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NAVIGATING THE CAREER PIPELINE: EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
Andrea Allen Deal
Lexington, Kentucky
Director: Dr. Wayne D. Lewis, Professor of Educational Leadership Studies
Lexington, Kentucky
2019

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

NAVIGATING THE CAREER PIPELINE: EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

Despite holding a majority of lower and middle management positions in public two-year institutions, women still hold only one-third of current community college presidencies. This study explored the gendered phenomenon of navigating the career pipeline in higher education to reach the office of community college president. The purpose of the study was to examine the educational backgrounds and career paths of recently-appointed female community college presidents, as well as the barriers and sources of support they encountered while navigating the career pipeline.

A phenomenological approach was utilized for this qualitative study. Data was primarily collected using semi-structured interviews. Additional sources for data collection include reflection logs, memos, and document analysis. A modified van Kaam method of data analysis was used to code participant data and identify recurring thematic elements. These recurring thematic elements provided the foundation for individual descriptions of the phenomenon, which were later synthesized to create a composite description.

Results suggest that study participants encountered three types of barriers while navigating the career pipeline in higher education: institutional, birdcage, and internal. The term “birdcage barriers” was coined here to describe scenarios in which aspiring female leaders could identify opportunities for professional growth or advancement, but were unable to access these opportunities because of situational boundaries. Findings also suggest study participants benefited from three sources of support: institutional, personal, and individual traits/strategies. Additional findings include: participants were reluctant to label gender a barrier; most of the institutional bias encountered by participants was second-generation; and, as aspiring leaders in higher education, participants required intrusive recruitment.

KEYWORDS: Community College, Higher Education, Educational Leadership, Women in Leadership, Female College President.

Andrea Allen Deal

08/27/2019

Date

NAVIGATING THE CAREER PIPELINE: EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Sharon Allen, who passed away in February 2011. She did not complete her college degree, but she possessed incredible wisdom. Her passion for learning instilled a natural curiosity in me. Most importantly, she taught me that wisdom is meaningless without a kind heart. She passed away before I started the doctoral program, but I hope this completed work honors her memory.

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To my husband, Mike Deal, thank you for insisting I persist when I was overwhelmed, and thank you for sharing the load at home to make the task a little less daunting. Your ongoing love and support spurred me forward. You believe in me more than I believe in myself, and my gratitude knows no bounds. Thank you to my grandson, Cy, for providing much-needed play breaks and for giving me incentive to 'hang in there.' I hope you are proud of Nons. Thank you to my dad, who always believed I could achieve any goal, and my grandmother, who spent countless hours of my childhood reading with me and playing 'teacher' in my pretend schoolhouse. Finally, I wish to thank the respondents of my study (who remain anonymous for confidentiality purposes).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

With the impending retirement of many community college presidents (Philippe, 2016) and the increasing enrollment of females in postsecondary education (Doherty, Willoughby, & Wilde, 2016), the time is ripe for females who aspire to leadership positions within higher education. Many women who aspire to leadership roles in higher education do so in community colleges where the environment has historically been more open to women (Townsend & Twombly, 2006). Community colleges have less defined pathways to the presidency, which provides greater access for women. When compared with four-year colleges and universities, community colleges employ a larger percentage of women in both faculty and senior administrative positions. This places more women in the career pipeline on the pathway to the presidency and provides institutions with a greater number of potential female leaders. However, despite holding almost two-thirds of the lower and middle management positions in public two-year institutions (King & Gomez, 2008), women still hold only one-third of current community college presidencies.

The clustering of women in lower and middle management positions supports Ward and Eddy's (2013) assertion that women may be reluctant to pursue leadership positions in higher education organizations if the organization appears closed to aspiring female leaders. In such traditional institutions, dominant leadership theories advance a masculine paradigm that excludes female voices from the leadership dialogue and hinders women's ability to incorporate leadership into their personal identity (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). When power is confined to a homogeneous group of leaders who generate a homologous view of leadership and leadership traits, the organizational structure conveys

a limited willingness to accept individuals from historically marginalized groups (Hagedorn & Laden, 2002). This masculine paradigm inhibits both males and females from viewing women as potential leaders (Carli & Eagly, 2011) and discourages females from pursuing leadership roles. This dominant view of leadership may be further reinforced when female leaders utilize stereotypically feminine traits in their leadership style, even though their approach may align with contemporary leadership practice. Further, the current body of literature on leadership, which is based predominantly on male experiences and practice as a result of the disproportionate number of men holding leadership positions, may not be applicable or insightful to today's aspiring female leaders (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). This chronic underrepresentation of females in advanced leadership positions (Hatch, 2017) and in the leadership literature offers rich opportunities to explore the experiences of current female community college presidents in order to describe their career pathways and examine the barriers and sources of support they encountered as they navigated the career pipeline.

Because this study sought to explore the lived experiences of current female community college presidents who successfully navigated the career pipeline in higher education and develop a composite description of the essence of the experience, phenomenological methods were used. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to elicit participants' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the experience of navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. Although the results of this study were not intended for extrapolation to the broader population of female community college presidents, participants' narrative descriptions of navigating the career pipeline provide valuable insight to aspiring female leaders, as well as to

stakeholders in institutions of higher learning who hope to develop the leadership potential of prospective female leaders in their employ. The study also contributes to the existing literature and body of knowledge regarding the experiences of women in leadership within the field of higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine and describe the career paths, barriers, and sources of support experienced by women who successfully navigated the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. Because women are substantially underrepresented in higher education administration and the impact of this exclusion is multi-faceted, a study of the perceptions of women currently holding the office of community college president was warranted. Their stories contribute to the existing body of knowledge about female leadership in community colleges and offer insight to other women who aspire to the position of community college president.

Research Questions

Four primary research questions guided this exploratory study:

1. How do female community college presidents describe their educational background?
2. How do female community college presidents describe their career pathway from initial employment to presidential appointment?
3. What barriers, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive as they navigate the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?

4. What resources and sources of support, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive while navigating the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?

Significance of the Study

Because women are underrepresented in leadership practice, the characteristics and experiences of women leaders are also underrepresented in research, contributing to a limited empirical base upon which the current body of knowledge is built (Stead & Elliot, 2009). The relationship between gender and leadership was not considered a point of interest for systematic study until the last quarter of the 20th century (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). Once acknowledged as an area of import, research on gender and leadership had two major focus areas: the differences in the leadership styles of men and women (Klenke, 1996) and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Eagly, Karpowitz, & Beaman, 2016). Research on the lived experiences of women who successfully navigated the career pipeline to the office of community college president is limited. For the most part, the existing body of knowledge regarding higher education leadership is based largely upon the leadership pathways and practices of males (Stead & Elliot, 2009). Further, in a 2016 survey with 239 respondents, Phillippe found that current community college presidents have served as CEO an average of 8.3 years. This number includes both current and previous positions. Previous studies found similar results, including 9.6 years in a 2007 survey, 9.7 years in a 2002 study, and 9.8 years in a study conducted in 1996 (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). As a result, the sparse existing research on the experiences of female community college presidents may be antiquated

and not representative of today's female leaders if the study was conducted more than ten years ago.

A 1995 study by the Glass Ceiling Commission identified multiple barriers that hinder women's professional growth in a variety of fields. Barriers such as a lack of institutionalized support for working families, inflexible work arrangements, inequity in promotion pipelines, a lack of professional mentors and sponsors, and blatant sex discrimination were all identified as factors inhibiting women's career advancement. The same report found that organizational programs designed to increase career opportunities for females are more effective if they have CEO support, emphasize an atmosphere of inclusivity, and include measures of accountability for gender parity. Almost two decades later, Ward and Eddy (2013) found that barriers to advancement for women in higher education foster the belief that leadership opportunities are not open to women, causing aspiring female leaders in academe to *lean back* rather than *lean in*.

Methodology

Studies that seek to explore the lived experiences of study participants often rely on qualitative methods of inquiry. Qualitative methods are particularly useful when researchers seek to understand the meaning participants assign to various experiences (Creswell, 2009). At its heart, qualitative research "is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 2). Of the various qualitative methods, phenomenology is a valuable approach when exploring individual perspectives that may challenge existing structural or normative assumptions (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Creswell (2013) claims this desire to understand human experiences is the best criteria for deciding to use phenomenological methods. Because this study sought to explore and

define the meanings of experiences through collaborative interactions between the researcher and participants, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilized with emphasis on techniques of narrative inquiry.

Design of the Study

Setting. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, there were 982 public community colleges in the United States in 2017. Of those 982, approximately 36%, or 353, were headed by females (American Council on Education, 2017). Study participants were purposefully selected from female-led community colleges in the eastern central region of the U.S.

Participants. Participants for this study were purposefully sampled based on their position as community college president. The primary criteria for inclusion were females who have held the office of community college president for five years or less. The goal of this purposeful sampling was to capture the lived experiences of females who have recently navigated the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. This purposeful sampling ensured the study's outcomes represent recent experiences that will be relevant and insightful to other females who are considering leadership roles in higher education.

Data collection. Data for this study was collected primarily using semi-structured interviews. Additional sources for data collection include reflection logs, memos, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were utilized because they are responsive in nature and allow the research to focus participants' discussions without steering their direction (Flick, 2002). By using semi-structured interviews with open-

ended questions and narrative inquiry, the researcher was able to elicit objective descriptions of facts, as well as the participants' subjective perceptions of experiences.

Data analysis. The purpose of this study was to explore the gendered phenomenon of navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president through the perceptions and experiences of study participants. Specifically, the study explored the career trajectories of women who successfully navigated this pipeline, as well as their perceptions of barriers and sources of support they encountered along the way. The data was analyzed for recurring thematic elements from interview transcriptions across a limited group of participants. The goal was to grasp the universal essence of the experience (Van Manen, 1990) by collecting data from those who have experienced the phenomenon and then “developing a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (Creswell, 2006, p. 58).

For this study, data analysis consisted predominantly of coding and thematic analysis of transcribed participant interviews. Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method for analyzing qualitative data provided the structure for data analysis. Throughout this iterative process, study participants remained actively involved and collaborated with the researcher to verify interpretations and conclusions. Memos and reflective notes were also coded and analyzed to substantiate emerging themes (Creswell, 2009).

Limitations of the Study

This study is not generalizable to the larger population of female community college presidents. Importantly, the strength of qualitative research is not dependent upon its ability to be extrapolated to a larger population. Qualitative research,

particularly phenomenology, emphasizes understanding the essence of a phenomenon, which is an interpretive process dependent upon participants' subjective perceptions as well as objective facts. This subjective nature yields conclusions that are not necessarily applicable beyond the study's participants. Still, the lack of generalizability does not necessarily negate the validity of the study's conclusions or its ability to inform others who are interested in or are experiencing the same or similar phenomena.

This study had a limited sample size. However, phenomenological research involves studying a small number of participants through extended periods of engagement (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, Creswell (2013) suggests that a small number of participants are both preferable and necessary. For phenomenological studies, ideal research groups consist of three to fifteen participants with the ability to richly articulate their experiences (Creswell, 2009).

Summary

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study along with an explanation of the purpose of the research, including its ability to contribute to the overall body of knowledge within the field of educational leadership. An overview of the literature was included as part of the discussion of the study's significance. The chapter also offered a summary of the study's methodology and limitations. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and discusses the theoretical frameworks undergirding the narrative interpretation of the data. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth review of the research design and methodology. Chapter 4 details the study's findings, and Chapter 5 discusses these findings in greater depth within the context of the study's conceptual frameworks.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of females who have navigated the career pipeline to become community college presidents. One of the assumptions underlying this study was the belief that navigating this career pipeline is a distinctly gendered experience. Therefore, after the theoretical frameworks for the study are discussed, the literature review begins with research that explores whether males and females differ in leadership style and ability, as well as society's *perceptions* of gender differences in leadership style and ability. The literature review then explores dominant leadership theories, especially their inclusion or exclusion of gender, and the ways in which the dominant theories have created an androcentric paradigm that disadvantages aspiring female leaders. Lastly, the literature review discusses female representation in leadership roles in various sectors of employment and existing research on reported barriers and sources of support impacting aspiring female leaders in the workplace.

Theoretical Frameworks

Because leadership perceptions and experiences are strongly influenced by gender, a critical feminist framework was one of the two theoretical frames utilized for this study. The five basic epistemological tenets of feminist research undergirded this study: the recognition of gender as a pervasive influence, the centrality of consciousness raising, the rejection of subject and object in research, a high concern for ethics, and an emphasis on empowerment and social justice (Cook & Fonow, 1986). The second theoretical framework guiding this study was Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four-Frame Model. Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest that effective leaders are able to draw from multiple leadership orientations based on the environment, task, or situation. Each of the

frames addresses a different aspect of organizational dynamics, and all are essential to gaining a comprehensive understanding of organizational structures and culture (Bolman & Deal, 2008). These frames, or mental models, provided a contextual framework for exploring organizational strengths and weaknesses, as well as barriers and sources of support experienced by aspiring female leaders.

