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The Role Development of a Community College President's Spouse

by

Tracy M. McGrady

October 2013

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in

partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

The Role Development of a Community College President's Spouse

by


Tracy M. McGrady

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

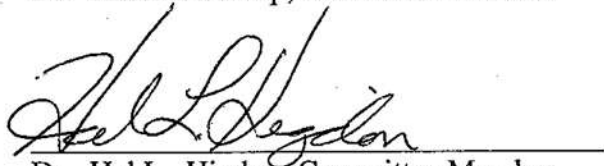
Lindenwood University, School of Education


Dr. Sherry DeVore, Dissertation Chair

10-29-13
Date


Dr. Rhonda Bishop, Committee Member

10-29-13
Date


Dr. Hal L. Higdon, Committee Member

10-29-13
Date

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.

Full Legal Name: Tracy M. McGrady

Signature: Tracy M. McGrady Date: 10-29-13

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ROLE OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT'S SPOUSE

Abstract

The role of a community college president's spouse can be an important one in the life of the college and in the success of the presidency, yet the role itself is often vaguely defined. This can cause frustration for a college president's spouse because he or she experiences ambiguity by not knowing the expectations college stakeholders hold of the spousal role. This study explored the role uncertainties held by community college presidents' spouses, the strategies they used to navigate their new role, and the conflicts they experience in the role as presidential spouse. A qualitative, grounded theory design was selected for this study and was framed through the perspective of role theory and sensemaking. Interviews with 17 community college presidents' spouses in two Midwestern states were conducted. Data analysis resulted in the emergence of three major themes: (a) feelings of ambiguity about the spousal role, (b) attempts to make sense of the role through engagement with others, and (c) feelings of a loss of identity. These findings were consistent with other studies conducted within the scope of role theory and sensemaking. The grounded theory approach, however, produced a new finding: Most of the presidents' spouses identified a profound and personal emotional investment in their role.

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ROLE OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT'S SPOUSE

Chapter One: Introduction

In 61 BC, Julius Caesar's wife, Pompeia, hosted a festival to which no men were invited. A young patrician, who wished to seduce Pompeia, managed to sneak into the party dressed as a woman. He was caught and acquitted of the crime. However, Caesar divorced his wife, famously saying what has now become a well-known proverb: "Caesar's wife must be above suspicion" ("Julius Caesar," 2012).

Like Caesar's wife, or the spouse of any public figure, a college president's spouse is held to a higher standard. Even though the spouse is not hired to fulfill the responsibilities of the presidency, he or she plays an important symbolic and functional role in the life of a college (Kiley, 2011; Schultz, 2010). The spouse's role is one which has only recently received much scholarly attention, but its impact can be profound. Schultz (2010) compared the experience to "living in a fishbowl" and wrote that the college community "will hang on the spouse's words and actions, often assuming the individual speaks for the president" (p. 2). However, the spousal role is often vaguely defined. This can cause a great deal of frustration for a spouse who is attempting to please college stakeholders but who does not fully understand the rules of the game. Under these circumstances, what methods do college presidents' spouses use to make sense of and develop their roles?

In this chapter, an introduction to this study is provided. The background for research on the topic of the role of college presidents' spouses is discussed. A conceptual framework is identified, along with an explanation of the significance of the problem and the purpose of the study. In addition, research questions, definitions of key terms, and limitations and assumptions are provided.

Background of the Study

There is limited scholarly research on the role played by a college or university president's spouse. Thompson (2008) found literature on this topic grew out of a focus on the wives of corporate executives and U.S. presidents and came in two waves: one in the 1950s and 1960s, and a second wave in the 1970s through the 1990s. In the first wave of the 1950s and 1960s, literature focused on the wife's social role and the expectation of "polished perfection" in terms of her home and personal appearance (Thompson, 2008, p. 12). In the second wave, which grew from the feminist movement of the 1970s through the 1990s, studies began to emerge which viewed the wife as a power base in the professional life of her husband (Justice, 1991; Thompson, 2008).

As the scholarly community began to acknowledge the influence of the wife on her husband's work life, attention turned to the college and university context. The highly visible nature of corporate executives and U.S. presidents is analogous to that of a college president. A college presidency is also a highly visible position, particularly in areas where the college is publicly-funded and an important part of the local culture (Stuart, 2012). Because of the public nature of the job, the president, and by extension his or her spouse, is often heavily scrutinized by the public (Kiley, 2011; Stuart, 2012).

As more scholarly research emerged on the role of the spouse in a college presidency, societal demographics began to shift. The profile of a college president—traditionally a married, white male with a stay-at-home wife—began to change. By the early 2000s, the number of female presidents, spouses with outside employment, and unmarried presidents had dramatically increased since the 1970s when the subject of college presidents' spouses was first studied (Smith, 2001; Trebon & Trebon, 2004). The

American Association of Community Colleges recently reported that women are increasingly being selected to fill leadership positions, and females occupy 28% of community college presidencies (“Community college,” 2013). In many cases, the impact of the spouse has shifted from a major role as one whose presence was required at social and fundraising events, to a more subtle role as confidante and private supporter (Trebon & Trebon, 2004).

Still, the impact of the spouse can be profound. Vaughan (1986) reported the words of one community college president: “A good wife will make a good president an excellent president, but a lousy wife can make an excellent president good at best and maybe a failure” (p. 149). Teresa Johnston Oden (2007b), an academic leader’s spouse herself, wrote of the job of being a president’s spouse: “Like housework, it’s a job that seems to attract the most notice when it is done badly, or not at all” (p. xv). Fortunately, the spouse usually has a positive influence on the institution (Schultz, 2010); however, this is not always the case. Recent situations involving the president’s spouse at colleges in Vermont, Tennessee, and Kentucky resulted in either presidential leaves of absence or resignations (Kiley, 2011). Constance Gee, the now ex-wife of university president Gordon Gee, published a tell-all memoir of her tenure as a president’s spouse, including her often detrimental effect on his presidency (Golden, 2012).

Though the role of the spouse in a college presidency is not widely studied, it has been researched more extensively in the context of four-year institutions. While universities and community colleges are different in many ways, Vaughan (1986) wrote that the volumes written about the university president’s spouse “are nevertheless valuable” and “add to the understanding of the complexities, frustrations, and rewards” of

being a president's spouse (p. 143). The role of today's college president's spouse has, in many ways, evolved from a conventional role to one more reflective of contemporary society; nonetheless, boards of trustees and other campus stakeholders still often hold traditional expectations for how a spouse will function in the life of the college (Kiley, 2011).

Regardless of the context, when reviewing the research conducted on the role of the college or university president's spouse, a common theme emerges: Presidential spouses resoundingly report feeling a sense of ambiguity regarding what their role should be. This ambiguity arises from the lack of a job description and no well-defined expectations for how they should function (Kiley, 2011; Schultz, 2010). Boards of trustees bear the responsibility for hiring the president; however, trustees and spouses typically differ in their expectations of the role (Kiley, 2011). Adding to the ambiguity is that while many believe defining the spouse's role should be the board's job, others believe boards should focus only on hiring the president, and not the couple (Kiley, 2011).

In the meantime, spouses can begin in their new role as presidential spouse with one set of expectations about the family's new life, only to find others hold different ideas about their role (Kiley, 2011). Vaughn (1986) relayed the frustrations of one spouse: "The president moves into a position and people know what is expected of him; they do not know what is expected of the spouse" (p. 148). While the notion of the party-hosting president's wife may have gone by the wayside, some still place the spouse's role in the more traditional light. In addition to perceptions of the board of trustees, the public, the campus community, and even the president, may continue to expect the

spouse to actively participate in the life of the college (Oden, 2007b). This can cause tension when the spouse has his or her own career, is helping to raise a family in the midst of the president's demanding schedule, or has little interest in having such a presence in the president's career. Likewise, some spouses enter the role relishing the idea of being an active participant in the president's career when such involvement is not desired by other stakeholders at the college.

At the same time, spouses feel the need to please the board and other stakeholders for the sake of the president. Oden (2007b) noted, "A new leader's relationship with the institution's board of trustees is crucial to his or her success. And yet many boards seem to studiously avoid...an official relationship with the leader's spouse" (p. 5). Adding to the difficulty is following in the footsteps of the previous presidential spouse. Spouses reported struggling to maintain their own identity while filling a role, which, in many ways, has already been defined for them (Kiley, 2011; Oden, 2007a).

While there are studies focused on the role of the spouse and his or her influence on the college or university presidency, absent from the literature is discussion about how presidential spouses make sense of and develop their roles. Vaughan (1986) acknowledged that expecting a singular definition of a spouse's role "might be unrealistic since the role varies so much from college to college" (p. 148). However, a thorough look at the strategies spouses have used in role development could be instructive for future presidential spouses, boards of trustees, and other community college stakeholders.

Conceptual Framework

This study was conducted using a qualitative, grounded theoretical approach. Grounded theory is used by qualitative researchers seeking to determine if something

other than established theoretical perspectives can best explain a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss and Corbin (1994) described grounded theory as “a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed,” (p. 273). Rather than the researcher formulating a hypothesis to test, the grounded theory method allows the researcher to generate a hypothesis based upon data collected from participants (Auerbach, 2003; Creswell, 2009). Strauss and Corbin (1994) further explained, “Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273).

Because the role development process of community college presidents' spouses has not been the subject of extensive study, grounded theory was selected as an appropriate methodology to determine if a new theoretical perspective would emerge; however, by reviewing existing research common themes, such as role ambiguity, role uncertainties and frustrations have been noted. These themes are rooted in role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Thomas & Biddle, 1966) and sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Because of these focus points in the existing literature, role theory and sensemaking were used as parameters within the grounded theory methodology to explore the experiences with role development of community college presidents' spouses. Although early grounded theorists discouraged the use of other theoretical perspectives (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) for fear they might overshadow an emergent theory, the field of grounded research has evolved to incorporate other approaches. Strauss and Corbin (1994) advocated the importance of having a general idea of where to begin, and Charmaz (2006) stressed the value of using other theories to inform the emergence of a new one. The discussions of role theory and sensemaking in

this chapter provide more background on these theoretical perspectives to defend the appropriateness of their use in this study.

Role theory. Role theory examines role perceptions and relational properties between individuals and organizations (Schuler, Aldag, & Brief, 1977). According to Thomas and Biddle (1966), although the role field has examined aspects and factors influential to human behavior, “no one grand theory” exists (p. 14). Therefore, role theory is best understood as one which “assists in explaining the person’s behavior based on their perceived social position and the assumed role expectations held by themselves and others” (Vargas, 2011).

Role theory is an organizational theory which “provides a set of social expectations or normative behaviours that prescribe how an agent should occupy a social situation, position or status level” (Simpson & Carroll, 2008, p. 31). Roles assist in the negotiation of tasks and “offer maps that guide people through their interactions and evaluations of themselves” (Emanuel, Bennett, & Richardson, 2007, p. 160). Collier and Callero (2005) asserted roles are “recognized, understood and shared with varying degrees of specificity and knowledge” by an organization’s members (p. 47).

Role theorists have argued, “Individuals constantly recreate and shape their roles, according to their self-concepts and through interaction with others in social settings” (Apker, 2001). Simpson and Carroll (2008) wrote, “Scholars are increasingly turning their attention towards the ‘becoming’ rather than the ‘being’ of identity” (p. 31). In short, people in organizations develop their identity within the parameters of how the role they occupy is defined and understood. However, what if there is no consensus among the organization about how the role should be defined? It is well-documented that

community college presidents' spouses are not usually provided a job description (Schultz, 2010) and are left to develop their role on their own.

This raises the question of how presidents' spouses ultimately navigate and develop their role. The research of organizational scholars suggests communication serves as a primary means for defining, developing, maintaining, and negotiating one's organizational role (Apker, 2001; Graen, 1976). Thus, organizational members use communication as a means for role construction through social interactions with others both within and outside the organizational setting. Examining how community college presidents' spouses navigate and negotiate through communication can provide insight into the process of role development in the midst of role ambiguity. Katz and Kahn (1978) defined role ambiguity as "uncertainty about what the occupant of a particular office is supposed to do" (p. 206). They identified frustration, low job satisfaction, high tension, reduced effectiveness in performance, and low self-confidence as side effects of role ambiguity (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Role research is very limited in the higher education setting, especially related to the topic of presidential spouses. Vargas (2011) used role theory to study a university's role expectations of the presidential spouse, but focused on the role itself and not on the process of how spouses made sense of and developed their role. Analyzing how and in what ways community college presidents' spouses develop their roles may help "set realistic expectations for performance of the role" and may "increase understanding of the dimensions of the overall process of [role] enactment" (Squires, 2004, pp. 273-274).

Sensemaking. In addition to exploring the strategies community college presidents' spouses use to contend with the ambiguity of poorly-defined expectations, it

is useful to look at the process by which they employ those strategies. This is where the theory behind sensemaking becomes useful. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) defined sensemaking as a process by which people organize information within a social context. Stringer (1999) explained sensemaking as a process primarily concerned with identity construction.

The blending of role theory and sensemaking as a lens through which to explore spouses' experiences in constructing role identity allowed for a rich and useful interpretation of the data which emerged from the study. Although role theory and sensemaking were used as a context for analyzing the data collected in this study, it was important to allow the results to emerge on their own without allegiance to any particular theoretical perspective. Grounded theory as a research methodology worked in tandem with role theory and sensemaking as a conceptual framework in examining how community college presidents' spouses navigate their roles. This is one of the useful features of grounded theory methods: These methods "can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis, rather than stand in opposition to them" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 18). The grounded approach allowed common themes to emerge, and viewing those themes through the lenses of role theory and sensemaking, while remaining open to the possibilities of new discoveries within this framework, helped identify a theory applicable to this new area of research. In this way, a grounded theory approach allowed for the possibility of a new theory to emerge (Charmaz, 2006). Not only does this study complement research based on role theory and sensemaking, but this approach extends prior research in these areas as well.

Statement of the Problem

Research has shown the role of the president's spouse is usually ill-defined and thus harbors a great deal of ambiguity (Justice, 1991; Kiley, 2011; Schultz, 2010; Vaughan, 1986). At the same time, the role holds great influence over the effectiveness of the presidency and can heavily influence the institution. Vaughan (1986) wrote, "By choosing to ignore the role of the spouse, those interested in the community college presidency have been denied an important insight into the presidency..." (p. 143).

This is especially true now. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, 25% of current college presidents are 60-64 years old, and another 37% are 55-59 years old ("Community college," 2013). As baby boomers age, vast numbers of administrators are retiring, creating a critical challenge for community colleges (Shults, 2001). A recent report on the American college presidency found the average age was 61 years old, and the average length of service of a college president had declined to only seven years (Stuart, 2012). A study of 415 community college presidents in 2008 found that 79% had plans to retire by 2012, while at the same time there had been a 78% drop in the number of graduates of programs in community college leadership (Fain, 2008). Nationwide, it has been estimated that in the decade between 2008 and 2018, upwards of 70% of community college presidents will have retired (Shults, 2001). In an age of shrinking budgets and the necessity for intense fundraising efforts, the college presidency is an increasingly difficult job. In addition, the position is subject to more scrutiny and much less privacy (Stuart, 2012). Many of those who once aspired to a college presidency are rethinking that choice, in part because of the scrutiny to which they and their families are subjected (Kiley, 2011; Stuart, 2012). Because the

spouse plays a role in the decision to pursue a college presidency, his or her satisfaction with the role should be considered (Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Williams, 1983).

The common theme emerging from research on college presidents' spouses is one of uncertainty and ambiguity, and many report feeling lost without anywhere to turn for guidance (Corbally, 1977; Oden, 2007b). While more has been written on the role of the spouse within a four-year institution, there is little focus on this topic within the context of a community college. While community college presidents and their spouses may not be quite as visible as those of large flagship universities, there are still significant demands upon the president, and by extension, his or her spouse.

