AACC board of directors, the competencies continue to play a major role in the development of community college leaders (Ottenritter, 2012). Support for the leadership competencies has been demonstrated by researchers studying their impact on the day-to-day work lives of community college presidents from various demographic subsets and geographic regions (Boswell & Imroz, 2012; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; Eddy, 2012b; Robinson, 2014). The responsibilities and challenges which come with the role of community college president, such as budget cuts, legislative relations, and shifts in academic programs, are all waiting on the desk of the campus CEO, regardless of gender (Boggs, 2012; Wolverton et al., 2009). As a result, the AACC leadership competencies provide a framework for the present study because the competencies add context to the career development of women in senior-level community college administration.

Statement of the Problem

Women represent the majority of students enrolled on community college campuses throughout the United States (AACC, 2016a). Women also comprise more than half of the faculty and administrative staff on community colleges nationwide (Amey &

VanDerLinden, 2002; AACC, 2016b). Unfortunately, the same egalitarian nature of gender representation on community college campuses stops just outside the executive suite (AACC, 2014; Dean 2009). Currently, women make up only 36% of current community college presidents nationwide (AACC, 2014). The aging population of many sitting presidents will inevitably create vacancies in the top leadership positions on community college campuses in the near future (AACC, 2013). The research focused on recommendations and guidelines which may help to prepare women leaders to fill those vacancies is enormously important (Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; Wilson & Cox-Brand, 2012).

In 2001, AACC launched a broad effort to collect data regarding the leadership development needs of community colleges across all geographic, socioeconomic and cultural boundaries (AACC, 2014, 2016a; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; Ottenritter, 2012). The resulting report identified a list of widely accepted leadership competencies which were intended to serve as a guide for the professional development of future community college presidents (Ottenritter, 2012). These leadership competencies were not created as a finite set of skills or qualifications; they were designed to be periodically evaluated and refined (Wallin, 2012). The competencies serve as a starting point for anyone embarking on a journey in community college leadership, not a finish line (AACC, 2013; Eddy, 2012b; Ottenritter, 2012).

Though a number of studies have identified how the AACC leadership competencies have informed the leadership development of sitting community college presidents, it was unclear how the AACC leadership competencies were being used by women currently serving in leadership roles at community colleges (Boswell & Imroz,

2013; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; McNair & Phelan, 2012). One criticism of the competencies and support for further research was AACC could do more to "capture the stories of leadership, principally leadership by minorities and women" (Wilson & Cox-Brand, 2012, p. 82). Women pursuing a career path towards a community college presidency could benefit from more clearly identified examples of how the leadership competencies impacted the careers of predecessors. (Wilson & Cox-Brand, 2012). The AACC leadership competencies can provide a unique framework through which women leaders can reflect on their career development, refine professional development plans, and learn from the lived experiences of their predecessors (Wilson & Cox-Brand, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

Little in current research on community college leadership addressed the degree to which the AACC leadership competencies had helped to shape the career paths of women in executive positions (Sullivan, 2009). Likewise, a gap in research existed as to how those same competencies were woven into the professional development and career paths of women in senior-level community college administration (Wilson & Cox-Brand, 2012). Additional research was needed to more readily understand what lived experiences or career opportunities had been most influential in helping women leaders gain the skills necessary to be confident in each of the AACC leadership competencies (Wilson & Cox-Brand, 2012). By identifying the influences and progression of the career paths of current women leaders in community college administration, more detailed and reliable recommendations could be generated to help future women leaders succeed in their quest for a community college presidency.

The purpose of this study was to explore how the AACC leadership competencies had been developed thus far in the career paths of women who have ascended in their careers to senior-level leadership roles in community colleges. By examining the career development stories of women employed in senior-level community college administration, the intent of this study was to gain a better understanding of traditional influences and experiences which had impacted their career paths (McMahon, 2011). Additionally, the results of this study have the potential to provide valuable insights for women leaders currently working to attain the AACC leadership competencies and skill sets. This study employed the personal, career stories of women in senior-level community college administration and was designed to identify recommendations for women who may aspire to follow in their footsteps (Wolverton et al., 2009).

Research questions. The primary focus of this study was to understand the impact of AACC leadership competencies on individual career development of women in senior-level community college administration. However, identifying common influences throughout the career paths of individual women leaders in community college administration through the STF was also an important component of this research. As a result, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What lived experiences have supported the development of AACC leadership competencies for women in senior-level community college administration?
2. What areas of the AACC leadership competencies do women in senior-level community college administration perceive as challenges, and what steps are they taking to overcome these deficiencies?
3. Drawing from their lived experiences, what recommendations

would women in senior-level community college administration offer women considering community college leadership as a career path?

Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

Career. The concept of career consists of a broad pattern of life experiences over time, including, but not limited to, entrepreneurialism, paid employment, volunteer experiences, and family commitments (Patton & McMahon, 2014).

Double bind. A circumstance, or feeling when faced with perceived circumstance, in which one is confronted with two or more options, but neither of which will result in a positive outcome (Catalyst, 2007). Catalyst (2007) also noted that a double bind is "that nagging sense that whatever you do, you can do no right" (p. 1). Sandberg (2013) identified the double bind for women in leadership as the dilemma of a qualified woman being judged as not nice enough. In other words, "If a woman seems really nice, she is considered more nice than competent" (Sandberg, 2013, p. 47).

Glass ceiling. A metaphor that represents any number of invisible barriers to leadership that women face in the workforce (Cook & Glass, 2014). For many women with aspirations for leadership, their goals are within sight, but not attainable (Jackson, O'Callaghan, Adserias, 2014; Patton & Haynes, 2014).

Leadership pipeline. Any paid position within a business or organization that falls along a logical progression towards more senior-ranking positions (White, 2005). Individuals in the leadership pipeline of an organization are more likely to be promoted or otherwise advanced towards top leadership positions (Eddy, 2009; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Ely & Rhode, 2010).

Leadership position. A paid position within a business or institution that has supervisory responsibility for other employees and has some influence over, or authority to develop or change policies and procedures affecting the entire institution (Dean, 2009).

Lived experience. A term often associated with phenomenological research, which reflects the importance of the individual's experience as a conscious, cognizant human being (Creswell, 2013; Van Manen, 2014).

Opt-out. For the purposes of this study, opting out represents the process through which some women have made the decision to not pursue certain leadership roles (Eddy & Ward, 2015; Hoobler et al., 2014).

President. The term "president" is used throughout this study to refer to the chief executive officer for a community college campus, or system of multiple campuses (Duree & Ebbers, 2012).

Senior-level community college administration. Individuals employed by a community college, or community college system, who report directly to the college president or chancellor (Bischel, 2016). Though position on an organizational chart may vary based on the size of a college, the label of senior-level administrator applies to anyone with the title of Dean or above (Bichsel, 2016).

Limitations, Bias, and Assumptions

Included in this section is a description of the limitations of the present study. Additionally, a certain level of personal bias was inevitable in the development of this study. Finally, assumptions were identified in accordance with the research participants in the sample population.

Limitations. As is common with studies that employ a qualitative research design, a number of limitations applied to this study (Creswell, 2015). The size and scope of the sample presented certain limitations to the broader applicability of research findings (Creswell, 2015). The sample for this study was limited to women who were currently employed in leadership positions at community colleges and who reported directly to a campus or system president in one Midwestern state. Because of this, results reflected only the experience of women leaders in the specific geographic region, or in states with a similar network of independent, state-funded community and technical colleges which mirrored the sample. Such a narrow focus lent credibility to the findings of the study, particularly for women who may decide to pursue future leadership positions at community colleges (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). Taking economic, cultural, and historical contexts into consideration, the career development experiences of women leaders in either the West or East coast of the United States may be dramatically dissimilar to those individuals serving in leadership roles in the Midwest, regardless of gender. As a result, the findings and recommendations may not be widely applicable (Creswell, 2015).

In many cases, individuals in leadership positions outside of higher education may be considered strong candidates for community college presidencies because of their expertise in business, finance, law, or other industries (McKenna, 2015). Depending on the needs and strategic goals of any respective institution at the time of an executive leadership search, highly qualified internal candidates may very well be passed over for an external candidate who is perceived to bring fresh ideas and improved processes to the community college operations (Sanderson, 2014). Because this study focused only on

women who were currently employed at community colleges, the resulting recommendations may not be applicable for women leaders who are hired as a president from outside of higher education.

Finally, as qualitative research design relies on the emergence of themes and commonalities, the research instrument itself imposed some limitations on the results of this study (Creswell, 2015). Though the interview protocol was developed to guide participants in relaying their individual career development stories, it was designed to touch on specific topics within the theoretical framework. The research instrument was limited by the previous research on which it was developed, and therefore, presented a risk of inadvertently limiting the data that may have emerged from interviews with participants in the study (Creswell, 2015).

Bias. Grossoehme (2014) noted, "bias is inherent in all research and should be articulated at the beginning" (p. 117). As with other qualitative research, this study was structured in a manner which the researcher was solely responsible for the collection and analysis of data (Fraenkel, et al., 2015; Olson, 2012). As a result, a risk existed for any bias from the researcher to impact the data collection and analysis processes throughout this study (Creswell, 2015). An important aspect of phenomenological research is bracketing, or the active, conscious exploration of the preconceptions, biases, or experiences that a researcher had with a phenomenon prior to the study of such phenomenon among research participants (Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). As a woman who has previously served in executive leadership roles professionally, the researcher outlined her potential biases through the bracketing process. Details of the researcher's identification of personal bias and the role previous

personal and professional experiences might have played in the present study are included in Chapter Three (Grossoehme, 2014).

Assumptions. The present study was conducted with the certain preexisting assumptions. It was assumed the women leaders participating in this study understood both the general purpose of the research project and the questions posed to them during the interview. Also, an assumption was made that women in senior-level community college administration who volunteered to participate in the study offered responses that were honest and without bias.

Summary

Within this chapter, the background of the problem and the purpose of the study were summarized. The two key frameworks used for this study, the AACC leadership competencies and the STF of career development, were described. The research questions which guided the development of the study were outlined, and the terms which were instrumental throughout the research were defined. Finally, an overview of the potential limitations, biases, and assumptions associated with a qualitative study of this nature was presented.

Chapter Two contains a review of the relevant literature relating to both the AACC leadership competencies and the STF, which provided the framework for this study. A brief analysis of the historical contexts of women in the modern workforce and their increased presence on college campuses is provided in the subsequent chapter. Finally, an examination of the challenges faced by women in leadership positions across industries and within higher education is presented.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Two dilemmas facing community college leadership may be on the brink of convergence. A significant number of community college presidents are approaching retirement age in the coming decade (AACC, 2013, 2014; Boggs, 2012; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2009, 2012; Ottenritter, 2012). Additionally, a predicted mass exodus of leadership will create opportunities for well-prepared, competent, and confident community college leaders to move up the ranks from leadership positions in administration to the presidential suite.

Recent research is plentiful in regards to recommendations for aspiring community college leaders. However, little is focused specifically on women leaders. Currently, women represent the majority of community college administrators and faculty (AACC, 2016b), but make up only 36% of sitting community college presidents (AACC, 2014). A review of the research focused on the relatively small number of women leaders in higher education, at both two-year and four-year institutions, offer some specific recommendations for future women leaders on campus. Female campus presidents strongly recommend identifying a mentor as a key factor in career development (Dean, 2009; Sullivan, 2009; Wolverton et al., 2009). Additionally, women serving as college presidents have stressed the importance of developing relationships on campus and with critical community stakeholders, learning to manage the demands of work and home life, and adapting one's leadership style to fit into challenging organizational cultures (Dean, 2009; Eddy, 2009; Wolverton et al., 2009). What is missing in the current literature is research regarding how women in line for a community college presidency have integrated both the development of defined leadership

competencies and the demands of navigating the difficult path to community college leadership.

In this chapter, a review of relevant literature related to the systems theory framework, or STF, of career development, and the AACC leadership competencies are explored (AACC, 2013; McMahon, 2011). Additionally, a historical perspective of women in the labor force and higher education is provided. A review of current literature relating to the challenges facing women in leadership is also presented as a means of illustrating some of the key career development obstacles women face in the workplace, particularly those serving in leadership positions in higher education (AACC, 2014; Boggs, 2012; Duree & Ebbers, 2012). An examination of the current leadership structure of community colleges nationwide is included as a starting point from which to understand the nature of the present study.

The Community College Presidency

The typical college president in the United States in 1986 was "a white male in his 50s. He was married with children, Protestant, held a doctorate in education and had served in his current position for six years" (Cook, 2012, para. 3). Unfortunately, not much has changed with regards to the demographic composition of the top leadership positions in higher education in the last three decades (Cook, 2012; Sanderson, 2014; Wolverton et al., 2009). One of the most significant changes noted among surveys of community college presidents presently is the increased number who report their intentions to retire in coming years. Nearly three-fourths of community college presidents surveyed in 2012 indicated their intentions to retire before the end of the decade (AACC, 2014).

Such a large number of impending retirements among top community college leaders should serve as good news for senior-level women administrators, as there is an underlying implication of opportunities for advancement. However, women are still underrepresented among top administrative positions in higher education, and more specifically, on community college campuses (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Dean, 2009; Eddy, 2009; Gangone & Lennon, 2014). While a significant number of vacancies may occur among community college presidencies in the near future, the path by which many of the current sitting presidents came to their positions pose some challenges for women in senior-level community college administration. A majority of current community college presidents came to their position from a previous community college presidency or a provost/chief academic officer position (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Ashford, 2016; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Lennon et al., 2013; Sullivan, 2009). Unfortunately, the traditional academic pathway to the presidency is one that could be somewhat inaccessible for women, as the "proportions of women in academic leadership drop off sharply as rank increases" (Dean, 2009, p. 133). If the most common candidates for community college presidencies are other presidents and chief academic officers, and such positions are held by a disproportionately low number of females, "there exists another obvious disadvantage for women" (Lennon et al., 2013, p. 20).

Systems Theory Framework of Career Development

Women have become more prevalent in the workforce following the Great Depression and through the height of World War II (Cobble, Gordon, & Henry, 2014; Parker 2015; Woloch 2011). As a result, theorists became increasingly aware that common approaches to career counseling at the time were not adequate to understand or

guide the career development of women (Patton, 2013a). Traditional career counseling theories were based exclusively on the vocational experiences of men (Patton, 2013b; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Early theories were based on the concept of career paths as predictable, linear progressions, and did not take into account the impact many internal and external factors can have, particularly on women (Etaugh, 2013).

Various adaptations to existing theories were developed to better explain the career development of women as their prominence in the workforce grew (Patton & McMahon, 2014). The STF was proposed as a means of synthesizing key points from previous career development perspectives while focusing on the individual's career path as interpreted through personal narrative (McMahon, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Unlike traditional models that produced numerical scores or prescribed job categories, the STF approaches career through storytelling (McMahon, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2014).

General systems theory. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a Dutch biologist, is credited with first proffering a general systems theory (Patton & McMahon, 2014; Weckowicz, 1988). In his writing, von Bertalanffy encouraged a departure from "traditional deductive and inductive reasoning processes, which led to the identification of parts rather than wholes" (as cited in Patton & McMahon, 2014, p. 215). Rather, von Bertalanffy recommended scientists from all disciplines become more concerned with a search for patterns (as cited in Patton & McMahon, 2014; Weckowicz, 1988). A basic premise of general systems theory is little in the natural world exists independently of its environment or other influences (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Save the controlled context of a laboratory, the whole of something is always greater than the sum of its parts. Such a

paradigm shift created ripples in numerous fields of research beyond the physical sciences, “including psychology, sociology, philosophy and history” (Patton & McMahon, 2014, p. 215).

Systems theory framework. The systems theory framework of career development first appeared in the literature in 1999 as an attempt for theorists to “use systems theory to provide an overarching theoretical framework for the field of career development” (Patton & McMahon, 2014, p. 234). McMahon (2011) proposed the STF as a means of synthesizing the existing theories and research in the field of career development and career counseling. The STF applies a general systems theory worldview to the experiences and circumstances of the individual, so as to be reflective of the “dynamic and complex nature of career development” (McMahon, 2011, p. 170).

Following in the tradition of general systems theory, Patton and McMahon (2014) incorporated key components of general systems theory in order to develop a framework through which career development researchers and practitioners could identify wholes and parts, patterns and rules, recursiveness, and discontinuous change in the “dynamic and complex nature” (McMahon, 2011, p. 170) of career development stories. Building on the premise that nothing, and no one, exists completely independent of the world around them, the STF allows for patterns and themes to emerge from an individual’s career development story (McMahon, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2014). In this manner, a career does not consist of a series of loosely related jobs but is shaped by continuously evolving influences and life factors.

McMahon (2011) identified two categories of influences impacting an individual’s career development; content influences and process influences. Content

influences illustrate the interconnectedness of three systems at work in career development; individual, social, and environment-societal influences (McMahon, 2011; McMahon et al., 2013). In terms of the individual system, factors like health, skills, gender, personality, and age are taken into consideration because of the impact each can have on an individual's career decision making (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Social systems reflect the fact that individuals do not live in isolation (McMahon, 2011, McMahon et al., 2013). Social entities including families, peers, and communities can have direct impacts on an individual's career path (McMahon, 2011; McMahon et al., 2013). Environmental-societal systems such as socioeconomic status, historical contexts, and geographic regions can also influence the career opportunities of an individual or group (McMahon, 2011).

Process influences within the STF provide an additional frame of reference through which an individual may understand his/her interaction with content influences, or how content influences may interact with each other (Patton & McMahon, 2014). The influence of changes over time and chance are key process influences (McMahon, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2014). The significance of particular influences on an individual's career development are not static and may gain or lose significance over the course of a person's life (McMahon, 2011). The recursiveness among career influences reflects a natural shift in importance over time (McMahon, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2014).

The influence of changes over time and chance are essential components of STF as well. Recognizing career development as something that occurs over a lifespan allows all of the work and life experiences to be considered as relevant (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Recognizing that the position an individual may find himself or herself in at any

given time is the result of a number of different influences and decisions, aids career counseling practitioners to give appropriate feedback and guidance in regards to subsequent career steps. Finally, the effect of chance on an individual's career development can be dramatic (McMahon, 2011; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999; Patton & McMahon, 2014). New job opportunities, promotions, and even terminations or dramatic changes in work patterns, can be the result of happenstance (Eddy, 2012b; McMahon, 2011). According to Mitchell et al. (1999), "unplanned events can be an opportunity for learning" (p. 115).

Patton and McMahon (1999) provided a visual depiction of the STF, which is included in Figure 1. The content influences on an individual's career path are listed in the center circles, with the individual influences closest to the center (Patton & McMahon, 1999). Social influences are depicted in the illustration just outside the central circle, and environmental-societal circles are completely separate from the individual influences (Patton & McMahon, 1999). The process influence of time is represented by the larger outer circle, and the effect of chance is symbolized by the lightning bolts (Patton & McMahon, 1999). The recursiveness of all types of influences in the STF is illustrated by broken lines throughout the illustration (Patton & McMahon, 1999).

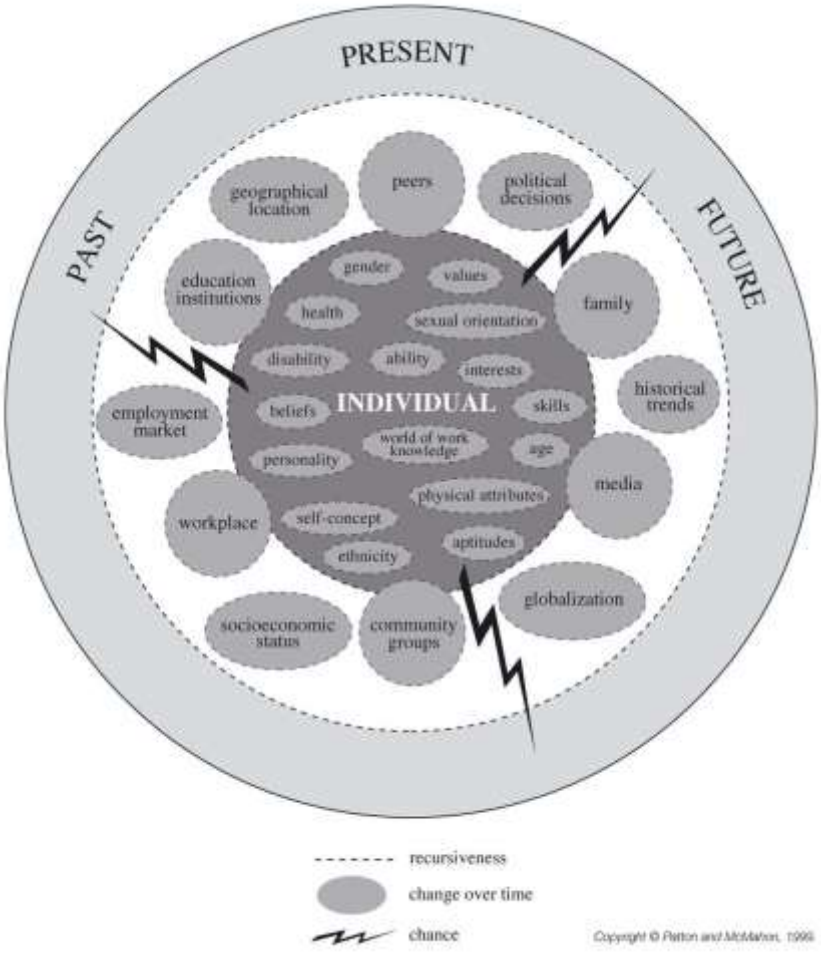

Figure 1. Illustration of the systems theory framework of career development (Patton & McMahon, 1999, p. 164)

Implementation of STF in the Literature. The STF was uniquely suited for a study of women's career development in this study, because it allows for patterns to emerge across the span of a woman's career, not focusing specifically on job titles within the structure of a single institution (Patton, 2013b; Patton & McMahon, 2014). For women currently serving in leadership roles in community colleges, their respective career paths may be full of "forks, crossroads, hills and detours" (Wolverton et al., 2009, p. 143). Many women in senior-level administration may have started their professional

careers outside of higher education or may have filled numerous roles within one institution (Wolverton et al., 2009). Other women leaders may not have been hindered in relocating for career opportunities at various institutions or may have been forced to leave the workplace for a period of time as a result of personal or familial commitments (Eddy, 2009; Eddy & Ward, 2015). Through the lens of the STF, each of those experiences and decisions is important in understanding the full career story of the women in the present study.

Applications of the STF in current literature often reflect its use as a theoretical framework while investigating other theories, methods, or models (McMahon & Watson, 2012; McMahon et al., 2013; Tajili, 2014; Whitson et al., 2015). As a means of helping female undergraduate college students establish a healthy work-life integration before beginning their careers, Tajili (2014) proposed an integration of the STF and the kaleidoscope career model. In the blended model, the STF served as the framework through which college women could identify relevant factors and influences on their future career paths, while the key concepts of kaleidoscope career model helped women identify personal values, need for authenticity, balance, and challenge in their work lives (Tajili, 2014). Likewise, McMahon and Watson (2012) used the STF as the theoretical framework in their case study of one professional athlete who struggled to choose a career path after retiring from sports. The STF served as the selected framework through which the retiring athlete could identify significant influences and patterns throughout his past experiences, which he could then use to craft his future story (McMahon & Watson, 2012).

The STF has also been used as the framework through which to understand the career development patterns of women later in their careers (McMahon & Watson, 2012; McMahon et al., 2013; Tajili, 2014). McMahon et al. (2013) used the STF as a lens through which to analyze the career development of older women. Whitson et al. (2015) also applied the STF in their qualitative analysis of older professional women's career experiences. By identifying key influences throughout different stages of the women's lives, both groups of researchers demonstrated the value of a framework that can adequately address the complex influences that directly impact women's career patterns (McMahon, 2011; McMahon et al., 2013; Whitson et al., 2015).

AACC Leadership Competencies

The AACC leadership competencies were initially conceived as broad descriptions of the qualities needed for a successful community college leader (Ottenritter, 2012). Beyond serving as a road map for individual professional development, the AACC leadership competencies have also been used to advise the development of graduate programs and grassroots professional development curricula (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Robinson, 2014). A review of the literature regarding the development, revision, implementation, and evaluation of the AACC leadership competencies are provided in this section.