Critical Feminist Framework

The critical feminist framework was used to acknowledge and interpret the uniquely gendered experiences of the study participants. Feminist critical theory blends elements of feminist theory and critical theory in a framework that is designed to question traditional epistemological views of ‘knowing’ and knowledge development. While other theoretical frameworks evolved from the dominant discourse created by those in positions of power (predominantly educated white males), feminist critical theory seeks to explore individual interpretations of the world based on the lived experiences of the interpreter within the existing patriarchal social structure (Agger, 2006).

Most traditional theoretical frameworks share an established set of assumptions which feminist critical theory calls into question. Chief among these assumptions is the objective nature of truth. This dispassionate and unengaged approach to research idealizes the notion of a single truth for all individuals, regardless of gender, race, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Thus, the unique sociocultural perspective of different demographic groups is ignored and diverse views of truth are muted.

This belief in the objective nature of truth is driven by the assumption that all individuals share the same relationship with their social environment, and thus a general

account of knowledge can exist. This knowledge is dependent upon a reliance on reason and a discounting of emotion (Heikes, 2012). However, research suggests that women perceive the world differently than men, giving weight to intuition and emotion as well as reason. Theoretical frameworks that are based only on the “Man of Reason” and Cartesian reasoning methods discount much of the female experience, resigning it to a state of insignificance within the dominant discourse (Heikes, 2012).

In contrast, feminist critical theory emphasizes the belief that there are multiple ways of ‘knowing.’ This individual formation of knowledge is the result of the unique circumstances in each person’s life and the ways in which the dominant beliefs and values of society intersect with an individual’s personal characteristics, such as gender or race. Specifically, feminist critical theory focuses on *feminine* ways of knowing, experiencing, and acting (Belenky, 1986). The social construction of gender and society’s tendency to socialize males and females in gender-segregated groups result in different social experiences for males and females, as well as different interpretations of experiences, even when those experiences are shared. As a result, feminist critical theory views the traditional goal of discerning objective truth as unachievable (Heikes, 2012).

Subsequent to this positing of the subjective nature of truth, feminist critical theory views gender as a fundamental category and central focus of research. As a result, the goal of research is “...not to develop a universal understanding of the human experience” (Shaw, 2004, p. 59). Instead, feminist critical theory stresses the ways in which context and individual characteristics alter individual perceptions of a particular experience. Notably, this approach challenges the dominant discourse and “...is therefore likely to be marginalized in many arenas...” (Shaw, 2004, p. 61).

The ‘critical’ element of feminist critical theory denotes the critical theory paradigm and refers to “the detecting and unmasking of beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice, and democracy” (Usher, 1996, p. 22). Critical theory seeks not only to recognize and understand social inequality, but also to empower members of marginalized groups and create democratizing change. When feminist theory and critical theory are fused, they yield a framework emphasizing issues of power, voice, justice, agency, and representation, with gender as the center of analysis (Frost & Elichaooff, 2014).

Four-Frames Model as a Theoretical Framework

Using Bolman and Deal’s (2008) four-frame model as a theoretical foundation for this study allowed the researcher to categorize and contextualize the barriers and sources of support as identified by the participants. The researcher could also assess which of the frames are particularly problematic for aspiring female leaders and which are likely to bolster women’s career aspirations.

Bolman and Deal (2008) suggest evaluating organizations from four distinctly unique frames, or perspectives, in order to gain greater understanding of multiple dynamics at work within the organizational system. A frame is “...a mental model – a set of ideas and assumptions – that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particularly ‘territory’” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 11). The ability to reframe situations in different perspectives helps leaders and aspiring leaders avoid cognitive ruts, gain a clearer understanding of an organization’s terrain, and make more effective leadership decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Relying on research from both social science and leadership practice, Bolman and Deal (2008) distilled their findings down to four major cognitive frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The structural frame looks predominantly at the structure of an organization, its hierarchy, and policies and procedures. The human resource frame is concerned with the individuals who comprise an organization and their unique needs. The political frame emphasizes the politics of an organization, including who holds power and how alliances are formed. Lastly, the symbolic frame considers an organization's culture, along with the shared values and beliefs that are transmitted among members (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Each of the four frames can potentially be supportive or detrimental to the productivity and growth of workers.

From a leadership perspective, the four-frame model offers leaders a way to view a single scenario from multiple perspectives in order to gain clarity, think critically, and solve problems innovatively (Bolman & Deal, 2008). From a research perspective, the model provides a framework for evaluating an organization's ability to meet the needs of its human capital and identify barriers that inhibit workers' personal and professional growth. A brief review of the assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses of each frame identifies key aspects of an organization that may offer barriers or obstacles to aspiring female leaders. Using these four frames, participant experiences were contextualized to identify which of the four frames were inhibiting and which provided sources of support to study participants as they navigated the career pipeline in higher education.

Structural frame. Six primary assumptions underlie the structural frame and reflect both the value of rational decision-making and the belief that formalizing each employee's role and responsibilities leads to maximum job performance (Bolman &

Deal, 2008, p. 47). These assumptions include the following: organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives; specialization increases efficiency and job performance; coordination and control serve to mesh various individuals and departments; rationale should take precedence over individual agendas or external pressures; an organization's structure must fit its current goals, technology, environment, etc.; and structural deficiencies lead to problems and poor performance, but can be remedied through systematic analysis and restructuring.

Structurally strong organizations are efficient, consistent, uniform, and predictable. Workers know what is expected of them and how those expectations are to be achieved. Uncertainty is minimized through clearly articulated goals and job specialization. The hierarchical structure provides both coordination and integration of efforts across departments. The hierarchical structure also facilitates collaboration among divisions. Lines of communication are clearly established and foster cohesiveness. When effectively implemented, structural organizations are able to meet organizational goals in a way that is both efficient and cost-effective (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Although specialization may enhance productivity, it can also lead to boredom and lack of motivation among workers. Specialization may also lead to territoriality and an unwillingness to collaborate and share knowledge. There is little room for creativity or innovation. Rigid hierarchies may foster excessive interdependence through too-tight controls, and authoritarian managers may be tempted to abuse their authority. If workers feel restricted or controlled, morale will suffer (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Structural components of organizations have the ability to help or hinder aspiring female leaders. For example, colleges and universities are traditionally hierarchical and this hierarchy is often an established part of organizational culture. Yet, Helgesen (1995) argues that rigid hierarchies are primarily male-driven, while female leaders tend to locate themselves centrally within their departments or organizations rather than at the top. A female leader who utilizes a circular structural form, or web of inclusion, rather than a traditional vertical structural form may meet resistance or have her leadership abilities questioned merely for diverging from the expected structural norm (Helgesen, 1995). Additionally, these rigid vertical hierarchies may favor women who follow a traditional trajectory through the ranks of academic affairs, but may disadvantage women who follow less traditional trajectories in student affairs or business affairs (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002).

Human resource frame. The four assumptions of the human resource frame reflect the belief that “people’s skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment are vital resources that can make or break an enterprise” (Bolman & Deal, p. 122). First, the human resource frame is predicated on the notion that organizations exist to serve human needs, and, conversely, that humans do not exist to serve the needs of the organization. Although all humans are different, some needs are common to most, if not all, individuals. For example, needs such as safety, acceptance, belonging, and esteem are commonly accepted as being collective (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Second, the need between people and organizations is reciprocal. Each needs the other. Third, when an individual and an organization are not well matched, one or both suffer. Organizations have the capacity to exploit individuals, just as individuals have the ability to take

advantage of organizations. However, in either of these circumstances, one or both will languish. Lastly, in contrast, a good fit between an organization and an individual benefits both sides. Organizations reap the benefits of the individual's talent and skills, while the individual receive opportunities for meaningful and rewarding work experiences (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

In contrast to the structural frame, the personal nature of the human resource frame is its most striking feature. In this frame, workers are treated with respect. Their input is valued. Workers and management are partners in an organizational *family*, striving to help each individual meet his/her goal, and, in doing so, improve the performance of the organization (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Every worker is viewed as uniquely motivated, and managers strive to find ways to bring out the best from each subordinate. In short, the human resource frame seeks to address the fundamental human needs of workers, and, in doing so, creates a synergistic environment where both sides achieve more than either side can achieve by working contentiously (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

Despite the obvious appeal of the human resource framework, this approach is not without its limitations. The human resource frame requires managers to personalize job assignments based on each worker's individual level of competence, motivation, and ability to follow tasks through to completion. Managers must be uniquely proficient at both job-related tasks and interpersonal communication, and the organization must be willing to provide them with the time and resources necessary to accomplish this high level of personalization (Hersey & Blanchard, 2007). Moreover, today's workplaces are

often highly diverse and rapidly changing, which can make this level of individualization impractical.

The human resource aspects of an organization have the potential to either foster or derail an aspiring female leader's career advancement. Although this frame offers advantages for females who effectively utilize a people-oriented style of leadership, it may impede those who do not conform to gendered leadership expectations (Klenke, 1996). In organizations that are highly attuned to human resource needs, women who nurture strong relationships and open communication while meeting organizational goals are likely to be seen as both effective and authentic. However, in organizations that promote a stereotypically masculine style of leadership, female leaders may find their advancement stifled by conflicting expectations. This creates a 'double bind' for female leaders (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Female leaders whose leadership behaviors differ from their expected gender role are often evaluated more harshly and perceived as 'inauthentic' (Eagly & Karau, 2002), yet the rigid hierarchy of higher education may encourage stereotypically masculine styles of leadership.

Political frame. The five assumptions of the political frame reflect the belief that organizations are "roiling arenas hosting ongoing contests of individual and group interests" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 194). First, organizations are composed of multiple factions of individuals and groups with varying interests. Second, the various members of these groups have persistent and enduring differences in their "values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 194). Third, the most important decisions involve the apportionment of limited resources among these groups within the organization. Fourth, the combination of limited resources and

differing values/interests creates ongoing conflict and makes power an important asset (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Lastly, decisions are made as a result of bargaining and negotiation among these competing groups and advocating for their own interests (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The strengths of the political frame are that it is both realistic and practical. It recognizes that individuals often have mixed motives when accomplishing tasks, and attempts to manage the inevitable conflict that occurs between factions. The political frame adds a layer of complexity to the structural frame's simplified view of workers and the human resource frame's naïveté. Another strength of the political frame is its emphasis on the need for ethical decision-making by leaders (Bogue, 2010). In organizations driven by multiple self-interests, leaders establish their trustworthiness by providing fair and equitable direction that balances the goals of the organization with the needs of the workers. A politically savvy leader can also create alliances to build support for institutional initiatives and generate momentum to propel the organization forward (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Notably, these strengths can become weaknesses when not managed properly.

The political frame takes a somewhat cynical view of human nature, assuming that workers are motivated by selfish interests. In this regard, the political frame bears some resemblance to early structural theories. In the hands of a weak or ineffective leader, political organizations can breed mistrust among workers, and, like the structural frame, become impersonal over time (Bogue, 2010). In order to function effectively, leaders must understand the nature of conflict and be able to manage it effectively. They must also be able to utilize the political climate and establish coalitions to accomplish

their goals. A leader who lacks political savvy, regardless of his/her level of expertise and interpersonal skills, is destined to fail in this environment (Bogue, 2010).

For women, the political aspects of an organization can prove particularly problematic, especially the utilization of power. According to Keller (1999), high-level leadership positions are viewed as powerful, but the idea of a powerful woman makes both men and women uncomfortable by challenging conventional gender norms. Female leaders function within tight behavioral constraints in which they must exert enough power to be viewed as competent and effective but restrained enough to avoid compromising social expectations of femininity (Chin & Trimble, 2015). As a result, the political elements of organizations can be especially difficult for female leaders to navigate.

Symbolic frame. The five assumptions of the symbolic frame reflect the beliefs that organizations are constantly changing and that symbols within an organization reflect its culture (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 254). Recognizing and understanding the symbols within an organization allow a leader to grasp the organization's priorities and values. First, "what's most important is not what happens but what that means" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 253). Second, the meanings people assign to different events vary based on individual perceptions and life experiences. Third, people create symbols and assign meaning as a way to diminish uncertainty and find direction. Fourth, production is often less important than the expression of events and processes, because events and processes cumulatively create an organization's myths, rituals, stories, and ceremonies (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Lastly, an organization's symbolic culture holds an organization together, unites its employees, and facilitates its ability to accomplish goals.