Purpose of the Study

In a 1991 study of trustees' and presidential spouses' perceptions of the spousal role, Justice advised spouses to be more assertive about bringing concerns about his or her role to the trustees during the interview process. However, Justice (1991) acknowledged, "This may not be easy to do...since a spouse who is unable or unwilling to play an expected role may fear jeopardizing the opportunity for her/his husband or wife to be offered the presidency" (p. 18).

Regardless of the context, there has been no investigation into how college presidents' spouses navigate the role development process. The intent of this study was to explore the degree to which spouses of community college presidents feel uncertain about their spousal role prior to officially assuming the role. It also sought to shed light on how spouses make sense of and develop their roles. This study also explored the conflicts spouses encounter in fulfilling their role. An understanding of how spouses navigate their roles might reduce some of the uncertainty involved with the role. This

can help boards of trustees and administrators better understand not only how spouses navigate and make sense of their new positions, but also the type of information which is useful to them in this process.

Research Questions

In order to gain insight into the ways in which community college presidents' spouses view their roles, develop their roles, and the conflicts they experience as they fulfill their roles, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What uncertainties did community college presidents' spouses have about their spousal role prior to assuming it?
2. What strategies do community college presidents' spouses use to develop their spousal role?
3. What role conflicts do community college presidents' spouses encounter in fulfilling their spousal role?

Definitions of Key Terms

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

President. The president or chancellor of a community college. A president serves as chief executive officer over one campus, while a chancellor serves as chief executive officer over multiple campuses within a community college system.

Spousal role. The series of responsibilities which accompany being the spouse of a community college president.

Spouse. The husband or wife of a community college president.

Limitations and Assumptions

The following limitations were identified in this study:

1. The sample was limited to spouses of community college presidents in two Midwestern states. Because of this, the results may reflect only a Midwestern experience and may not be widely applicable.

2. Researcher bias may invade on any qualitative study. Procedures were implemented to minimize bias and its impact on the study.

The following assumption was accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.

Summary

In this chapter, an introduction to this study was provided by discussing the background for research on the topic of the role of college presidents' spouses.

Interviews with community college presidents' spouses helped determine the perceptions they held about the role as a presidential spouse before assuming it, the strategies used to reduce ambiguity and develop the role, and the conflicts encountered while fulfilling the role. A conceptual framework was also identified, and the significance of the problem, as well as the purpose of the study, were explained. In addition, research questions, definitions of key terms, and limitations and assumptions were presented.

A community college president's spouse plays an important role in the success of the presidency and thus, the institution. The little research that does exist on the spousal role has primarily emerged from the context of four-year institutions. These studies suggested college presidents' spouses experience some frustration at trying to fulfill expectations that are not clearly defined. There is no extant research on how spouses

make sense of and develop into their roles. By studying this phenomenon, spouses and trustees can gain insight into how to communicate expectations and concerns during the presidential hiring process.

In Chapter Two, a review of the literature associated with this topic was conducted. Literature on the theoretical framework used to support this study was reviewed. Finally, historical research on the role of college presidents' spouses was also explored.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The community college president's spouse has been largely overlooked as a topic of academic study, despite the fact he or she plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of the presidency (Corbally, 1977; Justice, 1991; Kiley, 2011; Riesman, 1980; Schultz, 2010; Vaughan, 1986; Vaughan, 1987). Existing research focuses on determining influence (Thompson, 2008), investigating the spouse's relationship with the board (Justice, 1991), the spouse's role in fundraising (Schultz, 2010), and the overall role the spouse plays (Corbally, 1977; Vaughan, 1986). While these studies explored different aspects of the spouse's experience, all revealed the spouse's sense of frustration at the lack of role definition provided to them.

Boards of trustees and other campus stakeholders typically hold certain expectations for how the spouse will function within the affairs of the college (Riesman, 1980; Vaughan, 1987). These expectations, however, are usually vague and ill-defined and typically go unspoken during the presidential hiring process (Corbally, 1977; Riesman, 1980; Schultz, 2010; Vaughan, 1987). Some trustees expect significant time and involvement with the college, such as playing a role in fundraising, advocacy, and being present at college-related events. Others do not hold similar expectations, instead leaving the role to be defined by the person who occupies it.

This lack of clarity often contributes to the spouse's sense of confusion about the role (Kiley, 2011; Oden, 2007a; Oden, 2007b; Schultz, 2010). Because every board of trustees and every college culture is different, there is no rulebook to guide a president's spouse in navigating that ambiguity and developing his or her role.

This study sought to examine the degree to which presidents' spouses experience ambiguity regarding their role, the strategies they use to develop the role, and the conflicts they experience throughout the process. Because there have been no studies conducted specifically examining the role development strategies they use, a grounded theory approach allowed for a new theoretical perspective to emerge. At the same time, an examination of the data through the constructs provided by role theory and sensemaking provided insight into the strategies and process spouses used to define their role and minimize the uncertainty they felt about it. By examining the spouse's reported experiences through the lenses of role theory and sensemaking, a higher level of understanding of this phenomenon can be used to assist spouses as they grow into their roles. Results can also inform boards of trustees and other college personnel regarding actions they can take to ease this process, thereby contributing to the successful functioning of the institution.

The relevant literature related to grounded theory, role theory, sensemaking, and the college and university president's spouse was explored in this chapter, which helped reveal the gap in research regarding the role development process of a president's spouse. While it has been established that the spouse can play a pivotal role in the college presidency, this phenomenon has been largely overlooked within the context of the community college. More importantly, however, the process by which the presidential spouse develops into what many report to be a highly ambiguously-defined role has been unexplored.

Grounded Theory

In the 1960s, sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss developed grounded theory research methods through their studies on communication with dying patients in hospitals (Charmaz, 2006). The *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) served as the introduction of this new research strategy. It advocated developing theories from research “grounded” in, or emerging from, the data rather than determining a hypothesis based upon an existing theory (Charmaz, 2006). While a phenomenological study explores the meaning of a common experience for several individuals, a grounded study goes beyond that to discover a deeper explanation—a theory—of the experience (Creswell, 2007). As Glaser and Strauss (1967) asserted:

A grounded theory that is faithful to the everyday realities of a substantive area is one that has been carefully induced from diverse data...Only in this way will the theory be closely related to the daily realities (what is actually going on) of substantive areas, and so be highly applicable to dealing with them. (pp. 238-239)

This new approach developed by Glaser and Strauss was introduced at a time when qualitative research had lost its legitimacy among sociologists in favor of the more concrete, verifiable results produced by quantitative studies (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Charmaz (2006) explained the drift away from qualitative study during the 1960s in this way:

Only narrowly scientific—that is, quantitative—ways of knowing held validity for natural and social scientists; they rejected other possible ways of knowing such as through interpreting meanings or intuitive realizations. Thus, qualitative research that analyzed and interpreted research participants’ meanings sparked disputes

about its scientific value. Quantitative researchers of the 1960s saw qualitative research as impressionistic, anecdotal, unsystematic, and biased. (p. 9)

Because quantitative researchers tested their hypotheses from existing theories, their research did not often lead to the formulation of new theoretical perspectives (Charmaz, 2006).

Glaser and Strauss launched their ideas about grounded theory research by offering that “systematic qualitative analysis had its own logic and could generate theory” (as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). They posited that a researcher should approach the subject to be studied by minimizing preconceived ideas since these ideas might cloud the researcher’s ability to let the data speak (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The defining characteristics of grounded theory research were: simultaneous data collection and analysis; constructing analytic codes and categories from data, rather than hypotheses; using constant comparison during each stage of analysis; and memo writing to explain categories and define relationships between them (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). By using these strategies, Glaser and Strauss argued that qualitative study could “move...beyond descriptive studies into the realm of explanatory theoretical frameworks, thereby providing abstract, conceptual understandings of the studied phenomena” (as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 11).

Though it took about two decades, sociologists began to appreciate the grounded theory methodology for providing guidelines for data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Its application became more widespread, and it was found to be easily adapted to studies in a variety of fields in addition to sociology such as nursing, education, psychology, and communication (Creswell, 2007).

Grounded theory has evolved since its introduction in 1967. As the grounded theory approach matured through more widespread use, Glaser and Strauss began to diverge in their perspectives on its application (Charmaz, 2006; Zarif, 2012). While Glaser maintained the importance of approaching a research situation with an open mind, Strauss refined his method to a more structured approach, stressing the necessity of having a general idea of where to begin (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Zarif, 2012). Strauss and Corbin (1994) explained their approach: "In this methodology, theory may be generated initially from the data, or, if existing theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data are meticulously played against them," (p. 273). They went on to assert that researchers can welcome into current studies any theories based on previous research that seem appropriate (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This approach is markedly different from Glaser's insistence on coming to the research situation absent any predetermined ideas.

In recent years, grounded theory has been modified to include a perspective that invites the researcher to participate in the formulation of theory. Charmaz (2006) is one such grounded theorist who espouses the importance of the researcher building rapport with interviewees through demonstrated respect. This helps the researcher better empathize with and understand the interviewees' perspectives (Charmaz, 2006). Of the interviewer's role in the construction of theory, Colker (2008) wrote:

An intensive interview allows the interviewer to elicit each interviewee's perceptions and interpretations of his or her experiences. The general open-ended questions are a catalyst for each interviewee to consider the issue at hand;

nonjudgmental behavior on the part of the interviewer can help the interviewee feel free and allow important issues to emerge. (p. 57)

Charmaz and other grounded theorists argued that while the researcher must be cognizant of preconceived notions and possible biases, he or she plays a vital role in establishing the conditions which allow the interviewee to feel at ease in a way that allows his or her version of reality to emerge (Charmaz, 2006; Colker 2008).

Role Theory

The study of role is rooted in the social science tradition and focuses on describing and analyzing the many complex aspects of real-life, human behavior (Thomas & Biddle, 1966). Role theorists seek a practical application by striving “to understand, predict, and control the particular phenomena of its domain of study” (Thomas & Biddle, 1966, p. 3). The role perspective presumes human behavior is largely influenced by “the controlling power of one’s immediate social environment” (Thomas & Biddle, 1966, p. 4). In this view, an individual’s social environment has a tremendous influence over how he or she will choose to behave.

In the first comprehensive collection of readings on the subject, Thomas and Biddle (1966) used a theatrical analogy to explain the perspective of role theory by comparing people to actors in a play. When two actors are given the same part to play, each one will interpret it differently because of various factors, such as the director’s instructions, the performances of the other actors, and the reaction of the audience (Thomas & Biddle 1966). However, although their interpretations may be different, their performances will still have a significant number of similarities because of the common script (Thomas & Biddle 1966). Applying this analogy to real life, role theorists assert

that people occupying certain positions will perform their roles based upon social expectations and how others around them respond to their performance of the role (Thomas and Biddle, 1966). When summarizing this perspective, Thomas and Biddle (1966) wrote:

In essence, the role perspective assumes, as does the theatre, that performance results from the social prescriptions and behavior of others, and that individual variations in performance, to the extent that they do occur, are expressed within the framework created by these factors. (p. 4)

Therefore, role theory advances the viewpoint that an individual's behavior in a specific role is largely shaped by "the demands and rules of others, by their sanctions for his conforming and nonconforming behavior and by the individual's own understanding and conceptions of what his behavior should be," (Thomas & Biddle, 1966, p. 4). Applying this thought to community college presidents' spouses, role theorists would argue presidential spouses have an idea of how their role should be played; however, the manner in which they actually perform the role will heavily depend upon the reaction and feedback of those around them.

An important distinction is made between the underlying assumptions of role theory and those of social determinism. While social determinism posits human behavior is strictly the product of social influences (Thomas & Biddle, 1966), role theory acknowledges individual personalities and traits play a part in influencing a person's actions (Thomas & Biddle, 1966). Applied in this context, role theorists would postulate that while presidential spouses' roles will be heavily influenced by those around them, who they are as individuals will also affect role performance. However, examining the

influence of those individual traits is not within the scope of work for a role analyst; instead, role analysts focus on examining the external factors influencing behavior and the conditions in which those factors are most influential (Thomas & Biddle, 1966). Therefore, this study is designed to focus on those external factors and conditions, and not on how individual personalities shape role development and performance.

Role theory in organizations. Because of its application to a variety of situations, role has been studied in many different contexts. Thomas and Biddle (1966) reported early role studies in the areas of family, education, therapy, and deviancy. However, in the 1960s, role began to emerge as an important focus in the study of organizations, and today, the concept of role plays an important part in organizational research (Miller, Joseph, & Apker, 2000). While role theory has not been applied specifically to the experience of community college presidents' spouses, its application in a variety of organizational contexts makes it appropriate for this study.

Katz and Kahn (1966) were the first to advocate for viewing organizations as "open systems" (p. 2). This perspective views organizations as influenced by forces outside of the organization, such as environment, relationships with other organizations, and the influence of the organization on the individual. As Katz and Kahn (1978) wrote, "The great central area of human behavior in organizations and institutions has been ignored. Yet in the modern world people spend the greater part of their waking hours in organizations and institutional settings" (p. 2). They furthered this notion by asserting that organizations want only a "psychological slice" of an employee, rather than the whole person; however, they wrote, the "entire person" is exactly what "the organization

brings within its boundaries” and failing to recognize this fact creates an environment in which the employee fights for his or her role identity (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 46).

In the role development process, Katz and Kahn (1978) emphasized that role behavior in organizations is motivated by “learning the expectations of others, accepting them, and fulfilling them” (p. 188). Graen and Scandura (1987) built on this concept by creating the “Leader-Member Exchange” or LMX model of role development. The LMX model views role development as a dynamic process, dependent upon frequent information exchange between the supervisor and subordinate (Graen & Scandura, 1987).

Though some might argue a president’s spouse is not an employee of the organization, and thereby not governed by role expectations, research indicates quite the contrary. Corbally’s (1977) identification of the college presidency being a “two person single career” (p. 3) is consistent with subsequent literature which suggests that colleges as organizations hold role expectations for the president’s spouse (Kiley, 2011; Maimon, 2012; Vaughan, 1987). Therefore, a president’s spouse will experience the role development process in much the same way as other individuals within an organization. He or she will seek to learn others’ expectations and then carry them out, consistent with Katz and Kahn’s (1978) findings regarding role development within an organizational context.

Because of these early works on the role development process, contemporary researchers acknowledged its complexity (Miller et al., 2000). Role development is a multifaceted process influenced by a variety of external and internal factors. It is accepted by researchers as one which can quite naturally lead to role conflict and ambiguity (Miller et al., 2000). These findings are consistent with the commonly-

reported frustration of presidential spouses regarding the uncertainties associated with their role.

Role ambiguity and development. Katz and Kahn (1978) defined role ambiguity as “uncertainty about what the occupant of a particular office is supposed to do” (p. 206). Pinpointing research results indicating as much, Katz and Kahn (1978) wrote that role ambiguity leads to low job satisfaction, increased tension, low self-confidence, and a reduction in effective job performance. These results imply “ambiguity frustrates the human need for clarity or structure in the environment” (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 206).

However, in the 1980s, the idea of “ambiguity as strategy” began to emerge. Eisenberg and Witten (1987) questioned the assumption that clear and open communication advocated by Graen and Scandura (1987) would always lead to better attainment of individual and organizational goals. Eisenberg (1984) advanced the idea that “strategic ambiguity” can provide greater job satisfaction and organizational performance by allowing the individual to develop their own role rather than the supervisor providing a prescriptive definition of what the role should be. Doing so can “foster adaptiveness and creativity in role development,” (Miller et al., 2000, p. 199). This view is consistent with research findings indicating boards of trustees are reluctant to communicate their expectations to a spouse (Kiley, 2011; Riesman, 1980), instead leaving the individual to develop his or her own role.