Original leadership competencies. In response to growing concerns that a large number of current community college presidents were reaching retirement age, the AACC convened a leadership summit in 2001 to create a series of training opportunities, research briefs, and recommendations to assist community colleges nationwide with filling their leadership pipelines (Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Ottenritter, 2012). The resulting

initiative, the Leading Forward project, spanned more than two years and was funded by a $1.9 million grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (Sullivan, 2009; Ottenritter, 2012). The massive, strategic project was intended as a way to "understand current and diverse thinking in the field about approaches to community college leadership" (Ottenritter, 2012, p. 11) by engaging current and retired community college presidents, and local board of trustee members in the process.

Community college leaders participating in the Leading Forward initiative began the process by adopting a competency-based model and a philosophical position "that leadership can be learned" (Ottenritter, 2012, p. 9). Additionally, Leading Forward initiative participants sought ways of strengthening national leadership program curricula and provides greater access to such programs for community college leaders (Ottenritter, 2012). Throughout a series of four summits, community college presidents and boards of trustee members offered insights into what community college leadership development means and how it was to be facilitated in the future (Ottenritter, 2012). Sitting community college presidents shared best practices for localized leadership development programs and addressed the unique leadership needs of institutions in underserved areas (Ottenritter, 2012). Additionally, the Leading Forward Initiative summits sought to evaluate and advise "graduate-level programs offered by universities" (Ottenritter, 2012, p. 12), which were designed specifically to meet the professional development needs of community college leaders.

The final piece of the Leading Forward initiative's data collection was a survey of all individuals who had participated in the various summits and the national advisory panel (Ottenritter, 2012). The survey was designed to "ensure that critical leadership

competencies for community college professionals had been addressed in the first draft of the leadership competencies" (Ottenritter, 2012, p. 13). The survey results overwhelming indicated the original six leadership competencies were viewed as "either 'very' or 'extremely' essential to the effective performance of a community college leader" (Ottenritter, 2012, p. 13). With unanimous approval of the AACC board of directors on April 9, 2005, the competencies were published (Ottenritter, 2012). The original list of leadership competencies included organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (AACC, n.d.).

Revised leadership competencies. From the time the AACC leadership competencies were first adopted, the intent was for them serve "as a 'living document,' evolving over time to meet changing human resource and institutional needs" (AACC, n.d., p. 1). The AACC leadership competencies underwent a review and revision as part of the AACC 21st-Century Initiative, which was launched in the summer of 2011 in response to President Barack Obama's challenge to American community colleges to graduate an additional 5 million students by 2020 (AACC, 2013; White House, 2009). As part of the organization's long-range planning process, the 21st-Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges sought to redesign the leadership framework in order to produce community college leaders who would continue to champion the mission of community colleges well into the future (AACC, 2013).

As a result of the revision process, AACC leadership competencies were condensed from the original six competencies to a list of five (AACC, 2013). The revised competencies were presented as a progression in terms of what could be expected of

emerging leaders to what should be required of more seasoned community college CEOs (AACC, 2013). The AACC (2013) leadership competencies now include “organizational strategy” (p. 6), “institutional finance, research, fundraising and resource management” (p. 8), “communication” (p. 9), “collaboration” (p. 10), and “community college advocacy” (p. 11).

Support for and criticism of the AACC leadership competencies. Support for the AACC leadership competencies has been demonstrated through studies involving current or retired community college presidents (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2009, 20012b; McNair & Phelan, 2012; Sullivan, 2009). Since the development of the leadership competencies, researchers have explored how community college leaders rank the importance of the competencies, and have identified the skills in which current leaders perceive themselves as stronger or in need of development (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; McNair & Phelan, 2012; Sullivan, 2009). Current literature has noted which professional experiences are more likely to aid in the development of leadership competencies and pointed out how the development of the competencies may vary by factors such as the size of the institution or the geographic region in which a community college is located (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; Eddy, 2012b; McNair & Phelan, 2012; Sullivan, 2009). Likewise, researchers have repeatedly recommended that individuals who aspire to the challenge of serving as a community college president use the AACC leadership competencies as a professional development guide (Boggs, 2012; Sullivan, 2009).

Criticisms of the AACC leadership competencies indicate the list of skill sets may only represent goals to which to aspire, and additional research is needed in order to

understand how community college professionals develop the competencies (Cejda & Jolley, 2013; Eddy, 2012b; Sullivan, 2009). Researchers have noted that the original list of leadership competencies was developed based on the career experiences of community college leaders who were largely white, middle-aged, men who may have served as presidents for decades (Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b). Current literature seems to suggest future revisions of the AACC leadership competencies should reflect the realities of leading community colleges in the new millennium (Duree & Ebbers, 2012), should include some aspects of emotional intelligence (Boswell & Imroz, 2013), and "entrepreneurial thinking about the future; commitment to diversity and equity; and taking a systems perspective" (McNair & Phelan, 2012, p. 92). Finally, two factors that were recognized as contributing to the success of effective community college presidents appear consistently throughout the literature fall outside the framework of the AACC leadership competencies. Participants in various studies have strongly recommended that aspiring community college presidents find a mentor and complete a terminal degree (Boggs, 2012; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012; McNair & Phelan, 2012; Ottenritter, 2012; Sullivan, 2012).

Women in the workplace, higher education, and leadership

All women who are currently employed in the United States owe a debt of gratitude to women who struggled to carve a place for themselves within the labor force for the last century or more (Cobble et al., 2014). The involvement of women in higher education has evolved along a nearly parallel historical timeline with that of women in the workplace (Parker, 2015). An examination of literature relating to the history of women in the U. S. labor force, and their presence on campuses of higher education, are

presented in this section. Additionally, a review of literature relating specifically to the experiences of women in leadership across various industries, including higher education, is presented.

Women in the workforce. Following the U. S. Civil War, women rarely occupied roles outside of the home (Woloch, 2011). For those women who did seek employment in the early 1900s, the only viable career paths for them were as grade school teachers or clerical positions, and both of those options often ended with marriage (Woloch, 2011). Nursing, which had been a common career path for young women following the U. S. Civil War, was viewed as an ideal women's profession, as it fulfilled both a nurturing public service and a modest level of professional expertise (Woloch, 2011).

However, as a result of the Great Depression, women often sought paid employment outside of the home for the first time as a means of survival (Woloch, 2011). Previous social concerns about the damage that might be caused to the family if wives and mothers worked were no longer relevant during a time when wage-earning jobs were scarce and "unemployment, homelessness and industrial conflict soared" (Cobble et al., 2014, p. 15). As the economy began to improve slowly, women were urged to return home so men could fill what few jobs there were and resume the traditional roles as breadwinners for their families. (Woloch, 2011).

Conservative social policy again looked the other way throughout World War I and World War II when women's involvement in the labor force was heralded as patriotic (Woloch, 2011). In the absence of traditional male workers, women stepped into some of the dirtiest, most dangerous industrial jobs in America (Cobble et al., 2014). Women

were recruited heavily to work in the war industry, and iconic images such as Rosie the Riveter were celebrated as a heroic support system for the men on the battle fronts (Woloch, 2011). Governmental posters and magazine covers depicted "Rosie the Riveters holding their hammer guns aloft, doing a man's job with gusto and finesse" (Cobble et al., 2014, p. 23). Though at the war's end, women were again urged to leave the factories for a tradition life of domesticity, many women remained in the workforce in low-paying, low-status jobs (Cobble et al., 2014). Many historians agreed that the end of World War II brought about the first major structural change of the postwar era—the working wife and mother (Cobble et al., 2014; Woloch, 2011).

Meeting the demands of the consumer culture that developed in the postwar era of prosperity, two wage earners in a household became necessary in order to keep up with the new middle-class lifestyle (Cobble et al., 2014; Woloch, 2011). By the mid-1950s, "married women made up over half the female workforce, and each year their proportion rose" (Woloch, 2011, p. 490). Working wives and mothers faced another new normal, the "double day" (Cobble et al., 2014, p. 26). In addition to the hours put in on the job as a wage earner, working a second shift of unpaid labor relating to household and childcare duties became the new normal for women (Cobble et al., 2014).

A series of federal legislative actions in the 1960s and 1970s helped to eliminate barriers to equal treatment of women in the workplace (Parker, 2015; Woloch, 2011). Passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963 marked "the first occasion since World War II on which Congress recognized women's status as wage earners" (Woloch, 2011, p. 494). It was not until the 1960s that a growing number of women began to enter fields and industries that had long been dominated by men (Woloch, 2011).

The more economically and socially conservative 1980s and early 1990s saw a resurgence of a segregated job market and gendered stereotyping of women's work (Woloch, 2011). Federally-mandated affirmative action legislation resulted in hiring processes that often brought about resentment or suspicion when women or minorities were placed in leadership positions or promoted to other positions of authority (Equal Employment Opportunity Act, n.d.). Women promoted in largely male-dominated fields or organizational cultures were perceived as tokens (Dean, 2009). Sandberg (2013) noted, "In the days of tokenism, women looked around the room and instead of bonding against an unfair system, they often viewed one another as competition" (p. 173). However, as more women made it up through the ranks to middle management positions and beyond, they gained strength in numbers and eventually were successful in challenging employment discrimination in the form of glass ceilings and "mommy track" routes to leadership (Woloch, 2011).

Since midcentury, female participation in the workforce has steadily grown (Woloch, 2011). By 2000, "60 percent of adult women were in the workforce, where they constituted 46 percent of workers" (Woloch, 2011, p. 591). With the growth in employment among women came a dramatic shift in the American family dynamic. For the first time since the Great Depression, many married couples saw wives become the primary breadwinners of the household (Parker, 2012; Woloch, 2011). This economic shift occurred in part because women were more likely to be employed in fields historically proven to be resistant to economic recessions, such as health care and education, while men made up the bulk of the workforce in manufacturing and sales industries (Woloch, 2011).

Despite the increase of women in the labor force, working wives and mothers who chose to enter competitive fields increasingly found themselves in "a crunch between employer demands and private lives" (Woloch, 2011, p. 553). Sandberg (2013) noted that even the term "work-life balance" was untenable for working women, as striking such a balance for most women is virtually impossible. By buying into the notion that working women can have it all in terms of a successful career and a traditional family life, many women have reported feeling overwhelmed and disappointed when they have not been able to strike a reasonable balance between both, separate aspects of their lives (Sandberg, 2013; Tajili, 2014).

Women in higher education. A historical examination of women on college campuses follows a path that is nearly parallel to that of women in the workforce (Parker, 2015). As many authors have noted, but Dean (2009) stated clearly, "Women are no rarity on college campuses" (p. 128). In fact, women have earned more than half of all bachelor's and master's degrees awarded in the United States since 1979 (Parker, 2015). However, women remain underrepresented in top leadership positions across higher educations (Dean, 2009). Despite the number of women who presently fill what can be identified as a leadership pipeline, women are not selected to fill top positions to the degree expected based on their proportions in other administrative positions (Dean, 2009; Duree & Ebbers, 2012).

The disproportionate representation of men in the professoriate and leadership positions in higher education has existed since many institutions began in the United States in the early 1800s (Parker, 2015). Early conservative arguments against women being admitted to colleges and universities claimed that higher education would "destroy

the role of women in the household as homemakers, wives, and mothers" (Parker, 2015, p. 6). More liberal defenders of women in college argued that a postsecondary education would make them better, more well-rounded homemakers, wives, and mothers (Parker, 2015).

When women were finally admitted to Midwestern land-grant colleges during the Civil War, and exclusively women's institutions like Vassar opened in 1865, aspirations of American women were elevated beyond secondary education (Woloch, 2011). Women made up approximately one in five undergraduate students in 1870, a percentage which more than doubled to 47% by 1890 (Parker, 2015). In part, this dramatic growth in enrollment among women was due to the equally dramatic growth in the number of female professors teaching in higher education during and immediately following the Civil War (Woloch, 2011).

As the number of female students increased, so did the demand for women instructors and administrators (Woloch, 2011). The first such administrative position for women in coeducational institutions, the Dean of Women, was created in the 1890s (Parker, 2015). The need for Dean of Women grew at such a pace that in 1916, Columbia University's Teacher's College established a graduate program specifically to train future administrators (Parker, 2015). Unfortunately, after enrollment slowed following the Great Depression, the title 'Dean of Women' was slowly transformed by many institutions to 'Dean of Students' and the positions were more likely to be filled by men (Parker, 2015; Woloch, 2011). By the late 1940s, women were often hired in positions to work directly with students and reported to the Deans of Students but were no longer in a position of

influence or authority and no longer held a direct line to the college president (Parker, 2015).

Enrollment among women in colleges and universities leveled off during the early decades of the 20th century but saw a new boom during World War II (Parker, 2015). As the numbers of male students and faculty began to decline during the height of the wartime era, opportunities were seized by women as both students and professors (Parker, 2015). Much like the number of women in the labor force following World War II, enrollment in institutions of higher education among women declined as the roles of mother and homemaker were viewed as the honorable and patriotic option (Parker, 2015; Woloch, 2011).

The same feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s that brought about greater gender equality in the workplace also had direct impacts on higher education (Parker, 2015; Woloch, 2011). The resulting legislation helped to break down barriers for female students, faculty, and administrators (Parker, 2015). In 1964, the Civil Rights Act required equal treatment of minority groups and called for the elimination of discrimination based on gender (Parker, 2015). Likewise, Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 "provided protection for employees and students" (Parker, 2015, p. 9) on college and university campuses. Since the 1960s, the number of women enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States has doubled (Woloch, 2011).

For the first time, women became more than half of all enrolled undergraduate students in 1980 and made up the majority of graduate students in 1984 (Woloch, 2011). By 2010, 58% of enrolled college students were women, and "at most colleges, women outnumber men" (Woloch, 2011, p. 590). Parker (2015) noted:

> Despite this high representation of women as students, by 2012, about 86% of all presidents, provosts, and chancellors were male, and 75% of full professors were male. Additionally, data indicates (sic) female professors, when compared to males, move up the career ladder slower, are less productive, have heavier teaching loads, and have lower salaries. (p. 9)

Though no clear correlations have been established to explain the disparity between the number of women students on college campuses and the number of women in leadership roles, some researchers credit the same double-day dilemma that challenged working women at the end of World War II (Cobble et al., 2014). Women pursuing advancement in a male-normed academic career path find little relief, as the responsibilities associated with family life continue to fall largely on women (Dean, 2009; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

Women in leadership. The gender gap that exists among men and women in top leadership positions at colleges and universities is not a phenomenon exclusive to higher education (AFL-CIO, 2015; Catalyst, 2007; Rhode, 2012; Sandberg, 2013; Woloch, 2011). Women make up 47% of the workforce in the United States and represent the majority of workers in professional and technical occupations (AFL-CIO, 2015). Despite their presence at all levels of the workforce, women comprised only 4% of the *Fortune 500* CEOs in 2015 (Zarya, 2016). Women leaders in most industries remain in the minority and face barriers that result from organizational cultures which are based on the traditional work experiences of White men (Cook & Glass, 2014; Sullivan, 2009).

As the positional rank increases on organizational charts for U.S. college and universities, the proportion of women in leadership positions drops off sharply (Dean, 2009). The theory behind many legislative measures aimed at improving gender equality in the workplace was that increasing the number of women in a respective leadership pipeline would help close the gender gap in top positions (Ely & Rhode, 2010). According to Ely and Rhode (2010), "It is now clear that time alone is not the answer" (p. 377).

Debate continues among researchers with regards to why such dramatic gender gaps continue to occur among leadership positions across virtually all business and industry (AACC, 2014; Boggs, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2015; Rhode, 2012). With regard to the disparity that exists between men and women in campus CEO positions, three key speculations have been investigated. The first supposes that women in academe have been excluded from opportunities to develop leadership skills (Eddy & Ward, 2015; Sullivan, 2009). Others credit the gender gap in leadership to the classic double bind for women in leadership (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Sandberg, 2013; Sulpizio, 2014). Lastly, familial commitments and the difficulty women leaders face in attempting to keep home and work life separate have been theorized as an explanation for why women have so infrequently risen to leadership positions in higher education (Dean, 2009; Sandberg, 2013; Tarule, Applegate, Earley, & Blackwell, 2009). Such prominent themes in recent research involving women in leadership are examined in this section.

Exclusion from leadership training. In a study of women community college leaders, Sullivan (2009) noted many of the participants perceived being denied

opportunities to “learn leadership competencies on the job” (p. 104). By having limited access to formal development experiences and informal support networks to learn the skills necessary to succeed in higher education leadership, women in academe were less likely to attain leadership positions (Sullivan, 2009). Many women studied by Sullivan (2009) reported learning much of what was needed for leadership roles informally, while on the job.

A similar phenomenon was observed by Hoobler et al. (2014) in a study of employer-supervisor dyads in one Fortune 500 company. Hoobler et al. (2014) discovered “that when women do not get critical on-the-job development opportunities, they may report a lower desire to pursue the top jobs” (p. 704). In other words, women in the study reported opting out of pursuing further leadership positions when simply accessing the critical training needed became too great of an obstacle (Hoobler et al., 2014). Even inadvertent exclusion from significant professional development experiences can lead to women lacking the skills or competencies needed to lead (Sullivan, 2009). Recommendations for overcoming such barriers for the advancement of women in leadership roles included allowing employees opportunities to take on new, unique projects and enabling them to grow professionally through challenging assignments (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Hoobler et al., 2014; Rhode, 2012).

Though not directly related to leadership training, the value of finding a mentor from which to gain industry insights and career coaching was repeatedly mentioned in previous research related to leadership (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Boggs, 2012; Dean, 2009; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eddy, 2012b; Gangone & Lennon, 2014; Hoobler et al., 2014; Klotz, 2012; Rhode, 2012). The need for a

mentorship relationship was found to be particularly acute for women along with their career paths if their ultimate goal was a supervisory or leadership position (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gangone & Lennon, 2014; Hoobler et al., 2014; Patton & Haynes, 2014; Sullivan, 2009). Women are less likely to be engaged in informal networks through which established professionals serve as sponsors and enable the advancement of younger professionals toward highly valued leadership positions (Patton & Haynes, 2014).

What is recognized as an "old boys' network" through which professionals can benefit from "preferential treatment that often arises from relationships with powerful decision makers" (Patton & Haynes, 2014, p. 26) is not a resource that is accessible to women. The encouragement and advice that a mentor can provide to women professionals are incredibly important to their career development. However, the limited number of women currently serving in leadership roles means that the number of female professionals available to serve as mentors is limited (Dean, 2009; Patton & Haynes, 2014; Wolverton et al., 2009). As Dean (2009) noted, "Unfortunately, the 'old girls network' remains small in membership, scope, and depth of influence" (p. 132).

The double bind. Research has shown that women in leadership are often faced with a dilemma that does not plague their male counterparts. Women leaders have consistently identified what has been labeled a double bind, or instances when a "woman in authority who exhibits confidence and assertiveness may be perceived as arrogant or abrasive, and a woman who displays a caring attitude may be viewed as emotional or soft" (Sulpizio, 2014, p. 103). American work culture tends to equate leadership behavior to heavily gendered images favoring men (Chrisman & McClellan, 2012; Dean, 2009;

Eagly & Carli; 2007; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Schuh, Bark, VanQuaquebeke, Hossiep, Frieg, & Van Dick, 2014). A difficulty that many women face in their quest for leadership positions is that gendered images and expectations of professional women also exist (Dean, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Schuh et al., 2014). Unfortunately, such distinctly different paradigms relating to acceptable leadership behaviors rarely align (Catalyst, 2007; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Sandberg, 2013).

Despite decades of work towards gender equality in the workplace, underlying stereotypes still exist which expect women to be relationship-oriented and nurturing (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Conversely, the same longstanding assumptions reward men for displaying behaviors that are perceived as assertive and dominant (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Schuh et al., 2014). There can be negative repercussions for women who either step outside of those gendered expectations as a leader or who are perceived as behaving too much like a man (Sandberg, 2013). Mamie Howard-Golladay, retired president of Sullivan County Community College, reflected on her first year as a campus CEO. Howard-Golladay recalled being a tough, decisive, and consistent leader (Wolverton, et al., 2009). At the end of her first year as president, the result of her annual review showed that she had developed the nickname, The Ice Queen (as cited in Wolverton et al., 2009).

The double bind for women leaders is never to be perceived as too feminine or too masculine (Ely & Rhode, 2010; Rhode, 2012; Sandberg, 2013). This principle seems to permeate all leadership roles, regardless of industry (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eddy & Ward, 2015). In a study of women leaders in the legal field, Rhode (2012)

noted that what can be viewed as assertive, a valued behavior in a man, can be perceived as abrasive and unacceptable in a woman. Women leaders in business have reported having to choose between being competent and competitive or being likable (Ely & Rhode, 2010). In a criticism of the double bind, Sandberg (2013) wrote, "If a woman is competent, she does not seem nice enough. If a woman seems really nice, she is considered more nice than competent" (p. 47). Trying to strike some sort of balance between the two diametrically opposed images of leadership has the potential to leave women frustrated, or worse, eliminated from consideration for future leadership roles.

Motivation to lead. Differences in what motivates an individual to lead have been identified between men and women (Davies et al., 2017; Schuh et al., 2014). Women have been found to be significantly more motivated than men by interpersonal relationships (Davies et al., 2017). Unlike men in a study by Schuh et al. (2014), women "consistently reported lower power motivation" (p. 363). In other words, women were more likely than men to be motivated to help others, build trust, and feel connected with other people at work, rather than being driven by a desire to influence others (Schuh et al., 2014).

Notable differences in the motivation to lead have also been identified in women before entering the career field (Report of the Steering, 2011). In a study of undergraduate women and female alumni at Princeton University, it was found women on campus were less likely to hold highly visible leadership roles in relevant campus organizations (Report of the Steering, 2011). Not only were women not found at the helm of campus organizations, but many women also reported a preference for the strategic, detailed work required to keep organizations running as opposed to being the out-front

leaders (Keohane, 2014; Report of the Steering, 2011). As researchers with the Princeton University study noted, “This is not a Princeton-specific phenomenon” (Report of the Steering, 2011, p. 6). Similar patterns regarding the proportion of women in leadership roles on campus were identified at other colleges and universities (Keohane, 2014).

Connections with colleagues and supportive supervisors or work teams were considered critical by professional women at the end of their careers in a study by Whitson et al. (2015). Similarly, research focused on community college presidents found that women were more likely than their male counterparts to discuss the importance of both on- and off-campus relationships throughout their careers (Eddy, 2009). Demonstrated differences in personal values and motivators such as these could offer some explanation for the continued dearth of women in top leadership positions across industries (Schuh, 2014).

The impostor phenomenon. An aching fear of being found unqualified or ill-fitting for a particular professional role was first termed the “impostor phenomenon” by Clance and Imes (1978). Since the first study of 150 successful women, the impostor phenomenon has been recognized as a significant challenge of confidence in which individuals are more likely to credit their personal or professional success to temporary factors, such as luck, rather than internal sources such as ability (Clance & Imes, 1978; Clark, Vardeman, & Barba, 2014). Though men have been identified as demonstrating symptoms of the impostor phenomenon, it is widely associated with women (Cokley et al., 2015).

Impostorism has been related to feeling intense pressure to perform beyond expectations and continually demonstrating that one deserves success (Cokley et al.,

2015). Research differs in terms of whether the impostor phenomenon is the result of developmental experiences among high-achieving individuals, or if the development of impostorism derives from external influences in highly-competitive environments (Clance & Imes, 1978; Dean, 2009). Clance and Imes (1978) identified commonalities among women with a feeling of impostorism that related to early family dynamic and childhood experiences. Examples of impostor phenomenon have also been identified in populations of undergraduate students, which would indicate that impostorism can be experienced by women as young as their teen years (Cokley et al., 2015; Report of the Steering, 2011). In a study of undergraduate men and women, Cokley et al. (2015) found the impostor phenomenon played a "more important role in achievement for women than men" (p. 424). Similarly, undergraduate women interviewed for Princeton University's study of undergraduate women's leadership (Report of the Steering, 2011) reported feeling underqualified or undeserving of leadership roles on campus despite being highly regarded by faculty and peers.

Other researchers have indicated that feelings of impostorism may derive from difficult work environments or heavily gendered organizational cultures (Dean,2009; Gardiner, 2014; Sulpizio, 2014). Dean (2009) noted when women leaders do not fit the stereotypical male images of academic leadership; women can feel pressure to "demonstrate an even higher level of ability than their male peers in order to gain the same level of legitimacy and acceptance. Women have to prove they belong, more so than men do" (p. 242). Women in academic leadership can develop feelings of impostorism as a result of "inconsistent expectations, and inequitable rewards" (Dean, 2009, p. 246). In a phenomenological study of women leaders in higher education,

Gardiner (2014) described the experience of a woman with working-class roots who had been a first-generation college student. Despite her own accomplishments, the woman recalled experiences in which interactions with her colleagues had left her feeling as though she did not belong in academia (Gardiner, 2014). Gardiner (2014) noted, "She described how alumnae had, on occasions, brought their friends to visit her so that they could see for themselves how articulate Jill was in person" (p. 164).