The symbolic frame promotes sensitivity to an organization's history and culture. This sensitivity appeals to employees and provides insight into "fundamental issues of meaning and belief" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 339). The various elements of the symbolic frame (myths, stories, rituals, etc.) can be utilized to foster cohesion and solidarity among employees, as well as create a shared set of values and a shared mission. Effective symbolic leaders can help individuals find meaning in their work and motivate them to achieve shared goals. The symbolic frame is personal and it highlights the value of creating a shared set of organizational beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Despite its power to unite workers, the symbolic frame is often elusive and its ability to effect change is dependent upon the skill of those in management. The concepts are often perceived as vague and abstract, or simply impractical in many workplace environments. Further, as is often the case with a variety of snake-oil salesmen, the use of symbols and stories creates an atmosphere rife with opportunities for workers to be manipulated by charlatans (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Organizational symbols and culture can present daunting challenges for aspiring female leaders. Those who have traditionally been marginalized are often seen as outsiders who threaten the status quo (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Rituals and rites of passage function to reinforce the existing culture and workers are often slow to accept cultural shifts (Bolman & Deal, 2008). As a result, any newcomer who is viewed as an agent of change may be viewed with suspicion, while newcomers who have historically been excluded from positions of power pose an additional risk to the existing power structure. They threaten not only the values and beliefs of the organization, but also the

existing players in the organizational dramaturgy and their ability to influence others (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Four-Frames as a Research Paradigm

The four-frame model is useful as a research paradigm when assessing the strengths and weaknesses of organizations. Both strengths and weaknesses can be categorized as structural, human resource, political, or symbolic. This model allows the researcher to categorize which aspects of organizational life are hindering workers and which are supporting workers' productivity and professional growth. The model is particularly useful for researchers exploring the experiences of female leaders. Bolman and Deal (2003) argued that female leaders tend to rely on the human resource frame more than the other three frames. They reference Helgesen's Web of Inclusion to support their claim. Helgesen stated, "Women put themselves at the center of their organizations rather than at the top... they labor constantly to include people in their decision-making" (Helgesen as cited in Bolman and Deal, 2003, p. 81). Rather than a measure of individual leadership style, this study used Bolman and Deal as a framework to understand female leaders' perceptions of organizational barriers and sources of support within the context of higher education as they navigated the career pipeline and ascended to the office of community college president.

Do Male and Female Leaders Differ?

Because career experiences are affected by on-the-job behaviors, researchers exploring the career trajectories and experiences of female leaders should consider whether male and female leadership styles differ significantly. In doing so, the researcher gains relevant background knowledge that fosters the qualitative processes of

inquiry and meaning-making when interpreting participant data, drawing conclusions, and creating a composite description of the phenomenon. The question of innate differences in the leadership styles and abilities of males and females has served as the basis for extensive research. Conventional wisdom holds that males are the leader sex, and people often correlate effective leadership with stereotypically male traits (Schein, 1973). After analyzing over 200 definitions of leadership developed in the 20th century, Rost (1991) concluded that current leadership definitions are overwhelmingly androcentric. This correlation between stereotypically male traits and effective leadership is so prevalent that a 1973 sex-typing study by Schein led to the coining of the phrase *think manager, think male*. This dominant view, however, is unsupported by much of the empirical evidence. Research in the 1990s began to provide evidence contradicting the widely held belief that males and females differ significantly in their leadership styles and behaviors. Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that, although there are identifiable differences between male and female leadership styles, there are far more similarities. Moreover, the two are equally effective. Kaufman and Grace (2011) found that differences between male and female leaders are not consistent enough to draw conclusions about an individual's probable leadership style based solely upon gender.

Despite the many similarities between male and female leadership styles, some studies support the notion that male and female leaders differ, at least minimally. A meta-analysis of 45 different studies found small but statistically significant differences in the leadership styles of men and women (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). This meta-analysis suggests women tend to be slightly more democratic and inclusive leaders, both of which are associated with a transformational leadership style,

while male leaders tend to be slightly more transactional or autocratic. These findings suggest that differences between male and female leadership styles are either negligible or they slightly favor female leaders for their alignment with current conceptions of leadership (Billing & Alveson, 2000). Still, women remain vastly underrepresented in leadership positions.

Perceptions of Gender Differences in Leadership

While leadership style and ability both impact an individual's professional growth, *societal perceptions* of leadership ability also influence career advancement. Although there is little evidence supporting the notions that men are innately more qualified for leadership positions, men are more effective leaders, or the leadership styles of men and women differ significantly, Eagly and Karau (2002) report that male leaders are still preferred over female leaders by both male and female subordinates. Additionally, Kolb (1997) found that similar or identical behaviors are frequently evaluated more positively when exhibited by male leaders versus female leaders, and perceptions of idealized leadership characteristics align with traits that are stereotypically characterized as masculine. As a result, males may be *presumed* to be more effective leaders. At the same time, female leaders who exhibit behaviors incongruous with expected gender roles are evaluated more harshly (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This places aspiring female leaders in a difficult conundrum. By adhering to the cognitive framework that aligns with collectively gendered perceptions, women are likely to be perceived as lacking the traits and characteristics necessary for effective leadership. Conversely, by rejecting this framework, women risk being criticized by both superiors and subordinates for failing to conform to socially constructed gender roles (Klenke,

1996). Catalyst (2015, p. 42) described this experience as a “damned if you do, doomed if you don’t” dilemma that serves to inhibit women’s leadership opportunities in the workplace.

The influence of gender on individual leadership ability, then, is best described as complex. Although researchers conclude that “gender has little or no relationship to leadership style or effectiveness” (Kaufman & Grace, 2011, p. 8), gender is nonetheless tremendously influential on individual career experiences because it shapes expectations and perceptions, as well as role constraints, for those who aspire to leadership roles. It also influences the many bases by which performance effectiveness is evaluated. Leaders, then, simultaneously occupy dual roles, gender and leader. For women, the incongruence between the expectations for these two roles creates role conflict (Eagly, 1987). Female leaders are assumed to be more communal, possessing stereotypically feminine traits such as being nurturing, supportive, and kind. Male leaders are assumed to be more agentic, possessing stereotypically male traits such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and authoritativeness (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Despite transformational leadership trends which favor communal approaches, agentic traits are still highly correlated with perceptions of effective leadership. These traits also underscore many organizational evaluations of performance effectiveness. For female leaders, this creates a double bind (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Females preferring a communal leadership style are criticized for not being agentic enough, while agentic female leaders are criticized for not being communal. As a result, although gender itself has little or no influence on leadership, *societal perceptions* of gender are highly influential and shape the nature of our experiences.

Gender in Dominant Leadership Theories

A review of dominant leadership theories demonstrates the extent to which gender has been excluded from the dialectic. Calas and Smircich (1996) highlight the need for the “ongoing deconstruction” (p. 221) of both the theory and practices associated with leadership and gender in order for the female experience to be fully understood. Modern leadership theories are rooted in perspectives that evolved over the course of the last 125 years (Hopkins & O’Neil, 2015). During this time, several genres of leadership theory emerged. However, the issue of gender was customarily excluded. Characteristics identified as feminine were either overlooked or devalued. Although some theories depict opposing behaviors as a spectrum, as in ‘assertive to passive,’ societal perceptions of these traits are distinctly binary, with opposing sides associated with males or females. This binary view creates a form of second-generation bias which functions to exclude female voices and experiences from the discourse, practice, and epistemology of leadership.

Critical analysis of theories that disregard or minimize the significance of gender often reveal the dominance of masculine assumptions in organizational culture and practices (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). These assumptions shape the language, culture, and identity of organizations, as well as perceptions of effective leadership and management (Collinson & Hearn, 1996). As a result, such theories impact the experiences of leaders and aspiring leaders through their exclusion of gender just as profoundly as contemporary theories impact leaders and aspiring leaders through their inclusion of gender. Consequently, the evolution of the role of gender in leadership

theories is essential to understanding the context in which today's female leaders aspire to lead.

Trait-Based Theories

Early trait-based theories of leadership such as the Great Man Theory were formed by examining the traits and characteristics of those who held leadership positions. The underlying assumption of trait theories was that great leaders possessed a special or unique combination of traits that allowed them to rise to prominent leadership positions (Northouse, 2018). The earliest of these theories were based on anecdotal evidence and unscientific studies. Small study numbers were extrapolated to theories and applied to broader populations, which led to a "biased and incomplete portrayal of leadership and leader effectiveness" (Chin, 2011, p. 6) because individuals in leadership positions were overwhelmingly white males. Trait theories failed to address the impact of gender on an individual's opportunity to ascend to leadership positions, as well as the social and cultural constraints that determined appropriate roles for men and women. By failing to address both race and gender, trait theories deny social privilege through their implication that "anyone in a leadership must deserve to be there by virtue of a special capability" (Chemers, 1997, p. 19). Additionally, the androcentric portrayal of effective leadership in these theories perpetuated societal beliefs that women were unsuited for leadership roles and restricted female access to leadership positions.

Behavioral Theories

The popularity of trait theories waned in the mid-19th century as behavioral theories of leadership gained prominence. As interest in leadership behaviors increased, researchers identified two general categories of leader behaviors, task-oriented behaviors

and relationship-oriented behaviors. Task-oriented behaviors emphasize productivity and facilitate goal achievement. Relationship-oriented behaviors emphasize open communication, interpersonal rapport, and mutual trust (Chemers, 1997). Neither task-oriented behaviors nor relationship-oriented behaviors are identified as gender-specific. However, in gender-normative terms, relationship-oriented behaviors are closely associated with feminine gender roles while task-oriented behaviors are associated with masculine gender roles (Cann & Siegfried, 1990). These and other gender-related stereotypes shape societal expectations for male and female behavior, on and off the job (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Both males and females describe effective leadership in predominantly masculine terms, yet gender norms create opposing behavioral expectations for females, thereby reinforcing the double bind described by Carli and Eagly (2011). This tendency to frame conceptions of effective leadership in stereotypically masculine terms leads to the devaluing of female leaders because they may be perceived as inadequate from the outset (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Further, female leaders who attempt to alter negative perceptions by adopting masculine behaviors may then be evaluated more negatively because they violated their accepted gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Females in leadership roles find themselves facing contradictory expectations in order to be deemed both authentic as an individual and effective as a leader.

Contingency-Based Theories

Although contingency theories did not acknowledge the gendered nature of leadership, they opened the door for different leadership styles. They were revolutionary in suggesting there was no one best way to lead (Chemers, 1997). As early as 1948,

Stogdill suggested that any leadership theory would be incomplete without addressing the interaction between a leader and the situational aspects of the task and environment (Chemers, 1997). In the mid-1960s, Fiedler proposed that group leadership effectiveness is contingent upon a combination of factors, including leader-member relations, clarity and structure in assigned tasks, and amount of authority assigned to the leader (Fiedler, 1964). Hersey and Blanchard (1969) elaborated on this idea when they determined that different situations called for different styles of leadership. In 1971, House added another element to this mix. In his Path-Goal Theory, House (1971) theorized that subordinates are more likely to support and approve of leader behavior if the behavior is perceived as supportive of subordinates' immediate or future goal achievement.

Still, contingency and situational theories ignore the impact of gender on the experiences of both leaders and subordinates (Northouse, 2018). In 2002, Vecchio and Boatwright demonstrated the influence of subordinate characteristics, including gender, on preferred leadership style. Specifically, gender significantly accounts for worker preferences for worker-centered leadership behaviors, but such findings have not been incorporated into contingency models. This omission is especially problematic for prescriptive models such as House's Path-Goal Theory. Prescriptive models tell leaders which leadership style to use in a given situation. However, without parsing data by gender, research tends to skew in favor of male traits and preferences (Chin, 2011) and may subsequently affect leader-member relations and subordinate support for female leaders.

Transactional versus Transformational Leadership

In 1978, Burns identified two seminal leadership paradigms, transactional leadership and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership focuses on the exchange that takes place between leaders and subordinates (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Transactional leaders often use rewards and punishments to incentivize and shape follower behavior. Transactional leadership emphasizes stability and maintaining the status quo. In contrast, transformational leadership involves the process of relationship building. Leaders engage with followers and create a connection that “raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower” (Northouse, 2018, p. 167).

Transactional and transformational paradigms are often presented in opposing, binary terms that influence subordinate expectations and evaluations of leader behavior, even though these paradigms largely overlook gender (O’Connor, 2010). Transactional leadership is often described in stereotypically masculine terms, such as ‘competitive,’ ‘authoritative,’ ‘analytical,’ and ‘task-oriented,’ while transformational leadership is usually described in stereotypically feminine terms, such as ‘collaborative,’ ‘cooperative,’ ‘democratic,’ and ‘considerate’ (O’Connor, 2010). Although studies of effective leadership demonstrate the need for blending aspects of both styles, the two are often viewed as dichotomous (Van Wart, 2010). Research offers evidence to support the gender correlation between the two styles, although studies show the differences between male and female leaders are minimal. A meta-analysis of 45 studies of leadership style found when leadership styles of men and women diverge, female leaders tend to be more transformational than male leaders (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). The same study found that, among leaders whose style is predominantly transactional,

females are more likely to use contingency-based reward systems while males are more likely to use punishment. Such findings are encouraging for aspiring female leaders in their consistent reports that women exceed men on leadership domains that are positively correlated with leader effectiveness, whereas men exceed women on leadership domains that are either negatively correlated with leader effectiveness or are null (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Still, perceptions of effective leadership often center on transactional traits and this androcentric association may limit females' advancement opportunities.