Ultimately, however, most research suggests role ambiguity is a source of stress for individuals within an organization. As Katz and Kahn (1978) noted, “We conclude only that role ambiguity is a significant organizational problem by any count and measure

yet taken” (p. 207). Research on role ambiguity has been conducted in a variety of organizational contexts, and recently has focused on occupations within the volatile and dynamic health care environment (Apker, 2001; Gilstrap, 2011; Miller et al., 2000). Research in this context suggested the importance of successful role development in job efficacy and satisfaction.

Sensemaking. The question arising as a result of this approach relates to how individuals in organizations contend with this ambiguity to ultimately make sense of and develop their role. Simpson and Carroll (2008) wrote, “Scholars are increasingly turning their attention towards the ‘becoming’ rather than the ‘being’ of identity” (p. 31). Weick (1995) argued that role ambiguity will prompt individuals to rely on past beliefs and ongoing communication to “make sense” of their organizational roles. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) defined sensemaking as a process by which people organize information within a social context:

In the context of everyday life, when people confront something unintelligible and ask “what’s the story here?” their question has the force of bringing an event into existence. When people then ask, “now what should I do?” this added question has the force of bringing meaning into existence. (p. 410)

Weick et al. (2005) explained that sensemaking is defined by eight descriptive characteristics:

- Sensemaking organizes flux. Weick et al. (2005) explained, “sensemaking starts with chaos” (p. 411). It begins in a context of confusion, and individuals engaging in sensemaking begin to draw cues from those around them.

- Sensemaking starts with noticing and bracketing. In order to begin making sense of the chaos, individuals will use their training and life experience to place their experiences into some type of framework.
- Sensemaking is about labeling. After noticing and bracketing, individuals will begin to label these pieces of information. They may label them as a concern, a bad sign, a mistake, an opportunity, etc.
- Sensemaking is retrospective. Sensemaking occurs after the fact and after individuals have an opportunity to reflect on an event.
- Sensemaking is about presumption. In sensemaking, it is necessary to “connect the abstract with the concrete” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). It requires individuals to make thoughtful evaluations through interpretation and experimentation before choosing a course of action.
- Sensemaking is social and systemic. An individual’s sensemaking is influenced by a host of social factors, including the reactions of others.
- Sensemaking is about action. After individuals attempt to make sense out of what is going on, the next question is, “what do I do next?”
- Sensemaking is about organizing through communication, which is an essential component to the process. Dialogue is one of the primary tools an individual uses throughout the sensemaking process.

These distinguishing features of sensemaking present a model for how an individual in an organization processes information, and thereby creates meaning and action for a particular role.

The Role of the College and University President's Spouse

Given American higher education's long history, which dates back more than 350 years, there has been relatively little written about the college president's spouse.

Because of this, it is difficult to discover the beginnings of the spouse's involvement in the college presidency. In their infancy, most American colleges and universities were affiliated with churches, and many early presidents were ministers (Corbally, 1977; Thompson, 2008). The fact that many early presidential spouses were pastors' wives could explain the evolution of the college presidency as a "two person single career"—a term first used in the early 1970s to describe the spoken and unspoken demands placed upon the wife by way of her husband's occupation (Corbally, 1977, p. 3). These "unspoken" demands are a source of frustration for modern presidential spouses and have prompted much of what little research has been conducted.

Uncertainty about the role. Ruth Kintzer, a community college president's spouse, wrote the first book offering advice to new presidents' wives in 1972. Her reason for doing so was to offer advice to wives as they navigated into their new roles. Kintzer (1972) wrote:

Some college communities circumscribe the duties of a chief administrator's wife in a very specific fashion. In others, the dimensions of the role are less clearly defined but no less demanding. There is little doubt that the wife of a chief administrator has a highly significant impact on a college and to some degree on her husband's performance of his duties. To the extent that she does not meet the expectations of the college community, her husband's position becomes more difficult. (p. iv)

Marguerite Walker Corbally, herself a presidential spouse, conducted the first academic study on university presidents' spouses in 1975. The study stemmed from her own frustrations at a lack of resources and guidance available during her own development as a president's spouse (Corbally, 1977). The study, published in 1977, focused exclusively on the role of a president's wife, which is representative of a time when there were few female presidents. Though Corbally's study focused only on the traditional model of a male president with a female spouse, she accurately predicted, "... a trend in younger women to persist in pursuing their own professional goals...strongly influenced by women's liberation and consciousness-raising activities" (Corbally, 1977, p. 123). The two major frustrations expressed by the presidents' wives in Corbally's study were: 1) they felt unable to engage in the activities they wished because of the demands of time placed upon them by their husband's occupation, and 2) they were dissatisfied with "an inadequately defined role" (Corbally, 1977, p. 125). She noted:

Some of the most distressed of our correspondents reported a continuing source of difficulty for them was the uncertainty regarding exactly what was expected of them and what they were responsible for. Those who revealed the most satisfaction from their jobs were those who seemed to have the assurance they were doing what was needed. They were comfortable knowing they were filling a necessary and important position on the campus. (Corbally, 1977, p. 51)

This theme of a poorly-defined role emerged throughout the majority of the literature on presidential spouses (Corbally, 1977; Justice, 1991; Oden, 2007b; Vaughan, 1986), and although much of the research on presidential spouses was focused within the context of the four-year institution, the findings seemed to mirror research results within

the community college context as well. This might be because by the time the first community college opened its doors in 1901, the culture of American higher education was firmly established, having already been developed over more than 250 years (“Community Colleges,” 2012). While their missions may be quite different, many similarities exist in the administrative structure of community colleges and four-year institutions. Primary among these similarities is that most are governed by a board of trustees (or a board of governors) who are tasked with hiring and firing the president (“Governing Board Roles,” n.d.).

In this light, it is not surprising that the experiences of community college presidents and their spouses are so similar. In the mid-1980s, Dr. George Vaughan, a former community college president, was the first to explore the experiences of community college presidents’ spouses. The participants in his research also expressed a great deal of frustration at the lack of a job description (Vaughan, 1986).

Uncertainty about the board of trustees. Vaughan’s (1986) research bore another striking similarity to earlier research on university presidential spouses: Many study participants expressed frustration with their relationship with the board of trustees. One female trustee acknowledged this: “In the grey area which surrounds the role that the spouse is supposed to play, the relationship between the spouse and the board of trustees is probably the most misunderstood” (Vaughan, 1987, p. 33). This relationship typically begins during the hiring process, which may seem an ideal time to discuss the trustees’ expectations of the spousal role. Kintzer (1972) described situations in which some boards of trustees insisted on “interviewing not only the candidate but his wife as well” (p. 3). Furthermore, Kintzer (1972) claimed: “Some wives are actually asked to spend

time with a psychologist, not only to ascertain their stability, but to find out if they understand the pressures that they and their husbands will be under” (p. 3). However, Corbally (1977) described discussing role expectations during the interview as a potential contributor to the confusion:

They [the board] may have vague, uncrystallized ideas regarding their expectations of the wife. Some will deny they expect anything of her. Others are hoping that she already knows what is expected without their having to verbalize their uncertain feelings...[S]ome boards give the impression they believe they are hiring only the husband. She may get the impression—and this perception is very commonly reported—that all they wanted with her was to reassure themselves that she “looked the part.” (p. 49)

More recently, Justice (1991) examined the trustee-spouse relationship in greater detail and found that trustees and spouses agreed that discussions regarding the role of the spouse should take place during the interview process and should involve the spouse.

Yet despite these early studies identifying the board of trustees-spouse relationship can be a source of frustration, current literature suggests this tenuous relationship persists today. Schultz (2009) found the role of the presidential spouse to be vitally important though discussions about his or her role are largely absent from the interview process. After a controversy involving the president's wife, the University of Vermont board of trustees recently reformed its protocol regarding treatment of presidential spouses to include more direct communication with the spouse during the hiring process regarding role expectations (Kiley, 2011).

However, there are many good reasons for boards of trustees and spouses to be reluctant to engage in discussions about role expectations. First, the advice given to boards regarding this topic can be confusing. Boards of trustees are encouraged to more clearly define the spousal role and are advised to dialogue with the presidential spouse early in the process (Schultz, 2009), while at the same time are told to avoid the impression they are seeking a “two-for-the-price-of-one” arrangement. In fact, a vice president for the Association of Community College Trustees advised, “Boards need to recognize that they are there to hire one individual as the president, and not the couple” (as cited in Kiley, 2011, p. 3). There are also potential legal ramifications of a presidential candidate’s spouse being a factor in deciding whether or not to offer the candidate the job. Likewise, presidential candidates and their spouses are often hesitant to offer their perspective regarding what the spousal role should entail out of fear it will hurt their candidacies if their expectations differ from the board’s (Kiley, 2011).

Even so, all studies conducted on this topic have concluded the spouse should be involved in the interview process in some manner (Corbally, 1977; Justice, 1991; Kiley, 2011; Schultz, 2010; Thompson, 2008). The results confirm Vaughan’s (1986) assertion, “Indeed, to ignore the spouse during the presidential selection process would appear to be, rather than the final, the first affront to that spouse” (p. 161). As suggested by these findings, boards of trustees might be wise to consider ways to include the spouse in the initial stages of presidential interviews.

Other uncertainties and frustrations. Although uncertainty regarding role expectations tops the list of frustrations expressed by community college and university presidents’ spouses, other frustrations were reported as well. The sense that spouses are

important in the efficacy of the presidency, yet seem to be largely ignored, was a common complaint (Corbally, 1977; Oden, 2007b; Trebon & Trebon, 2004; Vaughan, 1987). Many also reported being dismayed at the high level of public scrutiny to which they and their families are subjected. Some of the metaphors the presidential spouses used to describe this experience were “living in a fishbowl” (Schultz, 2009), “coming under a microscope” (Kiley, 2011), and “the intense crucible of public life” (Golden, 2012).

Several presidential spouses also reported wishing they had more opportunities to interact with their peers (Corbally, 1977; Oden, 2007a). The American Association of State Colleges and Universities offers the AASCU Spouse/Partner program for this purpose, but the American Association of Community Colleges does not provide a similar option, except for programming specifically geared for spouses during a summer institute for presidents.

Summary

Grounded theory is a research approach developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s. It allows for the emergence of new theoretical perspectives from collected data, rather than using an existing theory to formulate a hypothesis. In its early incarnation, grounded theory required researchers to approach the research situation with a completely open mind; however, grounded theory research now allows for existing theories to guide its application. Based upon a review of existing literature on the topic of the experiences of college presidents' spouses, two theories were chosen to use as parameters for this study.

Though there has been limited research conducted on community college presidents' spouses, the findings suggest spouses typically receive very little communication regarding the college's expectations of their role, which leads to ambiguity in their own role development. As in other organizational contexts, this ambiguity often breeds frustration. Therefore, one of the theories used to guide the design of this study is role theory, which is a social scientific approach to understanding human behavior and the influences upon it. Role theorists study the ways in which one's social environment influences actions and ways of behaving in specific social positions. The study of role has wide application in a variety of contexts, but Katz and Kahn (1978) popularized its application to organizations in the 1960s and 1970s.

The other theory chosen to guide this study is based upon existing research in the area of sensemaking. Within role research is the concept of the influence of ambiguity on the development of an individual within an organization. It is in the face of this ambiguity that individuals must engage in sensemaking to determine the role they are to play. Sensemaking has eight characteristics which operate to answer the question, "now what should I do?" to bring meaning to the situation (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 410).

Although role theory and sensemaking were used as starting points in this study, it is crucial for grounded theory researchers to maintain an open mind to allow possible new themes to emerge from the data on their own. In studying the role development process of community college presidents' spouses, a grounded approach using role theory and sensemaking as study parameters produced results which expand the limited research on this topic. Discovering the experiences of the college president's spouse in navigating

the role development process can inform those involved with this process about ways to increase its effectiveness.

The methodology used to study the role development process of community college presidents' spouses was discussed in Chapter Three. An analysis of the study's findings was reported in Chapter Four, and discussion and recommendations for further research were given in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The spouse of a community college president can play such a pivotal role in the effectiveness of the presidency, the role itself should not be ignored (Vaughan, 1987). Though this is not a widely-studied topic, the research which has been conducted demonstrates an emergent theme: the frustration felt by college presidents' spouses at the ambiguity of their role (Kiley, 2011; Schultz, 2010). Boards of trustees and other college stakeholders typically have expectations of the president's spouse, but these are rarely directly communicated (Kiley, 2011).

Much of the research on the topic of presidents' spouses has been conducted within the context of a four-year institution, and there is little research on how these findings parallel the experiences of a community college president's spouse. Furthermore, there is no focus on how spouses navigate and develop their roles in the absence of any guidance.

To most effectively explore how spouses of community college presidents developed their roles, a qualitative study was conducted. A review of the problem studied and the purpose of the research was provided in this chapter. The questions guiding the research were restated, and a discussion of the research design was included. Participants of the study—a sample of community college presidents' spouses in two Midwestern states—were identified, along with information about the interview process used in the collection of data. Finally, the procedures used to analyze the data and interpret the results were discussed.

Problem and Purpose Overview

The high level of role ambiguity reported by college presidents' spouses can result in a problem which affects the functioning of the institution and the efficacy of the presidency. Low levels of satisfaction and higher levels of stress are the well-established by-products of an inadequately-defined role (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This lack of communication regarding the expectations of the president's spouse creates a situation in which spouses must plot their own course to determine what role they are expected to play.

The intent of this study was to explore whether spouses of community college presidents perceive that their roles are ambiguously defined. It also sought to shed light on how these individuals make sense of and develop their roles. An understanding of how spouses navigate their roles might reduce some of the uncertainty involved with the role and may help boards of trustees and administrators better understand how spouses navigate and make sense of their new positions.

Research Questions

In order to gain insight into the ways in which community college presidents' spouses cope with the ambiguous nature of their role, and thus make sense of and define it, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What uncertainties did community college presidents' spouses have about their spousal role prior to assuming it?
2. What strategies do community college presidents' spouses use to develop their spousal role?

3. What role conflicts do community college presidents' spouses encounter in fulfilling their spousal role?

Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen to study the process by which community college presidents' spouses develop into their roles. Qualitative research was chosen because its usefulness in discovering "meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon" (Auerbach, 2003, p. 3). Qualitative research is widely used as a method for gaining a better understanding of social behavior and the meanings individuals or groups assign to a specific phenomenon or problem (Creswell, 2009). Rather than being hypothesis-testing in nature, the focus of qualitative research is on hypothesis generation (Auerbach, 2003; Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2007) wrote that we conduct qualitative research when we want "a complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (p. 40). Creswell (2007) added, "We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices" (p. 40). Data collection for a qualitative study is usually conducted in the field and in the participants' natural setting, rather than a lab environment (Auerbach, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Because they are more flexible, qualitative studies allow for the discovery of unknown phenomena during the data collection and analysis process (Maxwell, 2005).

Qualitative research is also appropriate to develop theories to explain phenomena for which limited or no theories currently exist (Auerbach, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009). The method for analyzing qualitative data to generate a theory from field investigations is referred to as the grounded theory approach. This approach was introduced in the 1960s by Glaser and Strauss and derives its name from the idea that the

researcher can “ground” a hypothesis in what study participants have to say (Auerbach, 2003). Unlike quantitative research which requires the researcher to begin by formulating a hypothesis to test, the grounded theory method allows the researcher to generate a hypothesis based upon data collected from participants (Auerbach, 2003; Creswell, 2009). Lindlof and Taylor (2011) explained that grounded theory is widely popular because it can be used by almost any social science.