Such feelings of inadequacy or inefficacy among high-achieving women have the potential to lead to self-imposed barriers to leadership (Chrisman & McClellan, 2012; Report of the Steering, 2011). However, impostorism can be minimized and overcome through feedback and encouragement from respected colleagues and supervisors (Clark et al., 2014; Dean, 2009; Hoobler et al., 2014; Report of the Steering, 2011). Clark et al. (2014) emphasized, "The first step is acknowledging that 'feeling incompetent and being incompetent' are two different things" p. 266). Additionally, Clark et al. (2014) acknowledged seeking input regarding performance from colleagues, mentors, and supervisors can be an effective means of gaining a more balanced, often more positive, perspective for individuals who disclosed experiencing the impostor phenomenon.

Work-life imbalance. Since the mid-1950s when women's presence in the labor force became an increasingly important part of the United States economy, many women have been saddled with two jobs (Cobble et al., 2014; Woloch, 2011). Work for the majority of women does not stop at the end of the business day. The responsibility for unpaid domestic work, including childcare, eldercare, and household tasks, still fall primarily on women (Dean, 2009; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016; Woloch, 2011).

Numerous studies have examined the impact of women's unpaid work on career-related decisions and the progression of their paid careers (Boeckman, Misra & Budig, 2015; Patton, 2013a; Richardson & Schaeffer, 2013; Schultheiss, 2013). A perceived barrier for many women in leadership across industries is the difficulty with trying to keep life in the public sphere, or paid work, separate from life in the private sphere, or unpaid work (Schultheiss, 2013). For most women leaders, the boundaries between the public and private spheres are far from distinct. Rather they are inextricably linked and often blurred (Schultheiss, 2013). As Sandberg (2013) stated, "Framing the issue as 'work-life balance'—as if the two were diametrically opposed—practically ensures work will lose out. Who would ever choose work over life?" (p. 25).

The idea that working women can "have it all" in terms of a productive, rewarding career, and a happy, healthy family, has been found to have an opposite effect. Women have reported feeling guilt and shame for not being able to live up to the unreasonable expectations of a balancing their professional and personal lives (Sandberg, 2013; Tajili, 2014). Missing work to tend to familial needs can lead to women being perceived as less reliable, ambitious, or committed to their jobs than their male colleagues (Ely & Rhode, 2010; Hoobler et al., 2014; Sandberg, 2013).

The image of a woman successfully fulfilling multiple demanding roles in life has been labeled the superwoman construct (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015). Though popularized by mass media, the concept of a woman performing at unreasonably high standards in several concurrent roles such as employee, wife, mother, and homemaker is often associated with high levels of stress and anxiety (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015). Other research has noted superwomen demonstrate contradictory behaviors such as a

compassionate need to help others and the ability to suppress emotions or deny one's own needs (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015). By framing the concept of a woman struggling to balance multiple roles in the context of fictional, superhero language supports the notion that achieving a balance between the private and public spheres of a woman's life can be tough (Lee, 2013; Schultheiss, 2013).

Summary

The exploration of challenges faced by women at work, in higher education, and in leadership positions has provided a rich context through which to understand the individual and collective career experiences of women leaders in this study. The AACC leadership competencies served as a standard by which women leaders in this study could benchmark their career development to date (AACC, 2013). Additionally, the STF allowed for patterns of influences to emerge from the career experiences of women in senior-level community college administration (McMahon, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2014). The review of the literature provided in this chapter set the stage for exploring the career development of women in line for a community college presidency.

Included in Chapter Three is an explanation of the qualitative research methodology that was used in this study and its suitability for such research. A complete outline of the methods employed throughout the data collection and analysis processes is also provided. Finally, discussions of the sample population and instrumentation used can be found in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In order to understand the lived experiences of women in senior-level community college administration and how they have developed the AACC leadership competencies throughout their career paths, a qualitative study was undertaken (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posited qualitative researchers seek to explore the meaning individuals attribute to a problem or experience. Because personal experiences are subjective and can only be conveyed through stories or artifacts that reflect a single person's interpretation of the world, experiences are not easily quantifiable or measured (Fraenkel et al., 2015). In research studies for which quantitative statistical analyses or manipulation of variables simply would not fit, much like the present study, qualitative methods are used to explore the research questions (Creswell, 2013).

The present study was designed to examine common experiences along the career paths of women in senior-level community college administration. Phenomenology, a common qualitative research design, was selected as the method by which to identify the commonality, or essence, of an experience that is shared by multiple people (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2015). Through a phenomenological approach, the varied experiences of women in senior-level community college administration were used to create a convergence of themes and recommendations for women who may consider a career in community college leadership in the future.

Within this chapter is a review of the problem studied and the purpose of the research. The questions which guided this research are restated, and an outline of the research methods is included. A description of the participants in the study, as well as

details regarding the data collection process are identified. Finally, the procedures used to analyze the data and interpret the results are discussed.

Problem and Purpose Overview

Women represent more than half of all students, faculty, and mid-level administrators on community college campuses (AACC, 2016a, 2016b; Boggs, 2012). However, they are disproportionately underrepresented among current community college presidents (AACC, 2014; Dean, 2009; Eddy, 2009; Eddy & Ward, 2015). Opportunities exist for women leaders to bridge the gender gap among the community college presidency as the population of sitting presidents nationwide is nearing retirement (AACC, 2014).

Leadership development is a long process (AACC, 2014; Duree & Ebbers, 2012). Women currently serving in senior-level community college administration, and who have a broad range of experiences and essential skills, are in an ideal position to further prepare themselves by pursuing key professional development opportunities (Dean, 2009; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; Hoobler et al., 2014; McNair & Phelan, 2012). In establishing the leadership competencies, the AACC (2013) created a valuable tool for navigating the pathway to the presidency for any future community college leader (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Eddy, 2012a, 2012b; Sullivan, 2009).

A gap in the current literature exists in regards to understanding the lived experiences of women in senior-level community college administration which may have prepared them to assume the role of president in the future (Eddy, 2009). An analysis of the lived experiences of women community college leaders as they relate to their development of the AACC leadership competencies, viewed through the STF, will help

to illuminate the path to community college executive leadership for future women leaders. Far too few women have successfully navigated the road to the chief executive office on community college campuses (AACC, 2014). For those women who have paved the way to the presidency, their career paths have often been full of unexpected detours and obstacles that are not experienced by their male colleagues (Wolverton, et al., 2009). The results of this study clarified which career experiences and opportunities women leaders may need to pursue to bridge the gender gap that still exists among top community college presidents (AACC, 2014; Boggs, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to understand how women in senior-level community college administration have developed the AACC leadership competencies throughout their careers. Additionally, the research questions which guided this study allowed for exploration of emergent themes among the lived experiences women leaders perceived as beneficial in the development of the AACC leadership competencies along their career paths (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; Eddy, 2009; McNair & Phelan, 2012). Finally, this study identified which of the five AACC leadership competencies emerged as common areas of deficiency among women leaders and what developmental steps those women are taking to prepare themselves to occupy the presidential office on campus (Duree & Ebbers, 2012).

Research Questions

In order to better understand how women in leadership positions at community colleges have developed the AACC leadership competencies throughout their career paths and how the skills are being used to inform their further career development, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What lived experience have supported the development of the AACC leadership competencies for women in senior-level community college administration?
2. What areas of the AACC leadership competencies do women in senior-level community college administration perceive as challenges, and what steps are they taking to overcome these deficiencies?
3. Drawing from their own lived experiences, what recommendations would women in senior-level community college administration offer women considering community college leadership as a career path?

Research Design

Because the present study was designed to gain an understanding of how women in leadership positions in community colleges have acquired the AACC leadership competencies throughout their careers, a qualitative approach was most appropriate (Fraenkel et al., 2015). According to Fraenkel et al. (2015), qualitative research is most suitable for research projects that are not constrained by predetermined outcomes. Rather, qualitative researchers are more interested in identifying the complex nature of individual experiences, or that of a group of research participants (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Creswell (2015) summarized the goal of qualitative research as not intending to reach a conclusion that can be generalized to a population, "…but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon" (p. 206).

The influences and lived experiences that have shaped the career paths of women in senior-level community college administration are likely numerous and varied, thus making the manipulation of specific, predetermined variables, and the collection and

analysis of numeric data for quantitative research difficult, if not impossible (Creswell, 2015). When considering the career paths and development of specific AACC leadership competencies among the women in this study, the data collected consisted of patterns and themes that emerged throughout the data analysis process (AACC, 2013; Creswell, 2015). The necessity for random sampling in quantitative research is simply not appropriate to address the research questions put forth in this study (Fraenkel et al., 2015). The selection of the participants in this study was conducted through purposive sampling, which is discussed in greater detail in later sections of this chapter (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016).

In considering various approaches to qualitative research, the use of phenomenological methods was determined to be most applicable in attempting to explore the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Fraenkel et al. (2015) noted phenomenological researchers are most interested in understanding "reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon" (p. 430). Phenomenology, as a research method, is used to identify the commonality, or essence, of an experience that is shared by multiple people (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Van Manen, 2014). In the present study, the development of the AACC leadership competencies throughout the respective career paths of women in senior-level community college administration was an ideal research problem to be viewed through a phenomenological lens (Creswell, 2015; Eddy, 2009; Fraenkel et al., 2015; McMahon et al., 2013). In using a phenomenological approach, commonalities among the individual career stories of the participants emerged (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). As is common with phenomenological studies, data were "collected through in-depth interviewing" (Fraenkel

et al., 2015, p. 430). When women serving in senior-level community college administration recounted their lived experiences in their own words, common perceptions and themes emerged that both distinguished and unified their career stories (Creswell, 2013; Van Manen, 2014). A more robust discussion of the sampling and data collection methods are included in this chapter.

Bracketing. An important part of the process for engaging in a phenomenological study is bracketing, or epoch (Creswell, 2013; Darawsheh, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). According to Moustakas (1994), bracketing involves the disciplined acknowledgment of a researcher's experiences with the phenomenon being studied "in order to launch the study as far as possible, free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experiences" (p. 22). The process of bracketing allows the researcher to identify any preexisting biases, set them aside, and focus on viewing the phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). In this section, the career development and personal experiences of the researcher are discussed as a means of identifying preconceptions or predilections. Such experiences held the potential for bias within the investigator's interpretations throughout this study had the processes of identification and examination through bracketing not occurred early in the research process (Creswell, 2013).

As the researcher for this study, it was important to engage in bracketing before any data collection or analysis was undertaken, particularly because of the researcher's personal experiences as a woman in leadership roles (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). At the time of the study, the researcher served in a mid-level administrative capacity on a small community college campus in rural Missouri and had

been in that position for less than four years. As a result, the researcher did not have experiences that related directly to the population in this study or women leaders in senior-level community college administration. Prior to working in higher education, however, the researcher had a career spanning more than 12 years in social service-oriented, non-profit organizations. Nearly all of that time was spent as either a senior-level administrator or a chief executive officer for local affiliates of a national non-profit organization. The national organization utilized competency-based leadership models similar to those found in the AACC leadership competencies (AACC, 2013). The researcher was selected to participate in a number of executive leadership development programs throughout her affiliation with the national organization. In retrospect, the researcher could easily pinpoint experiences and individuals who helped in the development of such professional competencies, including people who were viewed as mentors.

Prior to the development of this study, the impact of specific influences on her career path, such as those outlined by the STF, had not been considered by the researcher (McMahon, 2011). After reviewing her career experiences through the framework of the STF, the researcher identified the role that both content and process influences had played at different points in time (McMahon, 2011). For instance, the researcher recalled being both one of the only women, and one of the youngest professionals, in the room at most state conferences, national professional development events, or important local meetings during her non-profit career. However, the researcher did not perceive being limited or discriminated against based on gender in those, or similar, circumstances. The researcher recalled often feeling as though she needed to work harder or do more in order

to be taken seriously due to her age. As one of only a few women in leadership in a local non-profit organization, networking with male colleagues was something that came easily to the researcher. Before getting married and having her first child, the researcher was often invited to play on co-ed athletic teams with the men from the office and engaged in conversations about sports, politics, or current events over a drink after work.

The freedom to put in long hours and network with colleagues changed after the researcher's first marriage. The researcher's spouse at the time followed her from one position to the next, relocating the family three times early in her career. During the first few years of her son's life, the child struggled with health issues which would often result in trips to the emergency room and extended time away from daycare. The tensions that arose from negotiating who would stay home with the baby, coupled with the demands of leading a million-dollar non-profit organization in a small community, contributed to the dissolution of the researcher's first marriage.

As a single parent, the researcher was forced to make adjustments to work schedules and shifted career priorities. The researcher turned down opportunities to further grow her career because she perceived relocating as no longer an option. Upon remarrying, similar difficulties emerged between the researcher and her new husband as they worked to negotiate who would be primarily responsible for child care and household chores. More often than not, the researcher assumed the greatest portion of the domestic tasks because her non-profit position paid significantly less than her spouse's job in the hospitality industry, despite similar demands on time and required levels of expertise.

The researcher experienced success in terms of developing relationships and community networks, which she credited to a gregarious personality. The researcher's strong oral and written communication skills were valuable for fundraising and grant-writing, both of which were essential competencies for any non-profit leader (Panas, 1988). However, following the economic downturn of 2008, traditional fundraising efforts became significantly more difficult for non-profit organizations (Brooks, 2017). The researcher found herself at odds with the non-profit board of directors in regards to the funding priorities of the organization. As a result, the researcher chose to leave the organization when she perceived reaching a consensus with the board was an unattainable goal. Though the detour in the researcher's career path was difficult, it ultimately allowed her to stay home with her second child and develop a successful small business as a contracted grant writer and non-profit consultant.

When considering the researcher's career path through the narrative lens of the STF, instances were identified during which individual, social, and environmental-societal systems impacted her career choices and ability to develop certain skills (McMahon, 2011). The researcher also clearly identified times when chance and timing were crucial in terms of the career decisions she made (McMahon, 2011). The recursiveness of various influences in the researcher's career story was what she perceived as most intriguing when viewing her career path through a retrospective lens (McMahon, 2011). The frameworks through which the researcher made decisions and interpreted the multiple roles she played in life, repeatedly changed with time and circumstances. The researcher's interpretation of certain situations at the time they occurred differ dramatically from her current perspective.

Ethical Considerations

Developing an understanding of the details of career paths and various challenges or opportunities women in senior-level community college administration may have encountered, required participants to discuss intimate details of their lives (Creswell, 2015; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Whenever personal information is shared, researchers must be sensitive to the ethical considerations that accompany such disclosures (Creswell, 2015; Van Manen, 2014). It is important for researchers to be transparent with regard to the purpose of the research and ensure participants are given ample information from which to make an informed decision to participate (see Appendix A) in research (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Establishing and maintaining the trust of the research participants is equally important when conducting qualitative research (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Researchers must protect the confidentiality of research participants, particularly when the subject matter studied includes sensitive details of the participant's lived experiences (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Van Manen, 2014). Pseudonyms were assigned to the individuals who agreed to participate in the research prior to the data collection process in order to protect the confidentiality of participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). Further, no identifying information regarding the community college for which the women were currently employed, or that of any previous institutions at which they had served in their careers previously, were shared. Fraenkel et al. (2015) recommended, with respect to the research participants, "care should be taken to ensure that none of the information collected would embarrass or harm them" (p. 436). The researcher secured all audio recordings, interview

notes, and documents generated from interview transcripts to protect data collected from the participants in this study. Security measures are outlined later in this chapter.

Population and Sample

The population for this study included all women serving in senior-level administrative positions who reported directly to a president or chancellor at public community colleges in one Midwestern state. A purposive sample was recruited from a population of 54 women in senior-level administration from 13 community college systems and campuses across the state using this criterion (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research as it allows researchers to identify individuals who are most likely to illuminate the central phenomenon to be studied (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Van Manen, 2014; Yin, 2016). It is important to note phenomenological research is not intended to produce empirical generalizations (Van Manen, 2014). Rather, phenomenological studies should be focused on identifying a sufficient number of examples needed to provide a rich description of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Van Manen, 2014).

As it relates to the present research, selecting a homogenous sample from all current women leaders meeting criteria outlined in the research questions allowed for an in-depth exploration of career development patterns of women in senior-level community college administration (Creswell, 2015). The target sample size was eight to 10 women who would agree to participate in the study and complete the interview process. The final sample size consisted of 12 women serving in senior-level community college administration completing the interview process. Creswell (2015) defined saturation as the point at which major themes have been identified, “and no new information can add

to your list of themes or to the detail for existing themes" (p. 251). Likewise, Van Manen (2014) identified a point of saturation in phenomenological studies as that which "analysis no longer reveals anything new or different about the group" (p. 353). A point of saturation was reached after conducting one-on-one interviews with a sample population of this size.

Instrumentation

Two tools were developed for the data collection process of this study. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) consisted of an outline of the interview process and a set of open-ended questions that were asked during each of the semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2015; Olson, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview protocol was designed to ensure consistency among all interviews conducted for this study (Yin, 2016). Space was provided in the interview protocol in which notes were made of all additional probing questions during the course of the individual interviews (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

A copy of each participant's current resume or curriculum vitae (CV) was reviewed after each separate interview concluded. Evidence of the skills outlined in the AACC leadership competencies and influences associated with the STF were identified through a review of the resumes/CVs of the women participating in the study (Fraenkel et al., 2015). The resume/CV protocol (see Appendix C) consisted of a table of facts or keywords from the participants' resumes/CVs which were matched to components of both the AACC leadership competencies and the STF (AACC, 2013; McMahon, 2011).

Data identified on the resume/CV protocol were cross-referenced with statements made by the research participants during their individual interviews (Carter, Bryant-

Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). This process allowed the researcher to look for evidence within each woman's professional background that would support, or lend credibility to, the stories shared during the interview process (Carter et al., 2014; Fraenkel et al., 2015). Additionally, completing the analysis using the resume/CV protocol helped the researcher identify any gaps or inconsistencies within the interview. This additional checkpoint added internal validity to the study (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Trotter, 2012).

The questions included in the interview protocol were designed to assess the participants' perceptions of their development of the AACC leadership competencies, as well as to identify influences within the STF that appeared throughout their respective career stories (AACC, 2013; McMahon, 2011). The interview questions consisted of both experience and opinion questions and were guided by the research questions (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Fraenkel et al. (2015) noted the importance of using both types of questions. Experience questions "focus on what a respondent is currently doing or has done in the past" (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 451), and opinion questions are designed to "call attention to the respondent's goals, beliefs, attitudes, or values" (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 451) in qualitative research projects. Because the present study explored the complex nature of women's career development experiences, questions used in the interview protocol were developed to allow the participants to describe their respective careers in higher education and provide a context to understand the progression in responsibility and authority each woman gained in her career to date.

Other opinion questions used in the interviews were developed to directly reference the AACC leadership competencies (AACC; 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2015).

Participants were asked to identify events, responsibilities, or job duties during their careers they perceived had allowed them to develop the skills associated with each of the AACC leadership competencies. Participants were asked to identify ways in which they were currently seeking to strengthen those competency areas in which they were less experienced or less confident. Finally, participants were asked what recommendations they had for women who may choose to follow in their footsteps by pursuing senior-level leadership roles in community colleges, or even a presidency, in the future. These questions were designed to aid in identifying the common or shared experiences among the participants (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Van Manen, 2014).

Validity. Validity in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the variables or indicators being studied actually represent the concept or problem (Grossoehme, 2014; Lub, 2015). In other words, the validity of a study is demonstrated by the degree to which responses to the interview questions actually provide answers to the research questions (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Olson, 2012). In this section, explanations of the steps that were taken to provide both internal and external validity are discussed.

In order to assure internal validity, or limit the impact of researcher bias in the outcomes of the study, the processes of member checking and triangulation were used (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After each interview was completed and transcribed, the researcher used the resume/CV of the respective participant as a means of matching terms, themes, or experiences from the resume/CV to information shared during the interview. Through the process of triangulation, the researcher used an alternate, but a consistent source of data to corroborate details within the individual career stories (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

After each interview was transcribed, an electronic copy of the transcript was sent by email to the respective research participants so responses could be reviewed for accuracy. This process, referred to as member checking, is commonly used in qualitative inquiries and allows for greater credibility and validity of research findings (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Grossoehme, 2014). A primary purpose of member checking is to "minimize the risk of misinterpretations by the researchers" (Lub, 2015, p. 3).

In qualitative research, external validity is assumed when there is a consistency in the meaning of the data for both the researcher and the participants (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Grossoehme, 2014; Olson, 2012). Pilot testing of both the interview protocol and the resume/CV protocol was conducted in order to assure external validity (Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Two women in senior-level community college administration who were not included in the sample for this study were contacted regarding their willingness to participate in pilot testing. The women selected for pilot testing fit the criteria established for senior-level administration in this study, but each worked closely with or served as indirect supervisors for the researcher. The initial contact, solicitation of informed consent, and interview process for pilot testing were conducted following the exact same process as for actual study participants. The researcher had the opportunity to assess the clarity of the questions in the interview protocol and made necessary improvements to the resume/CV protocol through the pilot testing process, including the removal of redundant questions (Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Reliability. The reliability of a qualitative study "refers to the consistency of these inferences over time, location, and circumstances" (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 456). In order to assure reliability in this study, all participants were asked the same questions, in

the same prescribed order (Olson, 2012). Also, the researcher conducted all interviews, transcribed all interviews, and completed the resume/CV protocol for each research participant (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Trotter, 2012).

As a means of ensuring instrument reliability, the researcher recruited a colleague familiar with the present study to accompany her for all pilot testing interviews (Creswell, 2015). The colleague made notes during the interview process, and both the researcher and the colleague completed a resume/CV protocol for each pilot testing interview. Interrater reliability of the resume/CV protocol became evident when a consensus existed between the colleague and the researcher regarding matching themes, or lack thereof, between an interview and corresponding resume/CV (Creswell, 2013, 2015).

Data Collection

After gaining approval from the Lindenwood University institutional review board to begin research (See Appendix D), a list of public community colleges within a particular Midwestern state was generated from the public website for the professional association to which all community colleges in the region are members (Creswell, 2015). For each of the public community colleges listed, an exhaustive search of the respective colleges' websites was conducted as a means of locating a current organizational chart, list of college administrators or cabinet members, and general college directory. Using these public sources, a list of positions which report directly to a college or campus president, or college system chancellor, and the names of the incumbents currently serving in those posts, was compiled.

Each of the 54 women leaders identified in the population was contacted by email with a message designed to explain the purpose of the study and request their voluntary participation (see Appendix E). Sixteen women in senior-level administrative positions originally agreed to participate and made up the purposive, homogenous sample (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016). Three scheduled interviews were canceled due to conflicts which arose after the initial contact was made. One interview was started but was not completed, due to an unforeseen circumstance which arose on the community college campus where the interview was being conducted. The final sample consisted of 12 women serving in senior-level community college administration who completed the entire interview process.

After each woman responded to the initial email message and indicated a willingness to serve as a research participant, a time to conduct the interview was agreed upon with the researcher. Eight in-person interviews were conducted in the offices of the respective research participants (Rahman, 2015). One interview was held at a location that was not affiliated with any community college campus, and the other three interviews were conducted by telephone. Prior to each interview, the individual participant was provided with a copy of the informed consent form and a copy of her current resume or CV was requested (Creswell, 2015).

In order to remain respectful of the time commitment made by each of the respective participants, the semi-structured interviews were conducted at the preferred time and location for each participant (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Rahman, 2015). Each interview was guided by the interview protocol, though participants were encouraged to clarify or elaborate on responses, as needed (Creswell, 2015). Interviews were audio

recorded, and field notes were taken in the event of an equipment malfunction (Fraenkel et al., 2015; Grossoehme, 2014). Each interview was transcribed and a copy of the transcript was emailed to the respective research participant. Participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of the transcript and suggest any corrections to be made (Creswell, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2015). In order to protect the confidentiality of all research participants, interview recordings and transcripts were stored in both a locked location and a password-protected electronic folder on a secure web-based data storage platform (Creswell, 2015; Olson, 2012).