Authentic Leadership

All of the aforementioned theories were developed prior to the 1970s and 1980s when the systematic study of the relationship between gender and leadership gained momentum (Hoyt, 2007). After the turn of the century, a major shift in leadership theory resulted from several major societal upheavals, including 9/11, widespread corporate corruption, and economic instability (Owusu-Bempah, Addison, & Fairweather, 2011). A demand emerged for leadership based on authenticity and trustworthiness. Over the next few years, researchers conducted a comprehensive literature review from which four central elements of authentic leadership emerged: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). Although these constructs initially appear aligned with perceptions of female leadership, theorists and researchers suggest achieving authentic leadership is more challenging for females than for males (Hopkins & O'Neil, 2015).

The theoretical framework of authentic leadership fails to consider the gendered contexts in which women work (Hopkins & O'Neil, 2015). From any relational

perspective, gendered differences in leadership behaviors are less relevant than *perceptions* of gendered differences in leadership behaviors because perceptions influence measures of authenticity. For example, a male CEO who is assertive and decisive may be perceived as authentic, while a female CEO who is assertive and decisive may be perceived as inauthentic (Liu, Cutcher, & Grant, 2015). Again, the idea of the double bind disadvantages females. Women who align their leadership styles with stereotypically female traits may be perceived as authentic but not effective, while women who align their leadership styles with stereotypically male traits risk being perceived as effective but inauthentic (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Eagly (2005) suggests that achieving authenticity requires consent on behalf of both leaders and followers. Followers must assign legitimacy to a leader and commit to following his or her promoted set of ideals, yet acquiring this assigned legitimacy can be formidable for female leaders struggling with the consequences of role incongruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Female leaders are expected to achieve authenticity and prove their efficacy within the confines of a narrow range of acceptable behaviors (Eagly, Makhijani, & Konsky 1992). Thus the performance expectations for female leaders are the same as those for male leaders, but females are expected to achieve these outcomes within more rigid constraints (Chin & Trimble, 2015).

Integrative Theories: Servant and Synergistic Leadership

Two recent trends in leadership theory are decidedly integrative. Rather than promoting a paradigm shift from masculine to feminine, integrative models frame an androgynous style of leadership utilizing a mixture of stereotypically masculine and feminine traits. The objective of integrative models is not to reject the masculine in favor

of the feminine; rather, the goal is to acknowledge and incorporate the essential roles of both (Reynolds, 2011). One such integrative model is servant leadership. Although frequently described as a genderless model of leadership, servant leadership integrates both task and relationship behaviors and can therefore be seen as integrative, at least in terms of its social constructs (Reynolds, 2011). Servant leaders exhibit highly moral leadership and decision-making while valuing followers' personal development over self-interests (Northouse, 2018). Spears (2002) conceptualized servant leadership as comprised of ten fundamental characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to follower growth, and building community. Of these ten, foresight, conceptualization, awareness, and persuasion would stereotypically be associated with masculinity and agentic leadership (Reynolds, 2011). The remaining characteristics are relationship-centered, communal, and stereotypically associated with feminine behavior. Although servant leadership has been criticized for its ambiguity (Northouse, 2018; Parris & Peachey, 2013) and for highlighting gender binaries through the semiotic use of paradox (Eicher-Catt, 2005), the model has also been praised for its integration of stereotypical masculine and feminine traits, as well as its emphasis on altruism, which "sets it apart from other models" and "allows leaders to step out of gender role norms and provide the most appropriate leadership for followers" (Barbuto & Gifford, 2010, p. 16).

Although intended primarily for use in educational environments, a second popular integrative theory emerged at the start of the 21st century. This theory, Synergistic Leadership Theory, differed from others in its purposeful attempt to incorporate the female voice (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). The impetus for

the theory was an examination of 24 popular leadership theories. These theories were examined for inclusion of the female experience, generalizability to both genders, and representation of both genders in the original design sample (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). This analysis showed that women were not included in the development of leadership theories, their experiences were not incorporated, and much of the theoretical language was sexist, such as the predominant use of masculine pronouns for leaders (Irby, Brown, Duffy, & Trautman, 2002). As a result, the Synergistic Leadership Theory was developed as the first leadership theory to purposefully incorporate the female voice and the experiences of both male and female leaders (Irby, Brown, & Duffy, 1999). The theory aligns with post-modernism in its emphasis on social justice, gender inclusivity, and cultural relevance. Although still in its infancy, Synergistic Leadership Theory contributes to the overall body of leadership research in its macro-perspective framework and its recognition of the impact of multiple realities on leader effectiveness and advancement (Brown & Irby, 2003).

Impact of Leadership Theories

Leadership theories attempt to define and explain effective leadership practices, but have historically done so when few women held leadership positions.

Overwhelmingly, leadership has been practiced and studied by males, and leadership theories were generated by males. As a result, most theoretical paradigms reflect only the masculine experience and are largely androcentric, yielding theories that reflect a masculine dominance. These theories were used to define effective leadership for over 150 years. Rost (1991) critiqued mainstream leadership literature for its continuing perpetuation of masculine conceptions of leadership. These masculine conceptions

impact the experiences of female leaders because they portray female leaders as an anomaly (Chin, 2011). This omission of the female voice leads to contradictory portrayals that create unique obstacles to females' leadership opportunities, their leadership experiences, and the willingness of their subordinates to view them as effective leaders (Chin, 2011).

Female Representation in Various Employment Sectors

Female leaders are still viewed as an anomaly, perhaps because they are overwhelmingly underrepresented in executive positions in most employment sectors (Chin, 2011). According to Chin (2011), this inequity is less about how women lead and more about their experiences while leading. These experiences may differ by sector, depending upon the extent to which an industry or organization reflects social constructions of gender within its culture. When compared to corporate America, education has more women in leadership positions as well as more women in the leadership pipeline, but they remain disproportionately clustered at the front end. In higher education, the conflict between rigid hierarchies and collaborative initiatives often yields contradictory policies that inadvertently create opportunities for women who aspire to leadership roles (Chin & Trinble, 2015).

Business

Females comprise 50.8% of the American population, earn more than half of all college degrees (both undergraduate and graduate), and hold 51.5% of all management/professional positions in the workforce, yet they are vastly underrepresented in positions of executive power. Women constitute only 5.8% of Fortune 500 chief executive officers (Eagly, Karpowitz, & Beaman, 2016) and 11.9% of all executive

leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies (Sams, 2014). Further analysis reveals that women comprise a significant portion of the employees at the front end of the leadership pipeline, but their numbers decrease at a rate two-to-three times that of males as they advance (Global Human Capital Gender Advisory Council, 2008). This phenomenon is difficult to explain since women self-report aspirations to lead at all levels (Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1998) and have both the education and experience needed for these positions (Barsh & Yee, 2012). Powell (1999) suggests the reason is unrelated to women's abilities or qualifications. Instead, he posits the explanation is societal. "Women's presence in top management positions violates the societal norm of men's higher status and superiority to a greater extent than women's presence in lower-level management positions" (Powell, 1999, p. 334).

Public Education and District Superintendents

Like women aspiring to leadership roles in business, female administrators in education are clustered at the entry-level end of the leadership pipeline, and the numbers decline incrementally as they move forward. According to Shakeshaft (1999), women hold 65% of licensed teaching positions but only 43% of principalships. Moving further along the pipeline, women hold only 33% of assistant superintendency positions (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999) and 20% of the superintendency positions (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). Women who aspire to the position of superintendent find it a distinctly gendered experience. In the 1970s, the percentage of female school superintendents reached an all-century low of 1.3%. In the first decade of the 21st century, approximately 20% of district superintendents were women (Kowalski, et al., 2011). At first these numbers may seem to indicate substantial progress, but the

reality is incongruous when considering 76% of educators are women (National Center for Educational Statistics or NCES, U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Women's inability to move through the leadership pipeline reveals distinctly gendered employment patterns in America's public school systems, as well as occupational sex segregation that limits women's career aspirations when trying to advance in fields traditionally reserved for men (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Kelsey, Allen, Coke, and Ballard (2014) state, "Women continue to be underrepresented among the ranks of public school superintendents despite having similar incentives and disincentives as men when considering a career as superintendent, outnumbering men as educators, and comprising at least half of the students in educational leadership programs." In 1992 (Glass), the U.S. Census Bureau declared the superintendency to be "the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States."

Higher Education

In four-year-colleges, women comprise 41.9% of full-time faculty members (West & Curtis, 2006). For institutions granting doctoral degrees, that percentage falls to 34.1%. However, in two-year institutions, women hold 50.8% of full-time faculty positions (West & Curtis, 2006). Although these figures at first seem encouraging for female community college employees, women remain clustered at the lower end of the career pipeline. Additionally, Hatch reported in 2017 that, among faculty members, men continue to make up a disproportionate number of full professors, outnumbering women by more than two to one. The majority of assistant professors, instructors, and lecturers are women, but again women fare better in two-year institutions. Females make up 46.9% of all faculty members holding the rank of full professors in community colleges,

and, unlike their university counterparts, female faculty members at two-year institutions hold over half of all tenure-track positions (Hatch, 2017).

In higher education administration, women are making only modest inroads. The representation of women decreases drastically in more prestigious, higher-paying jobs within the leadership pipeline. Men still comprise 73% of college presidents (Johnson, 2016). Women have slightly higher administrative representation at community colleges, occupying approximately 36% of all presidencies (American Council on Education, 2017). Additionally, presidents of community colleges are more likely than university presidents to ascend to the presidency from leadership roles in student affairs, which are more frequently held by women (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). Still, two-thirds of community college presidents are male, and this continued underrepresentation, despite numerous legislative and institutional strategies to increase diversity, suggests there are additional barriers and impediments that hinder the progress of aspiring female leaders.

Barriers and Sources of Support

Barriers

Gordian knot. The U.S. Department of Labor's 1995 Glass Ceiling Commission report identified a convolution of social, business, and governmental barriers that impede women's professional advancement. Societal barriers include such systemic problems as gender bias, socially constructed gender roles, and gender stereotypes that rigidly define male/female traits. Governmental barriers include a lack of monitoring of compliance with affirmative action requirements and employment laws that disproportionately disadvantage women, including those related to leave time for childbirth and childcare (Glass, 1995). Business barriers include recruitment and retention strategies that fail to

target women, a climate that is hostile or alienating to females, pipeline barriers, a lack of professional mentors, a culture that values traditionally male leadership traits, little access to assignments and/or career moves that facilitate a leadership trajectory, etc. (Glass, 1995). Additionally, women's general sense of leadership identity is rarely cultivated, leaving women feeling ill-prepared or mismatched for leadership roles (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013).

Marginalization. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission's findings were corroborated by Judith Oakley (2000) who identified a cumulative effect of both corporate practices and cultural causes underlying the paucity of females in senior leadership positions. Corporately, many organizations do not prepare women for leadership roles. Men disproportionately receive the types of crucial job assignments that provide essential experiences and build leadership skills (Silva, Carter, & Beninger, 2012). Men's workplace assignments tend to have larger budgets, garner more attention, and serve a more instrumental role in supporting the organization's mission. In contrast, women are likely to receive workplace assignments that involve more risk to the organization or a greater likelihood of failure, or 'glass cliff' assignments (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

Organizational culture and climate. Even when no discriminatory intent exists, second-generation bias may hinder the development of female leaders within organizations (Ibarra et al., 2013). Unlike overt first-generation bias, second-generation bias includes subtle or hidden factors such as a scarcity of female role models and career trajectories that entrench women in gendered career paths. These restrictive practices often result in a homogeneous group of leaders generating a homologous view of

leadership and leadership traits. Because those in power shape the organizational culture, this type of second-generation bias nourishes an exclusionary atmosphere. When power is concentrated in the hands of a small homogeneous group, the result is often a ‘chilly’ institutional climate. A chilly climate is characterized by differential treatment based on gender and favors men over women (Hagedorn & Laden, 2002). Maranto and Griffin (2011) describe this climate as informally exclusionary and marginalizing. Such marginalization may include the omission of women from powerful committees or key initiatives, inequitable resource allocation for predominantly female departments, assignment to support roles or administrative functions in group tasks, etc. (Sandler & Hall, 1986). According to Sandler and Hall (1986), the chilly climate increases as women progress through the leadership pipeline. Female administrators often experience the effects of ‘solo status,’ or being the only female representative in an otherwise homogeneous groups of males, which compounds an individual’s sense of isolation and may inflame subtle forms of discrimination (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). This solo status diminishes opportunities for networking, promotions, and pipeline progression (Ballenger, 2010).