A grounded theory approach is particularly applicable when seeking to discover how role theory and sensemaking apply to community college presidents' spouses. Because this is a new area of research, approaching this topic through the lens of role theory and sensemaking, while remaining open to the possibilities of new discoveries within this framework, set the stage for a new theoretical perspective. In this way, a grounded theory approach allowed for the possibility of a new theory to emerge (Charmaz, 2006). Not only can it complement research based on role theory, but this approach may extend prior role research as well.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was all spouses of public community college presidents in two states in the Midwestern region of the United States, providing a population of 39 community colleges. Once unmarried presidents were removed from the population, a purposeful sample of 32 presidents' spouses remained. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research seeking insight and understanding into the particular phenomenon being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2009). Another goal of purposive sampling is to yield the broadest range of perspectives

possible (Yin, 2011). Of the 32 spouses invited to participate, 17 consented to an interview.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Research began once approval was granted by Lindenwood University's institutional review board (see Appendix A). Community college presidents in the sample population were contacted by electronic mail (see Appendix B) to explain the study and its intent and to collect their spouses' electronic mail addresses. An electronic mail (see Appendix C) was then sent to the presidents' spouses introducing the study and requesting their participation. Those who were willing to participate were asked to send a phone number to be used for scheduling a face-to-face interview at the location of the participants' choosing. Participants were also given the option of a telephone interview in the event of scheduling conflicts or travel difficulties.

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to complete a demographic survey which asked their age, ethnicity, number of children, number of children living at home, length of marriage, education level, employment status, length of spouse's presidency, and whether or not this was the spouse's first presidency. All participants were asked the same interview questions, but some were asked to further elaborate on answers for clarification. Before interviews began, participants were given a consent form (see Appendix D), and their informed consent was obtained. Interviews were recorded, although field notes were also taken in the event of an equipment malfunction. Interview responses were then transcribed and locked in a secure location.

According to Seidman (2006), interviewing for research is done in an attempt to understand "the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that

experience” (p. 9). Interviews allow a researcher to enter into another person’s perspective and gain information which cannot be observed (Patton, 2002). This type of understanding is the goal of qualitative research. However, interviewing also has limitations. Primary among those limitations is interviewing can take a great deal of time, and transcribing and coding data can be quite labor intensive (Creswell, 2007; Siedman, 2006). In addition, the potential of personal bias or emotional reactions can distort the responses of participants (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). As Charmaz (2006) wrote:

We are not scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming scientific neutrality and authority. Neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world. Researchers and research participants make assumptions about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions in the presence of each other. Nevertheless, researchers, not participants, are obligated to be reflexive about what we bring to the scene, what we see, and how we see it. (p. 15)

Because of this lack of objectivity, the researcher must remain as open as possible to all emerging data throughout the collection process. In grounded research, the study often begins within a particular framework. This study used the framework of role theory and sensemaking as parameters within which to view the collected data; however, it was crucial to be cognizant of data which might have drawn the researcher in another direction (Charmaz, 2006). The possibility of other emerging theoretical frameworks was kept in mind throughout the simultaneous process of data collection and analysis,

which is a key feature of grounded theory research (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

The interview for this study was designed as an informal, semi-structured event, consistent with most qualitative interviewing protocols (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). All participants were given the same demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E) and asked the same questions during the interviews (see Appendix F). These questions were designed to discover participants' perceptions on the uncertainties they had about the role prior to becoming a presidents' spouse, the process the spouses engaged in to develop the role, and any conflicts encountered during that process. Participants were also asked to offer any advice they might have and feedback regarding factors which might have made the role development process easier.

Reliability

An account is considered to be reliable if it can be replicated by another researcher (Olson, 2012; Schwandt, 2001). Though social scientists have debated the importance of focusing on reliability in qualitative research, most agree that the repeatability of observations and consistent methods of data collection provide the foundation for a reliable study (Schwandt, 2001). With this in mind, this study was designed to include enough participants to reach saturation, defined as the point at which "research participants fail to provide new data that expand and refine your theory" (Auerbach, 2003, p. 21). In order to obtain the broadest range of perspectives, it was decided that all 32 spouses in the two Midwestern states selected would be invited to participate.

Another measure of reliability in qualitative research involving interviews is consistency (Olson, 2012). While interviews can be informal and semi-structured, questions should remain consistent in order and wording (Olson, 2012). For this reason, interviews consisted of a common set of questions to be delivered in a prescribed order.

Validity

To say that a social scientific study is valid is to assert that its findings “accurately represent the phenomenon to which they refer...and there are no good grounds for doubting the findings” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 267). There are two types of validity associated with qualitative research: internal and external. Olson (2012) defined internal validity as occurring “where measures conform to the stipulated meanings that the researchers intend to associate with the words used” (p. 16). In this study, internal validity refers to the degree to which interview questions provide answers to the defined research questions. Internal validity was assured due to the careful construction of interview questions which were worded to correlate with the questions guiding the research.

External validity is assumed when “data are...constructed in such a way as to have consistent meanings both for the researchers and for the respondents” (Olson, 2012, p. 16). External validity was assured in two ways. First, interview questions and procedures were subjected to pilot testing. Creswell (2007) noted the value of pilot testing in refining, developing, and clarifying questions and data collection plans. Pilot testing of interview questions was completed by conducting interviews with two spouses of retired community college presidents. Second, after the interview responses were transcribed, the transcripts were sent to those interviewed to be reviewed for accuracy.

Any necessary changes were made. This process, identified as “member validation,” helped ensure the reliability and validity of the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Data Analysis

Content analysis of data in a grounded theory study consists of three phases of coding: open, axial, and selective (Creswell, 2007). Open coding allows for the development of categories, axial coding allows connections to be made between these categories, and selective coding allows for the creation of a “story” (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). Thomas (2003) reported this approach to data analysis can allow “research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies” (p. 2).

For open coding, a close, line-by-line reading of the text was conducted. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), the goal of this stage “is to open up the inquiry” (p. 251). Yin (2011) explained that during the open coding phase, “items that seem to be essentially similar” are assigned the same code (p. 187). As interview transcripts were analyzed, it was determined to code responses in three categories correlating with the research questions that guided this study.

Axial coding occurred for the purpose of making connections between the identified categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In essence, this stage of the analysis process is designed determine “specific coding categories that relate or explain the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 161).

During the final stage of analysis, selective coding, information was organized into a theoretical model to begin building a hypothesis (Creswell, 2007).

Summary

The methodology used in this study was described in this chapter. The focus of this research was to examine the perceptions of community college presidents' spouses regarding their roles, the processes by which they make sense of and develop their roles, and the conflicts these individuals experience in their roles. This qualitative study, designed with a grounded theory approach, was intended to discover the experiences of community college presidents' spouses through semi-structured interviews with presidents' spouses in two Midwestern states. A common set of interview questions was used, and responses were coded and analyzed to determine emergent themes. The data analysis process and subsequent findings were described in Chapter Four, and discussion of these findings and suggestions for further research were given in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

This study was designed to discover if spouses of community college presidents perceive that their roles are ambiguously defined. Another purpose was to explore how these individuals make sense of and develop their roles. Because literature on this subject reveals college presidents' spouses often report feelings of ambiguity and frustration surrounding the role they are to play, an examination of their experiences as they assimilated into the role of a community college president's spouse could be helpful to boards of trustees and other members of the college community. As stated in previous chapters, three research questions guided this study:

1. What uncertainties did community college presidents' spouses have about their spousal role prior to assuming it?
2. What strategies do community college presidents' spouses use to develop their spousal role?
3. What role conflicts do community college presidents' spouses encounter in fulfilling their spousal role?

Justification for using these research questions to guide the study is based upon the themes that emerged from the literature review as areas of concern for college presidents' spouses. Two primary areas of concern were the frustration felt by college presidents' spouses at the ambiguity of their role (Kiley, 2011; Schultz, 2010) and the lack of direct guidance they receive for developing into the role they play (Kiley, 2011). Furthermore, previous studies on the topic of presidents' spouses did not explore how spouses navigate and develop their roles in the absence of any such direct communication about role expectations. Questions based upon these three research questions were

designed to glean as much information as possible regarding these primary themes of existing literature.

In addition, these questions also addressed one of the theoretical parameters used for the study, role theory. As Katz and Kahn (1978) defined it, role ambiguity is “uncertainty about what the occupant of a particular office is supposed to do” (p. 206), and they found that this ambiguity leads to low job satisfaction, increased tension, low self-confidence, and a reduction in effective job performance. Using role theory and its application to the organization to study the role development process of the community college presidential spouse filled a gap in the limited research on this topic. Research questions guiding this study were designed to discover the experiences of the college president’s spouse in navigating the role development process.

Another valuable aspect of this research was discovering not only to what degree participants in the study experienced role ambiguity, but how they processed that ambiguity and ultimately developed into the role they play within the life of the college. For this reason, research questions were designed to explore the other theoretical parameter used for the study: the process of sensemaking. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) defined sensemaking as a process by which people organize information within a social context. Weick (1995) argued that role ambiguity will prompt individuals to rely on past beliefs and ongoing communication to “make sense” of their organizational roles. Weick et al. (2005) identified eight descriptive characteristics that comprise the process of sensemaking. These distinguishing features of sensemaking present a model for how an individual in an organization processes information, and thereby creates meaning and action for his or her particular role. Applying the results of

this study to this model will be beneficial in informing boards of trustees, new community college presidents and their spouses, and other college stakeholders of the ways in which spouses currently progress through the stages of role development and what information might be helpful to them.

The results from interviews with community college presidents' spouses were reported in this chapter. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, spouses were identified by number only. Content analysis of data in a grounded theory study consisted of three phases of coding: open, axial, and selective (Creswell, 2007). Results of those three phases were detailed, including how those results allowed a theoretical perspective to emerge.

Demographic Analysis

Thirty-two community college presidents' spouses in two Midwestern states were invited to participate. Of that group, 17 agreed to be interviewed for this study. Demographic information was collected from each participant. A description of demographic data provides a picture of the characteristics of this group.

In this sample, fourteen spouses were female and three spouses were male. Most of them (10) reported being in the 55-64 years of age category. Three were 65 and older, two were 45-54, and two were 35-44. All of them reported themselves as Caucasian.

Only three participants said they had no children. Of the 14 participants with children, only five had children still living at home. Eleven spouses reported being married 25 years or more. Four had been married 11-15 years, and two had been married 16-20 years.

Eight of the spouses interviewed had completed a four-year college degree, while six had completed master's degrees. One spouse reported receiving a two-year degree, one had a high school diploma, and a one had completed a doctorate. The participant group was split almost in half regarding employment: nine reported being employed, and eight reported no employment. Of those who were employed, eight were employed full-time, and only one was employed part-time.

Seven spouses had been in their role as a community college president's spouse between 2-5 years. Five spouses had been in their role 6-10 years. Two had served 11-15 years, two 21-25 years, and one 16-20 years. Thirteen participants reported the current presidency as their spouse's first time serving as a college president. Only four identified prior presidencies. Of those, three reported one prior presidency, and one reported two prior presidential positions.

Nine spouses represented small colleges located in rural areas with a student population of 3,000 or less. Five spouses were located at colleges with an enrollment of 7,400-9,000 students. All of these were located in metropolitan areas and three were at campuses within a community college system. Two spouses represented colleges with a population of 6,000, and these were both located in rural areas. The largest college represented by a spouse in this study was one with a reported enrollment of over 20,000 located in a metropolitan area.

Responses to Interview Questions

As described previously, three phases of analysis were conducted on interview question responses. The first phase was open coding, which involved a line-by-line reading of the text. At this stage, it was possible to become familiar with the text which

allowed for obtaining what Creswell (2009) called “a general sense of the information” and an opportunity “to reflect on its overall meaning” (p. 185). This is what Creswell (2007) identified as “the central phenomenon” (p. 161).

As interview transcripts were analyzed, it was determined to code responses in three categories correlating with the research questions that guided this study. This allowed for the creation of direct connections with the main areas of inquiry. This process guided the second stage of analysis, or the axial coding phase. As Creswell (2007) described, this stage of analysis is designed to determine “specific coding categories that relate or explain the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 161). Each category was designated with a specific acronym, and interview responses were divided between those categories, which are described below:

- Uncertainties (U)
- Role-Development Strategies (RDS)
- Role Conflicts (RC)

Interview question #1 (U). *Think back to the time when you first learned that you might become a college president's spouse. What were your ideas about what your role would be? (Follow up: What factor or factors shaped those ideas?).* Participants' responses reflected two main ideas regarding the role they would play as a community college president's spouse. First, they identified their belief that they would serve as a supporter of their spouse in his or her presidential role. Spouse 2 responded, “I didn't expect that there would be a lot pertaining to my role, but I looked at it more as supporting him and the work he would be doing” (para. 1). Another spouse said, “I

thought the biggest role I would have was just supporting him in his role” (Spouse 11, para. 1).

Second, the spouses identified they expected their role would involve social roles related to obligations to attend college and community functions. Spouse 1 said, “I presumed that I would be a standard-bearer for all the great things that would be happening at the college...that I would certainly be in the public eye and viewed not as Mrs. (last name), but as the president’s wife,” (para. 1).

Still, many responses reflected a sense of no expectations regarding a role they would play as a president’s spouse. These responses ranged from assuming they would have no role, to those who imagined they would have a role, but had no idea what that role would be. One spouse said, “Actually, it never occurred to me that I would have any kind of a special role” (Spouse 7, para. 1). Spouse 14 stated, “I figured as long as I kept my nose clean and didn’t spill on anybody [at social events], life would be good” (para. 2). Spouse 12 reported her first question to her husband upon finding out that he had been offered the presidency was, “Okay, what am *I* supposed to do?” Another spouse responded:

I really didn’t have any ideas of what my role would be because I just had no idea of what was going to be expected of me. I think the biggest thing that I assumed...is that I was going to have to watch what I did and said. Just because they would look at me and say—there would be a connection with her, so I was just going to have to watch what I said in front of people and how I acted in front of people. (Spouse 15, para. 1)

Interview question #2 (U). *To what extent were you included in the presidential interview process? (Follow up: If so, did your ideas change about what your role might be? If so, who or what made you change your expectations?).* Participation in the presidential interview process was reported in one of three categories. The first was no participation at all. This was reported by most of the respondents. The answers given by Spouse 3 and Spouse 5 were typical of these responses. Spouse 3 said, "I was not included at all for this presidency." Spouse 5 responded, "No, I was not invited to anything [during the interview process]." Another spouse, Spouse 11, said she was not involved because she was not invited; however, the fact that she did not accompany her spouse was distressing to the search committee. She explained:

Because there was no specific invitation, we assumed there was going to be one more step in the process...which actually backfired. The search committee thought I was not supporting him because I did not come with him to the interview. It was very distressing. One of the board members called me and specifically asked me if I would be accompanying him if he were chosen for the position because I had not come. And to make it really interesting, because there was not another step in the process, my husband actually accepted the position, and I had never stepped foot in the community or even the state. (para. 4)

The second category reported by spouses related to involvement in the interview process is that they participated informally. Spouse 15 recounted, "I was not included with the actual interview process. The only thing was when she had contact with the board of trustees, I met with them in a social manner so they could meet me" (para. 2). Spouse 9 described being "part of a social time with the community and then also a meal

that we had together with the board” (para. 1). Spouse 3 explained that her involvement was “much more relaxed than a formal interview, meaning they had a meet-and-greet—and I met with the board of trustees” (para. 3).

The third category related to involvement with the interview was formal participation. This type of involvement in the process was not a typical finding. Spouse 13 described, “I was scheduled for a block of time with the board in their board room, and my spouse was not present” (para. 3). Perhaps representative of generational differences, Spouse 6 recalled that when her husband interviewed for his job 25 years ago, the board visited them in their home in another state and expected her to fix them dinner and entertain in their home. She said, “I think the most important thing they were interested in was [me] being friendly and entertaining a lot” (para. 3).