Data Analysis

Analysis of data from each interview began after each separate interview was completed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As Creswell (2015) noted, "qualitative research is an emerging design" (p. 130), and the identification of common themes are driven by the data collected. Each interview transcript was read, and notes were made of significant phrases or sentences that were directly related to the individual participant's career path, influences on their career choices, and their acquisition of the AACC leadership competencies (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Van Manen, 2014). Following an initial reading of the interview transcript, the resume/CV protocol was completed for each research participant as a means of supporting or enhancing information shared during the interview. The researcher was able to identify gaps or inconsistencies between the interview transcript and the resume/CV using the protocol through this process.

After all interviews had concluded and transcripts reviewed, the researcher engaged in additional inductive processes common to phenomenological research known as a reduction (Creswell, 2013, 2015; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). A list of

significant phrases and statements, or horizons, from each research participant were amassed with each horizon given equal significance (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then began clustering statements into common themes across all interview transcripts (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Based on such commonalities, the researcher identified comprehensive, textural descriptions of the career paths of women in senior-level community college administration (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

As Fraenkel et al. (2015) noted in regards to phenomenological studies, the hope of such research is to "gain some insight into the world of the participants" (p. 430). A deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges that are faced by women leaders in community colleges along their paths to a potential presidency emerged from the commonalities identified in this study. Additionally, themes surfaced among lived experiences of women in this study which can serve as recommendations for women who may choose to follow in their footsteps through the community college leadership ranks in the future (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Summary

Provided in this chapter was an overview of the methodology used for this study. Through a qualitative structure, this phenomenological study examined the development of the AACC leadership competencies on the career paths of women in senior-level community college administration. A series of commonalities and themes were identified through the use of semi-structured, in-person and telephone interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Olson, 2012). Though phenomenology is not intended as a research method through which broad empirical generalization can be made, the structural descriptions which emerged from this research can help to identify lessons learned and

recommendations to guide the career development of future women leaders (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). A thorough analysis of the data is included in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: Analysis

This study was designed to gain an understanding of what career experiences and influences had prepared women in senior-level community college administration for their current roles and what steps they were taking to further develop skills necessary for the next phase along a leadership pathway, presumably a community college presidency. The experiences and skills acquired over the course of their respective career paths were viewed through the context of the revised AACC leadership competencies (AACC, 2013). Another purpose of this study was to explore the development of career paths for women serving in community college leadership through the theoretical framework of the STF (McMahon, 2011).

Because literature regarding women in leadership across multiple industries have focused on specific barriers women have faced in the pursuit of executive level positions, the interview questions were structured in a way which allowed for the experiences shared by the research participants to be viewed through similar contexts (Bucklin, 2014; Catalyst, 2007; Dean, 2009; Diehl, 2014; Eddy, 2009; Ely & Rhode, 2010; Kellerman & Rhode, 2014; Sandberg, 2013; Sulpizio, 2014). This study used a phenomenological process, which was intended to identify commonalities among the research participants and approach the overall meaning, or essence, of becoming a senior-level community college administrator as a woman in the Midwest (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The analysis process included multiple reviews of each transcript for important statements through a manner in which every statement was given equal importance (Moustakas, 1994). The significant statements were grouped into themes across

transcripts and reduced in quantity to larger non-overlapping, non-duplicated themes (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014).

The results of the qualitative interviews are discussed in this chapter. A brief description of the demographic data for the sample population is provided. An analysis of the responses to each interview questions is included in this chapter, with common, repetitive responses among participants noted, as well as any unique responses or experiences. Additionally, an explanation of the five major themes which emerged from the research is outlined in this chapter.

Data Analysis

The participants in this study took part in semi-structured, qualitative interviews designed to understand their respective career paths, as well as challenges, barriers, or influences which helped them reach a senior-level administrative role in community colleges (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The questions included in the interview protocol were designed to explore which of the AACC leadership competencies the participants relied on throughout the course of their career path to date (AACC, 2013). Other questions were designed to understand which of the STF influences had the most profound role in decisions they made throughout their careers (McMahon, 2011). Lastly, questions were included in the interviews which related specifically to themes identified in a review of the literature on women in leadership.

The interview questions were aligned with the research questions guiding this study, in that, the participants were allowed to share their lived experiences throughout their careers and identify the experiences and relationships which aided them in developing certain AACC leadership competencies (AACC, 2013; Creswell, 2013).

Through their career stories, the participants were able to identify their future goals and what additional professional development experiences they would need to be successful in making those transitions. Participants shared recommendations they would have for women who may follow in their footsteps and pursue leadership roles in community college administration. By responding to questions asked specifically in regards to the theoretical framework, the participants were able to identify challenges or barriers they encountered along their career path, which provided a larger context to how and why they made certain choices along their respective career paths (McMahon, 2011).

Demographics. The population for this study consisted of women who were currently serving in a position which met the definition of senior-level community college administration in one Midwestern state. A list of public, two-year, associate's degree-granting institutions was generated, and an exhaustive search of the websites for each institution listed resulted in the identification of 54 women meeting the criteria to be included in this study. Each participant was contacted through a personalized email message, requesting her participation in this study. Of the 54 participants in the population, 16 responded to the email request. The sample was comprised of 12 participants who completed the qualitative interview process. A total of eight interviews were conducted in-person at a location determined by the respective participants. The remaining four interviews were conducted by telephone. An overview of certain characteristics of the sample, including their pseudonym, job category, and size of the institution is provided in Table 1. Each of these and additional characteristics are discussed in more detail in this section.

Table 1

Current Job Category and College Size, by Research Participant

Name	Job Category	College size
Brenda	Chief Student Affairs Officer	Small
Candace	Other	Small
Debbie	Chief Student Affairs Officer	Very large
Emily	Chief Financial Officer	Very large
Fran	Chief Student Affairs Officer	Medium
Gina	Chief Academic Officer/Provost	Very large
Holly	Chief Academic Officer/Provost	Medium
Inez	Chief Student Affairs Officer	Medium
Julia	Chief Development Officer	Medium
Laura	Chief Student Affairs Officer	Very large
Nadine	Chief Financial Officer	Medium
Olivia	Chief Financial Officer	Medium

Note. College size based on Carnegie classifications. All names are pseudonyms.

Seven of the in-person interviews were completed in the offices of the respective research participants. Conducting the interviews in this manner allowed the researcher to make informal observations of the physical working environment of the respective participants and bear witness to subtle social cues, facial expressions, or body language.

(Rahman, 2015). The researcher was able to make observations which added full descriptions to the data captured in the qualitative interviews (Creswell, 2015; Lub, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

While waiting to interview Brenda, the Chief Student Affairs Officer at a small community college, the researcher noted the sounds of laughter at the end of the hall. Many employees were walking down the corridor with small plates stacked with slices of cake. During the interview, Brenda shared she had spent lots of time working to create a culture of support and encouragement within her department. She stated her team works hard, gets results, and puts in many extra hours. However, she noted they also make time to celebrate individual accomplishments, including the party being held that day for an employee who completed a Bachelor's degree. Other participants who talked at length about the impact their families had on the choices they made throughout their career, shared those stories in offices with canvas prints of their children mounted on the wall or handmade crayon drawings affixed to filing cabinets with magnets. Being in the individualized workspaces of the research participants added specific contexts to the career stories shared in their respective interviews (Creswell, 2015; Lub, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

There was no ethnic or racial diversity represented among the participants in the sample. This was not surprising, as the Midwestern state selected had more than 80% of its population reporting as White in the 2010 United States Census (Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016). Most participants in this study voluntarily shared information about their familial structure. Through responses to certain interview questions, most of the participants shared they were married at the time of their interview (n = 10). One

participant stated she was not married. The majority of the participants reported having children (*n* = 9), while half of the participants (*n* = 6) stated they still have children living with them at home. Only one participant did not offer information regarding her familial structure throughout her interview.

The current roles of the sample participants were determined by their respective job titles and responsibilities. Though individual job titles varied greatly across institutions, the primary function of each position was categorized as Chief Academic Officer/Provost (*n* = 2), Chief Student Affairs Officer (*n* = 5), Chief Financial Officer (*n* = 3), or Other (*n* = 2). One job title which did not fit under any other higher education leadership category was included under the category of Other. The job description could best be classified as Dean of Health Sciences.

The career paths to which the participants in this study had taken on the way to their current positions were split equally among those who had only worked in higher education since graduating with an undergraduate degree (*n* = 6), and participants who had been employed in a different field before coming to higher education (*n* = 6). A common assumption in higher education leadership is those who are interested in moving up to higher ranking positions must relocate in order to fulfill these accomplishments (Eddy & Ward, 2015). The career paths of the participants in this study seemed to support that notion, as five of the six participants who had only worked in higher education were employed at multiple institutions. Only one participant has remained employed at the same institution for which she accepted her first full-time, professional position after completing her undergraduate degree more than 20 years ago.

The size of the public community colleges at which the participants were currently employed and the size of the communities in which the community colleges were located also varied. The 12 participants represented nine public community colleges within the Midwestern state. According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (The Carnegie Classification, n.d.), two of the community colleges were considered very large, one was classified as large, five were classified as medium, and one college was classified as small. Using data and definitions from the U.S. Census Bureau (Ratcliffe et al., 2016), the communities in which the community colleges represented in this sample population were located can be classified as Urbanized Areas (n = 3), Urban Clusters (n = 5), and Rural (n = 1).

Though age was not included in any of the interview questions, many of the women who participated in this study voluntarily shared their age or age range. For the remaining women, their approximate age was determined using data provided on their resumes or CV. A representation of the age ranges of the participants in this study is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

Approximate Age Ranges of Research Participants

	Age Ranges			
	30-39	**40-49**	**50-59**	**60 or older**
Number of participants	3	6	2	1

Note. Approximate age ranges disclosed in interviews or determined using data from resumes/CVs.

Results by interview question. A summary of the research findings, by interview question, are described in this section. Among the responses received from each research participant, a number of commonalities emerged and are reported. Additionally, some

experiences shared by research participants represented significant, powerful events in their lives, though such experiences were not mutual among other research participants. Such statements are included as a means of identifying the essence of what it means to be a woman in senior-level community college administration for the participants in this study.

Interview question 1a: *Tell me about yourself.* When asked to begin dialoguing about themselves, nearly all of the participants began by discussing their current professional positions, or the jobs which they had most recently held. Some provided a brief description of their career paths leading to their current job. Half of the research participants made statements regarding coming to their current position, or to the field of higher education by chance. Debbie, who serves as Chief Student Affairs Officer at a very large community college, recalled taking her first job in the field of higher education immediately after graduating from college. Her undergraduate degree in finance helped her find a full-time position in a financial aid office at a public university. She stated, "But I just happenstance got the job in financial aid because of my degree. I won't even say that I targeted higher ed."

Emily, who is currently employed as a Chief Financial Officer at a very large community college shared she had applied for the job once before but was not selected. She discussed the coincidence of seeing the job vacancy listed again a few years later. Emily noted, "So, fast-forward six years down the road, and I still had many people, many contacts that were involved [with the college] and learned that this position was being posted again. And, I thought, "Well, what the heck?"

Two participants spoke specifically about the role their families played in their decision to accept their current job, or in their decisions to relocate to the communities where they currently live or work. Laura, a Chief Student Affairs Officer for a very large community college, noted her first job with the community college was only part-time. "So, I started there as an advisor—not on a full-time basis," Laura stated. "But we had kids, so that was all fine." One participant indicated she began her career in higher education as a result of being recruited as an instructor by colleagues at a local community college. Prior to her communications with college officials, she had never considered anything outside of the health care industry.

Interview question 1b: *Tell me about life away from the office.* When asked to elaborate on parts of their lives which are not directly related to work, almost all of the participants talked about their relationships with their families, or spouses, or both. Nearly half of the respondents stated trying to find a balance between the demands of work and the responsibilities they have with their families was very tough. Fran, a Chief Student Affairs Officer at a medium-sized community college, works to incorporate her husband and children into her work life by bringing them with her to campus events. She stated, "It's intertwined some. It's difficult to know what's work and what's family."

Like Fran, many of the participants with young children still living at home talked about their deep appreciation for their spouses and extended families residing nearby. In addition to the extensive responsibilities of a senior-level community college administrator, the participants discussed the importance of coaching their children's teams, serving as scout leaders, or volunteering within their church or community. Olivia, the Chief Financial Officer at a medium-sized community college, discussed the

expectations placed on her to attend campus events, the demands on her husband to be available for some evening hours in his job, and trying to keep up with the schedule of an active teenage daughter. She laughed as she stated, “And, honestly, on weekends, it’s all I can do to just get out of bed.”

Three of respondents were new to their current positions, with start dates ranging from four months to a year and a half prior to the interview. The unbalanced nature of the demands on their time were especially acute for them, as they were each still working to learn as much as they could about their respective new institutions, departments, and responsibilities. When asked to describe what life looks like outside of the office, Gina, a Chief Academic Office for a very large community college, laughed when she stated, “There isn’t one. This job is 24/7. It’s all the time.” Similarly, Inez a Chief Student Affairs Officer at a medium-sized community college, noted the struggle to find personal balance after her recent promotion. Sitting in her office, still relatively empty and without a great deal of personalization as a result of her short time in her current position, she stated “It’s a just a whole different level of stress. A whole different level of responsibility. And, it’s hard. Even more difficult to get away from.”

Two of the respondents noted they often bring work home, but they do not mind doing so because their children are grown and no longer live with them. However, both participants indicated the demands of their current positions as senior-level administrators would have been almost impossible to manage when their families were young. Laura stated, “You know, I could not have done this job when I had young kids. I work on a lot of stuff at home… But, I like to work. I like doing what I’m doing, so it doesn’t feel like drudgery.”

Interview question 2: *Having had the chance to review the AACC leadership competencies, how would you say your daily responsibilities relate to the AACC leadership competencies?* Each of the participants was provided with a copy of the revised AACC leadership competencies and brief definitions for each. Upon reflecting on the list, every participant noted the ability to communicate well was the single most important factor in their daily responsibilities. Though the context through which they explained the value of communication varied, it was overwhelmingly the most significant of the AACC leadership competencies. Holly, the Chief Academic Officer at a medium-sized community college, compared the importance of communication between her current position and her previous job. She related, "I used to joke about that (at her previous institution), that the job was, like, 'Oh, 95% of this job is communication.' Well, 99.9% of *this* job is!"

Based on the nature of their primary job responsibilities, some of the participants also discussed the importance of other competencies, such as finance or organizational strategy. A few participants noted the degree to which the entire list of competencies are interconnected and cannot stand alone. Olivia, in her role as Chief Financial Officer, noted her ability to communicate well and work collaboratively across departments on campus was just as essential to her job as her accounting background. She stated, "I can't do it in a vacuum… These are all very intertwined."

Three participants noted they have learned to reframe their perception of certain leadership competencies throughout the course of their careers. Laura indicated early in her career she was terrified of finance and budgets and felt intimidated by anything relating to the fiscal side of the operation. However, in learning to view budgets from a

logical, problem-solving perspective, her outlook has changed. She stated, “I’m fascinated by budgets. Because it’s all just logic and has to make sense… It is one of my favorite things really. I would have never told you that three years ago.”

Many of the participants associated community college advocacy with the ability to work directly with state or federal legislators. However, Debbie and Brenda both chose to reframe the concept of community college advocacy in their current positions and talked about the role that particular competency played in their day-to-day interactions on campus. Brenda talked about community college advocacy from a more localized perspective, noting her regular meetings with public K12 administrators. In a small community, surrounded by even smaller, rural public school districts, her brand of community college advocacy, strategically blended with public relations and small-town good-will, had become a necessity. She shared her college had recently hosted state legislators on campus, and she had taken advantage of the opportunity to teach the legislators about the challenges facing students at her college:

> I saw it as an opportunity to educate… I think if you see yourself as a lobbyist or an advocate, I honestly think that turns them off. But if you ask questions and offer and an opportunity to share information so that they can make the best decisions possible for us, as a group of people they represent, I think they are much more open to it.

Debbie observed she often finds herself advocating for new students on her campus, because they often arrive from under-resourced, inner-city public K12 schools. For her, community college advocacy was just as much about reminding the campus community, or even her own staff, of the potential within each student:

> Because I have to advocate for my own. In my own setting. Because after a while, people just start to say "It's another student from that school. They're not going to be successful." So, I have to continue to preach, even to my own team, to help them remember.

Interview question 3: *What experiences in your career do you feel helped you to develop those competencies?* For more than half of the research participants, the skills they have developed throughout their careers were credited back to learning from the examples set by valued mentors, supervisors, or colleagues. Many of the participants called on previous supervisors by name when they reflected on positive experiences which helped them develop professionally, each with very specific stories of when their respective supervisors or mentors said or did something they still view as critically impactful on their careers presently. With a warm smile reaching across her face, Holly identified her very first supervisor at a public university as a tremendous influence on how she communicates and leads today. In describing the previous supervisor, Holly stated, "(She) was a phenomenal administrator. Just the way that she really pulled on people's strengths, and getting to know them as a person. Who they are as an individual."

Not every participant spoke so fondly of the supervisors from whom they have learned to develop key leadership competencies. Some participants noted they had learned to develop certain competencies through adversity, or through making mistakes in previous jobs. Olivia talked about a previous college administrator to whom she reported having pushed her beyond her comfort zone, forcing her to hone some of the leadership competencies as a means of survival at work. She recalled:

> I mean, he threw me into the deep end... And certainly, I had my misgivings about having worked for him, but I can also say that – even though I didn't like it at the time – it forced me to develop skills that I would not have otherwise willingly developed, probably.

A few participants discussed being willing to take risks, volunteer for new experiences, or saying "Yes" to challenges when they were presented. Such unexpected opportunities proved to be valuable experiences in the development of the AACC leadership competency areas among research participants. Candace, who is currently a Dean of Health Sciences at a small community college, credited her volunteer work with local non-profit organizations for helping her develop confidence in the areas of finance and organizational strategy. Similarly, Inez noted her role as a committee member, while preparing for her college's Higher Learning Commission accreditation visit a few years ago, was valued in helping her to better understand the importance of the finance, organizational strategy, and collaboration competencies.

Several participants insisted it was the sum of all their experiences which had ultimately helped them to develop the skills needed to lead from their current positions within community colleges. The opportunities they have had to learn and grown have been rooted in experiences much more than any professional development event. Gina underscored the value of all her previous experiences in helping her to develop the skill sets required for her current leadership role. She stated:

> I think every job I've had at some point has helped me to do each of these things… As funny as it sounds, the things that prepared me most for my communication skills were working my small, terrible jobs as an

> undergraduate and a graduate student. I worked at a pawn shop. I worked at a gas station. I worked as a library page, which is not glamorous… Through each of those jobs, I learned customer service skills. And that's really what it all comes down to—treating people as priorities.

Interview question 4: *What experiences or professional development opportunities are you currently planning to help develop the AACC leadership competencies that you lack?* When asked about additional professional development opportunities or experiences the participants were currently pursuing, none of the responses were centered on AACC leadership competencies. Three of the participants are currently pursuing their terminal degree, or are actively comparing doctoral programs because they intend to begin a terminal degree in the near future. Three other participants stated they had just completed a Master's degree and were not currently pursuing any specific professional development programs at the time of the interview. Julia, the Chief Development Officer for a medium-sized community college, echoed the sentiments of the other freshly-minted MBAs when she stated, "I decided to take a little break (laughter)."

Three of the Chief Student Affairs Officers each stated they are much more concerned with learning as much as they can about current and evolving legal issues in student affairs. Areas such as crisis management, student conduct, and other state and federal mandates placed on colleges and universities were identified as areas of immediate need for professional development. As Fran noted:

> The things that are on my intentional training docket right now are a little more in the weeds than these bigger, broader strokes of competencies. I

> mean, we're talking about prevention of drug and alcohol abuse training. We're talking about suicide prevention. We're highly involved in initiatives to keep students safe [including prevention initiatives] related to alcohol and drug abuse, sexual assault, and bystander intervention.

Two participants reported interest in pursuing a project management certification. Though the participants are employed by two separate community colleges, both institutions for which they work have recently hired project managers to oversee large-scale reorganization projects. One participant reported interest in becoming a Higher Learning Commission peer reviewer as a means of learning about other colleges and universities throughout the United States. One other participant stated she would like to gain more experience in working with elected boards of directors/trustees.

Interview question 5: *To what do you attribute gaps in your leadership skill sets?* Throughout the interview process, some participants voluntarily shared details about the kinds of professional development they felt like they needed and talked about why they believed they had those gaps in their current skill sets. For some participants, the response to this question came about through dialogue relating to other interview questions. For others, the question was asked directly.

For most of the research participants, any gap in their current skill sets relating to the AACC leadership competency had to do with the nature of their career path and the lack of access they may have had to additional experiences or opportunities within the college. For instance, individuals who built their careers in student affairs noted having been so intensely focused on their respective areas of expertise (i.e., housing, financial aid, academic advising) they had not invested time learning about other sectors of the

college until they reached a position of leadership in which such experience became critical. That experience rang true for Laura, as she noted her progression through leadership positions leading towards her role as Chief Student Affairs Officer:

> But then when I was in enrollment management, I had to learn a little more about a lot of things. I had more breadth. Not as much depth, but certainly breadth. I knew a little bit about financial aid. A little bit about admissions. A little bit about a number of different things.

Similarly, participants who had come to their current leadership position through a more traditional academic path stated it was not until they began to take on additional responsibilities and gain experiences with other departments of the college that they began to develop what they now view as their leadership skill sets. Holly recalled the benefits of taking on other responsibilities while working as a full-time English faculty at a previous community college. She stated, "All the while being a faculty member, I had opportunities to, kind of dip into administrative roles… Some of that opened opportunities up additionally."

Laura talked about the limited experiences she was given in her first two decades at a very large community college. She recalled a supervisor who did not encourage employees to grow professionally, or learn new things. Laura stated, "Once you were placed in a box, that's the box where you stayed. The expectations were that you would never get out of that box."

Other participants who have come to the field of higher education from other industries noted learning the culture of higher education has been a challenge for them in identifying and developing the appropriate leadership skill sets. With a professional

background as a certified public accountant, Olivia recalled being challenged to refine her communication skills to adapt from a corporate environment to a community college setting. She stated, “And probably one of the largest pieces that I had to improve on—and continue to try to improve on—going from being an accountant… to being more the leader and the CFO.”

Similarly, Candace acknowledged much of what she has had to learn in her leadership role on campus she learned while on the job. Coming from a professional background in health care, she found herself looking for other means of learning budgeting and institutional finance. She stated, “Honestly, I didn’t have a good background in budgetary costs, and line items, and how to move budget, and what you have to look at is the bottom line, that bottom dollar.”

Interview question 6a*: Do you aspire to become a community college president?* The majority of research participants stated they did not aspire to become a community college president at the time of their respective interviews. The reasons behind those decisions varied and are discussed in more detail in the outline of the next interview question. Only two participants were certain they would like to eventually pursue a role as community college president in the future. One of those participants has even applied for a vacant presidency position in the past.

Two other participants stated they were not certain if the presidency would be something they would pursue as a career goal at the time of the interview. Candace, one of the two participants who responded to the question with uncertainty, described her long-term career planning through the lens of her personal faith:

> Ten years ago, if you told me that I would be (in the role that she is in now), I would have probably laughed. So, I never say never anymore. I am very open to possibilities and where God will lead me and wherever my gifts are needed.

Interview question 6b: *At what point did you decide that would be (or, would not be) part of your career goals?* Half of the participants have been asked by either their current community college president or a member of their current board of directors/trustees if they aspire to become a community college president. For those participants who have no aspirations towards a community college presidency, the personal reasons for reaching that conclusion are varied and specific. The most pervasive reason given for not aspiring to the presidency was the individual participants felt as though the presidency would not be a good fit for their style of leadership. Participants talked about their perceptions of what a community college president does and how that would not fit with the kind of work they find meaningful or fulfilling. Some participants expressed a fondness for working directly with students, while others talked about the loyalty they feel to their current department staff. The participants recognized those types of interactions would end if they were to accept the presidency.

Similarly, participants stated they enjoyed working on more defined, specific tasks than the top-level oversight a community college president must maintain. Gina stated, “I’ve always liked the minutiae. The little tiny pieces of work. The academic affairs piece often gets lost in the presidency… I don’t need to be the flashy, in-front person.”

Additional arguments for not aspiring to a community college presidency included what participants perceived as realities of the job that become a lifestyle and things they simply do not want to do. For nearly half of the participants, the idea of living a public persona, day in and day out, made the idea of becoming a community college president undesirable. The perceived level of external focus away from the college and on to community, state, and national level political relationships was also noted as a reason for not aspiring to a community college president among participants. Fran stated:

> I do know that I am not interested in the political piece. And, I mean political, as in Democrat and Republican, but also I mean political just in the kinds of political positions college presidents often have to operate within. That the "little p" political, and "capital P" political. Both… It's just not something I think I enjoy.