Personal identity. When males hold the majority of leadership positions and conventional wisdom holds that males are the leader sex (Schein, 1973), effective leadership is correlated with stereotypically male traits and definitions of leadership are highly gendered in favor of males (Rost, 1991). Consequently, women who lack the idealized, stereotypically male leadership traits often fail to see themselves as possessing leadership potential or suitable for leadership roles (O’Connor, 2010). According to Ibarra et al. (2013), “The resulting underrepresentation of women in top positions

reinforces entrenched beliefs, prompts and supports men's bids for leadership, and thus maintains the status quo." In this climate, women fail to integrate a persona of leadership into their personal identity (O'Connor, 2010). In order for women to begin to see themselves as leaders, they must integrate leadership into their core sense of self. This is especially difficult for women considering the dominance of the androcentric paradigm, the underrepresentation of women available as role models, and the shortage of females available to serve as mentors for women aspiring to leadership roles (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013).

Behavioral expectations and the 'double bind.' Women who are able to ascend to positions of leadership often face rigid behavioral constraints associated with normative gender roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In 2004, Brunner described the gendered nature of the concept of power, saying it creates barriers for women's ascension to leadership positions, as well as for their ability to be perceived as effective once in those positions. Within the field of education, research shows that females demonstrate more empathy, collaborate more with subordinates, and are more likely to engage parents and community members as partners (Grogan, 2005). This style of leadership is perceived as decidedly feminine and is deemed appropriate and trustworthy within the classroom, but not for organizational or system leadership. Traits that are linked socio-culturally with strong organizational and system leadership are decidedly masculine (DiCanio et al., 2016). As a result, women aspiring to leadership roles in education feel pressure to conform to androcentric models of leadership. This gendered view of leadership is reinforced in female narratives of their personal experiences. Women report being told to talk like men, act like men, avoid acting in ways that are associated with femininity,

suppress their emotions, and demonstrate their toughness (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011) in order to increase perceptions of effectiveness and inspire trust among their subordinates. As a result, women in positions of leadership are pressured into conformity, but then penalized for this conformity by being judged inauthentic and untrustworthy (Gardiner, 2013). Research shows that women who act ‘masculine’ receive little or no support, are highly criticized, and are viewed as cold and impersonal (Brunner, 2004). At the same time, if a female behaves in ways that are stereotypically viewed as ‘feminine,’ she is perceived as weak and ineffectual (Blount, 1998). This role conflict inevitably impacts female administrators’ measures of job satisfaction. In a 2015 survey of over 1,500 university administrators (Morris & Laipple), women respondents reported feeling more skilled than their male counterparts at inspiring subordinates and handling problems related to poor employee performance, but they also have higher measures of feeling overwhelmed and challenged by subordinates.

Sources of Support

Mentors and role models. Mentors and role models play an integral part in the professional development of effective leaders (Zachary, 2012). Mentors function as coaches, counselors, and protectors as they scaffold their protégés to increasingly higher levels of responsibility within the organization (Hezlett & Gibson, 2007). Aspiring leaders who have mentors receive more promotions at shorter intervals than those without mentors (Dreher & Ash, 2000). In 2000, Sullivan found that mentors facilitate the type of experiential learning necessary to develop leadership skill sets, while also shielding protégés from the inevitable missteps that occur as part of the learning process. For women, the presence of mentors and role models is particularly important. In addition to

advising and counseling, female mentors and role models catalyze the paradigm shift necessary for aspiring female leaders to integrate leadership into their self-identity. A 1998 Catalyst survey of 786 female executives and CEOs from Fortune 1000 companies found that 91% reported having a mentor as they progressed through the leadership pipeline, and 81% rated their mentoring relationship as either critical or important to their career path. While those with male mentors found they were given greater access to those in power, those with female mentors reported their mentors were better equipped to guide them through the particular barriers faced by women in male-dominated organizations. They also provided crucial emotional and social support when navigating the sometimes exclusionary world of corporate America (Catalyst, 1998).

Proactive workplace policies. Hiring and promotion policies can reinforce or combat gender inequities. For example, hires made through word-of-mouth and networking are likely to perpetuate existing gender and racial inequities in androcentric organizations. Open advertising is more likely to yield a higher percentage of female applicants (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Once employed, Oakley (2000) reports that women rarely find themselves trained and groomed for the types of positions that move them beyond the entry to the pipeline. Eyring and Stead (1998) found that companies committed to modifying corporate practices in order to promote women and combat gender bias are able to effect change more quickly than companies without such policies. Such policies, especially when combined with leader support, serve to mitigate some of the restricting effects of workplace bias.

Summary

This chapter reviewed two theoretical frameworks through which the content of this study is viewed: critical feminist theory and the four-frame model of leadership. Critical feminist theory is an appropriate and relevant framework because it emphasizes the exploration of individual perceptions of events and the ways in which individuals assign meaning to various experiences. The four-frame model is a relevant framework through which the various barriers and sources of support identified by female leaders can be categorized and contextualized. Using these two frameworks, a composite portrait of the experience of navigating one's way to the office of community college president was developed, and barriers and sources of support identified by study participants were assessed to determine which frames of leadership were particularly problematic for study participants. Additionally, the four-frame model provided insight into which of the frames bolstered the women as they navigated the career pipeline on their way to the office of community college president.

This chapter also reviewed research on actual versus perceived gender differences in leadership style and ability, as well as dominant leadership theories and their inclusion/exclusion of gender. The failure of most theories to recognize leadership as a gendered experience has served to disadvantage women who aspire to leadership roles. Only in recent years have leadership theories begun to incorporate gender as a relevant aspect of the leadership experience. Despite this new trend, most workers and employers still hold traditional, androcentric views of leadership.

Finally, this chapter reviewed the current representation of women in various employment sectors and reviewed existing research on reported barriers and sources of

support. Barriers to women's advancement come in the form of both overt discrimination and subtle second-generation bias that creates a 'chilly' work environment for women who aspire to leadership roles. However, the presence of mentors and role models, as well as proactive workplace policies to combat gender bias, have some mediating effect on these obstacles.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research shows women are making strides in higher education, but their representation in administrative positions diminishes as they advance along the career pipeline (Johnson, 2016). Women in higher education remain relegated to lower- and mid-level administrative positions, while the majority of upper level positions are held by males. Although community colleges offer women more leadership opportunities than four-year colleges or universities (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002), the office of community college president remains overwhelmingly male-dominated. Nationally, two-thirds of community colleges have a male president (American Council on Education, 2017). The diminishing representation of females as one advances through the career pipeline in higher education leads to an underrepresentation of female experiences in literature and research, particularly in the field of leadership. This underrepresentation marginalizes female voices and yields an incomplete portrait of the phenomenon of navigating one's way to the office of community college president. By exploring the journeys of female community college presidents, this study informs the scholarly discourse regarding the barriers and sources of support encountered by women who successfully navigated the career pipeline in higher education.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of female community college presidents as they navigated their individual career path to reach the office of president. Qualitative methods were appropriate for this study as the goal of qualitative research is understanding the participants' experiences and the meanings they assign to those experiences (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research also emphasizes depth of understanding rather than breadth of knowledge (Merriam, 1991). As indicated, the

marginalization of women in practice and in literature has led to a skewed understanding of the phenomenon of ascending to the position of community college president. Qualitative methods allowed the researcher to explore the experiences of participants, as well as the meanings they assign to those experiences, with the depth needed to develop a composite picture of this shared phenomenon.

Because this study sought to explore experiences relevant to aspiring female leaders, particularly those who may aspire to the office of community college president, participants for this study were female community college presidents who have held the position of president for five years or less. Semi-structured phenomenological interviews were the primary method of data collection for this study because this type of data collection allows researchers to examine the meanings participants assign to lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). Phenomenological research assumes reality is socially constructed and participants will bring individual interpretations of life events (Merriam, 2009). The goal of these interviews was to obtain thick, rich descriptions and experiential understanding (Stake, 1995). The interview responses were then parsed for recurring themes and categories. A modified Van Kaam method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994) was used to identify these commonalities and emerging themes.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology used in this phenomenological study. The major sections of this chapter include research questions, research design, research setting, sample and data sources, instruments and procedures, data collection, data analysis, and role of the researcher.

Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine and describe the career paths, barriers, and sources of support perceived by women who have navigated the career pipeline and ascended to the office of community college president. Their stories contribute to the existing body of knowledge about female leadership in community colleges and offer insight to other women who may aspire to the position of community college president.

Four primary research questions guide this exploratory study:

1. How do female community college presidents describe their educational background?
2. How do female community college presidents describe their career pathway from initial employment to presidential appointment?
3. What barriers, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive as they navigate the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?
4. What resources and sources of support, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive while navigating the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?

Research Design

In this study, qualitative methods were selected because of the nature of the study's focus. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the lived experiences of study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative methods are particularly useful when researchers seek to understand the meaning participants assign to various experiences (Creswell, 2009). At its heart, qualitative research "is a broad approach to the study of

social phenomena” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 2). Creswell (2009) identified several characteristics of qualitative research that are relevant to the issues being explored in this study. In qualitative research, data is collected in the field and/or by talking directly to study participants. This person-to-person interaction is a primary characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). The researcher serves as a key instrument in the study through this process of data collection. Researchers may use an interview protocol, but the instrument is usually self-developed rather than a standardized instrument developed by other researchers (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is often an inductive process in which the researcher organizes the data and allows themes to emerge (Creswell, 2009). As themes emerge or the study evolves, the design may change. Qualitative researchers frequently conduct their study through the lens of a particular set of assumptions, or a theoretical framework. These assumptions provide a social or political context around which the study is organized (Creswell, 2009). This study aligns with Creswell’s characteristics of qualitative research through its use of semi-structured interviews, a researcher developed interview protocol, inductive data analysis, and a critical feminist framework. Qualitative methods allowed the researcher to explore the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of each participant’s experiences (Merriam, 1991), along with the meaning she assigned to those experiences, to elicit rich descriptions that contribute to the existing body of knowledge and offer applicable insights for other aspiring female leaders in higher education.

Phenomenology

Of the various qualitative methods, phenomenology is a valuable approach when exploring individual perspectives that may challenge existing structural or normative

assumptions (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Creswell (2013) claims this desire to understand human experiences is the best criteria for deciding to use phenomenological methods. Phenomenological research involves studying a small number of participants through extended periods of engagement (Creswell, 2009). Study participants are usually a relatively homogeneous group by virtue of sharing a common experience or trait that serves as the focus of the study (Glesne, 2016). Phenomenology seeks to understand how participants perceive the world through the filter of their unique perceptions and experiences (Glesne, 2016), and researchers examine similarities and differences among and between study participants. Phenomenological researchers resist any thoughts of developing generalizations. The goal of phenomenology is not to extrapolate study results to a broader population. Rather, phenomenology seeks to understand and gain insight into participants' unique experiences and the meanings they ascribe to those experiences (Yin, 2011). This does not imply that phenomenological findings are not useful to others. As the name implies, phenomenology studies the lived experiences of a specific phenomenon. The goal is to grasp the universal essence of an experience (Van Manen, 1990) by collecting data from those who have experienced the phenomenon and "develop a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals" (Creswell, 2006, p. 58). This process of developing a composite description is one of several ways in which phenomenology is a practice of interpretive inquiry (Creswell, 2009). In developing the composite, the researcher's role is to construct the phenomenon being studied based on its manifestations, structures, and components (Ponce, 2014). The composite then gives insight to others who are interested in or affected by the phenomenon being studied.

Because this study sought to explore the interpretation each participant brings to her lived experiences as a community college president, as well as the meaning she assigns to those experiences, qualitative phenomenological methods were used. Through this phenomenological study, the researcher hoped to: (a) elicit rich narrative data, (b) develop a composite description of the experience of navigating the career pipeline as a female to reach the office of community college president, and (c) offer insight to institutions hoping to develop female employees' leadership potential, as well as to females who aspire to leadership roles, particularly the position of community college president.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Phenomenological research often falls into two categories or schools of thought: transcendental phenomenological research and hermeneutic phenomenological research. Transcendental phenomenological research focuses on describing events while hermeneutic phenomenological research emphasizes the interpretation of events (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). While both approaches require researchers to assess their assumptions and biases about the phenomenon being studied, transcendental methodology asks researchers to set aside these preconceptions (Moustakas, 1994). Through the process known as epoche, researchers intentionally bracket, or suspend, their existing beliefs in order to listen openly and naively to the participants' descriptions of experiences (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Hermeneutic phenomenology, on the other hand, recognizes the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of setting aside one's existing knowledge. Instead, hermeneutic methods value intrinsic awareness and the intentional recognition of both sets of perceptions, the participants' and the researcher's (Van Manen, 1990). This hermeneutic

approach to epoche, then, differs from the transcendental approach. Instead of setting aside one's existing beliefs, the researcher's goal is to recognize and overcome any feeling or belief that "may seduce or tempt one to come to premature, wishful, or one-sided understandings of an experience that would prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through" (Van Manen, 2002). In doing so, the researcher is able to "...empathically enter and reflect on the lived world of other persons ..." (Wertz, 2005, p. 168).