Interview question #3 (U). *What was communicated to you during the interview process that related to what your role would be as the president's spouse?* Since most of participants reported no involvement in the interview process, the majority of responses were, “Nothing.” Spouse 2 said she did not receive any direct communication regarding her role during the interview, which contributed to the ambiguity of the role:

[The communication] was somewhat vague, I would say. I wasn't totally sure, but there was nothing that they said or did that indicated to me that I would have a huge role or there was going to be a large amount of my time spent with fundraising or anything like that. I wasn't really sure, I guess to answer your question. (para. 4)

Some of those who were included in the interview process reported receiving no communication about role expectations; however, of those who did receive

communication about expectations of them in a spousal role, the primary response centered on the idea of “visibility.” One spouse said the message she received from the board regarding her role was that she would need to be “forward and out front,” and “there would be expectations of me, if you will, to attend public events not only that were campus-oriented but also to be an integral part of the community” (Spouse 1, para. 4). Another spouse said, “The board chair made statements like, ‘Well, you’ll be involved in these activities, and...’ It was kind of a directive” (Spouse 12, para. 5). Spouse 13 reported a much more direct message from a member of the board of trustees who said to her, “We’re getting two for the price of one” (para. 5).

Interview question #4 (U). *In what way did the college communicate its expectations of you in your role as the president’s spouse? (Follow up: Who communicated this to you? How satisfied were you with that communication? What would have been helpful?).* The majority of participants responded that the college did not communicate any expectations of them in their role as president’s spouse. Some in this group reported feeling dissatisfied at not receiving direct messages regarding what was expected of them. Some typical responses were, “It might have been nice to have a little bit of direction,” (Spouse 3, para. 5) and “it would be nice to know what is really expected” (Spouse 4, para. 6). Spouse 17 said, “I was fine with it, but it would have been nice to be included in discussions and make me feel like I was part of the process” (para. 5). Of those who did receive communication, the board of trustees was reported as the source of those messages. Spouse 1 recalled:

More than—there are five members on the board of trustees, and I would say two out of five explicitly stated that to me on how did I feel about being in the

limelight, and so on and so forth, to make sure I was comfortable with those expectations they had for me to be out and about and visible. (para. 5)

Spouse 8 also stated that a member of the board spoke with her about community involvement. "I can remember specifically during an informal dinner situation that was part of the interview process, she asked me specifically if I was a member of certain organizations, and that kind of thing" (para. 7).

Overall, those who did receive direct communication felt satisfied with it. When asked how she felt about receiving communication about her role from the board, Spouse 1 said:

I felt very positive about that it was communicated to me. I did appreciate being told again, and it was in no way a threatening...it was more giving their expectation of me that they wanted me to be visible and out there in this small community. (para. 6)

Interview question #5 (U). *Did anything in this process make you feel uncertain about what your role as the president's spouse would be? (Follow up: If so, could you give me some examples?).* Responses to this question were varied. Many reported that since they were not involved in the process, there was nothing about the process that made them more uncertain than they were before. Of those who did participate in interviews, some said they had lingering questions about expectations regarding the amount of community involvement they were expected to have. Spouse 8 explained she was worried "that the expectations were going to be more than what I wanted as far as involvement in organizations here" (para. 8).

Interview question #6 (U). *What aspects were you most worried about regarding your role should your spouse become president? (Follow up: Is this still a worry? If so, explain. If not, explain.).* While several spouses reported they did not have any significant worries regarding their role, the majority said they remember having concerns. These concerns were varied, but mainly focused on three areas. The first concern was that the time commitments of the role would be too great. Spouse 3 said:

I really was worried about how much time and effort it would take from the family, from what I was doing. Would I be expected to travel? Would I be expected to be involved in the community beyond things I was comfortable with?
(para. 6)

Spouse 2 expressed concern about being worried about the time involved with “schmoozing,” an activity about which she said, “I wasn’t really up for that” (para. 5).

The second area of concern was about whether or not they and their families would like their new community. One spouse spoke of being unfamiliar with “the small town environment and...the nature of the homegrown people here. That was a little surprising to me coming in from a large, large town into a very, very rural...place, and that gave me some uncertainty” (Spouse 1, para. 7). Spouse 2 spoke of being “a little bit uncomfortable with the demographics of this particular area” (para. 5).

The last area of concern focused on worries about how they and their families would integrate into the new community. Spouse 6 spoke of being “a little apprehensive about coming to such a small city and wondering how I could make friends” (para. 6). She also expressed concerns about her child fitting in and making friends: “Our high

schooler had quite a difficult time. It was very difficult for him to break into the ninth grade when everyone here had their own little cliques” (para. 6).

While very few reported that there were lingering concerns, some did express they have continuing worries. Spouse 4 indicated an apprehension about interacting with other presidents' spouses:

Because how am I going to relate to all these wives of the chancellors and presidents when I don't have anything in common with them? That was a concern; it really was. And it still is somewhat. So having some kind of opportunity to meet those people and spend time with them would have been a good thing. (para. 7)

Spouse 3 said:

Sometimes I think my kids have not always gotten the best deal from other kids because it is a small town and because of their last name...so I wonder how much that has really affected them. Maybe they'll look back and say it didn't affect them at all. I always worry about that...So that's always in the back of my mind: Do people really trust me? Do they really like me? Or is it just because I'm the president's wife? And I worry about that for my kids, too. (para. 18)

Interview question #7 (U). *Once your spouse became president, how did your initial ideas about your role change? (Follow up: What factors influenced those changes?).* Most participants reported gaining a greater level of comfort with their role once their spouse became president. As indicated by the responses in question #6, initial worries they had about what their role was to be did not linger after their spouse assumed the presidency. One spouse said, “They've changed only in that I've become more

comfortable in knowing what was expected” (Spouse 2, para. 7). Of the college community, Spouse 3 stated, “Not once did I feel like they wanted me to be somebody I wasn’t. The expectation has not been as daunting as I thought it would be” (para. 7). Spouse 16, however, explained that initially, his ideas did not change and the ambiguity continued: “There was this question mark at the beginning [regarding my role] because of the exclusion [from the interview process], and then that just carried on” (para. 8).

Interview question #8 (RDS). *Please complete the following statement. Being a community college president’s spouse is _____.* (Follow up: *Could you please explain?*). Responses varied, but many mentioned the words “challenging” and “rewarding.” In terms of challenges, participants discussed the demands of the job in terms of visibility. Spouse 1 lamented, “You’re being viewed and looked upon 24/7” (para. 10). When her husband first assumed the presidency, Spouse 3 said, “I think at the time I was pretty naïve in a lot of ways as to how open my family life would be to the college” (para 1). Other challenges reported relate to the long hours and stresses associated with their spouse’s position. Spouse 15 answered, “It’s a lot more involved than I initially thought” (para. 8). Spouse 17 reported that his spouse’s exhaustion at the end of the day results in limited social activity for them as a couple, which is challenging “particularly when you go to a new area to make friends and try to fit in. So that’s definitely a challenge from a spouse’s standpoint” (para. 9).

However, most spouses spoke of the rewards of the role in terms of the pride they feel about the opportunities created by the college, and many said they felt a sense of honor and personal fulfillment. Spouse 1 said, “I feel such a sense of accomplishment on behalf of my husband because of the great things he has done here. It’s very, very

rewarding to be by his side as he has accomplished these great things..." (para. 10).

Spouse 2 explained:

We're giving people an opportunity. I guess I'm just very excited and proud of that—that there is direct placement into good paying positions for people. It changes lives. And the community college here has offered so much for families...so it's exciting and I feel really good about it. (para. 9)

Interview question #9 (RDS). *Think back to your first six months as a community college president's spouse. Describe the process you went through to determine the responsibilities of your role. (Follow up: Which of these steps did you find to be the most helpful? Which helped you the least?).* Most participants reported that the first six months of their spouse's presidency was spent forming relationships with people at the college and in the community and paying attention to the feedback they received to determine if they were living up to the expectations others had of their role. Spouse 1 said she spent the first 6 months "getting adjusted to my professional life and attending and meeting and greeting folks in casual circumstances" (para. 11). Another spouse reported, "Well, the process was very informal and it was primarily built on relationships—being introduced to people, very influential people, in this community" (Spouse 2, para. 10). Spouse 6 said, "I listened very carefully to what people were telling me" (para. 9).

Several spouses said they tried to attend as many events as they possibly could, and then used those experiences to determine what they really needed to attend and what they could let go. Spouse 10 reported, "Everytime [my husband] would go to a dinner, I asked, 'Do I need to go? Do I need to be there?' I was constantly questioning what my

role was to be” (para. 10). Spouse 11 related, “I would say that I tried to be involved at the college in everything that was offered, everything that I learned about that I could possibly be a part of” (para. 13). While this was a useful role-development strategy, some reported that it backfired. One participant said, “I made a mistake, and I tried to get involved in as many clubs as possible because I was thinking that was my role to be involved in those, and I ended up burning myself out” (Spouse 12, para. 12).

Interview question #10 (RDS). *Besides you, what or who else assisted you as you developed into your role? (Follow up: Which of these were most helpful? Least helpful?).* Some spouses reported that friendships they developed were most helpful in this process. Spouse 8 named a close friend as one who offered valuable feedback as she developed her role. She said: “That’s all it takes is one person sometimes. If you have one friend, you can survive” (para. 10). Spouse 16 recalled speaking with a friend whose wife was a superintendent: “So we had discussions about his role and her role as a superintendent and how he played a part in that” (para. 11). He also spoke of attending a professional conference with a program specifically designed for spouses of community college presidents:

There was a section for spouses. So there was some—I’m not sure you would call it training—but there certainly was opportunity for discussion among the spouses. That was helpful, actually. That was probably the most helpful thing that I encountered. (para. 10)

While some reported talking with friends was useful, the overwhelming number of those interviewed named their spouses as the most influential and helpful in their development of their role as the spouse of a community college president. Spouse 10

stated, "I have to give my husband some credit. He has been the biggest help" (para. 11). Spouse 12 said, "Well, my husband has been key. He's been very supportive, and he gives me feedback when people make comments to him [about me]" (para. 13). Spouse 3 described her husband as being "the biggest support" in her role development, explaining that throughout the process, they saw themselves as "kind of a team" (para. 11).

Interview question #11 (RDS). *Currently, how would you describe your role as the spouse? (Follow up: How has this changed over time? Which part of your role do you enjoy the most? The least?).* In describing the role they currently play as the president's spouse, all responses fell into one of two categories: 1) supporter of their spouse, and 2) providing the social function of visibility at college and community events. In describing the support role they play for their spouse, many of them identified their role with the term "sounding board." Spouse 4 said, "You know, he brings a lot of work home as far as—he's not very good about leaving it at the office. And so I become a sounding board I think sometimes" (para. 12). Spouse 2 explained her role in this way:

I'm a sounding board for my husband. I am there at events, and I talk to people, and I support the college, but primarily I'm there to support him when he needs to vent a little bit or share events of the day or frustrations. (para. 12)

Spouse 3 repeated this: "He has to have a sounding board. He has to come home and talk to somebody" (para. 9).

In responding to the question about what part of their role they enjoy the most, the majority of participants named an aspect of their involvement with the college.

Attending student events and interactions with students were identified as the most enjoyable. Spouse 12 indicated, "I love going to the musicals, the plays, the concerts, the

athletics, their honors society dinners when they get inducted or get any kind of awards. Anything with the students I enjoy” (para. 16). Spouse 6 routinely has student athletes over for dinner, and she identified her “most rewarding job” as “taking care of the students” (para. 13).

Pride in being associated with the college and the opportunities it provides were reported as other enjoyable aspects of the role. Spouse 13 said, “I enjoy being incessantly surprised and moved, hearing from people who have been touched by the college or whose family members attended the college and were provided the basis of their happy, successful lives” (para. 16). Citing a recent building project on their campus, Spouse 1 explained:

I think the most enjoyable role—the feeling that I have that’s been most enjoyable—is to see the beginning of a dream. To see the seed that was planted, and then it comes to fruition...to see the beginning of a vision and seeing that vision come to pass. (para. 18)

In terms of least enjoyable aspects of their role, the majority reported that the visibility of the position is a challenge. One spouse said, “I always have to watch what I say and do” (Spouse 17, para. 16). Another spouse explained, “The thing I enjoy the least is always having to smile and have somewhat of a façade 24/7. Even when I might have a toothache or a headache, I’m still smiling and shaking hands” (Spouse 1, para. 19). Spouse 9 echoed this idea when she said:

Before I ever jump in the car just to run and do an errand somewhere—that extra step of changing out of something that has a hole in it or jeans or that kind of thing. Just making sure I look presentable. (para. 15)

Interview question #12 (RC). *What tensions or conflicts, if any, do you experience as a college president's spouse? (Follow up: Why?).* While some of the participants identified pressures associated with the college, such as funding concerns and personnel issues, most of them focused on personal tensions and conflicts. The majority of these responses reflected conflicts associated with the intense demands on the president's time and its interference with their home life. Spouse 10 said, "Conflicts would just be problems scheduling stuff. If you allowed it to, the college could take over your entire life" (para.18). Spouse 15 explained, "There's always something going on,....She's president 24 hours a day. I find that probably the hardest thing to get used to" (para. 18). Another said, "From my standpoint, it's not an equal relationship as long as they're in that role because their number one focus is the school and the job. That creates some tension and anxiety" (Spouse 16, para. 15).

Spouse 12 identified time conflicts related to balancing her professional life with her role as the president's spouse. She replied, "I still struggle with balancing two jobs...I never have much time for myself. That's a challenge" (para. 18). When asked to clarify if she envisions her spousal role as a job, she said, "Yes, I say that to people all the time: I have two jobs" (para. 18).

Some participants also identified conflicts as the lack of a private life and having to stifle speaking out on controversial issues because of the visibility of their position. One spouse said, "Private life? What's that? Whether you're at an official college event or relaxing with friends at a night spot...you are always a representative or extension of the college" (Spouse 13, para. 18). This public scrutiny was acknowledged by Spouse 5 when she related:

I'm sort of a social and community activist. I'm sort of active in political issues. Sometimes I couldn't put signs in the yard, especially for the [U.S.] presidency. And there was one particular thing that I was very involved in, and someone in the community was on the opposite side, and he called my husband at work and threatened him—told him he needed to control his wife. So I do have to be cognizant of his role in the roles I play. (para. 17)

Spouse 12 repeated this idea:

I would say one of the big challenges that I really struggle with is that I feel there are times when I have to bite my tongue. And so I struggle a lot with wanting to be able to voice my opinion, but I know that can come back and harm the college. Therefore, it's not worth it. (para. 17)

As some spouses mentioned worries about assimilating into the new community in their responses to question #6, Spouse 2 reported difficulty forging authentic relationships as a conflict. She said, "It's hard to navigate just a personal relationship" (para. 15). She explained that in her attempts to make friends with people at the college, she has felt as if some make assumptions about her or accept her invitations to lunch because they feel like they have to since she is the president's wife. She went on to say, "I don't know if it's paranoia or they think I have some power. I guess I do, maybe? I'm not comfortable with that kind of thing" (para. 15).