Of the participants who indicated they do aspire to become a community college president, their reasons for pursuing that goal were clearly defined as well. One participant indicated she felt comfortable with all aspects of the presidency, except for working with elected board members. Additionally, her only hesitancy about becoming a community college president is that it could mean relocating away from the area she and her husband call home.

The other participant who stated she did aspire to become a community college president, noted she felt as though she could offer a great deal in terms of shifting a stagnant culture on campus; a dilemma she has perceived as a shortcoming of other institutions. However, she shared the same hesitancy with regard to relocating in order to take a community college presidency:

> All of my family is here. My external family. For me, if I connected to aspiring to be a president, or making that next kind of upward move, would mean potentially moving my family out of (the county in which she resides). And, I think that's probably what I don't want to do.

Interview question 7: *Why do you think a significant gender gap exists in community college executive leadership?* Prior to being asked this question, participants were given current data relating to the proportion of women serving in senior-level community college administration and the percentage of women serving as community college presidents at both a national level and at the state level for the Midwestern state in which they all reside and work. Most of the participants were aware of the data from the AACC (2016b). About half of the participants were not surprised by the state level data because of their interaction with colleagues in statewide organizations. Others, particularly those participants who had come from industries outside of higher education, were surprised by the dramatic gender gap at the state level, as the data did not match what had been their personal experiences in their careers to date. Candace stated, "Wow. I mean, honestly, that is shocking to me. I mean, good, bad, or ugly, I don't know. It is absolutely shocking to me that we have that much of a differential. Honestly, I do not feel that here."

Half of the participants theorized the reason behind the continued gender gap in community college executive leadership could have something to do with a more traditional, Midwestern culture. These opinions were shared by participants living and working in small, rural parts of the state, as well as large, metropolitan areas. Using

political references which were associated with the most recent presidential election, Gina stated, “We’re a red state. And, that makes a significant difference.”

A few participants remarked that community college presidents are hired by elected boards, and elected boards are widely comprised of men. Participants perceived board members were more likely to hire someone similar to themselves. Brenda stated, “I think you have a board of trustees, or regents, or whatever they are called on various campuses, who may be a little bit more conservative and feel more comfortable with a male at the helm.” Likewise, Nadine stated, “Look at who hires those people (presidents). It’s men. And those men, those elected positions, are much more comfortable working with a man than they are with a female.”

Half of the participants referenced perceived challenges women may face along a path to a community college presidency include subtle sexism or a double bind. Fran discussed the difficulty women in executive leadership roles can face in needing to be both tough and decisive but maintain a more collective, feminine nature:

> Forgive me for saying this. You either come off looking like a bitch, or bitchy. Or, you come off being soft and too sensitive. You know, men can be tough to work with, but they are not seen as bitchy. They are seen as firm.

Olivia spoke from a much smaller regional perspective when she stated, “Speaking for us specifically, being more rural, the good old boys club is alive and well. And, that certainly does limit where you can go.” Debbie echoed that sentiment when she stated, “It’s still a good old boys club. I mean, it is. So, there’s just that stereotype.”

Some participants posed additional questions, such as inquiring about the number of women who have actually applied for community college presidencies, and if women were applying for such vacancies were they being granted interviews? Several participants opted to discuss why women might not even choose to throw their hat into the ring for consideration in community college presidential searches. Other participants noted the perceived non-stop, public nature of a presidency and the potential for relocation as factors which may cause women to avoid pursuing the presidency. Holly stated, "To have to be on, to have that public mask persona 24-7, is a little daunting."

Laura addressed the issue of needing more women in leadership roles in order to serve as role models and mentors for women who may choose to follow similar career paths in the future. She said, "I think it has to do with… At least, my experience would be, you know, it's a chicken and an egg thing. If you have fewer female mentors, you're going to have fewer female followers." Brenda provided further illustration of the need for women in executive leadership roles to model balanced career paths and life priorities for future generations of women leaders. She described a conversation she had with an undergraduate student worker at a college where she was previously employed. Her intent at the time was to encourage the student to consider a career in student affairs, maybe even replace Brenda in the director role someday:

> And the student said, "No. Thanks, but no thanks." I said, "Why not? What's wrong with what I do?" She said, "I want to have children someday." I said, "Great. So, what's your point?" She said, "When I look at you, you don't have any kids. And when I look at (another director in the same department) she doesn't have any kids." Every female—the

> director of activities, the student union director—none of them had children. And, I thought about that. That was the message we were sending.

Interview question 8: *Do you feel as though you have faced challenges along your career path that are different from your male colleagues?* Half of the participants stated they had experienced challenges along their career paths which they perceived as unique to their gender. The degree to which the participants interpreted those experiences as being true barriers to their success, or less significant cultural annoyances, varied. Some of the most noteworthy examples of gender bias, or gender-specific barriers, which emerged during the interviews came from outside of higher education. Emily shared a story about being passed over for a promotion, which she felt she had worked many years to earn because she was pregnant at the time of the hiring process:

> I was the top person. And, had been doing it for nine months. And (the hiring managers) came to me and said that they were not even going to interview me because I was pregnant. And, they knew I would be taking my time off and so…

With previous experience in the non-profit industry, Nadine laughed when she noted a lot of business gets done on the golf course. Despite her role in a powerful position within a large organization at the time, she was always given a subservient role during fundraising golf tournaments. She stated, "My job was to drive the beer cart. I mean, ask a man to do that!"

Two participants stated they had experienced a perceived gender-related pay gap. Gina was certain her experience was related to gender, as the male candidate hired to be

her counterpart in a different department was paid more despite have fewer qualifications. She stated, “And, though he had less experience and less academic credentials than I did, he was making $40,000 a year more than I was.” Laura was less inclined to label her experience as specifically gender-related:

> I was in this role for about a year or so before we hired our first person that was my colleague at another campus. And, he was a male, but he had a Ph.D. And, so they did offer him more money, but I’m assuming it was because of his Ph.D.

A few participants mentioned noticing what they perceived to be subtle, even inadvertent, examples of sexism at work. Gina recalled experiences at a previous college, during which she was often called on to serve as secretary during administrative meetings because she was the only woman in the room. Holly shared examples of having to insert herself into meetings involving two former male colleagues because she had not been invited formally to participate. She stated, “Even after the most recent board meeting I asked the president if he did not have faith in me because I was not in on some conversations that I felt I should have been.” Gina experienced what she perceived to be more obvious examples of sexism while employed at a college in the southern United States. A college vice president to whom she was a direct report would threaten her job unless she helped him with what he viewed were other duties as assigned. She stated, “He asked me to come over and help him pick out boots. Would ask me to help decorate his office. You know, things women can do” (Gina).

Other participants discussed behaviors or circumstances they actively avoid at work in order to not be viewed as too weak or too feminine. Debbie stated she

recommended to female employees to learn to control their emotions in the office. She stated, “Because the moment you cry, you are weak, and you are a woman. And, that’s another thing, if a guy shows emotion, they would not have to worry about that. A woman cries at work? You are weak.” Brenda discussed similar examples of the double-bind she has experienced throughout her career. She stated “I think I’m a pretty direct, assertive person. And, women aren’t supposed to be that way.” Brenda also noted that even though professional women may also carry a greater proportion of the responsibilities for their families, they are more likely to be labeled or discussed negatively for doing so. She stated when she had to take her young son to a doctor’s appointment, she used a personal day to do so and did not mention the reason for her absence:

> I didn’t say, “My son is sick,” because I don’t want to use him as an excuse. Or, have it be perceived as an excuse. Or, “She was dealing with Mom things.” Because I’ve never heard anyone say, “My husband was dealing with Dad things.” (Brenda)

Some participants stated they had never felt limited in any way along their career paths because of gender. A few participants shared that any barriers which had been placed on them had been largely self-imposed. Such self-imposed barriers took the form of not wanting to relocate for a promotion, not wanting to pursue a terminal degree or any number of other factors. Fran stated, “I think that’s self-imposed. I have never felt like because I was a woman, I was not given an opportunity.”

Interview question 9: *Did you encounter barriers along your career path—either professionally or personally? If so, what were they?* Most of the participants stated they

did not feel as though they had encountered any other barriers along their respective careers paths. The majority of the participants responded by saying they feel as though they have worked very hard to reach their current point in their respective careers, and they are very proud of their accomplishments along the way. Inez recalled a conversation she had recently with friends, which illustrated her perspective:

> Not too long ago, I was having a conversation with some friends who were talking about, you know, it's who you know. And so many times, it's the connections. And I said, "No, I beg to differ. That's my hard work that got me in the door."

Both Candace and Fran recalled difficult working circumstances in previous positions either did prove or could have demonstrated to be barriers. In Candace's experience, she reached a point at which she felt like the amount of work and stress had become too much to bear. Her supervisor at the time did not offer support or assistance in redistributing the workload, which resulted in her leaving the position. She stated, "And at that point, the leadership was not hearing me out and seeing that the change needed to be made. So, that was… Obviously, that was my biggest barrier." Fran shared a similar story of a supervisor who created a work environment which could have been a barrier in her career if a change had not come about. Despite having a close relationship with her then-supervisor, Fran stated:

> There was no organization, or planning… I knew that I could not work in that environment long-term because I was getting really cranky and frustrated… She was great at complementing strengths and giving me

> enough rope to do things with. She was just always very, very difficult to work with and work for.

Two participants stated that the only real barrier they had each encountered was relocating to very rural environments and having to learn to fit into that culture both at work and in the community. Two other participants stated not understanding the influence of the faculty on campus and not working to establish a good working relationship with faculty proved to be a barrier for each of them respectively. Inez stated, "Faculty have to buy in, and faculty, have to be part of decisions that are being made that will affect them." Julia shared a similar experience in which a stronger relationship with faculty would have been beneficial for her in the long-term:

> Internally, I assumed we were all on the same page. And, that assumption really hurt when I was new, and I was young, and I did not have teaching experience… Oh, if I would have done that differently, it would have been so much of a smoother ride.

Interview question 10: *Did your family have an impact on your career decisions? If so, in what ways?* When asked about the impact their respective families have had on their careers, the majority of participants commented they could not have accomplished as much as they have to date without the support of their families. Of the participants who reported being married, the majority of them gave credit for their career success to their spouses. Three participants stated their husbands view their careers as a partnership or a venture into which they have chosen to enter together (Julia). Both Brenda and Fran mentioned their spouses also have very demanding jobs in the public eye in their respective small communities. Brenda stated her husband often bears the brunt of the

responsibilities for taking their young son to medical appointments, preschool events, and other activities, while Fran noted she is grateful to have extended family who lives nearby. She remarked, “My parents are close by. My husband’s parents are close by… I have a great village. I have just a very supportive family… That has certainly been key.” Holly shared a story to illustrate her husband’s generous support of her while she was completing her doctoral dissertation:

> When I say, literally, I am so focused on the writing, and the audio, and my computer, that I didn’t even recognize that he had sat down the sandwich and the glass of water. And, like, an hour into it I would think, “I just had a sandwich. Where’d that come from?”

Several participants shared their decision to relocate to the communities in which they resided and worked at the time of the interviews was influenced by their extended families. Olivia discussed her reluctance to move from a major U.S. city to the rural community in which she currently resides even though it allowed her husband to be close to his family. She stated, “So, in comparison to (her current community), I consider myself a city girl. And, he moves us here… It felt like I was really coming to the country” (Olivia). Both Brenda and Gina shared they ultimately decided to relocate closer to the extended family after experiencing the loss of a family member. Gina recalled she and her husband reached an agreement to either move to one state to be nearer to his family, or the state in which they resided at the time of the interview, because it was closer to her family. She said, “You know, we’re getting older now. It was fun being 15 hours from everybody when I was 20. People couldn’t check on me. But now, I was like, “Uh, it’s time to be closer” (Gina).

In addition to relocating to be closer to family, several participants shared choices they had made to remain in certain jobs, or regions, in order to accommodate the needs of their families. Brooke shared making a change from health care to higher education was a financial burden for her family, but that her ability to be home in the evening with her children makes the sacrifice worthwhile. Likewise, Debbie noted she made the decision to not continue with her doctoral dissertation when her child reached an age at which his educational experience superseded her own:

> School doesn't come easy for my son, so I had to evaluate whose education was going to be most important at that point. My doctorate is optional. His solid foundation in school is not. And, so, that was a choice I made.

Nadine also shared stories of career opportunities she did not pursue in order to do what she felt was right for her children at the time. Her career choices involved everything from leaving a powerful position which she loved, to working part-time for a period of time, to taking a job in a local K12 school district so she could drop her children off and pick them up every day after school (Nadine). Sitting at the conference table in her office, photos of her husband and children lined the window just over her shoulder. She recalled turning down a position when her children were in junior high school:

> I would have to hire someone to get (her daughter) to practice and to get her home from practice. How do I juggle all these things? And I finally said, "Nope. We're just going to sit still until we can get them to that point… I definitely made some career decisions for them.

Interview question 11: *Reflecting on the experiences along your career path to date, what would you have done differently? Please explain.* In reflecting on their career experiences, nearly all of the participants stated they would not change anything about the path they had taken. Many of them felt as though the culmination of the experiences they had made them better professionals, better supervisors, and better leaders in their current positions (Debbie).

Some participants expressed if there were things they could do differently along their career paths, most of those examples had to deal with relationships. Julia stated taking more time to build relationships with colleagues across divisions at her current college would be something she would do differently:

> I would have spent a lot more time building relationships with those internally involved… It's my personality. I just want to get stuff done… But, I realized that if you just barrel down, then you're all alone.

Gina shared an experience from a previous college on which she still reflected regularly at the time of the interview. She discussed a faculty member, who was her direct report, whom she felt like had been targeted unfairly by the college's administration. Gina talked about a particular incident for which the faculty member was released from the college for behavior which might have been overlooked among other colleagues. However, without access to affordable health insurance, the faculty member succumbed to a preexisting medical condition a short time after the dismissal. Gina reflected on the experience by saying:

> But, in hindsight, it was probably not that big of a problem. She probably could have kept her job… While I know that, you know, it wasn't

> ultimately my decision anyway—that (administrator) was going to do what he was going to do—I feel like I should have fought harder for her.

For some participants, missed opportunities, or leaving jobs they loved, were examples of things they would change if they had the chance to do them over again. Olivia talked about the regret she felt for leaving a job she loved in a field she had pursued throughout her undergraduate college experience:

> It was 1997, so telecommuting wasn't really a thing… And, I loved that job. And, had I left that job maybe a few more years into the future, maybe I might have had a few more options.

Nadine's response to the question was from a different perspective. She discussed a position for which she felt like she stayed too long. In reflecting on the experience, she remarked she would have left one of her previous jobs sooner (Nadine).

A few participants noted, in retrospect, they would like to have continued with their own formal education. For Laura and Candace, they would have started sooner and gone further with their studies. For Debbie, she would have begun her doctorate, and her family, earlier in life.

Interview question 12: *Please talk about the relationships that have been influential along your career path—both position and negative.* Participants shared experiences they felt were influential for them professionally, with similar references to people who have been strong, positive influences, and those who were not. Several participants shared the names of former colleagues, supervisors, and mentors they credited with helping to shape them professionally. Brenda talked about a previous

administrator to whom she directly reported who helped her to learn to work collaboratively:

> I would talk to him about an initiative or an issue, and he would say, "Did you talk to the other two deans?" I would roll my eyes and think, "Really? This has nothing to do with (their departments). And 90% of the time it did.

Similarly, Holly talked about a former supervisor for whom she tries to emulate her style with employees and faculty in her current role. She also shared an experience with her favorite instructor as an undergraduate student, who was the first person to encourage her to consider teaching. She recalled, "He said, 'Hey, I think you should do this teaching assistantship. I think you'd be good at this. I think you'd do all right.'" (Holly). Gina discussed a relationship with a former colleague who coached her and advised her as she grew into various leadership roles. She laughed when she commented, "I call her my Yoda. She, literally, trained me. And, still, if something is going wrong, I will call her and say, 'I just don't know what to do.' And, she'll talk me off the ledge" (Gina).

Nadine shared fond memories and vivid experiences she had of her supervisor at a non-profit organization; a role she felt like was her first real job as a professional. She shared her supervisor challenged her a great deal. She stated, "He pushed me into that (fast-paced, metropolitan) environment. That, 'Oh my God, you've got to grow up and not be such a country hick!' environment. But, he was there to hold me up" (Nadine). Olivia credited a former college administrator, to whom she was a direct report, for also

pushing her outside of her comfort zone. However, she reported her experience as being far less pleasant:

> Like I said, it might not have been the way I wanted it to happen, but he tested all of my boundaries. All the soft people skills that I wasn't comfortable with, he forced me to do. And forced me to do it repeatedly. He tested my ethics. He tested my will.

Like Olivia, a few participants shared experiences they felt were influential in their career development, but not for positive reasons. Inez talked about being a young professional in her first job in higher education and bearing the brunt of a campus president who had a reputation for launching into loud, inappropriate, and ill-timed temper tantrums. She talked about enduring one such episode sitting with colleagues around a conference table by saying, "And, you look back on some of those experiences and say, 'I would never want to treat someone like that.'" (Inez). Gina recalled two administrators at a previous college to whom she reported, genuinely enjoyed, and from whom she learned valuable lessons about leadership. She also noted two administrators from whom she learned a different kind of lesson. She said, "The crazy-town (administrators) were pretty influential, in terms of things that I should never, ever do… So, I learned pretty much everything I could ever need about what not to do from those two people" (Gina).

Two participants discussed relationships they felt had been particularly influential along their respective career paths which were not their supervisors or colleagues. One participant discussed the decision to use some of her professional development budget to hire an executive coach. She stated, "She really was a game changer for me. And still is. I

still work with her" (Julia). Similarly, Holly discussed the somewhat inadvertent influence the family of a former spouse had on her before her career in higher education actually began:

> (At that time) I was ready to go to law school. So, I had a very different life planned. That family, those in-laws actually said to me… "We don't really think you need to go to law school… He's getting this degree in this. You can just let him go to work, and you can start having babies."

Interview question 13: *What impacts, if any, did timing or change have on your career decisions?* Every participant relayed stories of how either timing or chance, or both, had a direct impact on the trajectory their respective career paths took. Some laughed as they reflected on what they perceived as fortuitous events they would never have predicted. Others expressed a deep gratitude for opportunities they had missed, because of the trajectory their careers and lives had taken despite what was perceived as a setback at the time. Many participants saw the impacts of timing and chance along their career paths as intermingled and not mutually exclusive. Throughout their respective stories, it was difficult to differentiate between the two.

Many participants related their experiences with timing and chance through the imagery of doors opening. Candace associated the imagery of doors opening for her along her career which she would not have otherwise anticipated, or sought out on her own, in terms of her personal faith. She remarked:

> Doors have to open up in order to make those things happen, and the possibilities be there… And I wholeheartedly believe that God had a hand in everything lining up the way that is was supposed to.

Both Fran and Laura acknowledged they were in their current positions, not because they had applied and prepared for those posts, but because they had been appointed unexpectedly. Following the sudden removal of her supervisor, Laura was asked to serve in an interim role until college administrators could determine a long-term plan to fill the vacancy. Laura stated, "I go from coordinator to vice president, like, overnight. It was total chance and total timing. And, it was just dumb luck… I couldn't explain that. That wasn't something anyone would ever have planned" (Laura). Fran confirmed feeling fortunate to have been appointed to positions with progressively more responsibility throughout her career. She said, "I have not been asked to interview for positions that I have taken while being moved up. It has been, 'We need you. Gather up your group, because on Monday we're appointing you to this position'."

Some participants identified times in their career when they seemed to be in the right place at the right time, while others noted they had consciously made a choice to accept unexpected opportunities along their career paths. Julia recalled walking into the development office of a local community college simply to ask if they had any openings at the time and found out a position was available. She stated, "Lucky me. So, I kind of think it was fate." Debbie stated, "I was very lucky, but I was also someone who was willing to do a job that someone else wouldn't do." Likewise, Gina pointed out her sense of personal determination helped in to seize opportunities when she least expected them. She said, "People who kept leaving kept giving me more jobs, and I was smart enough to say, 'Yes.' And, it really did make a difference."

A few participants recalled experiences along their career paths which were examples of timing not being right for certain decisions or moves. Inez shared a similar

experience when the position in which she is not employed first came available several years prior:

> A lot of people thought at that point in time, I would apply. And, I didn't. But at that point in time in my career, I was not ready to assume the responsibilities of a vice president. I didn't feel like I had enough experience under me.

Several participants who had longer careers in higher education shared experiences which were rooted in larger economic or political shifts, or changes in higher education policies. Laura talked about taking a role related to enrollment management at a time when community colleges were shifting to more data-driven approaches to recruitment and retention. Gina and Holly both noted falling in love with the community college mission after their first encounter with students who were underprepared for college. For Gina, the personal paradigm shift came after working with students in targeted outreach programs, and those seeking assistance at the campus tutoring center:

> I thought, "I don't think the university is really the place that I want to work." I would prefer to work at a two-year institution that would allow me to work with people who may not have thought college is for them.

Holly was able to pinpoint experiences early in her career in which timing and changes brought about by broader community and regional events, shaped her career path to date. She discussed starting her first job as a full-time faculty member at a community college in a town where a major manufacturing plant had suddenly closed. She said, "Jobs were leaving. People were coming to (the community college) for some job training. I can still remember some of those essays and some of those students

specifically… The students had a different commitment, and need" (Holly). Many years later in her career, Holly accepted a position in a different state at a time when a newly-elected governor was making significant changes with far-reaching implications statewide. She stated, "It was an incredibly tumultuous time to be in (that state). But, at the same time, being able to kind of walk people back, and say, 'We're going to be OK.' It was good. It was a good experience."

A few participants cited experiences not directly related to their career paths as signs they had made the best decision. Gina noted the good fortune she and her husband had in choosing to relocate to the Midwest to accept a position at the institution where she was currently employed:

> I took the job. It was fast. We sold our house in four days… Which never happens. We found a house we loved here in one day… You just never get that… Everything has just worked out really well.

Interview question 14: *What recommendations would you have for women who are interested in community college leadership as a career path?* The majority of participants made statements which suggested women lead differently and offered encouragement for potential community college leaders following in their footsteps to embrace those differences. Additionally, a majority of the participants offered suggestions relating to the need for women leaders to accept challenges, take risks, and push themselves beyond their comfort zones in the workplace. Additionally, most of the participants talked about the value of relationships at work, many of which referenced building networks, engaging mentors, and working collaboratively across a division or

departmental lines. A few participants focused on the importance of completing a terminal degree.

Several participants discussed the importance of being passionate about their career choices and recommended women who follow in their footsteps find the kind of work which gives them joy (Debbie). Candace recalled the sense of regret she felt during her brief departure from higher education. She stated, “I knew as soon as I walked out this door that I was leaving my passion… You truthfully have to be passionate about what you do.” Olivia shared a similar sentiment when she stated, “I think, more than anything, it’s being passionate about what you do. I think that’s what really matters when the rubber meets the road.”

Emily suggested women who are considering community college leadership as a career path should evaluate their individual motivation early on in order to identify what exactly drives them. She said, “Really, kind of introspectively figure out what is it that I want to do. And, why do I want to do it? Because that is what’s going to give you the most satisfaction.” She also noted the importance of doing work which is fulfilling, as opposed to chasing after a specific title or position within an organization. She recommended:

> Don’t take something just because you think it will lead to something else, because that kind of betting on the come may not happen… Be willing to know that you would be satisfied to stay in that job perpetually.

Gina took the idea of knowing one’s motivation and loving the work being done a step further when she insisted someone pursuing a leadership position in community colleges should have experience working directly with students. She did not place

preference on any one job on campus over another. Her emphasis was put on any frontline position which serves students:

> If you don't have a true, true love for students, it makes this job very hard. Because there are always so many conflicting things, you always have to be able to know what is in the best interest of students. You can't just know that by proxy. (Gina)

The importance of relationships on and off campus was stressed by almost all participants. Many participants discussed the value of building relationships on campus. Regardless of the departments in which the participants were currently employed, they each talked about building bridges with other departments. Student affairs professionals, like Brenda and Laura, gave specific examples of the need to establish bridges with faculty. Participants who had followed an academic path to their current leadership position noted the value in developing strong working relationships with other departments, such as student affairs, the college's development office, or the campus finance office. Laura stated, "Know who your go-to people are… Know who can help you. It's reciprocal."