Hermeneutic methods are non-foundationalist. Meaning is co-created from the interpretive interaction between the participants and the researcher (Allen, 1995). These dialogical encounters explore the intersubjective space between the researcher and the participants (Marion, 2002). As such, ongoing collaboration and verification of emerging themes is an essential part of data analysis. Such attempts to validate the researcher's conclusions help ensure accuracy and lend credibility to the study. This hermeneutic school of thought is central to the phenomenological approach of narrative inquiry, which was selected for this study because of its emphasis on the value of individual experiences and its acknowledgement of multiple ways of knowing.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative researchers study stories, narratives, or descriptions of events in an attempt to gain deep understanding of human experiences (Clandinin, 2007). Their goal is to collect and deconstruct narrative descriptions to paint a picture of participants' lived realities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Four aspects of narrative inquiry make it unique as a research methodology and appropriate for use with this study. First, narrative inquiry denies the objective position of the researcher (Clandinin, 2007). In narrative

inquiry, the researcher and participant are in a relationship and work together to explore, interpret, and understand the meanings of experiences in a given sociocultural context. Second, narrative inquiry recognizes that numbers are inadequate when trying to capture the essence of lived experiences, and therefore uses words, rather than numbers, as data (Clandinin, 2007). In this aspect, the interpretive stance of the researcher is central to the process and the researcher recognizes the importance of acknowledging one's own assumptions. Third, narrative inquiry sees value in the particular experiences of the individual regardless of generalizability (Clandinin, 2007). Individual narratives are powerful tools for understanding complex experiences, particularly those of marginalized groups, and therefore constitute part of a gendered epistemology. Fourth, narrative inquiry turns away from objective ways of knowing and acknowledges the existence of multiple ways of knowing. Truth is considered from varying dimensions, and findings are established through authenticity, resonance, and trustworthiness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

A polyphonic approach to narrative inquiry involves the use of multiple participants whose stories are woven together to create a composite picture of the phenomenon being studied (Czarniawska, 2004). This approach yields a negotiated narrative which integrates a multiplicity of perspectives and contributes to the authenticity of a phenomenon's representation (Eaves & Walton, 2013). In phenomenology, the experiences of study participants are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the core components that comprise the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

Research Setting

Participants for this study were purposefully selected from female-led community colleges in an eastern central region of the U.S. Community colleges were chosen as the setting for this study because, as previously discussed, women in community college leadership are underrepresented in the existing body of literature, despite holding a greater number of full professorships and having greater administrative representation than women in four-year colleges and universities. Community colleges serve a significant portion of the students enrolled in higher education. In the fall of 2014, 42% of all undergraduate students were enrolled in public two-year institutions, which, for the last 30 years, has become increasingly feminized in enrollment. In 2015, 56% of undergraduate students were female (National Center for Education Statistics or NCES, 2017). For two-year public institutions, the percentage is 57% (St. Rose & Hill, 2013), and the number of females enrolled in college is expected to increase 16% by 2026 (NCES, 2017). Students at community colleges are twice as likely as those at four-year institutions to have dependents who rely on them for care (Ma & Baum, 2016). Among millennial females, 82% express a strong desire for female role models in leadership positions (Rockefeller Foundation, 2016).

Research Sample and Data Sources

Because the focus of this study was the lived experiences of female community college presidents, only women who currently hold this position were recruited to participate. Participant selection was based on purposeful sampling, which, according to Creswell (2013), can be appropriately utilized when researchers wish to select participants specifically for their ability to inform an understanding of a specific

phenomenon of interest. Additionally, the study sought specifically to explore *recent* experiences that are more likely to be relevant to today's aspiring female leaders, so only participants who have held the office of president for five years or less were selected for participation. Participants were identified by researching community college institutions' websites for public data available on the current president. Chain-referral sampling was initially utilized but later rejected as a means of identifying additional participants. Chain-referral sampling involves first identifying study participants who possess the requisite characteristics. After these participants are interviewed, they are utilized for referrals to others who may also qualify to participate in the study (Bailey, 1994). This recruitment strategy was eventually rejected due to the small number of study participants and the desire to protect the confidentiality of participants and their responses. In addition to participant interviews, multiple data sources, including correspondence, memos, and documents were utilized.

Instruments and Procedures

Of the various phenomenological methods, the phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection for researchers seeking to examine the meanings assigned to lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). This approach is especially appropriate when examining past events which cannot be directly observed. The phenomenological interview assumes reality is socially constructed and participants will bring individual interpretations to life events. Therefore, Creswell (2013) suggests that research groups consist of three to fifteen participants with the ability to richly articulate their experiences. Phenomenological interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. A semi-structured interview allows researchers to delve in the phenomenon

of interest while remaining as non-directive as possible. As such, they are able to focus the interview without steering its direction. Semi-structured interviews also allow researchers the leeway needed to follow-up on essential elements of the conversation (Flick, 2002). In semi-structured interviews, researchers encourage participants to give a full description of their experiences. They elicit more than objective facts by asking participants to describe the thoughts, feelings, images, and sensations that accompanied the experience (Bevan, 2014). Because this study sought to explore the lived experiences of current female community college presidents, semi-structured interviews were utilized as the primary method of data collection. In order to gather and validate data for this study, a minimum of two interviews were conducted with each participant.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were selected based upon their appropriateness for the study according to the criteria established in the study design. Website reviews were conducted to identify female community college presidents who were appointed to their position no more than five years earlier. An initial round of ten emails was sent from which three participants were recruited. A second round of solicitations was emailed, and an additional three participants were recruited. One of these participants later withdrew from the study due to scheduling conflicts. Participants were recruited via an email (see Appendix A) sent to their institutional email address. The email explained the purpose of the study and requested their participation. The email included an explanation of how the results of the study would be used. The email also had an attached consent form for participants to complete electronically if they wished to participate. Performing ethical research requires obtaining each participant's informed consent (Rossman & Rallis,

2012). The practice of obtaining informed consent is based on four ethical principles: 1) participants are knowledgeable about the purpose of the research, 2) participants understand what their participation will involve, 3) participants willingly give their consent to participate, and 4) participants understand they may withdraw from the research at any time without repercussion.

The recruitment email explained how the confidentiality of participants would be protected throughout the course of the study and in the reporting of the data. An RSVP was requested within two weeks of the date of the initial email. After two weeks, any recipients who did not reply received a second email requesting their participation. If recipients did not reply after an additional two weeks, the recipient was considered uninterested in participating.

Confidentiality

The number of participants in this study was small. Therefore, maintaining confidentiality was of the utmost importance. Names, institutions, and other identifying pieces of information were removed from all written records and study documents, which were then kept securely locked in a file cabinet in the primary researcher's office. The only person who has access to the file cabinet is the primary researcher. Additionally, the primary researcher's office remains locked at all times unless the primary researcher is present. Transcripts of initial interviews were only emailed from the primary researcher's secure server to the participant's email account with the participant's permission. Participants' names and identifying information were not used in any published results. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym which was used in all written records, including the final research report. Documents and written study records will be

maintained in their current secure location for six years after completion of the study. Audio and video files are stored on a password-protected computer that is only accessible by the primary researcher. After six years, written records will be destroyed by shredding. Electronic audio and video records will be permanently deleted. Because no other regulatory agencies will be involved in this study, record retrieval and destruction from individuals other than the principal researcher is not relevant.

Data Collection

Data were collected for each participant from multiple sources. Interviews served as the primary data source and each participant was interviewed twice. All interviews occurred face-to-face via GoToMeeting. Both audio and video recordings were made of interviews. Additional sources such as memos and documents were used to enhance, expand, or clarify data gathered from the interviews. Public and private documents, including those produced directly by participants, were utilized to supplement the information obtained from interviews (Murray, 2009, p. 118). These types of documents, whether public or private, if produced before the study, can reduce problems associated with reflexivity because they were not produced as a result of researcher inquiry and were not influenced by the inquiry process (Yin, 2011). Documents for this study consisted primarily of those which were publicly available.

Interviews

The primary sources of data were two semi-structured interviews with each of the participants. These interviews were conducted via GoToMeeting to allow visual as well as auditory interaction. All interviews were video- and audio-taped and transcribed. During the interviews, the researcher looked and listened, recording both verbal and

nonverbal feedback as important sources of data (Glesne, 2016). When seeking to explore an individual's experiences and the meaning he/she assigns to those experiences, Riessman (1987) suggests interviewers should avoid interrupting during the interview and allow the participant's voice to guide the interview. However, in order to do justice to the complexity of this study's subject matter, responsive interviewing and probing was required. In responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), the interview is self-revelatory with flexible questions and open conversation between the interviewer and the participant. The conversational nature of responsive interviewing lends itself well to hermeneutics by allowing the researcher to explore participants' interpretation of events. According to Glesne (2016), the next question in an interview protocol should only get its turn "when you have stopped learning from the previous one and its spinoffs" (p. 114). Probing techniques such as silence, encouraging sounds, or single probative words, as well as direct probative phrases and questions, were used to request explanation, clarification, and additional description from study participants (Glesne, 2016). In this way, the interview remained participant-driven while eliciting the thick, rich descriptions needed for phenomenological research.

Participants were asked to commit to two interviews, an initial 60-90-minute interview and a second 30-60 minute interview. Before this interview took place, the researcher explored public websites and asked for a resume' or curriculum vitae to gather background information on the participant. The researcher attempted to outline the participant's path to the office of president, as well as her career trajectory and any significant accomplishments mentioned in the literature and/or online. An interview guide was followed with each participant, and each interview was recorded and

transcribed to accurately capture all relevant data generated during the interview. During the interview, the researcher took notes on both verbal and nonverbal feedback from the participants. To maintain consistency among interviews and enhance the study's validity, a single researcher conducted all of the interviews. A mix of open-ended and structured questions can be used in semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009). This mixture of questions allowed the researcher to be responsive to the participants' prompts while still homing in on the topic of interest. Each initial interview was fully transcribed within one week and sent to the participant for her review. A follow-up phone interview was scheduled at the participant's convenience. By providing participants with their responses electronically, participants had an opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcript prior to the second interview. The second interview provided an opportunity for both the researcher and the participant to explore the researcher's understanding of the participant's perceptions of events as part of the process of co-creating meaning. The second interview also allowed participants to question, clarify, and offer additional insight. The second interviews were then recorded, transcribed, and delivered via secure email to the participant for her review. The data gained from the second interviews was integrated for analysis with the data from the first interviews. The individual and composite textural-structural descriptions that were developed as a result of this analysis represent information from all relevant data sets.

Interview protocol. Creswell (2009) recommends the use of an interview protocol to guide the interviews. The protocol for this study (see Appendix B) followed Creswell's (2009) suggestion to include an ice-breaker question followed by four or five interview questions and potential probes for each question. Creswell (2009) also

recommends allowing room on the protocol for researchers to take notes and jot down observations. According to Yin (2011), when used correctly, the interview protocol leads to a guided conversation with each of the study participants. With the use of a written interview protocol, participants may feel they are part of a more formal inquiry, which can lead them to be more self-revealing when responding to interview questions (Yin, 2011). In using the protocol, Yin (2011) suggests researchers hold the guide during the interview and allow participants to glance at the contents and topics. In doing so, the researcher conveys a message of serious inquiry and invites participants to give serious consideration to the interview questions and engage in the conversation with reflective self-disclosure.

Creswell (2009) recommends centering interview questions around a broad central question or goal that emphasizes exploration of the phenomenon or concept being studied. He also suggests asking open-ended questions that invite participants to describe their experiences. The overarching focus of this inquiry was to develop an understanding of the gendered phenomenon of navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. This guiding focus provided direction in the development of the preliminary interview questions and probative prompts (see Appendix B).

Recording and transcription. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim within one week to ensure accuracy of the data. During the interview, written notes were taken to record any information not captured on audio or video. These notes included descriptors, questions, or thoughts that arose during the interview. Interview notes provide a record of valuable data that may otherwise be forgotten (Glesne, 2016). They also provide reference points for further exploration without interrupting or

distracting the participant during her narrative (Glesne, 2016). In addition to these interview notes, field notes were written immediately following each interview to record the researcher's reflections on the interview itself, as well as the processes, procedures, and protocol. However, these notes were structured in the form of analytic memos rather than a simple recording of events. Discussion of these memos is provided under the heading 'Documents and Memos.'

Correspondence

All electronic communications with each participant was preserved and included as a document for potential analysis. Following the initial interview, the researcher used electronic correspondence to clarify any areas of ambiguity and to collect any additional data as needed. The researcher also provided each participant with a record of her interview for review. Participants were asked to review the document and make a written record of personal thoughts and reflections about the process, as well as identify any areas in the transcription that required elaboration, correction, or further discussion.