Interview question #13 (RC). *How do you cope with those tensions or conflicts? (Follow up: How effective has this coping strategy been for you?).* In coping with the tensions identified, many of the participants have found pursuit of their own interests to be an effective coping strategy. Several spoke about hobbies, exercise, and spending

time with friends as important ways of coping with the stresses of their role. Spouse 2 said, "I try to take care of myself and go for walks, work in the garden...getting some alone time" (para. 19). Spouse 13 explained, "I find that forging tried and true friendships with women wherever we live and spending time with them is a great stress reliever and happiness booster for all the roles of life" (para. 19). Another spouse said that he copes with the tensions he feels in these ways: "Well, I play tennis three times a week, and I go to a number of classes. I try to set up my own social life, separate from hers so I'm not demanding much of her time" (Spouse 16, para. 16).

These responses all indicated the importance of maintaining a sense of self separate and apart from their spouse, whether it involves going to social functions alone when their spouse cannot accompany them (Spouse 11, para. 17) or involvement in personally meaningful roles in the community (Spouse 13, para. 20). Still, the sense that the role can consume the spouse's life remains. One spouse explained that she recently quit her job in order to provide more support for their two children in the face of her husband's demanding schedule. While she expressed that she was happy to be in a financial position where that was possible, she explained that after working for 20 years, the decision to quit has been difficult. She said:

But it's hard because it puts you in a sort of traditional role of a woman who doesn't have a career of her own, you know? And I guess maybe that it is difficult in some ways to feel diminished. I have felt some loss...I've missed [my career]. I do have a sense of loss about who I am a little bit because it was such a big part of who I was. (Spouse 2, para. 22)

Interview question #14 (RDS). *What advice would you give someone whose spouse is a new community college president? (Follow up: Why do you think this would be important to know?).* Responses to this question were varied. Many participants again identified the importance of providing support to the president because of the demanding nature of the job. Spouse 2 related, “Just be prepared that it is all-consuming for your spouse” (para. 20). Spouse 6 said, “Being an understanding partner is important. Understand that sometimes board meetings will last until midnight. Too bad. That’s his job” (para. 17).

However, the majority of responses centered on two ideas: 1) the importance of realizing that the president’s spouse is a central figure in the life of the college, and 2) the importance of maintaining an identity separate from that of “the president’s spouse.” Related to the visibility of the position, typical responses were, “You’re expected to be an essential part of the college and a promoter” (Spouse 10, para. 20) and “evaluate what is most important for the college because that’s your role” (Spouse 11, para. 20). Another spouse said, “First and foremost, you need to be a positive representative of the college” (Spouse 9, para. 18).

Yet in the midst of advice about being visible and active in college life, comments about the importance of maintaining personal interests were common. “Have your own life and do the things you enjoy” advised Spouse 7 (para. 13). Spouse 5 responded, “Try to retain some of yourself” (para. 20). Other pieces of advice were, “Find balance,” (Spouse 11, para. 20) and “stay involved with your own activities” (Spouse 17, para. 17). One longtime president’s spouse offered: “It’s a learning curve being a spouse, and you

probably mean more to the position of the president than you realize” (Spouse 15, para. 20).

During the final stage of analysis—selective coding—all responses were analyzed and emerging themes within each category were identified. This information was organized into a theoretical model to begin building a hypothesis (Creswell, 2007). It was during this stage that a “story line” began to emerge that connected these three categories.

Emerging theme: Ambiguity. The spouses interviewed all spoke of a degree of ambiguity about the role they would play. Most reported exclusion from the interview process and receiving little information from the board of trustees or other college stakeholders about the role they should play. Many were dissatisfied at this lack of communication, and those who reported receiving information about the expectations of the role welcomed it.

The three most prevalent worries regarding the role can be directly related to the ambiguous nature of the communication they received. First, prior to their spouses being named president, those interviewed identified they had concerns about the time commitment involved in fulfilling the duties of their role. Second, they were concerned about whether or not they and their families would like the new community. Last, they were concerned about themselves and their families being able to make new friends in a new place. Once they assumed the role, however, many of them reported feeling more comfortable with the role and found that most of their worries were unfounded.

Emerging theme: Engagement. In terms of role development strategies, spouses built on the expectations they had of the role, primarily supporting their spouse and fulfilling a social function as a visible supporter of the college. Many reported spending

their first few months in the role attending as many college events as they could and trying to foster new relationships. Nearly all of them reported that their spouses served as their main source of information regarding the expectations of them in their role.

When asked to complete the statement, "Being a community college president's spouse is _____," most of the responses centered on the ideas of "challenging" and "rewarding." The primary challenges were the visibility of the position and the intense demands upon the president's time, which translates into greater responsibilities for the spouse. Rewards were almost always described in terms of pride in being associated with the positive contributions the college made to the people of their communities. In short, most of those interviewed see their roles as important, are engaged in the life of the college, and feel a connection to it.

Emerging theme: Loss of identity. Most of those interviewed identified conflicts or tensions resulted from time demands on their spouses. Some said the demands of their role as spouse also created tension in terms of not being able to balance the various aspects of their personal and professional lives. Others said they felt difficulty determining if they and their families were forging genuine relationships because of their spouse's position and visibility as president.

To cope with these conflicts, almost all of the spouses interviewed talked about the importance of trying to maintain a sense of self apart from their spouse or their role as president's spouse. They discussed the need to develop and maintain their own interests outside of college life, whether it was their own career or other activities.

Summary

A total of 17 spouses of community college presidents were interviewed. The major themes to emerge from their responses were feelings of ambiguity, engagement, and loss of identity. Overall, the spouses felt a great deal of ambiguity regarding how they were to execute their role, but they attempted to define it through engagement strategies. A loss of a sense of identity also emerged as a common experience among those interviewed.

However, it is important to note that other themes emerged based upon demographics, such as age, gender, number of children, and college size and were addressed in Chapter Five. Findings in relationship to the literature, conclusions, implications for future practice, and recommendations for further research were also discussed.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

This qualitative study, designed with a grounded theory approach, was intended to discover the experiences of community college presidents' spouses through semi-structured interviews with presidents' spouses in two Midwestern states. Though this is not a widely-studied topic, the research which has been conducted demonstrates an emergent theme: the frustration felt by college presidents' spouses regarding the ambiguity of their role (Kiley, 2011; Schultz, 2010). Community college boards of trustees and other higher education stakeholders typically have expectations of the president's spouse, but these are rarely directly communicated (Kiley, 2011).

Because much of the research on this topic has been conducted within the context of a four-year institution, there is little research on how these findings parallel the experiences of a community college president's spouse. Furthermore, there is no focus on how community college spouses navigate and develop their roles in the absence of any guidance.

The intent of this study was to explore whether spouses of community college presidents perceive their roles are being ambiguously defined. It was also designed to shed light on how these individuals make sense of and develop their roles (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Weick et al., 2005). An understanding of how spouses navigate their roles might reduce some of the uncertainty involved with the role and may help college boards of trustees and administrators better understand how spouses navigate and make sense of their new positions. Findings in relationship to the literature, conclusions, implications for future practice, and recommendations for further research were discussed in this chapter.

Findings

This section links interview results with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Interview questions were categorized based on their correlation with the research questions, which focused on uncertainties, role development strategies, and role conflicts (Yin, 2011). These research questions correspond with the literature about the experiences of college presidents' spouses as they navigate their spousal role (Corbally, 1977; Justice, 1991; Kiley, 2011; Kintzer, 1972; Oden, 2007b; Trebon & Trebon, 2004; Vaughan, 1987).

The following questions are presented by category using the same acronyms given in Chapter Four. Discussion includes the themes that emerged from the interviews and how these connect to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. These findings are consistent with the existing research already conducted regarding the experiences of college presidents' spouses at four-year institutions. These results also contribute a greater understanding of the uncertainties, role development strategies, and role conflicts experienced by spouses as they assume and inhabit the role.

Interview question #1 (U). *Think back to the time when you first learned that you might become a college president's spouse. What were your ideas about what your role would be? (Follow up: What factor or factors shaped those ideas?).* Participant responses reflected three main thoughts: 1) they would serve as a supporter of their spouse in his or her presidential role; 2) they expected their role would involve social obligations to attend college and community functions; and 3) they had no expectations of what their role as the president's spouse would be. These findings are consistent with

early studies by Kintzer (1972) and Corbally (1977) showing that spouses were not sure what role they were to play.

Interview question #2 (U). *To what extent were you included in the presidential interview process? (Follow up: If so, did your ideas change about what your role might be? If so, who or what made you change your expectations?).* The majority of spouses reported either no participation or limited participation of a social nature in the presidential interview process. While older studies report spousal involvement (Corbally, 1977; Kintzer, 1972), this finding is consistent with recent studies which show the spouse to be largely excluded from the hiring process (Justice, 1991; Schultz 2009).

Interview question #3 (U). *What was communicated to you during the interview process that related to what your role would be as the president's spouse?* Because many of the participants were not involved in the interview process, the most frequent response to this question was, "Nothing." Many of the spouses said this lack of communication contributed to the ambiguity of the role and caused frustration. This is highly consistent with the literature which reports spouses' frustration at the lack of a job description (Corbally, 1977; Justice, 1997; Kiley, 2011; Schultz, 2010; Vaughan, 1986). This is also in keeping with the findings of Katz and Kahn (1978), who identified role ambiguity as a source of stress for individuals within an organization because it "frustrates the human need for clarity" and that it "leads to low job satisfaction, increased tension, low self-confidence, and a reduction in effective job performance" (p. 206).

Interview question #4 (U). *In what way did the college communicate its expectations of you in your role as the president's spouse? (Follow up: Who communicated this to you? How satisfied were you with that communication? What*

would have been helpful?). Most of those interviewed stated they received no communication from anyone at the college about what role they were to play and expressed dissatisfaction with that experience. Those who did receive communication identified the board of trustees as the source and felt satisfied with those messages. This is again congruent with studies indicating spouses are interested in having role expectations clarified (Justice, 1991; Schultz, 2009; Vaughan, 1986).

Interview question #5 (U). *Did anything in this process make you feel uncertain about what your role as the president's spouse would be? (Follow up: If so, could you give me some examples?).* Responses to this question were varied. Many reported that since they were not involved in the process, there was nothing about the process that made them more uncertain than they were before. Of those who did participate in interviews, some said they had lingering questions about expectations regarding the amount of community involvement they were expected to have. These findings mirror other studies which indicate spouses are given little direction regarding expectations about their involvement (Corbally, 1977; Kintzer, 1972; Schultz, 2010; Thompson, 2008).

Interview question #6 (U). *What aspects were you most worried about regarding your role should your spouse become president? (Follow up: Is this still a worry? If so, explain. If not, explain.).* While several spouses reported they did not have any significant worries regarding their role, the majority of concerns expressed centered around the time commitment of the role, the degree to which they would like their new community, and how easily they and their families would be able to make friends. The

impact on family has emerged as a common theme in other studies (Oden, 2007b, Schultz, 2009) as well.

Interview question #7 (U). *Once your spouse became president, how did your initial ideas about your role change? (Follow up: What factors influenced those changes?).* Most participants reported gaining a greater level of comfort with their role once their spouse became president. This came about through interactions with others and positive feedback about how they were functioning in their role. Weick et al. (2005) identified that the first stages of sensemaking involve chaos, followed by individuals drawing cues from those around them to make sense of their organizational roles.

Interview question #8 (RDS). *Please complete the following statement. Being a community college president's spouse is _____.* (Follow up: *Could you please explain?)* The words “challenging” and “rewarding” emerged most frequently in response to this question. The visibility of the role and the stress and long hours associated with their spouses’ career were viewed as substantial challenges. Most spouses reported feelings of reward as well. These were mainly associated with their pride in being associated with the college and the personal fulfillment it brings. As Corbally (1977) identified, a college presidency can be considered a “two person single career.” She also noted, “Those who revealed the most satisfaction from their jobs were those who seemed to have the assurance they were doing what was needed. They were comfortable knowing they were filling a necessary and important position on the campus” (Corbally, 1977, p. 51). The fact that community college presidents’ spouses feel so invested in the college they serve explains how Katz and Kahn’s (1978) work on

role development in organizations is applicable to the role development process spouses experience.

Interview question #9 (RDS). *Think back to your first six months as a community college president's spouse. Describe the process you went through to determine the responsibilities of your role. (Follow up: Which of these steps did you find to be the most helpful? Which helped you the least?).* Most participants reported that the first six months of their spouse's presidency was spent forming relationships with people at the college and in the community and paying attention to the feedback they received to determine if they were living up to the expectations others had of their role. The work of Weick et al. (2005) on sensemaking as an active, social process clearly emerges here. Individuals who are attempting to make sense of a role rely on the communication of those around them to make sense out of what is going on. The spouses in this study reported this process as key in helping them determine the role they should play.

Interview question #10 (RDS). *Besides you, what or who else assisted you as you developed into your role? (Follow up: Which of these were most helpful? Least helpful?).* The literature was replete with the idea that college presidents' spouses feel their roles are vaguely defined and get little direction about the expectations of the role from college trustees (Corbally, 1977; Justice, 1991; Oden, 2007b; Vaughan, 1986). The overwhelming majority of those interviewed for this study named their spouses as the most influential and helpful in their development of their role as the spouse of a community college president. Many reported questioning their spouses about what they were supposed to do, how they were supposed to act, and what events they were expected to attend.

Interview question #11 (RDS). *Currently, how would you describe your role as the spouse? (Follow up: How has this changed over time? Which part of your role do you enjoy the most? The least?).* In describing the role they currently play as the president's spouse, all responses fell into one of two categories: 1) supporter of and "sounding board" for their spouse, and 2) providing the social function of visibility at college and community events. It is interesting to note that this is unchanged from the role as it was first written about in the 1970s (Corbally, 1977; Kintzer, 1972).

In responding to the question about what part of their role they enjoy the most, the majority of participants named an involvement with the college and pride in the opportunities it provides. In terms of least enjoyable aspects of their role, the majority named the visibility of the position. This was reported as a frustration in the literature as well. Metaphors such as "living in a fishbowl" (Schultz, 2009) and "coming under a microscope" (Kiley 2011) were commonly noted.

Interview question #12 (RC). *What tensions or conflicts, if any, do you experience as a college president's spouse? (Follow up: Why?).* The majority of responses reflected conflicts associated with the intense demands on the president's time and its interference with their home life. This finding aligns with previous studies which indicate the job of president has a big impact on the spouse and family as well (Corbally, 1977; Oden, 2007b; Trebon & Trebon, 2004; Vaughan, 1987).

Another common frustration spouses reported was lack of a private life and being unable to pursue their own interests because of their spouse's career. This is again consistent with early studies on the topic. Corbally's (1977) study found that one of the

major frustrations presidents' spouses felt was the inability to engage in the activities they wished because of their husband's occupation.

Interview question #13 (RC). *How do you cope with those tensions or conflicts? (Follow up: How effective has this coping strategy been for you?).* Many of the participants have found pursuit of their own interests to be an effective way to cope with the tensions associated with the spousal role. Several spoke about hobbies, exercise, and spending time with friends as important ways of coping with the stresses of their role. These responses all indicated the importance of maintaining a sense of self separate and apart from their spouse. This is a relatively new finding to emerge, although some studies have indicated that spouses wish they had more opportunities to interact with other presidents' spouses (Corbally, 1977; Oden, 2007a).

Interview question #14 (RDS). *What advice would you give someone whose spouse is a new community college president? (Follow up: Why do you think this would be important to know?).* Responses to this question were varied; however, the majority of responses centered on two ideas: 1) the importance of realizing that the president's spouse is a central figure in the life of the college, and 2) the importance of maintaining an identity separate from that of "the president's spouse." The idea that the spouse is an important part of the college, but is largely ignored, has emerged as a frustration in other studies (Corbally, 1977; Oden, 2007b; Trebon & Trebon, 2004; Vaughan, 1987).