Other participants stressed the importance of building a network of relationships off campus. Holly talked about relationships she built along her career path and has maintained even though she does not work with those individuals directly in her current role. Brenda, too, discussed ways in which previous relationships with colleagues have continued, and grown, and developed into a network of trusted professionals which she reached out to for advice regularly. Both Julia and Inez spoke specifically about finding mentors, either on-campus or off-campus, from whom valuable lessons and experiences

can be gleaned. Julia's recommendations for developing a network were somewhat different, as she indicated much of her professional network at the time of her interview existed outside the field of higher education. She stated, "Gain a network outside of your community college. I think that's the key to keeping yourself sharp."

Other participants recommended women work hard to be the kind of colleague with whom others want to work. Olivia recalled the advice she had been given by a former colleague whose personal demeanor and communication style was one Olivia respected. Olivia recalled the colleague often reminded her to soften her approach and work to win others over, with the mantra "You catch more flies with honey." Being the type of colleague others want to work with was an important lesson learned by Fran along her career path. She shared advice which she gave to her employees and more colleagues on a regular basis:

> This is what I tell people, "Keep your head down and be a great team player. Don't complain. Take what's coming to you… And, do good work, and step up when you're needed. People will want you on their team. They will seek you out to find ways to work with you." (Fran)

Many participants encouraged future women leaders to make efforts at learning as much about other departments within a college as possible. Inez noted she gained invaluable knowledge about the inner-workings of her community college by serving on a number of committees, both within and outside of her department. Three participants referenced the tendency for community college leaders to work in silos or narrowly defined portions of the larger operation. Laura stated, "We learn about our own silo, but we're not always good about opening ourselves up to learning about other areas…

You're creating your own breadth. I don't think we're all that comfortable doing that where we are." Recommendations to learn as much about the college as possible took a different meaning for participants who had come from industries outside of higher education. For those participants, each of them recommended learning about the culture on campus, or within community colleges at-large. For each of them, learning to adapt to higher education was more of a hurdle than developing relationships or constructing a personal network.

More than half of the participants recommended future community college leaders make every effort to seize opportunities as they arise. Both Gina and Holly acknowledged their willingness to volunteer for additional responsibilities and accept challenges was beneficial for their career development. Gina reflected on the times in her career when she agreed to take on tasks she had not anticipated, and said:

> But, now I think, 'You know what? That was placed in my lap to give me an opportunity.' Because I said, 'Yes.' I was willing to do something… that was outside my comfort zone; it just kept opening doors.

Holly recalled examples of times throughout her career during which opportunities just emerged, and there was no way for her to have predicted what was coming. In terms of what she would recommend for future women leaders who encounter similar situations, she stated, "Be ready for it… And be willing to."

A few participants shared observations of female colleagues who have been hesitant to speak up for what they want, or what they deserve. Holly shared a story of a former supervisor who asked her if she would be interested in taking on a leadership role. The supervisor then encouraged her to make those aspirations known. In reflecting on the

conversation, Holly stated, "(Previous supervisor) just paused and said, 'Does (college president) know you're interested?' And, I said, 'No.' And, she said, 'You need to tell him.' And, it made me uncomfortable… If you are looking, let people know." Sitting beneath a hand-written note on the wall of her office which read, "I never lose. I either win, or I learn," Julia noted the following observation:

> I see a lot of women around here defer to other people's opinions, and I would encourage them to find their voice. And, to own it… And… to not be afraid to say, "I want it. I want this challenge. I want this role." Because I think a lot of them wait to be asked. Build your case, and ask for the opportunity to lead.

Invariant horizons and themes. An integral part of the phenomenological process is taking the invariant horizons, or the "nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122), of the experiences of all participants and clustering them into themes. Each of the following themes was identified through a process of reduction after significant statements were noted among the transcripts for each respective participant (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). Those relatively narrow themes were clustered into progressively more inclusive themes in order to approach the essence of the overall experience of the participants (Van Manen, 2014). A description of each emergent theme and supporting evidence from the research interviews is included in this section.

Communication is key. Of the five AACC leadership competencies listed in the current iteration of the guidelines established by the AACC (2013), communication emerged as the single most important competency among the participants interviewed.

When participants discussed ways in which they had been successful along their career paths, they credited their ability to communicated well. Similarly, when participants noted difficulties they had in previous positions, it was almost always associated with something they could have communicated more effectually.

In instances where participants talked about the value of the other leadership competencies, those experiences were tied to the need to have had strong communication with colleagues in order to have successfully collaborated on a project, or created buy-in for organizational strategy, or help to have navigated critical budget cuts. Many participants observed the AACC leadership competencies were interconnected, and none of the competencies alone could create a productive and efficient community college leader. However, even in recognizing the intricate relationship among the skills, communication was consistently identified as the central component. Serving in the role as her college's Chief Financial Officer, Olivia stated, "I would say communication is a huge, huge piece." Nadine, also a college Chief Financial Officer, shared the same perspective. She noted, "You know, communication is just huge. And, every organization is not as good as they should be at it."

Among the participants who work either as Chief Academic Officers or Chief Student Affairs Officers, strong communication skills were noted as playing a critical role in their daily work lives. Gina stressed the importance of her ability to be able to communicate well with multiple audiences, including students, faculty and other administrators. She stated, "Communication is probably the most important because that's everything. Everything I do needs to be communicated out to the campus community, then promoted back up to my supervisor." For participants working on the

student affairs side of an institution, communication was no less significant. While sitting in her office as the campus' Chief Student Affairs Officer, the hustle and bustle of new student orientations, and last-minute registrations, and a myriad of other student-related activity could be heard down the hall. Laura insisted, "For me, the communication piece is, like, at the top… I kind of pride myself on that part of it." Similarly, Brenda dropped her shoulders and laughed when she emphasized, "Communication. Every. Single. Day." Strong communication skills were identified by participants as being key to not only conveying a message to various audiences, but also to the development and maintenance of relationships.

Relationships matter. When viewing responses from research participants through the lens of the STF, some observations must be made. Though only a few participants discussed ways individual factors have impacted their career path, the entire focus of this study regards women serving in senior-level administrative roles. An assumption had been made by the researcher that much of their individual experiences are influenced by the very nature of their collective gender.

A recurring theme throughout all of the career experiences of the participants interviewed was they have placed on relationships and the different ways in which various relationships have impacted their career path. Many participants gave names of individuals whom they identified as mentors and positive influences on them personally and professionally. Brenda named a former administrator to whom she once reported as a mentor to her. Nadine did not hesitate to identify a former supervisor as a mentor and a relationship she valued. She stated, "Probably one of the best… I mean, he could do it all." Emily noted a supervisor for whom she worked in a previous industry as being a

significant influence on her. She reflected, “Hard-working, innovative, inspiring. And, to this day I’m still very close family friends. I learned so much in terms of style from him.” As she commented on a number of individuals whom she labeled as mentors, or influential along her career path, Holly stated, “It’s weird, because it's people that I would have never considered true mentors, but as I reflect on that, those were definitely turning points. A tipping point.” This perspective was shared by many of the research participants, in that, when looking back on experiences along their career paths to date, most of the significant shifts, or episodes of change, are closely associated with influential relationships. It was not the experience in and of itself which had been impactful, but it was the support, encouragement, or interactions with people whom the participants valued which seemed to matter most in retrospect.

Some participants identified working relationships with individuals they perceived as being difficult. Nonetheless, each of the participants indicated they learned from both the positive, and not-so-positive, relationships along their respective career paths. Inez and Gina both provided examples of learning how not to treat people from experiences with previous supervisors. Laura shared stories of past supervisors who were out of touch with what was actually needed by staff. Such experiences, by her account, have helped her to recognize the potential for real growth and change which the newly-hired administrators at her college represented. Laura reflected:

> I’ve had a string of supervisors who have not been dialed in to what the real needs are… It’s just nice to finally, after all these years… have somebody who's just, like, on it… It’s just starting to get good.

Olivia credited the difficult working relationship she had with a former college administrator with helping to solidify her identity as part of the campus community and part of the small town in which it was located. After a particularly difficult interaction with the former administrator, she recalled:

> I just dug in and was like, "You know what? You're from wherever the hell you're from, and I'm from here. And, this is my community and my college. And, you will get your retirement check, and you'll move on to somewhere else, and I'll still be here. (Olivia)

Professional relationships on and off campus were repeatedly noted as necessary for the growth and development of the participants in this study. Many of the participants talked in generic terms about the relationship with entire departments, or with nebulous groups of individuals such as students or faculty. Gina and Holly, in their roles as Chief Academic Officers, felt building rapport among faculty was something they have always done well and something which has helped them throughout their careers. For professionals outside the academic track, developing strong relationships with faculty is a lesson they learned the hard way. Inez shared, "I remember one time having a dialogue about something, and a faculty member was upset. So, you quickly learn how to ensure everyone is informed, and there's buy-in." Julia also shared an experience which centered on the ability to develop relationships and seek mutually beneficial results:

> I think that's the biggest thing I've learned as a leader… Trying to make more time to build relationships with my colleagues across divisions… No matter how hard you work, unless other people are with you, you cannot make the big dreams happen.

Among the most significant relationships discussed by participants in terms of helping them to achieve goals along their career paths were relationships with spouses and extended family members. Brenda remarked the responsibility for getting her young son to necessary medical appointments often falls on her husband because of her work obligations. Candace named her husband as the personal most supportive of her career. She stated, “He has given up probably more than I have given up throughout my professional career to allow me to do what I love to do… So, I thank him for that.” Those sentiments were echoed again, and again, throughout the qualitative interviews. Gratitude for a spouse who was both supportive emotionally, but also able to take one a significant amount of the familial responsibilities was expressed by participants. In making a recommendation for future women leaders, Debbie said, “If they are in a relationship, they need to have a partner who really supports them and is willing to carry 150% of the load. You know, regularly. For many years.”

Likewise, Holly shared gratitude for the role her husband had chosen to play in her career. She stated, “He’s been phenomenal… And, very supportive… He says, ‘This is what we’re doing. We’re a partnership. Here’s where we’re going. This is what we’re going. That’s it. I can make it work’.”

Women lead differently. Amid responses from research participants, a number of different experiences or statements were aligned with the notion that women in professional positions may be motivated by different factors than their male colleagues. The participants, all senior-level community college administrators, with significant responsibility for the development and implementation of policy within each of their respective campuses, overwhelmingly shared they have either sought out roles or have

stayed in roles because they found the work meaningful. For the participants in this study, finding satisfaction in their jobs, or doing work which they perceived as positive, and impactful for others, was a primary concern for them throughout their respective career paths. Though their sources of fulfillment on the job varied from interactions with students, relationships with faculty, and community engagement, the need to feel fulfilled in their careers was a constant across all participants.

Emily, Candace, Julia and Gina all shared very specific examples of choices they made earlier in their careers to leave jobs which they did not perceive as fulfilling or meaningful for them. In reflecting on a period of time during which she briefly left higher education, Candace noted, "I found that I am one of those people who really needs to see the fruits of my labor." Though Olivia did not intentionally choose a career track in community college leadership, she stated she had grown fond of the work she did in her role on campus. She stated:

> [The corporate world] just doesn't have the same meaning. Even though I'm not directly influencing students personally, I play a role in that. And, it makes a difference in those students, and it makes a difference in my community as a whole.

Similarly, some of the participants mentioned they now encourage their employees and students to seek out jobs which bring them joy. Laura explained, in her roles as both academic advisor and mother, she tells younger women to follow their passion:

> After years of advising, where for every student who came in and wanted to do art, music, or theater, there was a parent in the background saying,

> "What about business?"… It's like, do what you're passionate about because that's where you'll find your happiness. I didn't feel like I had a lot of direction at that age, so I'm very… empathetic with our students.

A few participants discussed feeling satisfied with the work there are doing in their current roles, and not feeling a need to move on to the executive suite. Likewise, a few participants reflected on their careers to date and identified a pattern of not setting far-reaching goals; rather simply aspiring to do well in a given role, or occasionally setting their sights on only the next logical step in the chain of command. Some participants expressed no real need to climb any particular leadership ladder. Gina noted she is relatively young to hold her current position on campus, and recognized the only upward movement for her in her career would be to pursue the same role at a larger institution, or a community college presidency, even though she is not motivated to do so.

> I guess the point is to always be moving up, in a trajectory. But, I think we only have to do that because of our pride. If I'm very honest with myself, I really love what I do in this job… I would be perfectly happy to be [a Chief Academic Officer] anywhere.

In addition to identifying factors which may motivate women in leadership roles differently than their male colleagues, the participants identified ways in which they perceived women leaders to make different decisions while in the leadership functions. Several of the participants shared examples from their own career paths. Gina credited much of her success as she progressed to Chief Academic Officer to her ability to develop trust among faculty. Likewise, Holly shared one of the most influential people in her career had demonstrated capacity to see people as more than just employees; a style

she said she has worked to emulate throughout her career. Much like Gina, Holly credited her ability to earn the trust of faculty and staff as having been helpful for her at every college for which she has worked.

Holly also shared a recent experience in which she had been excluded from meaningful, senior-level conversations on campus. Though she noted the exclusion was likely the result of an inadvertent oversight, she speculated how the difficult interactions which arose from that decision could have been avoided if a more collaborative approach had been taken. Holly reflected, "I wonder if, because I have a different leadership style, I would have shared things differently." Laura shared similar experiences she had along her career path in which her inclusive, transparent approach to decision-making may have been labeled as indecisive:

> If a decision as to be made, I do speak to all the folks involved. Get their take. You know, trust their judgment. I feel like what my job is is to support decisions… I mean, the best decisions are when you have everybody at the table who is talking things through.

Realities of the job. Participants responded to interview questions which were designed to understand their development of the AACC leadership competencies to date, and the steps they were taking to continue to develop those competencies. Implied in those questions, and addressed directly to one interview question, was their aspirations toward a community college presidency. The majority of the participants stated they did not wish to become a community college president in the future, and they noted specific reasons why they had come to that decision. Even for the two participants who stated they were interested in a community college presidency, a variety of hesitations and

concerns for taking the next step in their respective careers were listed. The collective, recurring statements from all participants were grouped into the present theme.

Among the most prevalent reasons participants gave for not wanting to pursue a community college presidency, or personal theories as to why other women may be hesitant to pursue a Chief Executive Officer role on campus was that relocation might be inevitable. Nearly all the participants indicated they had accepted their current positions or had chosen to remain in their present positions, because of their proximity to family. Participants with young children at home shared they did not wish to uproot their children and move in order to take another role. Even participants without young children at home stated a willingness to relocate would be important for someone pursuing a community college presidency, and it was one of the reasons why moving into the executive office on campus was not something which they were interested in at the time of the interview. Inez stated, “In terms of the job itself, I’m not one who wants to relocate, but I can see some value in people being at different institutions, and having different experiences.”

The pressures of living in the public eye, and having to maintain a constant public persona, is another factor which emerged as a reason why many of the participants were not interested in pursuing the next step in community college leadership. Brenda noted what she perceived as a struggle to balance the multiples roles she plays in life with the expectations which are often placed on a community college president. She stated, “I understand that I would need to be a president a lot of times with that hat on, but there are times when I need to be a mom, or a spouse, or a partner, or a daughter.” Nadine, who held a high-profile position in a K12 school district earlier in her career, referenced the struggles publicly visible leaders often face from her own personal experiences. She

recalled, “At that point, it was like, ‘I’ve had all of this I can stand. I’m ready to do something different…’ I wanted out of the fish bowl… You really don’t have any friends.”

A few participants pointed out more tangible road blocks which may impede women leaders from pursuing a community college presidency, including the role the board of trustees has in the selection of community college presidents, and the limited number of community college presidents relative to the number of other administrative positions nationwide. Two participants spoke specifically about the role board members play in screening presidential candidates, and ultimately hiring community college chief executives. Despite her current president offering to mentor her and provide her with opportunities to grow in critical competency areas, Holly stated:

> It doesn’t matter what kind of conversations take place in an informal, unofficial context. The board is still the one who hires a president. So, I understand all the other variables. I am not naïve in that capacity…

Holly also framed her observation of an “administrative bottleneck” around her experiences in a previous position in another state. In her assessment, more top-level leadership roles existed in states, or regions, where the community college or technical college systems were under localized control, and independent of a statewide university system in which community colleges serve largely as feeder campuses for transfer students. From her perspective, the structure of a higher education system had some impact on the number of opportunities for executive leadership, regardless of gender. However, nationwide the number of community college presidency jobs is limited, and competition for those positions can be intense. Holly observed, “And, the other side to it

is, when you look out on higher ed jobs, when you look at dean positions there are 500. When you look at vice president jobs, there are 10. So, that bottleneck happens naturally."

Superwoman complex. Borrowing from pop culture images of superheroes who lead ordinary lives by day, but who are also responsible for accomplishing feats of bravery and self-sacrifice in a way ordinary people never could, this theme has captured a variety of statements made by the research participants in regards to the pressures they feel to exceed expectations in all areas of their lives (Lee, 2013; Sumra & Schillaci, 2015). Throughout the qualitative interviews, every participant shared stories of experiences within their own lives, or what they would perceive as obstacles for other women leaders, which included trying to do everything on their own, or being all things to all people. Participants discussed their willingness to learn as much as possible by taking on additional tasks or responsibilities, often with no extra pay.

Respondents often mentioned times along their career paths when they volunteered to take on more, or when they said, "Yes" to opportunities when caught them by surprise. Sandberg (2013) referred to this kind of behavior as "leaning in" to one's career. All participants in this study either shared examples of times when they leaned in or discussed perceived reasons why other women choose not to lean in. Debbie described it as a willingness to take risks. Debbie stated, "I was willing to do a little bit more because there was a need. And, somebody had to do it, so you just step up. It looked exciting. It looked challenging." Gina also shared very similar experiences along her career path. She recalled, "So, I just kept doing all of these things. Even small assignments, I would say, 'Yes. I'll do it'."

Many of the participants noted their decisions to lean into their careers often came with consequences, or were not options after they had children. Debbie reflected, “My family will tell you that I am not good with work-life balance. These jobs never end… I won’t say there weren’t things that I missed because I did. And, so, it’s tough.” Fran recalled it was easier for her to volunteer for new tasks, or participate in campus initiatives before she became a parent. She stated, “When someone would say, ‘Hey we’re thinking about…’ And I would say, ‘Can I help?’ I didn’t have children, and my husband was working crazy hours just like I was…”

A majority of the participants stated they had felt a distinctive tug between their work responsibilities and their responsibilities at home, or for self-care. For participants with children still in the home, there was a sense of having double-duty, or another full-time job waiting for them at home after their full-time job on campus ended. Even the participants without children at home expressed an inability to achieve a successful balance between their personal and work lives. Gina stated:

> The good thing is that because I served in so many different capacities… I knew everything about the college. So, the terrible thing about that is that I, you know, hadn’t slept, or enjoyed life in many, many years.

Holly noted the intensity of the workload she experienced in starting her new position less than two years ago. She sighed, both hands wrapped around a mug of hot tea, as she stated, “There are not enough hours in the day… There are still some days that I feel swamped and overwhelmed.”

The change in professional routines, and to some degree professional ambitious, seemed most acute among participants with children. Julia stated, “When I started, I was

a workaholic. Then I had a little girl… I was used to going 150 miles an hour, and she pulled me back and said, '… I need you'." In reflecting on her time in a previous leadership role, one she held while her children were still very young, Nadine described the difficulty of the double duty many working women faced:

> You had to pick them up from daycare by 5:30. You'd go home and be mom until 9:30. Then you'd put them to bed and work until 1:00 or 2:00. Then you'd get up the next morning and start all over again. You know, you prided yourself on how little sleep you could get by on.

Several other participants identified what they noted as self-imposed barriers which either impacted them at certain points in their respective careers or had the potential to limit other women from pursuing leadership roles (Watson & Detjen, 2014). The limitations an individual may put on themselves—either real or perceived—could be viewed as the antithesis to what Sandberg (2013) referred to as "leaning in," or choosing to be active, motivated, goal-focused in regards to career pursuits. Rather than finding reasons to stretch professionally, a self-imposed barrier has the potential to narrow an individual's ambitions (Watson & Detjen, 2014). Some participants noted what they perceived as a limited return on investment at their current stage of life as a reason for not completing a terminal degree. In reflecting on previously held doubts and hesitations, in her career, Laura stated, "I don't think the outside world pigeon-holed me. I'm pretty sure I did a pretty good job of that by myself. I don't know that I needed any help."

Julia shared her perception of the reasons women may avoid pursuing leadership roles. In her assessment, such self-imposed barriers could be the result of fear. She noted, "So many of these colleges are needing to address… financial issues… I think a lot of

women shy away from a sales role…" Holly shared a piece of wisdom she had gleaned from a colleague many years ago relating specifically to the barriers women impose on themselves:

> She kept saying to our little (group), "You are your only barrier. You are the only person in the way. Family won't. Your spouse won't. Your kids really won't. You will be the only one to decide, "Will I? Or, will I not?"… Maybe for the right reason, but you are still imposing that on yourself.

Summary

Twelve women serving in senior-level community college administration were interviewed regarding various experiences throughout their respective careers. The participants represented a broad variety of senior-level leadership roles and were currently employed at campuses of varying sizes and structures. The career stories of each participant were viewed through the lenses of the AACC leadership competencies, the STF, and themes derived from previous research regarding women in leadership (AACC, 2013; McMahon, 2011). From each individual interview emerged stories and perceptions from which certain textural descriptions of their experiences could be derived (Moustakas, 1994).

Collectively, a series of themes were identified within the experiences of all participants (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Those common themes were clustered into progressively broader groupings of larger themes through a process of reduction (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2014). The major themes identified included communication as the most highly valued and frequently used of the AACC leadership

competencies (AACC, 2013), and importance relationships in the career development of women in senior-level community college administration far exceeded the other influences within the STF (McMahon, 2011). In terms of consistency with results identified throughout previous research on women in leadership, the major themes that emerged were the notion that women lead, or are motivated to lead, differently than men, the perceived demands on a community college president were factors why women choose not to pursue it as a career goal and women in leadership struggle with a superwoman complex.

Within the themes, a glimpse at the respective textual descriptions of the experiences for the research participants can be gleaned (Moustakas, 1994). The broader structural descriptions of the experiences for the research participants as a group will be discussed in Chapter Five. Associations between the findings and current literature and conclusions will also be addressed. Recommendations for future research and implications for practice are included in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

This study was designed with a phenomenological lens to identify commonalities among the lived career experiences of women serving in senior-level community college administration (Creswell, 2013; Yin 2016). The population was selected under the assumption that individuals who occupy a senior-level leadership role on a community college campus, or system, would be most likely to be considered for the presidency in the future (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). Extensive research has previously noted the number of current community college presidents nationwide who are approaching retirement age (AACC, 2014; Lennon et al., 2013). Additionally, current data points to the fact that women make up the majority of students, staff, and faculty on community college campuses, but are underrepresented among the ranks of campus presidents (AACC, 2016b; Boggs, 2012; Gangone & Lennon, 2013). An examination of the career experiences of women who have progressed to senior-level administrative positions at community colleges was identified as a means of understanding the barriers women leaders have faced along their career paths, and what additional experiences they perceived as professional development needs in order to prepare themselves for the role of president.

A significant body of research exists which has focused on the career experiences of community college presidents (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; Garza-Mitchell, 2012; McNair & Phelan, 2012; Tekniepe, 2014). Other research has explored how community college presidents ranked the significance of the AACC leadership competencies in their daily responsibilities, and which career experiences helped them to acquire the respective competencies (Boggs, 2012; Boswell & Imroz,

2013; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Eddy, 2012b; Wallin, 2012). Studies of women in executive leadership positions in higher educations are plentiful, though research which examined the experiences of female community college presidents was somewhat lacking (Eddy, 2009; Sullivan, 2009; Wolverton et al., 2009). The present study fills a gap in the current body of research because it centered on the experiences of women who have not made it to the pinnacle leadership position on campus. Rather, the research participants who volunteered for this study reported directly to a community college president, thus putting them in line for a community college presidency (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002).

The intent of the study was to explore the career experiences of women in senior-level community college administration, in terms of how they acquired the AACC leadership competencies along their career paths (AACC, 2013; Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). Using the STF as a theoretical framework, an understanding of the influences that had been most impactful in career decision-making for research participants was sought throughout the qualitative interview process (McMahon, 2011). Lastly, an exploration of themes, which emerged from a review of current literature relating to women in leadership, was undertaken during the presenting of interview questions to the participants, and throughout the career experience as they were conveyed through personal stories and perspectives of the contributors.