Documents and Memos

Documents. In addition to the data generated by the interview process, documents related to each participant's career pathway were collected and analyzed. Document analysis is unobtrusive and convenient for both the researcher and the participants. It is also "...rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Documents included newspaper articles, institutional websites, social networking sites, resumes, curriculum vitae, and scholarly articles. Participants' institutional websites were also reviewed, including the presidential welcome and discussion of the goals, mission, and values being advanced at

each participant's institution. Newspapers articles included announcements of presidential hires and one-on-one interviews with participants. This information provides insight into participants prior to the study and is therefore not influenced by the researcher's inquiry (Yin, 2011). Such documents are an important research tool to corroborate findings across data sets, which helps triangulate the data, diminishes the impact of bias, and enhances the study's credibility (Bowen, 2009).

Memos. Throughout the research process, researchers engage in continuous internal dialogue about their experiences, insights, hunches, and hypotheses regarding the data as it is collected (Strauss, 1987). Memos provide a means by which qualitative researchers can record and analyze this ongoing dialogue. They also allow the researcher a vehicle for analyzing personal perspectives and bias throughout the research process (Maxwell, 2005). As such, memos are reflective tools and can range from brief marginal notes to a full analytic memo (Maxwell, 2005). These memos infuse the integrated findings that are reported in the end and, as such, are an integral part of a study's documentation (Strauss, 1987). A variety of memos were written and reflected upon throughout the course of this study as a way to analyze individual perceptions, synthesize key pieces of information, and conceptualize possible relationships among and between clusters of data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Data Analysis

Coding qualitative data is a process of understanding the data, separating it into common areas, labeling those common areas, and reviewing them for overlap and redundancy. Once these steps are complete, the last step is to categorize these common areas into recurring thematic elements. The practice essentially entails narrowing large

amounts of data into a small number of themes (Creswell, 2002). Further data analysis then allows the researcher to group participant responses into meaningful categories in order to identify emerging patterns (Patton, 2002). The researcher uses significant statements from the participants to support the validity of the identified themes. From these themes and statements, the researcher develops a description of what the participants experienced, or a textural description, and a description of how they experienced it, or a structural description (Creswell, 2007). For this study, coding and data analysis were used to understand and describe the career paths, barriers, and sources of support perceived by women who have navigated the career pipeline and ascended to the office of community college president.

Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method is a seven-step method of coding and data analysis that is designed to extract emerging themes from participant narratives. The transcribed interview of each research participant was analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method (see Table 1). First, all textual data was listed in order to develop groupings or themes. Second, the invariant themes were reduced/eliminated. Third, core themes were clustered together. Fourth, clusters of core themes were compared to the interview transcripts for patterns. Fifth, textural descriptions of the barriers and sources of support were developed for each participant. Sixth, textural descriptions were used to develop structural descriptions of the barriers and sources of support for each participant. Seventh, the textural descriptions and the structural descriptions were used to develop textural-structural descriptions. After steps one through seven are completed for each of the study participants, a composite description of the essence of the experience was constructed to represent the group as a whole. For this

study, the composite textural-structural description represents the synthesis of data obtained from ten interviews with five participants after the data were analyzed, coded, and compiled. The composite description reviews the barriers and sources of support identified by the five study participants as they navigated the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. Verbatim examples from participant interviews are used to explicate the findings and validate the results.

Table 1

Moustakas' Modified van Kaam Method of Qualitative Data Analysis

Step	Technique
Listing and preliminary grouping	List every expression relevant to the experience. (Horizonalization)
Reduction and elimination	To determine the invariant constituents. Test each expression for two requirements: Is it a necessary constituent for understanding the experience? Is it possible to abstract and label it?
Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents	Cluster the invariant constituents that are related into a thematic label. These clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.
Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application (Validation)	Check the invariant constituents and their themes against the record for each participant. Are they expressly stated? If not, are they compatible? If they are neither, they are not relevant to the experience and should be deleted.
Construct an Individual Textural Description	Use the relevant validated invariant constituents and themes, as well as verbatim examples from the transcribed interview

Table 1 (Continued)

Construct an Individual Structural Description	Use the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation
Construct an Individual Textural-Structural Description for each participant	Should describe the meanings and essences of the experience using the invariant constituents and themes

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a process of reviewing and evaluating printed and electronic information (Bowen, 2009). The researcher’s goal in document analysis is to elicit meaning and gain understanding. In phenomenology, document analysis is primarily used as a means of synthesizing data sources to find convergence and corroboration (Bowen, 2009). In this study, documents were analyzed for their ability to provide information about the context within which study participants operate. Documents were also analyzed to corroborate themes and findings, as well as to provide research data to supplement the primary source of data (the semi-structured interviews). Document analysis is an iterative process consisting of skimming, thorough reading, and interpretation (Bowen, 2009). As recommended by Bowen (2009), predefined codes from the primary research method were used to conduct a thematic analysis of documents that were reviewed. These codes were applied to the information contained in the documents in order to integrate findings from multiple sources.

Imaginative Variation

Imaginative variation is a component of step six of Moustakas’ modified Van Kaam method. The purpose of imaginative variation is to probe the meanings of experiences through the use of imagination and varying one’s frame of reference (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers engage in imaginative variation by using intuition to

examine a phenomenon from a variety of divergent perspectives, eventually uncovering the underlying factors that are the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative variation moves away from facts and toward the meaning and essence of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher conceives the experience in multiple forms, only the invariant will persist across all incarnations (Turley, Monro, & King, 2016). Through this process, researchers are able to derive structural themes from textural descriptions and arrive at a more nuanced understanding of an experience. In this study, imaginative variation was used to develop a more refined composite of the gendered experience of navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president.

Validation

Quantitative researchers often criticize qualitative research and question its legitimacy on the basis of issues related to validity (Maxwell, 2002). Unlike the positivist stance of traditional research methods, qualitative research emphasizes the credibility, or truthfulness, of study findings (Thyer, 2010). In particular, qualitative researchers are concerned with testing the truthfulness of their findings with the individuals from whom the data were drawn (Thyer, 2010). Two important threats to the validity of qualitative studies are researcher bias and the influence of the researcher on study participants (Thyer, 2010), but there are several strategies used by qualitative researchers to enhance the credibility of their work. Creswell (2009) recommends that researchers choose the appropriate strategies based on the nature of the study. For this phenomenological study, four strategies were used to establish the credibility of the findings.

Triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources or methods in the study of the same phenomenon. Specifically, within-methods data triangulation refers to using a variety of sources and analyzing them for convergent data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This approach increases the credibility of study findings and provides richer, thicker data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To validate the findings of this study, the researcher used interview data from multiple participants, document analysis, memos, and written correspondence with participants.

Member checks. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checks are a crucial technique for establishing a study's credibility. Member checks involve distributing the data and interpretations to study participants so they can confirm the truthfulness and accuracy of the data and narrative account. The goal is to determine if the portrayal is both accurate and sufficient (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Study participants received a transcribed copy of their interview prior to the second interview. The second interview allowed study participants to ask questions, clarify, make corrections, and provide additional information if they wish to do so. Member checks continued via email and telephone throughout the data analysis process to ensure accuracy of study findings.

Thick, rich descriptions. In order to create thick, rich descriptions, researchers provide as much detail as possible in the data. In doing so, the interview conversation is brought to life and the reader is transported into the study setting (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The reader is able to contextualize the data and findings, enhancing its credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To create these rich, thick descriptions, exemplar quotes were used throughout the findings and the conclusions section.

Researcher reflexivity. In qualitative research, the research contributes to the construction of meaning throughout the research process (Willig, 2013). Researchers are encouraged to explore the ways in which their own values, interests, and beliefs influence and act upon the interpretation of data and the construction of meaning (Willig, 2013). Reflexivity involves recognizing one's theoretical and disciplinary background, as well as any subconscious agendas that may influence the research process. As part of the practice of reflexivity, the researcher included a reflexivity vignette as part of the role of the researcher. Reflexivity statements were also included in notes and memos throughout the research process.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in phenomenology is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants. The experiences and perceptions of the study participants are central to understanding the phenomenon being explored. Therefore, the researcher is tasked with accessing participants' experiences and perceptions through dialogical encounters, interpreting them, and assigning meaning. Through this qualitative process of interpretive inquiry, the researcher is an instrument, and both the researcher and the participants are co-creators of knowledge.

Researcher Reflexivity Statement

I have been in higher education for 24 years and have completed three master's degrees in technology education, reading education, and criminology/sociology. I also completed an additional graduate certificate program in women's and gender studies. These certificate courses were influential in shaping my current feminist worldview. I am now a full professor and subject coordinator in the field of sociology. This uniquely

positions me as both an insider and outsider for the purposes of this study and will facilitate my ability to examine the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives, as required by imaginative variation. I am an insider by virtue of having worked my entire career as a female in higher education, but an outsider in that I have never served in the office of president. My feminist worldview leads me to use critical feminist thought as a framework for conceptualizing the findings of this study. Although my years in higher education give me an insider's awareness of the industry being studied and my feminist worldview provides a lens through which to focus my views, each of these also offers a potential source of bias. This reflexivity vignette is one way to acknowledge this potential bias and effectively manage it. I ensured that study participants were aware of my background and the theoretical framework for this study. Additionally, I engaged in reflexive practices such as journaling throughout the course of this study to make my thoughts, beliefs, and feelings visible in order to create transparency in the research process.

Summary

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data to explore the gendered phenomenon of navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. To ensure the relevance of study conclusions, participants in the study were female community college presidents who have held the office of president for five years or less. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit information about the participants' educational backgrounds, career paths, and perceptions of barriers and sources of support they encountered. Documents, memos, and electronic correspondence were used to triangulate the data. A seven-step modified

van Kaam method was used to analyze the data before creating a composite description of the phenomenon. Triangulation, member checks, rich descriptions, and researcher reflexivity were used to enhance the credibility of study findings. Throughout this process, the researcher and the participants shared power and function collaboratively as co-creators of knowledge.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the educational backgrounds and career pathways of female community college presidents, as well as their perceptions of both the barriers and supports they experienced as they navigated the career pipeline in higher education. Their stories add to the body of knowledge about female leadership in community colleges. They also offer insight to aspiring female leaders in the higher education pipeline.

Four primary research questions guide this exploratory study:

1. How do female community college presidents describe their educational background?
2. How do female community college presidents describe their career pathway from initial employment to presidential appointment?
3. What barriers, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive as they navigate the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?
4. What resources/supports, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive while navigating the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?

The first section of Chapter 4 provides participant vignettes that encapsulate the educational background and career pathway of each participant. The second section presents findings related to barriers (as experienced and perceived by the participants) that were identified as recurring themes during the data analysis process. The third section reviews sources of support (as experienced and perceived by the participants) that were identified as recurring themes during data analysis. In each section, quotations from

the participants' semi-structured interviews are used to illustrate concepts and provide examples. Following these three sections, a brief summary is provided to segue into greater discussion of these findings in Chapter 5.

A modified van Kaam method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994) was used to analyze the textual data and identify emergent themes. This process was first applied to individual participant narratives to create individual textural-structural descriptions of the experience. These individual descriptions were then integrated to create a composite description of the experience as shared by study participants. The modified van Kaam method allows researchers to identify the essence of an event and parse out common thematic elements. This method was used to identify collectively shared experiences of barriers and sources of support encountered by female community college presidents as they navigated the career pipeline in higher education. To ensure the authenticity of the study's findings, each theme is supported with direct quotes from participants. Quotes have been edited to protect the confidentiality of the participants, to correct grammatical errors, and to eliminate redundancy of words or phrases. However, care was taken to protect the integrity of the participants' words to ensure their meaning was not distorted. Quotes were also validated through member checking to substantiate their accuracy.

In section one, a brief vignette describes the educational background of each study participant. Depending on the information provided by the participant, vignettes may include a descriptions of the participant's family of origin, or FOO, and descriptive phrases indicating the FOO's values and beliefs regarding education, employment, gender roles, and/or individual achievement. Section one also includes a description of the participant's career pathway. Pathway descriptions include job titles, brief

descriptions, and relevant peripheral data. Any data with the potential to personally identify participants has been purposefully redacted and/or edited to obscure the identity of study subjects.

Section 2 presents barriers perceived by participants as they navigated the career pipeline to the office of community college president. These barriers have been classified as institutional barriers, birdcage barriers, and internal barriers. The term ‘birdcage barriers’ is introduced here as new coinage. Institutional barriers are barriers that directly relate to the participant’s employment experiences. They result from workplace policies, structural elements, or management practices that establish roadblocks for aspiring female leaders, either advertently or inadvertently. ‘Birdcage barriers’ are barriers directly related to the conflict between the participants’ personal and professional lives. These barriers allow participants to identify opportunities for professional growth and advancement but they are unable to fully access these opportunities because of situational boundaries or limits. Internal barriers reside within the participant and result from disempowering internal dialogues that diminish an individual’s sense of self-esteem and agency.