Conclusions

Conclusions reached in this study were based upon answers to the research questions that guided its design. This section will address those answers and how they shaped the formulation of conclusions. Much of the data gathered for this study directly addressed the research questions; however, because a grounded theory approach was used for this study, other significant information materialized that did not fit within the scope of the research questions. This information will also be discussed. Finally, the emergence of a new finding which expands prior role theory and sensemaking research was considered.

Research question #1: What uncertainties did community college presidents' spouses have about their spousal role prior to assuming it?

Uncertainties of the role. The spouses interviewed reported many uncertainties about what their role might be should their spouse become a community college president. Many conceptualized the role based upon personal experiences observing other presidents' spouses and how they handled their role. Many identified their beliefs about the role to be simply that of supporter of their spouse. Others thought they would have social obligations related to their role and visibility through community and college events. Still others identified no expectations about the role and did not envision themselves playing a part in their spouse's presidency.

Communication about the role. Few spouses were invited to participate in the presidential interview process. The interview is the primary opportunity for prospective community college presidents' spouses to gather information about any expectations the college board of trustees or other stakeholders have of the spousal role, yet many spouses

expressed frustration that they were not included in the process. Most of those who did participate were invited to do so in an informal, social manner, such as dinner with board members.

Of those spouses who did receive messages about the expectations of them in the spousal role, most reported those messages came during informal meetings with the board during the interview process. Most of these spouses said they received indirect messages, though some received directives about their participation in college and community activities. Some were told they were expected to be a visible representative of the college; others were told there was no such expectation. It is interesting to note that regardless of the nature of the direct message, spouses who received this forthright, direct communication reported the greatest satisfaction with the interview process and their involvement in it.

Worries about the role. While there were worries about the time commitment involved with their spouse's new position, most spouses reported some anxiety about assimilation into the new community and making friends. Those with children still at home had concerns about how their children would adapt to new schools and how quickly they would make new friends.

This insight into the uncertainties felt by community college presidents' spouses prior to assuming the role indicates the need for more communication between the college and the spouse. As Katz and Kahn (1978) determined in their work on role theory, ambiguity of this nature can lead to low job satisfaction, increased tension, and low self-confidence. Many of the uncertainties and anxieties spouses experience could be alleviated through open conversations and greater interaction with members of the

college community, particularly the board of trustees since they are tasked with hiring the president.

Also interesting to note is that most participants in this study gained a greater level of comfort once their spouse assumed the presidency. The spouses reported feeling more at ease with the role once they had the opportunity to interact with college stakeholders and receive feedback from them. As spouses had the opportunity to begin engaging in the sensemaking process identified by Weick et al. (2005), their anxiety about the role decreased. This finding also suggests that the sooner a presidential candidate's spouse can begin engaging in sensemaking, the less anxiety he or she will experience.

Research question #2: What strategies do community college presidents' spouses use to develop their spousal role?

Engagement. The results of this research clearly show most spouses are actively engaged in the life of the college. Most of them spoke of challenges of the role in terms of the visibility of it, which is indicative of their heavy involvement in college and community activities. However, they also reported feeling a great sense of personal reward at being involved with the work of the college and its service to the people of the region the college serves.

This engagement is one strategy spouses initially used to make sense of and determine the role they would play. Spouses related that the first six months were spent cultivating relationships and attending college and community events. Again, many of the spouses said they used this time and these activities to gauge peoples' reactions to them and process these reactions as feedback to determine if they were "on the right

track” in terms of meeting the expectations of others. This reaffirms the importance of the social element of the sensemaking process in role development (Weick et al., 2005).

The president's function in spousal role development. Nearly every spouse who participated in this study identified the president as a key player in his or her role development. The spouses reported the president as the most influential person in developing their role as spouse. Most said they asked for the president's feedback and advice when they had questions about how to function in their role.

In addition, most of the spouses interviewed reported their support of the president as a central element in their role as spouse. Many of them used the phrase “sounding board” to describe their role with regard to the president and his or her career.

What can be concluded from these findings is that many community college presidents' spouses do indeed take their role as spouse seriously and feel a great deal of commitment to the college. This supports the results of Corbally's (1977) early research and her identification of the “two person single career” (p. 3). Although they were not the ones who were hired to fulfill the job duties of the presidency, spouses feel the responsibility to perform well in their role because of the visibility of the position and its reflection upon the college. This confirms that the negative effects of role ambiguity in an organizational context (Weick et al., 2005) transfer to the spouse as well. This solidifies the notion that assisting spouses as they develop their roles can be an important contributor to the president's effectiveness.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the finding that spouses are heavily invested in the life of the college is the feelings a spouse brings to the role have not appreciably changed since Corbally's (1977) research nearly 40 years ago. Although

social conditions have changed significantly since then in terms of the increased number of women with their own careers and a greater number of female presidents, most spouses still bring to the position a traditional viewpoint. As Spouse 5 said, "I keep the home fires burning" (para. 15). Many see this type of support for the president as a primary responsibility, and they feel it plays a tremendous role in the success of the college. This is virtually the same sentiment expressed by the spouses interviewed for Corbally's (1977) study.

Research question #3: What role conflicts do community college presidents' spouses encounter in fulfilling their spousal role?

Time. The lack of control over personal time is one of the greatest conflicts reported by the community college presidents' spouses who participated in this study. They spoke of this in terms of the often unyielding demands on the president's time, but also with regard to the time management issues they experience because of their role as spouse.

Visibility. The sometimes intense pressures associated with the visibility of the presidency, and thus the spousal role, was also reported as a source of struggle. This was particularly true in smaller, rural communities in which the college may be the largest employer and a central focus of the community. Some spouses said they feel the need to stifle parts of themselves and their ideas in order to live up to the expectations of the role.

Relationships. Some spouses identified relationships with others as a conflict. Specifically, many were disappointed that they were unable to form authentic relationships due to their position as the president's spouse. Some talked of being unable to know if someone is making overtures toward friendship because of genuine feelings or

because of the fact they want to be closer to the person who is married to the president.

Likewise, some of the spouses spoke of extending invitations to others but not knowing if they accept because they are interested or because they feel obligated to do so.

These responses lead to the conclusion that spouses are personally impacted by the demands of the presidency as well as the demands placed on them in the spousal role. Many of them report feeling little control over their time and experiencing the scrutiny of the public spotlight. The difficulty in forming authentic bonds with others was a particular source of unhappiness. This illustrates the need for college stakeholders to recognize that even when few expectations are placed upon the spouse, the pressures of the presidency extend beyond the campus and affect the lives of his or her family as well. This can have implications for the president's efficacy as well.

Uncategorized occurrences. As the interviews were conducted, the spouses divulged information that does not directly relate to the three research questions which guided this study's design. Nonetheless, this information is significant and worthy of consideration. These findings, and their associated conclusions, are discussed.

Board of trustees-spouse relationship. This study did not focus questions around the spouse's relationship with the board of trustees; however, in some cases, this relationship emerged as a significant finding. Again, this is consistent with early studies conducted by Kintzer (1972) and Vaughan (1986) in which the sometimes tenuous relationship with the board is a source of frustration for community college presidents' spouses. Although Kiley (2011) found some feel that boards should be advised to recognize they are hiring one person as president and not the couple, some spouses reported a different experience.

Spouse 6 recounted the story of members of the board of trustees visiting her home while her husband was a candidate for the presidency. She said, "They came to my home and expected me to give them a nice dinner...and entertain them in my home. And I did that" (Spouse 6, para. 3). Later she revealed, "I support the board. I just had a board dinner for 30 people—sit down—the other day after they had their planning session" (Spouse 6, para. 5).

Although stories showing this type of close relationship with the board were not common, they did exist. This is indicative of the fact that some boards do still place expectations on the president's spouse and view that individual as part of a package deal. This is also illustrated by Spouse 11's story about not being specifically invited to accompany her husband during his interview at a college outside the state where they were living:

They made no mention of the spouse coming. At the time I was working, so I would have had to take off work. But because there was no specific invitation, we assumed there was going to be one more step in the process, so I did not accompany him—which actually backfired. The search committee thought I was not supporting him because I did not come with him to the interview. It was very distressing. One of the board members called me and specifically asked me if I would be accompanying him if he were chosen for the position. There was some sort of strange rumor that we had trouble in our marriage and that's why I hadn't come. So I found it interesting that should even factor into a hiring decision...it almost was unspoken that they wanted a solid married couple and not a single person. (Spouse 11, para. 8).

This experience suggests that some boards view the presidential spouse's role as pivotal, while at the same time trying to avoid communicating that message. This may reflect the advice that trustees are given to avoid the appearance they are seeking a "two-for-one" arrangement when hiring a president (Schultz, 2009); however, a mixed-message is sent when the board members' true feelings emerge.

"Down time" and its impact on relationships. Some spouses identified the intense demands of the presidency as a source of conflict in their lives. These were mentioned mainly in the context of the president's schedule, though some indicated that the intensity of the job creates a situation in which the president needs to take advantage of down time. In some cases, this can negatively affect the president's desire to socialize and engage with others.

A side result of this finding was the tremendous impact this need for down time has on family and other relationships. The president's need to relax and unwind, often in a solitary manner, can create stress on the family since it impacts the time they spend together. Spouse 2 related, "My husband does need quiet and down time at home, and he also needs me to be cognizant of all the challenges, the juggling, the taking care of the family" (para. 20). Spouse 17 said, "I have to support her need for solitude and quiet time and non-social activities, even though I feel like I'm a lot more social" (para. 14). Many spouses identified this as having a negative impact on their marital and family relationships because of the physical separation necessary for the president to relax.

Theoretical conclusion. This study employed a grounded theory methodology within the parameters of role theory and sensemaking to examine the role development process of community college presidents' spouses. The purpose of this approach was to

determine if an expanded theoretical perspective would emerge within the context of the research questions that guided the study. Codes were assigned to each interview question which correlated with the research questions. These codes were developed based upon the literature available concerning the experiences of college presidents' spouses. This method is consistent with that advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1994) and Charmaz (2006), who argued that approaching the research problem with a general idea of where to begin can enrich the data collected.

Many of the experiences reported by the spouses regarding ambiguity about the role, strategies for developing the role and how they made sense of it, and the challenges of the role, were consistent with the elements of role theory (Thomas & Biddle, 1966; Katz & Kahn, 1978) and sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). For example, as Thomas and Biddle (1966) theorized in their writing on role theory, feedback from others will influence how a particular role plays out. In this study, it was determined that presidential spouses adapt how they play their role based upon the reaction and feedback of those around them. The frustration spouses expressed at the ambiguity of the expectations of them in the spousal role is reflected in Katz and Kahn's (1978) work about role ambiguity and its relationship to increased tension. Likewise, elements of the sensemaking process (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) are seen in the presidents' spouses' attempts to define their identity through organizing from a state of confusion, considering their interactions with others in retrospect in order to think about the feedback they received, and asking the question, "What do I do next?"

However, a new piece did emerge which extends beyond role theory and sensemaking, and that is the deep, personal investment that spouses have in the college.

As a result of the role development and sensemaking processes spouses undergo, most of them develop a profound, emotional connection to the college, its employees, and its students. Because of this bond, many spouses feel a personal responsibility to the institution and have a need to fulfill the functions of the role, as they understand and define it, to the best of their ability. When describing the part of their role they enjoyed the most, an overwhelming majority of them identified personal pride in their association with the college. Spouse 1 discussed her own enthusiasm and passion for the college, and went on to say, "I firmly believe a college president's wife should be enthusiastic and passionate about the college itself and about where the college may be heading" (para. 21). When asked why she believed that to be so important, she replied:

Because you're marketing. You are marketing the institution. And when you market any institution, you must have a feeling that this is the best place that exists. And if you do not have that feeling, then you're tearing the entity down. (para. 22)

Spouse 8 related similar feelings: "I feel like I'm almost a cheerleader for the college...I think we're making a difference here. It's very personally satisfying to be a part of the college and be a promoter of it" (para. 14). Spouse 6, whose husband was only a few weeks away from retirement, began to cry during her interview and said, "I just love being the spouse of a college president. I'm going to miss it. I'm going to miss it terribly. I'm not looking forward to retirement at all" (para. 8).

This finding demonstrates that regardless of the frustrations and challenges experienced by presidential spouses, most of them develop an emotional bond with the role they play. This *emotional investment* in the role which arises out of the role

development strategies and sensemaking experiences of community college presidents' spouses may be a phenomenon that develops within other populations who undergo these processes. This is a significant outcome which may possibly extend the research on role theory and sensemaking.

Implications for Practice

It is clear from these findings that community college presidents' spouses overall feel a great deal of commitment to the college and its effective functioning. Many of them feel pressure to live up to the expectations others have for them in their role as presidents' spouses, but are frustrated at the fact they often do not know what those expectations are. Most spouses feel some degree of ambiguity regarding the role they are to play in the life of the college, which can create stress and lead to decreased satisfaction in their role. Katz and Kahn (1978) identified this as "a significant organizational problem" (p. 207).

Based upon the findings of this study, there are two main recommendations for community college boards of trustees and other college stakeholders with regard to their treatment of college presidents' spouses:

Inclusion in the interview process. Inclusion of presidential candidates' spouses in the interview process should be standard practice. However, it is important to note here again that boards of trustees are often reluctant to include spouses because of the conflicting advice they receive. At the same time they are being encouraged to more clearly define the spousal role and dialogue with the president's spouse early in the process, they are also being told to avoid the impression they are seeking a "two-for-the-price-of-one" arrangement (Schultz, 2009). There may also be potential legal

ramifications of the appearance that a presidential candidate's spouse was a factor in deciding whether or not to hire the candidate (Kiley, 2011). Spouse 13 in this study identified this double-bind as "the elephant in the room" (para. 7).

Even so, the literature suggests that both boards of trustees and spouses agree that spouses should be a part of the interview process (Corbally, 1977; Justice, 1991; Kiley, 2011; Schultz, 2010; Thompson, 2008). The findings of this study confirm that as well. Most spouses interviewed were excluded from the process but report that they would have liked to have been involved. As Spouse 11 said, "It's not just one person making a move" and "if the spouse isn't there [for the interview], who are the candidates bouncing things off of to try to make a decision about whether the job is a good fit" (para. 4)?

Community college boards of trustees can begin to navigate this difficult situation making it standard practice to invite the spouse to accompany the presidential candidate during his or her interview. If boards of trustees are not comfortable formally including the spouse as part of the interview, the spouse can be invited to participate in all public forums.

However, open communication between the board and the presidential candidate's spouse is a two-way street. Spouses, too, should be encouraged to ask questions about role expectations. Spouse 13 suggested this can be done in a non-threatening way, such as: "As the spouse of the president, what do you think is important for me to know about the college and community? What things do you think are important for me to do?" (para. 7). It should be noted that for spouses to feel comfortable starting this dialogue, boards of trustees need to communicate that the spouse should feel free to ask questions during the process.

Acknowledgement of role of the spouse. The “two person single career” identified by Corbally (1977) is alive and well nearly 40 years later. Whether or not boards of trustees place expectations on the president’s spouse, the person who occupies that role feels the effects of the demands of the job. Even if it is not an expectation, the spouse typically feels a great deal of emotional investment in the college and sometimes gets a great deal of personal satisfaction and fulfillment out of his or her association with it.

It is crucial to note that many spouses sacrifice a tremendous amount personally so their spouses can occupy a community college presidency. In this study, many spouses indicated moving from beloved communities, friends, and family so their spouse could accept a presidency. Some have quit their jobs or stopped pursuing personal interests because of conflicts with the presidency. Others experience tremendous strain on their marriages due to the intense demands of the presidency.