This chapter consists of a discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations, which emerged from the present study. Additionally, this chapter includes a visualization of the interconnectivity of the STF, the AACC leadership competencies, and other emergent themes, as communicated through the lived

experiences of the research participants. Based on the individual stories of the participants, and the identified commonalities, an illustration of the overarching essence of the career experiences of women in line for a community college presidency was formulated (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Van Manen, 2014; Yin, 2016).

Findings

The research questions used to guide this study were developed based on a review of research relating to the AACC leadership competencies, and general studies of the career paths of women in leadership, both within and outside the career field higher education (AACC, 2013). This study was designed using a phenomenological lens to identify common influences along the career paths of women who have pursued a leadership trajectory in community college senior administration. Additionally, of the career experiences shared by research participants, a richer understanding was sought for those, which aided in the development of the AACC leadership competencies, or were crucial for the success of women serving in senior-level community college administration (AACC, 2013; Grossoehme, 2014; Patton & McMahon, 2014; Yin, 2016).

The three research questions then served as a framework from which the interview protocol was created. Interview question 1 was designed as a means of acquiring generalized data regarding the participants' current and recent professional positions, as well as to elicit a glimpse into each of the participants lives away from work. It was through this interview question, and the triangulation of data provided on the resumes and CVs of research participants, that data relating to tenure in their current position, positions held at previous institutions or in other states, marital status, or a number of children living at home were obtained.

Interview questions 2 and 3 were created to address Research Question One by learning which of the AACC leadership competencies the participants implement in their daily work routines, and what specific professional positions or experiences they perceived as being especially useful in the development or refinement of the AACC leadership competencies. Despite broad professional backgrounds and varied job responsibilities at the range of community colleges for which the research participants were currently employed, a commonality emerged among their responses to these interview questions. Communication was noted as the most imperative of the five AACC leadership competencies for the participants in this study, both in their current senior-level administration roles and throughout their career paths to date.

Research Question Two was the foundation for most of the interview questions, as it addressed challenges women in senior-level administrative position may have faced along their respective career paths. Interview questions 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 were written to explore which leadership competencies the participants perceived as personal deficiencies at the time of the interview, and what other obstacles they may have encountered along their respective career paths. Interview question 6 was designed to determine the participants' desire to pursue a community college presidency.

The responses to these interview questions provided a broad range of findings. One such finding was the acquisition of the AACC leadership competencies is something, which cannot be easily planned, or facilitated in a specific time frame. According to the participants, the competencies are also not acquired individually but are interconnected in such a way that it is difficult to focus on any single competency area in isolation (Eddy, 2012a). A related finding was most of the research participants were not

interested in pursuing a community college presidency, largely due to the perceived level of work that would be required in the area of community college advocacy. Many of the participants indicated, in addition to the extraordinary time commitment needed to be an effective community college president, they were simply not interested in the political nature of the relationships that would be necessary to develop and maintain political alliances on a state or national level.

Lastly, another finding which emerged in connection to Research Question Two, was many of the barriers participants have encountered along their career paths are largely self-imposed. Subtle examples of sexism and resistance to female leadership styles were evident in the lived experiences of the participants, both in career stories from many years ago and from more recent experiences. The most common obstacles reported by participants throughout their careers were within their own capacity to change such as relocation, taking on responsibilities for fundraising or political relationships, or pursuing a terminal degree.

Interview questions 11, 12, 13, and 14 were all designed to address Research Question Three by allowing participants the opportunity to reflect on the relationships, and other lived experiences throughout their career paths, which had been influential on their career-related decision-making processes. Research Question Three, and the corresponding interview questions were developed to explore how the influences within the STF related to the career stories of the participants in this study. The findings, which emerged, indicated participants deeply valued relationships and based many of their career decisions on them. Workplace mentors, spouses, children, extended family, and colleagues were all mentioned as playing pivotal roles in either the process of how the

participants achieved their current statuses at the time of the interviews, or what their goals for the future were.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, which emerged from the data, five broad themes were identified. These themes relate back to both the research questions guiding this study and findings which were identified in the review of current research literature. These themes are outlined below and further explained in the context of existing literature.

Communication is key. Of the five AACC leadership competencies, communication was noted as a key to the success of all the participants in this study. For many of the participants, communication was identified as the single most important of the AACC leadership competencies, and one the participants relied on heavily on a daily basis. Communication was also recognized as significant through previous studies focused on community college leaders and their perceptions of the AACC leadership competencies (Boggs, 2012; Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Eddy, 2012b). Communication was noted as one of the most valued and most frequently utilized of the AACC leadership competencies in studies of sitting community college presidents (Boggs, 2012; Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Eddy, 2012b). Likewise, communication was named as the AACC leadership competency in which current community college presidents have rated themselves as being well prepared for prior to taking on the role of community college president (Duree & Ebbers, 2012).

Many of the participants in this study noted none of the AACC leadership competencies stood independent of the others. Rather, research participants perceived the value of the leadership competencies, and even strategies for developing the

competencies, as inextricably connected. Participants whose primary responsibilities were for the financial oversight of their colleges, identified communication as essential to their ability to be effective in their current positions. Other participants noted true collaboration could not take place without the strong communication skills. These findings from the study support the holistic approach to supporting the development of the AACC leadership competencies proposed by Eddy (2012a).

The significance of having strong communication capabilities for anyone in a leadership role cannot be understated. Williams (2014) identified ways in which ineffective communication has the potential to reinforce the glass ceiling by limiting women leaders when they are unfairly labeled in negative terms. Several participants shared stories of experiences during which they had assumed they were strong communicators or were conveying a message well, but the situations participants found themselves in did not turn out as well as they had planned. Others participants noted increased skill as a communicator became necessary as they progressed in leadership roles and became responsible for communicating with wider populations, both on and off campus. These findings aligned with the results of a study of women leaders from across multiple industries conducted by Catalyst (2007). In their research, key strategies for women leaders to overcome the double bind included talking openly about perceived problems at work, and "use clear and effective communication" (p. 26).

Relationships matter. Social connections were frequently mentioned throughout all interviews conducted for this study. The participants each discussed the roles their families, colleagues and supervisors had played in affecting their career paths, or the career-related decisions they made along the way. In previous research relating to women

in leadership roles, it was noted that “women more than men valued interpersonal relationships” (Davies et al., 2017, p. 29-30). Despite a lack of previous research focused specifically on the influence that social connections have on career development patterns of women, the significance of relationships with role models, mentors, and peers cannot be emphasized enough (McMahon et al., 2013). In studies focused on community college presidents, relationships were found to be significant in terms of on-the-job learning and promotions (Eddy, 2009, 2012b).

Nearly all participants who stated they were married at the time of their respective interviews credited their spouses with being a significant support and source of encouragement throughout their careers. Other research focused on women in leadership roles have noted similar findings, with highly successful women in both business and education indicating that support received from a spouse was paramount to building their careers (High-powered Women, 2012). The constant source of encouragement and potential for shared household and familial responsibilities, a supportive spouse provides is critical for women who intend to pursue both a leadership role and a family (Sandberg, 2013). More specifically, having a supportive spouse with whom to share household and childrearing responsibilities has the potential to increase the amount of time women have available outside of the office to develop and maintain meaningful work-related relationships and networks (Eagly & Carly, 2007; Ely & Rhode, 2010).

Participants in this study were able to dialogue about particularly influential role models and mentors, even if those relationships were developed in decades past. The impact of an encouraging supervisor or mentor had on the career paths of the participants in this study was often perceived as being part of critical turning points. Some

participants noted they accepted jobs or took on challenging responsibilities only after a respected mentor had identified specific abilities in them they might not have recognized in themselves. This observation is consistent with findings from previous research, which noted women were more likely than male colleagues to have mentors or to be mentors for more junior employees (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). In research of career women over the age of 50, Whitson et al. (2015) identified relationships with mentors and with colleagues were particularly important to women. Likewise, Hoobler et al. (2014) found career encouragement and mentoring was highly valued by women at all levels of management.

Connecting with an influential career network was also something that emerged from this study as a priority for the women interviewed. Many of the participants discussed the importance of their connection with statewide and regional community college and higher education professional associations. Other participants shared details of the informal networks, which they have developed, or the formal groups to which they belonged, within their respective communities. The value these networks provided for the participants included having trusted colleagues with which to discuss work-related issues or questions, and the camaraderie shared among professionals with similar career experiences.

Developing a network within and outside of the college campus community is a recommendation which has flowed from previous research. Penney (2014) insisted "women should take every opportunity to develop and expand their networks, including political and business contacts as well as leaders in education (p. 206-207). Sitting community college presidents who participated in a study by Boswell and Imroz (2013)

noted participation in a professional network was as impactful in the development of the AACC leadership competencies as accepting challenging work assignments and completing graduate degree programs in leadership.

Not all impacts of relationships on the career paths of women in leadership roles were considered positive. Some participants recalled experiences with colleagues or supervisors that had lasting effects on their career development, or their development as a leader, which were disappointing or disheartening. This finding, too, is reflected in previous research with examples of career women who perceived relationships with colleagues, supervisors or subordinates had harmed or interrupted their career ambitions (Marcus, 2016; Wolverton et al., 2009).

Women lead differently. The underrepresentation of women in the top leadership positions across many industries, including higher education, has been examined by a wide variety of researchers (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Cobble et al., 2014; Dean, 2009; Eddy, 2009; Gangone & Lennon, 2014; Patton & Haynes, 2014). Among previous studies, recurring themes included a perceived difference in how men and women lead, as well as differences in what motivates males and females to pursue leadership roles. Eagly and Carli (2007) explained such differences in terms of transformational versus transactional leadership styles. Schuh et al. (2014) expanded on communal versus agentic qualities in leaders.

Likewise, research conducted by Gerzema and D'Antonio (2013) identified the majority of the qualities sought in an ideal leader were those associated most closely with women. Gerzema and D'Antonio wrote, "In other words, across the globe, society wants those in power to connect more personally – an understandable response to the hidden

agendas and tightly wound power circles often associated with men" (p. 11). Regardless of the labels used to describe the phenomena, studies have found that women and men differ in what motivates them to lead (Davies et al., 2017; Schuh et al., 2014). The participants in this study expressed views that aligned closely with previous research, in that, they described wanting to make a significant difference on their respective campuses, or within departments, more so than needing to be the public face of their respective institutions.

The participants in this study discussed the degree to which they valued relationships with their colleagues or their direct reports. The participants shared their desire to excel in their current role, and create a lasting impact for students or faculty, more than a desire to progress to the next rung on the proverbial career ladder. This finding coincided with Davies et al. (2017) finding that women tended to value relationships and helping others more than opportunities for promotion or power. Likewise, Schuh et al. (2014) "found that women consistently reported lower power motivation than men" (p. 363). Stories shared by participants in this study seemed to support those results, as they spoke of male colleagues who did not hesitate to name their ultimate goals when their experiences had been that women did not assert that kind of confidence in career goals. Fran described ways in which male colleagues named their career goals in a very distinct way:

> It's interesting because they talk about "When I become a college president…" Or, "When I get an opportunity…" Or, "I want to be the lead dog…" They use power-position language. They talked about wanting to be the president. They want to be the chief decision-maker. (Fran, 2016).

Other participants in this study shared they have felt excluded from certain meetings, opportunities or experiences because they did not feel as though they "fit" into what was perceived as a male-dominated culture. Leadership culture is built around behaviors and expectations that favor men (Catalyst, 2007; Davies et al., 2017; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Sandberg, 2013; Sulpizio, 2014). By contrast, in order to avoid being perceived as difficult or abrasive, leaders who espouse more feminine leadership qualities must "constantly have to monitor their behavior and how they interact with others" (Catalyst, 2007). This kind of double-bind can create a sense of inauthenticity and frustration for women in leadership roles. Brenda stated, "I think I'm a pretty direct, assertive person, and women aren't supposed to be that way… It's a fine line you walk." Likewise, Fran noted, "It's why I wouldn't make a good college president. It becomes a snitch more awkward for me because it becomes a little less easy to just be transparent… It becomes a little harder to just be Fran." Tarule et al. (2009) recounted a similar experience when observing a female colleague who had attempted to shift to a traditional, agentic leadership style after being promoted. "She keeps trying on a male skin, but it never fits quite right; she just doesn't know it" (Tarule et al., 2009, p. 32).

Previous research has identified having women leaders at the helm in many industries can be advantageous in terms of measurable outcomes such as revenue and impact (Lennon et al., 2013). Other studies have found no perceived differences in the effectiveness of male and female leaders (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014; Pew Research Center, 2015). However, participants in this study hypothesized that some communities or regions might not be ready for women in top leadership roles, particularly in a community college presidency. Holly identified a community college, for which she was

previously employed, which has never had a female president. Holly perceived the challenge for women in leadership might reach beyond campus and into the community. She noted, “I have to admit that I'm not sure (the) College, and (the) County, is ready for a female president.” This sentiment, though disappointing, aligned with finding from the Pew Research Center’s report on women in leadership (Pew Research Center, 2015). In their national survey of more than 1,830 individuals, “53% believe men will continue to hold more top executive positions in business, even as more women move into management roles” (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 37).

Realities of the job. Most of the participants in this study reported they did not aspire to a community college presidency at the time of their respective interviews, though their reasons for arriving at that conclusion varied. An individual serving in senior-level community college administration who does not have sights set on the chief executive role on campus is not uncommon among both men and women (Eddy, 2009; 2012b). As noted in a series of interviews with the females serving in the role of president of various institutions of higher education, Gretchen Bataille, president of the University of North Texas summarized the serendipity of the ascension to the chief executive position on campus for many female leaders by saying, “It just happened” (Wolverton et al., 2009, p. 3). Such a lack of intentionality was also reported by women who participated in this study as many of them stated that they had come to their current position in senior-level administration by chance, a finding which aligns with the recursive nature of career paths noted in the STF (McMahon, 2011).

One of the primary factors cited by participants in this study for not aspiring to a community college presidency was the perceived need to become a public figure, and

thus sacrificing certain parts of their private lives and a loss of unscheduled time. Such a sacrifice of personal time and privacy was a concern voiced by all participants but seemed to be particularly troublesome for those with children at home at the date of the interviews. Previous research supported those concerns by identifying living as a public figure has been a challenge for leaders in higher education regardless of gender (Asghar, 2013; Eddy, 2012b; Kellerman & Rhode, 2014; Tekniepe, 2014; White, 2014).

In a 2013 article published in Forbes magazine, Asghar referred to the job of a university president as one of the most difficult leadership jobs in the U. S. Other researchers have highlighted the difficulties college presidents faced in balancing political relationships and avoiding conflicts among internal and external stakeholders (Tekniepe, 2014; White, 2014). In research focused on rural community college presidents, Eddy (2012b) noted "participants frequently mention of how stressful the role of president can by, their lack of anonymity, (and) feelings of isolation or change in identity. Brenda explained why she was not interested in pursuing a community college presidency at this stage in her life by stating, "I'm not at a place in my personal life where I'm ready for that because I think the best presidents that I've seen are the ones who live and breathe the institution. It's another part of their family."

Another reason for not pursuing a community college presidency which was noted among many participants, and which aligns with current research, was the perceived need to relocate to another college, community, or region of the United States. Eddy and Ward (2015) similarly identified the need to relocate as a potential stumbling block for women in academe. A reluctance to relocate was found to be a potential barrier to career advancement for females in other industries as well (Ely & Rhode, 2010). Ely

and Rhode (2010) noted, “Women with families also face more constraints on travel and relocation than similarly situated men” (p. 382). Statements from participants in this study supported the conclusion that women leaders are reluctant to relocate. Many participants dialogued about not wanting to leave the extended family and support system on which their families had come to rely.

A few participants indicated a disinclination to report directly to a board of trustees. Many of their statements were based on stories of ways the interviewees perceived college presidents to be treated unfairly, or board members being difficult to work with or disengaged. Similar concerns regarding the tenuous nature of relationships with boards of trustee members, and a perceived imbalance in terms of board expectations and actual presidential responsibilities were also reflected in previous research as well (Ashford, 2016; Lennon et al., 2013; Sanderson, 2014).

Superwoman complex. The most frequently occurring of the themes that emerged from this study was the presence of what was termed a superwoman complex. The superwoman, in psychological and sociological research, is one who performs a number of different roles such as parent, wife, employee, and homemaker, often with a degree of self-sacrifice, which has been romanticized by pop-culture superheroes (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015). However, for women who participated in this study, finding a balance between domestic and career responsibilities was a somewhat unattainable goal. Participants overwhelmingly shared stories and feelings needing to be “all things to all people.”

The most predominant of the invariant horizons relating to the superwoman complex were associated with a perceived imbalance between serving in a leadership role

and maintaining multiple roles away from work (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015). Participants in this study shared their personal disappointments with not being able to leave work at the office, or regrets with regard to missing important events in the lives of loved ones because they were consumed with work. Participants stated that demands placed on them in their leadership roles included weekend and evening events, unexpected or unplanned meetings, and innumerable email messages and tight reporting deadlines, all of which pulled them away from time spent with their families or focusing on their own hobbies and interests. Many of those frustrations were due in part to the fact that leadership positions, both within higher education and across industries, still operate under antiquated structures in which men were the family breadwinners, "with the assumption he had or would have a full-time wife at home" (Cobble et al., 2014, p. 30).

For some participants, not only were there two wage-earners in their home, both were in demanding, leadership roles which made balancing life and family even more challenging. The term balance itself was rejected by Sandberg (2013) because it implies a dichotomy between which women in leadership roles may choose. The notion that such a balance between work life and home life can actually be achieved successfully has been challenged by a number of previous studies (Eddy, 2012b; White, 2014). Brenda, whose husband also holds a demanding leadership role in a different industry, noted the difficulties they experience in meeting career expectations and keeping up with the schedules for their children. She stated, "Honestly, it falls mostly on my husband, but we take turns doing that. Then, managing evening obligations and workloads and things like that, and still try to make time for our (child). It's hectic" (Brenda).

Tajili (2014) elaborated on what she labeled the myth that women can have it all in terms of both a successful career and family. Similarly, Watson and Detjen (2014) described the guilt women in leadership roles feel for not being with their families while they are at work, and the remorse they experience when they are at a family event but should be at work. That same sense of guilt was repeatedly acknowledged among research participants in this study. Debbie noted the struggle she experienced in trying to balance family life with spending long hours in the office:

> It's being able to make sure that you can keep your family, your spouse, your partner, your children so that they know that you are there for them. And, trying to make that work-life balance work. Which is really hard.

Likewise, Doherty and Lassig (2013) noted the demands of both the work environment and the family "cannot be 'balanced,' since they are part of a seamless, messy whole: a conglomerate" (p. 85). Some participants stated they felt a sense of responsibility to set a better example for their female employees, by being the kind of supervisor that values family time and models family life as a priority. Sandberg (2013) endorsed this goal as she wrote, "We need more portrayals of women as competent professionals and happy mothers—or even happy professionals and competent mothers" (p. 26).

Another factor that made up the superwoman theme was the idea that women serving in leadership roles had to work harder than their male colleagues in order to be viewed as equally capable and competent. Many of the participants discussed feeling as though they had proven their worth in their current, and previous positions, and took a great deal of pride in the hard work they had accomplished. In line with Clance and Imes

(1978) theory relating to the impostor phenomenon, the women interviewed in this study attributed their career success to luck or the effort they put forth (temporary, variable causes) as opposed to "men who are much more likely to attribute their successes to the internal, stable factor of ability" (p. 2). Rather than enjoying a presumption of competence, some participants in this study shared stories of putting in extra hours and effort in order to be perceived as worthy to hold their current positions (Christman & McClellan, 2012; Kellerman & Rhode, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2015). As affirmed by Dean (2009), "women have to prove they belong, more so than men do" (p. 242). Nadine described what she perceived as expectations for her to outperform colleagues throughout her career because of her gender. She stated, "You had to work so hard at being better. Which almost makes you upset, because you had to also work very hard at being non-female" (Nadine).

Sandberg (2013) made popular the concept of women leaning into their careers, which was meant as an encouragement for females do whatever is necessary to advance along a given career path, overcoming any existing obstacles and eliminating self-imposed barriers. Suggestions that emerged from previous research relating to steps women in leadership can take to progress in their careers included volunteer for challenging assignments, pursuing professional development opportunities, and developing a reputation for cooperation and effectiveness (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Hoobler et al., 2014; Rhode, 2012). Additionally, developing mentoring relationships and receiving career encouragement from trusted supervisors or colleagues have been shown to being valuable for women's career motivations (Hoobler et al., 2014; Sandberg, 2013).

Participants in this study provided career stories that supported the importance of these recommendations. Nearly all participants stated that they had volunteered for tasks or assignments throughout their career paths which helped them in the development of leadership competencies, and to establish their reputation as someone with whom others wanted to work. For the participants, taking on such challenges proved to be critical in helping them to develop the skills and connect with the professional networks necessary to succeed in their current positions.

Implications

Though this study, like others using a phenomenological lens, was not designed to produce recommendations which have widespread applicability, some implications for practice can be assumed from the experiences of the women serving in senior-level community college administration who participated in the qualitative interviews (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2004). The individual career stories of the research participants, and the commonalities which emerged from among their various experiences can be a source of insights for community colleges with significant numbers of women within their leadership pipelines. Additionally, professional organizations responsible for designing leadership development curriculum, or other training opportunities, could use the findings of this study to meet the needs of women leaders who are in line for a community college presidency now, or in the future. Finally, a discussion of implications for women in senior-level community college administration, who may consider pursuing additional leadership roles, or even a community college presidency, as part of their career paths, are outlined in this section.

Implications on campus. Women make up more than half of the students, faculty, and staff on community college campuses nationwide (AACC, 2016b). Presumably, there is a substantial amount of talent and commitment to the mission of community colleges just waiting to be tapped among the masses of women on campus. In a climate of state and federal budget cuts, community college leaders will be best served to identify and groom the leadership capabilities of the most talented faculty and administrators on campus, regardless of gender (Mitchell, Palacios & Leachman, 2014).

Women coming up through the community college leadership pipelines need to be prepared to lead, even from the chief executive position on campus. To effectively do so, boards of trustees, human resources offices, and other leadership teams on campus will need to evaluate the expectations placed on presidents, and possibly adjust out-of-date operational structures which have served as barriers to the advancement of women to date. In an era of mobile communications and 24/7 economies, a community college president can stay connected to campus events and issues remotely while tending to the needs of a family (Hoobler et al., 2014). A more collaborative style of executive leadership that encompasses a wide variety of perspectives and voices in decision-making could also be an important step forward in both promoting work-life balance, and shifting campus culture towards a more inclusive environment (Davies et al., 2017; Dean, 2009; Eddy, 2012b; Eddy & Ward, 2015).

Additionally, paying careful attention to subtle, inadvertent barriers which have been linked to women choosing to avoid leadership roles will be extremely beneficial for the long-term advancement of women into leadership positions (AFL-CIO, 2015; Khan et al., 2014; Sullivan, 2009; Williams, 2014). Subtle aspects of campus culture, such as

numerous after-hours events, limited opportunities for networking or professional development, or disproportionate rewarding agentic, traditionally male leadership styles, can create a barrier to advancement for women leaders (Eddy & Ward, 2015; Hoobler et al., 2014; Marcus, 2016). Such cultural adjustments on campus could benefit all individuals with their sights set on becoming a community college president, regardless of gender (Eddy & Ward, 2015). By simply changing the way things have always been done will pave the way for outcomes, and individuals, that are different from the way things have always been (Dean, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sulpizio, 2014). Sandberg (2013) encouraged a spirit for such shifts in organizational culture by stating, "In my opinion, it is always worth the battle to change an undesirable dynamic (p. 127)."

Implications for professional development. Among the previous research, and the findings of the present study, one of the most important factors for the success of women who have pursued leadership roles across all industries, was the influence of mentors and the value of engaging with professional networks. Professional development organizations can promote growth among women in senior-level community college administration by encouraging mentorship, sponsorships, and network among community college leaders during events, or through non-traditional methods such as web-conferencing, email distribution lists, or social media platforms (Donelan, 2015; Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013). The traditional methods of networking, which included after-hours events and sports-related outings, are not always conducive for women who bear the double-duty of building a career and caring for a family (Hoobler, Lemmon & Wayne, 2014; Penney, 2014). An increased number of women among senior-level administrators and community college presidents will help with the development of

an “old girls’ network,” as opposed to the proverbial “old boys’ club’ (Dean, 2009; Patton & Haynes, 2014). The increase in the number of women available to aid in the development and sponsorship of more junior community college leaders will aid in helping women leaders picture themselves at the helm of community college leadership, imagery that is greatly lacking currently (Eagly & Carli, 2044; Sandberg, 2013).

Implication for women community college professionals. The implications from the findings of the present study for current female professionals in the leadership pipeline for community college leadership is multifaceted. In Figure 2, the implications for women in community college administration who may choose to pursue executive leadership as a part of their career path in the future are depicted through the lens of the systems theory framework of career development (McMahon, 2011). As outlined by Patton and McMahon (2014) the STF includes three primary influences which have the potential to impact any career path, including personal influences, social system influences, and environmental-societal influences. Based on the finding of this study, and adapted from Patton and McMahon’s (1999) original diagram depicting the STF, the various themes which emerged from interviews with research participants are illustrated in Figure 2.

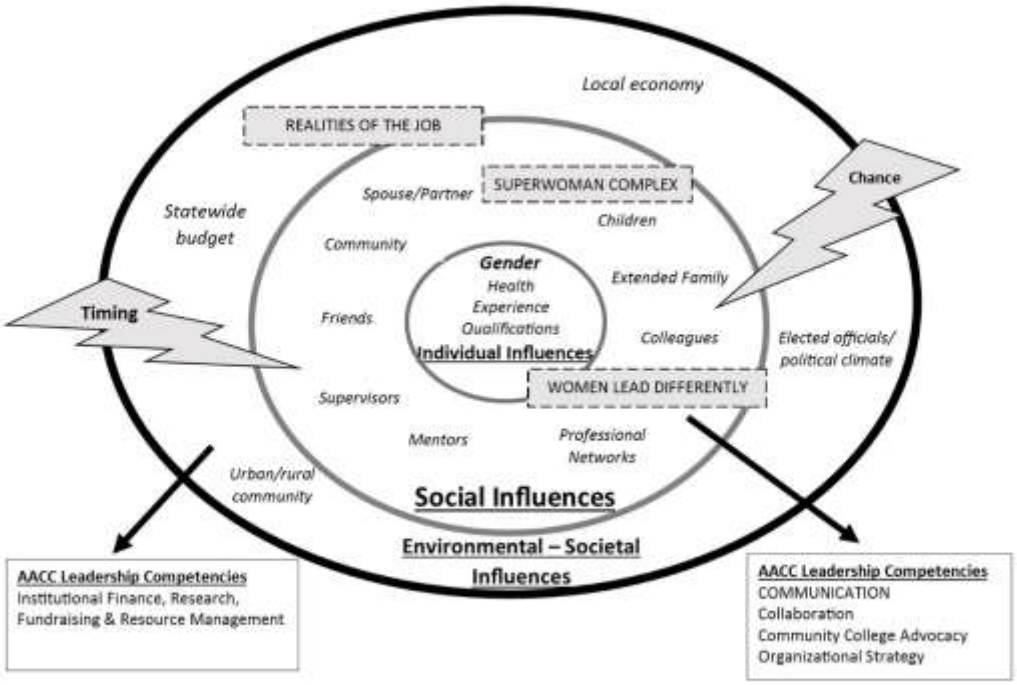

Figure 2. Emergent themes and interpretation through systems theory framework, adapted from Patton & McMahon (1999).

Communication is key. With regard to the AACC leadership competencies, communication was acknowledged by research participants in this study as the single-most-important of the five competencies. Additionally, strong communication skills were found to be a critical component of the social systems influences. Collaboration, community college advocacy, and organization strategy competencies were also identified as important in terms of the impact they had on the various relationships with which the participants engaged in on their respective campuses. By contrast, many of the participants that discussed the impact of the institutional finance, research, fundraising and resource management competency area in terms of the influence larger statewide economic and regional employment market influences had on how they either acquired or

reacted to the tasks associated with the competency area. As a result, the finance competency is included in Figure 2 as being tied directly to the environmental-societal influences.

Realities on the job. The theme "Realities of the Job" overlaps both the environmental-societal influences and the social system influences. The requirements and demands on a community college president are largely dictated by the community in which the institution is located. The relocation required to pursue a community college presidency was expressed as a primary concern among many participants, so leaving friend and family networks in one location to assume a job in an area for which a potential candidate knows very little can be a very reasonable issue for which women in senior-level community college leadership may have to overcome. State-level funding for higher education, housing, and employment markets, and neighborhood safety are all concerns that may influence a woman's decision to pursue a community college presidency at certain points in her career.

Women lead differently. Additionally, the emergent theme "Women Lead Differently" is positioned in Figure 2 so that it overlaps all three career influences in the STF. The decision to position the theme so broadly was based on the career experiences of women serving in senior-level community college leadership as the stories were conveyed throughout the interview process. Many participants in this study discussed their individual preferences for working in environments, or with audiences, from which they derived inspiration, meaning, and fulfillment; all of which can be encompassed in the individual influences.

Gina discussed her decision to leave an institution for which she worked after an announcement was made regarding the college's change in mission and priority. She stated, "I wanted to stay true to what I'm passionate about, so I sought opportunities elsewhere." Also, any gender-based bias, either overt or subtle, present challenges for which the participants had to navigate through within the same individual scope of influences.

The inclusive nature through with research participants in this study chose to approach solving problems within their respective departments or campuses, and their desire to surround themselves with competent, trusted, mentors and advisor could be illustrated within the social systems influences. Brenda summarized this desire, which was expressed in different ways by many participants, when she stated, "You have to surround yourself with people who are supportive of you, and people who aren't supportive of you. And people who are just going to be transparent, tell the truth, and have that open dialogue." Finally, difficulties that some participants experienced along their career paths which were perceived as the result of small-town politics, or rural, Midwestern, traditional resistance to women in leadership can be viewed through the lens of the environmental-societal system of the STF (McMahon, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2014).

Superwoman complex. The superwoman complex, or the pressure a woman places on herself to be "all things to all people" despite multiple, conflicting demands on her time, was the last emergent theme to be plotted in Figure 2. The superwoman complex was positioned between the social systems and environmental-societal influences for a number of reasons. Primarily, the feelings of stress and regret that were

expressed by participants in this study were connected to the expectations they perceived others had for them, including supervisors, colleagues, family members, and society as a whole.

Nadine shares a story about a time in her career when she was working excessive hours while attempting to raise her two young daughters. She recalled:

> I mean, you were working 50 or 60 hours a week. Trying to be a mom. On a Friday night, I remember (my daughter) looking at me and saying, 'Mom, this job is killing you.' And she was seven!

Nadine shared that the pressure she felt to be both a good mom and an exceptional employee reached the point at which the personal struggle was too much to bear, and she made a career change that would allow her to focus on her family while her children were still in grade school.

The pressure for profession women to do it all, look perfect, and be nice, is something that can be experienced on a personal level through workplace and community relationships. However, the need to strive for an untenable ideal, which is illustrated in the superwoman complex, can also be reinforced on a larger, cultural level through images and stereotypes in mass media (Watson & Detjen, 2014). Women in line for a community college presidency are not immune to such pressures but can develop a framework through which such outside influences can be identified, discredited, and disregarded.

Recursiveness, timing, and chance. Two final pieces of the STF, which are reflected in Figure 2, are the influences of timing and chance, and the impact each can have on the career paths of women in community college leadership. In addition, the STF

addressed the recursiveness, or shifting nature of significance, of all the aforementioned influences across time. All participants in the present study attributed at least a part of their career success to the influences of timing and chance.

Debbie reflected on her career path as less of a direct, linear series of progressively responsible positions, but more a culmination of fortunate turns of chance. She stated, “You know, kind of not a straight path. As I doubt anybody's path was. And, really, not always that self-directed” (Debbie). The recursive nature of what is critical in other areas of a professional’s life, or the influence on a career that is outside of one’s immediate control, must be considered and evaluated on a recurrent basis. Women who may consider a community college presidency as part of their ultimate career goals may be well served to weigh every career opportunity presented to them in terms of both the impact it will have on their end goal, and the impact it could have on their lives in the short-term (Patton & McMahon, 2014; Sandberg, 2013; Tajili, 2014; Watson & Detjen, 2014).

Important takeaways for women in leadership. The overall implications of this study, and the essence of what is to be learned from the experiences of the research participants is that it is essential for women in senior-level community college administration to recognize that a community college presidency is within their reach. It is also important for women who may consider community college leadership to understand there are certain obstacles to which they may have to navigate along the path to the executive suite. However, the present study has shown that many of those barriers are short-term and self-imposed.

Of the major influences in the STF, the participants in the present study identified the social system influences, or the influence of relationships on their career paths, as the most significant (McMahon, 2011; Patton, 2013b; Patton & McMahon, 2014). What this finding implies for women who may choose to pursue a career path through senior-level administration on their way to a community college presidency is that a conscious assessment of their most meaningful relationships, and the impact such relationships have on their career decision-making, will be an ongoing process. For women who seek to pursue key leadership roles, including a community college presidency, connecting with mentors, engaging with professional networks, and developing supportive relationships with colleagues and peers should be top priorities, as well as ensuring that certain support systems are in place to meet familial obligations (Dean, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gangone & Lennon, 2014; Hoobler et al., 2009; Rhode, 2012; Sandberg, 2013; Sullivan, 2009).

Another implication, which can be taken from the present study for women who may pursue community college career path, is that identifying what motivates them to lead, and embracing and optimizing those sources of motivation, could be key to long-term sustainability of a career. For the participants in this study, salary thresholds and ultimate authority were not mentioned as primary driving forces for their respective careers. Rather, women who participated in this research were able to clearly articulate what inspired them and drove them to succeed on a daily basis. Many of the participants identified relationships among faculty and colleagues, desires to do good in their communities, and the need to help students from difficult circumstances achieve as motivators for their career goals.

Some participants went so far as to state that they were not interested in climbing a career ladder. Women participating in this study shared that they were content with not being the public name and face for their institutions, or an out-front leader (Keohane, 2014). What may be discerned from the findings of this study is that leadership on campus does not have to equate with the presidency alone.

For women who are not convinced that the executive suite on campus is their ultimate career goal, developing relationships on campus with mentors and colleagues, participating in activities like job shadowing or localized leadership develop programs could be highly influential in guiding them down a career path that will be both fulfilling for them personally and beneficial for students and stakeholders on campus. The motivation to lead is important, and women with a desire to pursue a career path in community college leadership should be advised to identify what precisely motivates them at work. With a motivation to lead articulated, women may then be able to more accurately find ways in which their talents and passions can benefit the entire campus community, whether that path leads to the presidency or to other critical leadership roles within the community college.

Recommendations for Future Research

Though the present study has taken important steps in identifying the experiences through which women in senior-level community college administration have come to develop the competencies necessary to transition to the presidency successfully, there is a great deal more research that can be done to continue to identify the essence of what it means to be a woman in a senior leadership role in community colleges. Further expansion of the literature relating to women in line for a community college presidency

could help to shed light on other barriers and opportunities for women who are currently filling the proverbial leadership pipeline. A clearer understanding of the experiences, obstacles, and recommendations for women from all walks of life could finally help to fill the gender gap in community college executive leadership that has repeatedly been documented through previous research.

The present study is limited in its applicability to a larger population primarily because it was framed through a phenomenological lens, and because it was focused on a small sample of women in senior-level community college administration from one Midwestern state (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2015; Yin, 2016). A different, more empirically-based, research methodology could generate results with broad applicability of findings, such as a large-scale, nationwide quantitative study, or even a different qualitative structure with a larger, nationally representative sample (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2015). Likewise, the inclusion of more participants within the same geographic area could shed more light on the unique, cultural influences of women in community college leadership in the Midwestern state, or those in the immediate region. From a different perspective, a longitudinal, ethnographic approach to studying the same population, or a broader sample, could identify valuable details relating to the collectivistic experience of the population, whereas the present phenomenological approach focused on the lived experiences and individual perspectives of the research participants (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Another worthwhile direction in which to focus a similar study would be a narrowed focus on only women currently serving as chief academic officers. Among community college presidents nationwide, they're most frequently held previous positions

were that of chief academic officer at their current, or another community college campus or system (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Lennon et al., 2013). More thorough examinations of the career experiences of women chief academic officers, or those women leaders on campus who are not just in line for the presidency, but who could be considered at the front of the line, could provide interesting insights for women currently occupying a place among faculty, but whom have leadership aspirations, at community colleges nationwide (Dean, 2009).

The revision of the AACC leadership competencies which was published in 2013, with its distinction between how each of the competencies may be manifested among emerging leaders, new and established campus CEOs, could also serve as an enlightening variation to the current research. Rather than interviewing women in senior-level community college administration with regards to their perceived value and application of the broad definitions of the five competencies, a study which asks women to rate themselves, or frame their experiences along the experiential continuum established by the AACC could shed light on the essence of their overall career development in an entirely different way (AACC, 2013; Whitson et al., 2015). Specific demographic information was not collected directly from the participants in this study. Rather, their approximate ages and length of tenure in their current positions were ascertained through the interview process or the review of their respective resumes or CVs. Such data could be significant when aligning those experiences within the general framework of the new experience-based progression of the AACC leadership competencies.

Other ways through which to expand on the current study would be to study a population that reaches beyond the confines of community colleges. Using the current

research methods, though changing the sample population to reflect public or private, four-year baccalaureate or higher degree-awarding universities could provide insights into the career paths of women in senior-level administration in all of higher education (The Carnegie Classification, n.d.). By shifting the emphasis away from community colleges exclusively, more career patterns and recommendations could be generated for higher education as an industry. Additionally, making a concerted effort at recruiting participants, rather than relying on volunteer participation within a specific population, would help build a more diverse sample. Much of the previous research with regards to the glass ceiling phenomenon is focused on the experiences of women and people of color. A great deal of additional research is needed to understand the paths towards leadership in higher education, the development of the AACC leadership competencies and the STF career influences through the lived experiences of individual beyond the predominantly Caucasian women who participated in this study.

Finally, an examination of the career development experiences, the influences relating to the STF, and the acquisition of the AACC leadership competencies for all senior-level community college administrators, without regard to gender, could paint a much broader, more applicable picture of what to expect for individuals who are passionate about the mission of community colleges. Certain barriers and opportunities may exist along the career paths of anyone who wishes to pursue an executive leadership role on campus, such as the perceived need to relocate in order to move up in one's career, and the pressures of serving as a public figure. Recommendations could be uncovered that would benefit individuals with the goal of becoming a community college president, without regard to gender. Additionally, categorizing senior-level administrators

by age or age range could also be important in identifying specific, lasting barriers that are unique to community colleges, or higher education, and less indicative of campus or regional cultures.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study, which was approached through a phenomenological lens, was to explore how women who have reached senior-level administrative roles on community college campuses have acquired the AACC leadership competencies, a framework that has been established as the benchmark for community college executive leadership. The STF was identified as the theoretical framework from which to explore the career experiences of the research participants (McMahon, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2014). The STF has been identified as a framework through which the career experiences of women can be explained, because it was broad enough to encompass the numerous personal, social and culture factors that often impact how women make career-related decisions (McMahon et al., 2013; Patton, 2013a; Tajili, 2014).

Phenomenology was identified as an appropriate research method, as the intent of the study was not to make broad generalizations about the experiences of the participants, but to obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences that had shaped their respective career paths to date (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen 2014; Yin, 2016). Though all the participants in this study came from one Midwestern state, they represented a variety of job titles, professional backgrounds, and familial structures. The individual experiences and career influences of the women participating in this research were as varied and as unique as the participants themselves. However, a series of

commonalities emerged among their distinctive stories (Fraenkel et al., 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). From an examination of such commonalities, five predominant themes were identified.

The finding which emerged from the analysis of the qualitative interviews aligned with the AACC leadership competencies, the STF influences, and themes from previous research relating to women in leadership. Of the five AACC leadership competencies, communication was overwhelmingly identified as the most prominent among the participants in their current roles (AACC, 2013). The women interviewed for this study spoke at length about relationships that had played significant roles throughout their careers to date. Connections with colleagues, mentors, and family members fit within the social systems influences of the STF (McMahon, 2011). Many participants discussed their personal motivations for success at work and described ways in which they chose to lead their teams and departments in a manner different from what had been modeled for them in the past, often by previous male supervisors.

Nearly all participants stated they were not interested in pursuing a community college presidency at the time of their respective interviews, largely citing what they perceived as realities of the job which were not appealing to them, or would be difficult for their families. Lastly, participants shared stories and examples of times throughout their careers in which they felt pressure to "do it all, and do it all well" (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015; Watson & Detjen, 2014). Referred to as a superwoman complex, experiencing a struggle to balance work demands and domestic responsibilities, guilt for working excessive hours, and regret for not spending time with loved ones were themes that were repeated throughout the qualitative interviews (Sumra & Schillaci, 2015).

A number of implications for practice were identified, including suggestions for community college administrators and boards of trustees, professional development organizations, and for women community college professionals. Closing the gender gap among community college presidents is a worthwhile goal, but one that can only be accomplished with changes in campus leadership cultures so that both women and men find meaning and fulfillment in their work, while also maintaining a healthy work-life balance (AACC, 2014; Boggs, 2012; Dean, 2009; Eddy & Ward, 2015; White, 2014). Professional development organizations interested in developing women for senior- or executive-level community college roles on campus would be best served to help women identify potential career obstacles and develop plans to navigate through those challenges (Gangone & Lennon, 2014; O'Neil et al., 2013). Finally, women with a desire to pursue a career in community college leadership need to be able to visualize themselves in key administrative roles, including the presidency (Sulpizio, 2014; Wilson & Cox-Brand, 2012). An important part of being able to see leadership potential in themselves, is to develop a network of colleagues, mentors and trusted individuals who can serve as sources of encouragement and advocates along their career paths (Dean, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gangone & Lennon, 2014; Hoobler et al., 2009; Rhode, 2012; Sandberg, 2013; Sullivan, 2009).

Appendix A

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

In Line for the Presidency: The AACC Leadership Competencies and the Career Development of Women Leaders in Community College Administration

Principal Investigator Autumn Rene Porter

Telephone: [redacted] E-mail: arp601@lindenwood.edu

Participant_____

Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Autumn Porter under the guidance of Dr. Rhonda Bishop. The purpose of this research is to understand how career experiences have impacted the development of specific leadership competencies in women currently working as senior-level community college administrators.

2. a) Your participation will involve submitting a copy of your current resume or curriculum vitae by email and completing an interview with the principal investigator. The interview will be conducted at a time and location that is convenient for you. A telephone or Skype interview can be conducted, if preferred. Your interview will be audio recorded and notes will be taken by the Principal Investigator. After interviews of all participants in this study are complete, you will be provided a typewritten copy of your interview transcript for review. Any suggestions, elaborations, or corrections you recommend will be made before the data analysis process will begin.

   b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length.

   Approximately 12 women in senior-level community college administration from various campuses and systems will be involved in this research.

3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.

4. There are no direct benefits for your participation in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about the career development experiences that may be necessary for future women community college leaders in order for them to acquire the AACC leadership competencies and encourage other women administrators to consider a career path towards a community college presidency.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the Principal Investigator in a safe location.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Principal Investigator, Autumn Porter [redacted] or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Rhonda Bishop [redacted]. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Provost at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or [redacted].

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

_____		_____	
Participant's Signature	Date	Participant's Printed Name	
_____		_____	
Signature of Principal Investigator	Date	Investigator Printed Name	

Revised 8-8-2012

Appendix B

Interview Protocol
Interviewee/Institution: Date:

Time of Interview:

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1. Tell me about yourself.

    a. Tell me about your life away from the office.

2. Having had the chance to review the AACC leadership competencies, how would you say your daily responsibilities relate to the AACC leadership competencies?

3. What experiences in your career do you feel helped you to develop those competencies?

4. What experiences or professional development opportunities are you currently pursuing to help develop the AACC leadership competencies you lack?

5. To what do you attribute gaps in your leadership skill sets?

6. Do you aspire to become a community college president? Why or why not?

    a. At what point did you decide that would be (or would not be) part of your career goals?

7. A significant disparity exists between men and women community college presidents nationwide, with only 36% of women in the role of president. In (this Midwestern state), only 19% of the community college presidents are women. Why do you think such a gender gap continues to exist?

8. Do you feel as though you have faced challenges along your career path that are different from those of your male colleagues?

9. Did you encounter barriers along your career path—either professionally or personally? What were they?

10. Did your family have an impact on your career decisions? In what ways?

11. Reflecting on the experiences along your career path to date, what would you have done differently? Please explain.

12. Please talk about the relationships that have been influential along your career path—both positive and negative.

13. What impacts, if any, did timing or chance have on your career decisions?

14. What recommendations would you have for women who are interested in community college leadership as a career path?

Appendix C

Resume/Curricula Vitae Protocol

Interviewee:_____ Date:_____

Interviewer:_____

Question #	Key Points from Interview	Connection to Resume/CV	AACC leadership competencies/ STF influences

Appendix D

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE: December 2, 2016

TO: Autumn Porter

FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [930596-1] In Line for the Presidency: The AACC Leadership Competencies and the Career Development of Women Leaders in Community College Administration

IRB REFERENCE #:

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: December 2, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: December 1, 2017

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

IN LINE FOR THE PRESIDENCY

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research project. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation (Category 7).

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the completion/amendment form for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of December 1, 2017.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

If you have any questions, please contact Michael Leary at 636-949-4730 or mleary@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

If you have any questions, please send them to IRB@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

Appendix E

December 5, 2016

<Research Participant Name>
<Institution Name>
<Mailing Address>
<City, MO Zip Code>

Dear <Name>,

My name is Autumn Porter, and I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University seeking an EdD in Higher Education Instructional Leadership. As a current employee in community college administration, I have a particular interest in the experiences that have shaped the careers of women in senior-level community college administration and how those experiences have helped them develop the leadership competencies necessary to become an effective community college president. I sincerely hope to have you participate in my study.

My research will focus primarily on the lived experiences that have led you to your current position and the influences throughout your career that have helped you hone the skills outlined in the leadership competencies outlined by the AACC. Participation will take approximately 60 minutes of your time, and I will schedule a date and time to visit you on your campus or at a location of your preference. If a telephone or Skype interview would be more convenient, I can make those arrangements with you as well. There are no known risks involved in this research. Your identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym and nothing shared in your interview will be linked directly to your current institution.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the email address below, or my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Rhonda Bishop, at rbishop@lindenwood.edu. To indicate your willingness to participate in this study, please contact me by email at arp601@lindenwood.edu.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Best regards,

Autumn Porter
arp601@Lindenwood.edu
[redacted]

Enclosure:
AACC Leadership Competencies for Community College Leaders

American Association of Community Colleges

AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders

Listed below are broad definitions of the five competencies required for community college presidents, as adopted by the American Association of Community Colleges on August 9, 2013 (AACC, 2013).

Organizational Strategy – An effective community college leader promotes the success of all students, strategically improves the quality of the institution, and sustains the community college mission based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends.

Institutional Finance, Research, Fundraising, and Resource Management – An effective community college leader equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, and information as well as physical and financial assets to fulfill the mission, vision, and goals of the community college.

Communication – An effective community college leader uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community; promotes the success of all students; ensures the safety and security of students and the surrounding college community; and sustains the community college mission.

Collaboration – An effective community college leader develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, mutually beneficial and ethical internal and external relationships that nurture diversity, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission.

Community College Advocacy – An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college on the local, state, and national level.

Adapted from “AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders (2nd ed.),” 2013, American Association of Community Colleges. Retrieved from http://www.aacc.nche.newsevents/Events/leadershipsuite/Documents/AACC_Core_Competencies_web.pdf.

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Vita

Autumn Porter currently serves in the role of Student Services Director at Ozarks Technical Community College's Table Rock Campus, located in Taney County, Missouri. Porter has been recognized for her dedication to student success by receiving the Excellence in Education award for support staff in 2015. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree, with Honors, in Criminology from Drury University, and a Master of Science degree in Criminal Justice from Drury University.

Prior to her current role in higher education, Porter held managerial and leadership roles at Boys & Girls Clubs in Springfield, Columbia, and Branson, Missouri. While working in the resource development department of United Way, Porter was instrumental in launching the first United Way campaign in Taney County, Missouri. Porter also owns and operates a non-profit consulting business which provides grant-writing, grant management, and communications services for local charitable organizations.

Porter credits the success she has experienced throughout her career to the support and encouragement of her family. A first-generation college student, her parents have cheered her on through her undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Porter currently resides in Branson, Missouri with her husband Noel, and two children, Logan and Taylor.