It is important for the board of trustees to acknowledge the spouse’s contributions and provide feedback about how the spouse is functioning in the role. As indicated by this study, board members were one of main ways spouses gained information about not only expectations, but whether or not they were doing a good job. Although spouses seem to be aware that board members are in a precarious position in terms of directly communicating expectations to the spouse, many spouses were appreciative of feedback about their performance. Spouse 12 said that board members at her community college made comments, such as, “Oh, you guys are everywhere. I don’t know how you can do that. I don’t know how you can work full time and still be out in the public so much” (para. 7). She went on to say that she interpreted this feedback as, “Okay, well I guess

I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing" (para. 7). Spouse 12 finalized her comments about the importance of board feedback by saying, "People do better when they know what's expected of them. And even if it's just a few little comments, it's better than the guessing that goes on" (para. 15).

It is noteworthy that most spouses were matter-of-fact about the personal impact of the presidency and did not complain about its challenges. Spouse 13 said, "I don't consider always having to be 'on duty' as a complaint as much as a fact. We chose this life, these positions" (para. 17). However, the board of trustees' positive acknowledgements of a job well-done can go a long way toward sustaining the positive contributions of the spouse. This, in turn, impacts the college in a favorable way.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study contributes to the knowledge of how community college presidents' spouses define and navigate their roles, it is by no means exhaustive. Several future studies should be considered to gain a more comprehensive view of some of the key issues relating to presidential spouse role development. Future studies could also contribute further to the application of role theory and sensemaking in the context of a community college organizational structure.

Because this study was conducted in only two states in the Midwestern region of the United States, there are limitations on the generalization of its findings. Further research should be conducted in other areas of the country and in community colleges that may have different governance or organizational structures. Geographic and cultural differences may have an impact on how the role of the president's spouse is regarded and college stakeholders' treatment of it.

Limited demographic information was collected from study participants, but these data were not heavily analyzed and correlated with the findings. A deeper exploration of some of these demographic categories might reveal differences in experiences. For example, future research could include a closer examination of the experiences of spouses based upon gender. The findings of this study suggest the experiences of male spouses differ from those of female spouses in some ways, especially in terms of the traditional social expectations of the role. However, more research is needed to determine the extent of these variances.

The preponderance of community college presidents are married; however, there is an emerging demographic of presidents who are either unmarried and/or are openly gay (Jaschik, 2010). While these are still a minority, exploring how the spousal role is developed and fulfilled in these nontraditional relationships would contribute to the literature on this topic. It is likely that an increasing number of gay academics will aspire to leadership positions (Jaschik, 2010), so further exploration would help boards of trustees be proactive in their approach to hiring these individuals.

Another demographical shift that warrants consideration is age and generational differences. With the expected onslaught of presidential retirements as baby boomers age, members of Generation X are primed to fill these high-level administrative positions in community colleges (Shults, 2001). The findings of this study suggest there are some generational differences in how the community college president's spousal role is regarded. Although many aspects of the role remain rooted in the traditions of 40 years ago when the topic was first studied, there does appear to be a subtle shift toward a more

modern portrait of a president's spouse. The melding of the traditional foundations of the role with the contemporary influences upon it would be an important area of study.

The finding of the spouse's often profound emotional investment in his or her role as college president's spouse is an important one that warrants further exploration. This is an interesting finding considering that most spouses probably do not feel that level of emotional involvement in their spouse's career. It would be enlightening to understand more about how this level of investment develops and the implications it has for the college. Also of interest would be if spouses of chief executives in other careers experience this same level of emotional connection to their role.

Further research in the areas of role theory and sensemaking would expand the application of these theories into another organizational context. Thomas and Biddle (1966) reported early role studies in the areas of family, education, therapy, and deviancy. More recent studies have focused on role theory in the health care industry (Apker, 2001; Gilstrap, 2011, Miller, Joseph, & Apker, 2000). Using role theory and sensemaking as a framework for studying the experiences of presidents and boards of trustees would add to the body of literature and more solidly demonstrate the universal applicability of these theories.

For example, one area of study that would contribute greatly to literature on community college leadership is to explore the process by which new presidents develop their roles. By applying role theory and sensemaking, a more in-depth analysis of the transition process could take place. Although new community college presidents have a job description and benefit from direct communication of expectations from the board of trustees, they experience many of the same ambiguities and challenges as their spouses,

such as navigating the culture of the college and assimilating to a new environment. Having information about how presidents go through this process could help national associations, such as the American Association of Community Colleges, who conduct training programs for new community college presidents.

Because presidents were identified by spouses as the primary source of information regarding the development of the spousal role, it would be valuable to investigate the process by which presidents gather that information. Do boards communicate explicitly with presidents about their expectations of the president's spouse? If not, how do presidents know what guidance to give?

Similarly, further research on how boards of trustees make sense of their roles and responsibilities would assist the Association of Community College Trustees in better training for new trustees. Interviewing trustees to learn about their role development experiences and perspectives about the power they hold would contribute greatly to the quality of training trustees receive and, ultimately, to the effective functioning of community colleges.

Summary

This qualitative study, designed with a grounded theory approach, was intended to discover the experiences of community college presidents' spouses, through semi-structured interviews, in two Midwestern states. Using role theory and sensemaking, the study was guided by research questions intended to determine if spouses felt uncertainties about their role, how they developed into their role, and the conflicts they faced in their role as a community college president's spouse. The grounded theory approach was used

to determine if other findings emerged that would generate new theoretical perspectives or extend the current research on role theory and sensemaking.

Many of the findings reflect the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. It was determined that community college presidents' spouses do indeed have uncertainties about their roles and feel that their roles are ambiguously defined. As Katz and Kahn (1978) determined in their work on role theory in organizations, this type of ambiguity can lead to low job satisfaction, increased tension, and low self-confidence. Because many spouses are not invited to participate in any kind of meaningful way in the interview process, they are not given an opportunity to reduce the uncertainty they feel about the role they may play in their spouse's new job. Those who did participate in the interview and received direct messages from the board regarding expectations of them in their role reported the greatest satisfaction with the process. This finding suggests encouraging greater involvement of the spouse in the interview process is key to alleviating this anxiety.

This study also examined the strategies spouses used to develop their roles in the absence of substantive guidance. Most of the participants in the study engaged themselves in the affairs of the community and college. From these interactions, they were able to gain enough positive or negative feedback from others to determine if they were meeting expectations. Weick et al. (2005) identified receiving feedback from others as one element of sensemaking. These findings also reveal that anxiety decreased once the spouses began to engage in sensemaking. Study participants also relied upon their spouses to give them direction about what they were supposed to do and what activities they were expected to attend.

The final area explored through this study was that of role conflicts experienced by community college presidents' spouses. The main conflicts identified related to the time commitment involved, the visibility of the position, and the ability to forge meaningful relationships. A major theme that emerged from this area of study was that of loss of identity. Many of the spouses felt the stresses of the presidency required them to make choices that diminished their sense of self. Some did not have time to pursue their own interests, while others gave up their own careers in order to accommodate the demanding nature of their spouses' job.

The grounded theory approach did produce a new finding. Most of the presidents' spouses interviewed identified feeling a profound and very personal emotional investment in their role. Despite the challenges of the presidential spouse role, most of them communicated deep feelings of personal pride in being associated with the college. They also reported feeling a sense of responsibility for the college's success.

Although including spouses in the interview process is considered by some to send the wrong message about a "two-for-one" expectation, the fact remains that a community college presidency is, to one degree or another, a "two person single career" (Corbally, 1977, p. 3). Acknowledging that fact is crucial at the early stages of the process, and inviting spouses to participate in the interview is a recommended practice. Spouses should be encouraged to ask questions that will help reduce the ambiguous nature of the role they are seeking to inhabit. Once a new president is hired, the board of trustees should be mindful of the difficulties of the job and the impact it has on not only the president, but on the president's spouse and family as well. Regular feedback offered

to the president and the spouse can help sustain a spouse's positive influence on the presidency, and ultimately, the college.

Appendix A**Approval Letter
Institutional Review Board**

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE: April 22, 2013

TO: Tracy McGrady
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [448551-1] The Role Development of Community College Presidents' Spouses

IRB REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: April 22, 2013
EXPIRATION DATE: April 22, 2014
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

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.

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.

The researcher should be cautious when writing up the results of the demographic questionnaire. The questions are so detailed as to easily identify the individual, particularly within such a small geographic region.

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 April 22, 2014.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years. If you have any questions, please contact Beth Kania-Gosche at (636) 949-4576 or bkaniagosche@lindenwood.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

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

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter Presidents and Chancellors

Subject: Research Request

Dear Dr. _____

I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri, majoring in Higher Education Administration. I am also an administrator and former faculty member at Ozarks Technical Community College in Springfield, Missouri.

For my dissertation, I am conducting research to identify how spouses of community college presidents develop into the role they play as a presidential spouse. The purpose of this study is to determine the types of information spouses identify as being beneficial as they transition into their role.

I want to invite a total of 35 community college presidents' spouses in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to participate in the interviews for this research project. I would like to include your spouse in my research. This will involve conducting a brief in-person or telephone interview with your spouse on or before June 30, 2013.

I ask you to please encourage your spouse to participate. If your spouse is interested in participating, please reply to this electronic mail (e-mail) with: 1) his or her **e-mail address**, and 2) his or her **telephone number**.

All information provided during the interview will be kept confidential, and the identities of those participating will in no way be revealed. If you have any questions about the process, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail (mcgradyt@otc.edu) or phone [REDACTED]. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Sherry DeVore, at Lindenwood University at sdevore@lindenwood.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tracy M. McGrady
Doctoral Student
Lindenwood University

Appendix C**Recruitment Letter
Spouses**

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Research

Dear _____

I am a doctoral student at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri, majoring in Higher Education Administration. I am also an administrator and former faculty member at Ozarks Technical Community College in Springfield, Missouri.

For my dissertation, I am conducting research to identify how spouses of community college presidents develop into the role they play as a presidential spouse. The purpose of this study is to determine the types of information spouses identify as being beneficial as they transition into their role.

Your spouse has indicated that you might be willing to participate in a brief in-person or telephone interview on or before June 30, 2013. Your participation would be extremely valuable. If you are willing to participate, please indicate that in a reply to this electronic mail. I will contact you to determine a mutually-acceptable time and location.

All information provided during the interview will be kept confidential, and your identity will in no way be revealed. If you have any questions about the process, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail (mcgradyt@otc.edu) or phone [REDACTED]. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Sherry DeVore, at Lindenwood University at sdevore@lindenwood.edu.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tracy M. McGrady
Doctoral Student
Lindenwood University

Appendix D

Lindenwood University

School of Education
 209 S. Kingshighway
 St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

“The Role Development of a Community College President’s Spouse”

Principal Investigator Tracy M. McGrady
 Telephone: [REDACTED] E-mail: mcgradyt@otc.edu

Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Tracy McGrady under the guidance of Dr. Sherry DeVore. The purpose of this research is to identify how spouses of community college presidents develop into the role they play as a presidential spouse and the types of information spouses identify as being beneficial as they transition into their role.
2. a) Your participation will involve participating in a brief in-person or telephone interview during which you will answer questions about your experiences as a community college president’s spouse. Interviews will be conducted at a time and location acceptable to you. After the interview has been transcribed, I will send it to you and ask you to review it for accuracy.

I give my permission for the interview session to be recorded.

Participant’s initials: _____

- b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 20-30 minutes.
- c) Approximately 35 participants will be invited for interviews for this research project. These participants will be from the Midwestern states of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.
4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about the experiences of community college presidents’ spouses as they transition into their roles. The findings from this study may provide a better understanding to boards of trustees

and administrators about not only how spouses navigate and make sense of their new positions, but also the type of information which is useful to them in this process.

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 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 Investigator (Tracy McGrady, [REDACTED]) or the Supervising Faculty, (Dr. Sherry DeVore, [REDACTED]). You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs, at 636-949-4846.

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

Appendix E**Community College Spouse Study
Demographic Questionnaire**

1. What is your age?

- 21 and Under
- 22 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 and Over
- Decline

2. (*Optional*) What is your ethnicity?

- African American / Black
- Asian
- Caucasian / White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American
- Other

3. How many children do you have?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

4. How many of those children are living at home?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

5. How long have you been married to your current spouse?

- 1 year or less
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 25 years or more

6. What is the highest level of education you have attained?

- Less than high school
- High school/GED
- Some college
- Two-year degree (Associate's)
- Four-year degree (Bachelor's)
- Master's
- Doctoral
- Professional degree (MD, JD)

7. Are you currently employed in a paid occupation?

- Yes
- No

If *yes*, are you employed: Full-time Part-time

8. How long has your spouse been the president of your current institution?

- 1 year or less
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 25 years or more

9. Is this your spouse's first community college presidency?

- Yes
- No

If *no*, how many prior institutions have you served as a president's spouse?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

Appendix F

Community College Spouse Study Interview Protocol

Introduction (Read Aloud): A community college president's spouse plays an important role in the effectiveness of their spouse's presidency. For this study, I am interested in examining your experiences as a president's spouse. Please keep this in mind when answering questions during the interview.

SECTION 1: UNCERTAINTIES

1. Think back to the time when you first learned that you might become a college president's spouse. What were your ideas about what your role would be?

(Follow up: What factor or factors shaped those ideas)

2. To what extent were you included in the presidential interview process?

(Follow up: If so, did your ideas change about what your role might be?)

(Follow up: If so, who or what made you change your expectations?)

3. What was communicated to you during the interview process that related to what your role would be as the president's spouse?

4. In what way did the college communicate its expectations of you in your role as the president's spouse?

(Follow up: Who communicated this to you?)

(Follow up: How satisfied were you with that communication?)

(Follow up: What would have been helpful?)

5. Did anything in this process make you feel uncertain about what your role as the president's spouse would be?

(Follow up: If so, could you give me some examples?)

6. What aspects were you most worried about regarding your role should your spouse become president?

(Follow up: Is this still a worry? If so, explain. If not, explain.)

7. Once your spouse became president, how did your initial ideas about your role change?

(Follow up: What factors influenced those changes?)

SECTION 2: ROLE DEVELOPMENT

1. Please complete the following statement. Being a community college president's spouse is _____.

(Follow up: Could you please explain?)

2. Think back to your first six months as a community college president's spouse. Describe the process you went through to determine the responsibilities of your role.

(Follow up: Which of these steps did you find to be the most helpful? Which helped you the least?)

3. Besides you, what or who else assisted you as you developed into your role?

(Follow up: Which of these were most helpful? Least helpful?)

4. Currently, how would you describe your role as the spouse?

(Follow up: How has this changed over time?)

(Follow up: Which part of your role do you enjoy the most? The least?)

SECTION 3: ROLE CONFLICTS

At some point in their jobs, most people experience tensions or conflicts. For example, a teacher may feel the need to give honest feedback to her students but at the same time not want to hurt the students' feelings.

1. What tensions or conflicts, if any, do you experience as a college president's spouse?

(Follow up: Why?)

2. How do you cope with those tensions or conflicts?

(Follow up: How effective has this coping strategy been for you?)

3. What have you found to be most enjoyable about the role of being a president's spouse?

SECTION 4: ADVICE

1. What advice would you give someone whose spouse is a new community college president?

(Follow up: Why do you think this would be important to know?)

SECTION 5: WRAP-UP

1. Is there any question I should have asked?

We have come to the end of our interview today. Do you have any questions for me?
Thank you for your participation in this study

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Vita

Tracy McGrady currently serves as Interim Dean of Academic and Student Affairs at Ozarks Technical Community College-Richwood Valley in Christian County, Missouri. McGrady holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a Master of Arts degree in Communication from Missouri State University.

Prior to her current role, McGrady served Ozarks Technical Community College as faculty member in the Department of Communication, College Director of Grants Development, and Assistant to the Vice Chancellor of Advancement | Student Affairs | Workforce Development. She has also held administrative positions in Student Affairs and Continuing Education at Missouri State University.