Section 3 explores the sources of support identified by participants as significant and meaningful in navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. These supports were classified as institutional supports, personal supports, and individual traits/strategies. Institutional supports are those encountered by the participant either in or through the employment environment. Personal sources of support are relationships with individuals or organizations outside the workplace that comprise the participants’ support system. These relationships form a support system for study

participants and helped moderate the effect of barriers. Individual traits/strategies are personal traits, thought patterns, and behaviors which, in hindsight, participants believe facilitated their career progression.

Participant Profiles

Anna

Anna learned her earliest employment lessons working in her family business. She worked with her father at the family business throughout her high school years, where she learned basic business principles and management concepts. She learned how to manage inventory, keep books, and process payroll. In hindsight, Anna can see how these experiences shaped her, but at the time she did not recognize their importance. She describes her high school years and early career exploration by saying,

I knew I wanted to do something non-traditional with my career. I was a feminist even in high school, right? I felt women should be able to do whatever they want. I knew I wouldn't be a nurse or a teacher or an accountant. Those were off the list. So when I discovered engineering as a junior in high school, because I took a drafting class, I wanted to learn how to design homes or something. I found out all the boys in that class were going to be engineers, and I realized no one had even talked to me about being an engineer. I went to my counselor and I said, I'm good at math. I like drafting. Wouldn't I be a good engineer? He just kind of looked at me like I had two heads.

Anna completed a bachelor's degree in engineering and worked as an engineer in industry before opening her own business. She describes being a young female engineer and opening her own business as a "seminal event" for her as a leader. As a young

female engineer and business owner, Anna says she quickly saw the need to continue her education. Not only did she want to understand the science behind her methodology, but as a young female engineer she found it was,

...very difficult to have CEOs take you seriously and believe you could do something that would be helpful to their company. That was part of the reason I went back for a Ph.D. I really wanted to be the expert. I wanted to have the Ph.D. after my name.

Anna completed both her master's degree and doctoral degree while running a successful business and teaching as an adjunct instructor for local colleges. Her unique combination of experiences prompted the university to offer her a full-time position as director of a new center for workforce research and development. This leadership position later allowed Anna to move into positions in government and public service where she played an integral role in economic development and strategic planning. As center director, Anna forged collaborative relationships between business/ industry leaders, public educators, and institutions of higher education around her state. Impressed by her leadership skills, a college board member approached Anna and suggested she apply for the institution's presidency. Despite her initial reluctance, she was persuaded to apply when she began to consider the impact she could make on the lives of people in her community. She explains her decision by saying,

I knew the importance of the institution. I knew the needs of employers and how difficult it was becoming to get those skilled workers. I understood the importance of community colleges to both the health of local economies and

bringing first generation learners into middle class careers. That's what drives me, helping solve important problems in communities.

Marie

Marie began her career in public schools as a special needs educator. In this role, she worked predominantly with students with learning disabilities, students with behavior disorders, and gifted students. During the six years she taught in public schools, she completed her master's degree in education. After only three years, Marie was named department head of the Special Education Department. Marie then began to transition into higher education. She worked as an instructor while pursuing her doctoral degree before being tapped to start a new teacher education program. At this point in her career, she did not envision moving into a full-time administrative role. She explained her thoughts at the time by saying,

I really believe in teaching. I believe in teaching children, I believe in teaching adults, and there was a point in my life when I said I would never leave teaching. Even when I was in higher ed, I said I would never leave teaching because that's where the rubber meets the road. That's where the real work happens.

As Marie began to take on more administrative responsibilities, her career trajectory moved in a traditional path for higher education administration. After developing the new teacher education program and overseeing its implementation for ten years, she was appointed Chair of Education and then, five years later, Associate Dean of Education. This eventually led to her appointment as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs followed by Dean of Academic Affairs. Marie's total time at this institution, from initial hire to Dean of Academic Affairs, was just over 20 years. She left this

institution to accept another Dean of Academic Affairs position at an institution in another state. She served in this role for three years before accepting the position of president at a third institution. Marie describes a valuable lesson she learned as she navigated her career path, “I learned by the time I became a dean to ‘never say never’ because I said I would never be a dean. You don’t know what life is going to bring you. You don’t know what opportunities will be there. So I quit saying never and now here I sit.”

Sandra

When Sandra entered college, her goal was to work in radio and television, so she majored in broadcast journalism. Shortly after graduation, she was hired by a local community college to explore the feasibility of starting a program in communications technology. While there, she elected to take advantage of the tuition waiver program offered by her institution in collaboration with other state universities. Still, she did not envision a career in higher education. Instead, she viewed her job as an opportunity to build viable work experience and pursue additional education in her field. When Sandra entered a master’s program in communications, she was asked to transition into the classroom because her college faced a shortage of communications instructors. Even though she discovered she had a talent for teaching and easily built rapport with students, Sandra still did not consider a long-term career in higher education. She explained, “I was still struggling with what I wanted to do with my life. In my mind education was not what I thought I would be doing. You know, when you apply for any job, you've got to have the degree and a minimum of two years of experience. This was my second job out of college, and I thought I was coming to get some experience.”

After teaching for six years, Sandra was appointed to Division Chair. She served in this role for five years while teaching classes. After her eleventh year in higher education, administrators at the college decided to restructure extended campus sites. In doing so, they needed someone to serve as the extended campus coordinator, so Sandra applied and was chosen as the new Associate Dean of Academic Extensions. Two years later she was tapped to serve as interim Chief Academic Officer (CAO). While in this position, Sandra recalls thinking to herself,

Okay, doors of opportunity keep opening for you in education and at this institution. If you are going any further, if another door opens, there's no other place for you to go because you're not prepared. That's when I went back to get the doctorate in order to prepare myself in the event additional opportunities were presented.

Rather than returning to the classroom when the Chief Academic Officer position was filled, Sandra was offered the position of Dean of Academic Affairs working directly under the new CAO. She served in this position for six years while completing her doctoral program. She then moved from Dean of Academic Affairs to Chief Academic Officer before being named president four years later. She describes her journey as following the “traditional route from faculty member, chair, dean, and then president.”

Jeannette

Jeannette graduated from a 5-year program that led to both a bachelor's and master's degree in business administration. Of her early goals, Jeannette says,

I wanted to be a CEO and president of a Fortune 500 company. I've always aspired to be a president. That's been since I was a little girl. I wanted to be the first female president of the

United States. I think that's just something about who I am. I always aspired to be the lead person.

After working for a large manufacturer for a few years, Jeannette's first position in higher education was adjunct business instructor for a proprietary two-year school. She moved into a full-time position shortly thereafter and was soon named Department Chair. She describes her first teaching experience as impactful because,

I did not have a clue at all what I was doing. Being in that classroom with those students changed my entire life and it shapes how I lead today. My dad was first generation, but I grew up in a house where it was, "*Where* are you going to college?" not *if* I was going. Being in the classroom with the students who are first generation, they have all these barriers and no support at home. Their level of academic preparation was not at all what I expected. It made me realize how powerful education is. It can change not just an individual, but families and communities. That was a life changing moment when I realized how important this work is.

Although she enjoyed teaching, she realized she was a better fit for the administrative aspects of the job, so after three years as Department Chair, Jeannette accepted her first full-time administrative role at an institution in her home state. She served as the director of off-campus sites for seven years when her president, knowing of her career aspirations, created a new position for her, Executive Assistant to the President. As Jeannette explains,

I had a president that not only understood but supported my desire to be a president, and at some point we started having conversations about it. I was a

director of off-campus sites. My next job was not college president. How was I supposed to get the experience I needed to be competitive? I hadn't done the traditional full-time faculty member, tenure, department chair, dean. That was not my track. My track was not academic affairs, so how do you get competitive for other roles if you haven't had that experience? That executive assistant to the president became like a master class for being a college president.

In this role, Jeannette had the opportunity to analyze budgets, develop institutional effectiveness plans, represent the college at various events, serve as interim head of resource development, and manage significant campus construction projects.

After three years as executive assistant, Jeannette accepted a position as the Dean of Extended Services at another institution. She says this experience represented an important growth opportunity for her because, "Until that point I had really only either supervised part-time people or clerical staff. So now I'm leading leaders and I needed that experience." Her performance as Dean of Extended Services led to her appointment as Associate Vice President of a new campus site which had not yet been developed. In this position, she led the "...development of a brand-new campus, a 42-million-dollar project, three buildings from the ground up." Jeannette was in this position for two years before applying and being named president at her current institution.

Ruth

Ruth graduated from college with a bachelor's degree in English. After graduation, she took a seven-year hiatus to marry and start her family. During this period, she worked part-time but her primary focus was being a wife and mother. After the birth of her second child, she went back to school to earn a master's degree in

English. She began teaching English part-time and discovered she enjoyed the work. After being hired to teach English full-time by a local community college, she became increasingly involved in a variety of activities on campus. She got engaged in campus life, chaired several committees, and returned to school to pursue her doctorate while still caring for her two children. In her fourth year, she became Department Chair for her division. Three years later, another department was added to her scope of responsibilities. Within seven years, Ruth had progressed from new hire to chair of the two largest departments on campus. Five years later, she was named Associate Vice President of General Studies, which encompassed all transfer classes, but Ruth says she never really had a long-range plan. Instead, she simply tried to excel in each new role she was given. By excelling as an individual, she believed the institution and students would also excel. She explained her thoughts at the time by saying,

I wasn't trying to climb the ladder per se. All I was trying to do was be the best I could be at the time. I wanted the college to be the most successful that it could be, and I wanted the students to be the most successful they could be. I had a very clear vision and picture of this in my mind.

After five years as Associate Vice President of General Studies, Ruth decided to apply for a position as college president in another state "...almost on a whim..." but was surprised to be named a finalist. Shortly thereafter, the president at her own institution announced his retirement. She decided to apply and was named president of the community college where she started her higher education career almost 20 years earlier.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics and Educational Backgrounds of Participants

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Age at Appointment	56	54	50	47	51
Trajectory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Engineer Private Consultant Business Owner Gov't & Public Service › President 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Public School Educator › Faculty Member (Higher Education) › Department Chair › Associate Dean of Academic Affairs › Dean of Academic Affairs › President 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Program Developer › Faculty Member › Division Chair › Associate Dean of Academic Extensions › Interim Chief Academic Officer › Dean of Academic Affairs › Chief Academic Officer › President 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Project Manager in Industry › Adjunct Instructor › Faculty Member › Department Chair › Director of Off-Campus Sites › Executive Assistant to the President › Dean of Extended Services › Associate Vice-President (new campus) › President 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Part-time Instructor › Faculty Member › Department Chair › Associate Vice-President of General Studies › President

Table 2 (Continued)

Highest Degree Earned	Ph.D. Industrial Engineering	Ph.D. Curriculum & Instruction	Ed. D. Educational Policy Studies	Ed. D. Admin. & Supervision	Ed. D. Higher Education, Community College Admin.
Years in Higher Ed. at Appointment	6	25	26	21	17.5

Barriers

To identify common barrier themes, each participant interview was transcribed verbatim and analyzed line by line. Every expression relevant to study participants' experience of encountering barriers while navigating the career pipeline in higher education was tested using two questions: (a) is this expression necessary to understand the experience, and (b) is it possible to abstract and label the expression? Each expression that was judged to be both necessary and able to be abstracted was then characterized as an invariant constituent of study participants' experiences encountering barriers while navigating the career pipeline in higher education. Related invariant constituents were clustered together in thematic categories (example, institutional barriers) and subthemes (example, supervisors as barriers). Each thematic category and subtheme, along with their invariant constituents, were validated by checking to see if they were either expressly stated or compatible. Once validated, these thematic categories and subthemes were used to construct descriptions of what the participant experienced and how she experienced it. This same process was repeated for each participant. After all of the individual textural-structural descriptions were completed, they were then synthesized and integrated to create a single composite description of

study participants' experiences with barriers while navigating the career pipeline in higher education to reach the office of community college president. This goal of this composite description was to capture the *essence* of the phenomenon. The same analytical process was used to construct a composite description of sources of support as encountered by study participants.

Study participants were asked to identify barriers they encountered as they navigated the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. Barriers could be either gender-related or non-gender-related, which in retrospect was a significant distinction because participants were hesitant to identify gender as an obstacle. Most participants referred to gender as a *factor*, but not a *barrier*, because they did not believe it hindered their career advancement in a substantive way. Anna compared today's higher education workplace to the work environments she encountered 30 years ago.

There are very few barriers. ...Males are much more sensitive. They know they shouldn't say certain things or do certain things. So then it becomes just the occasional inappropriate remark, but women mostly give them a pass on the little stuff. If it becomes much more than that, we call it out and we move on.

While Anna emphasized the changes that have occurred in the workplace, Marie speculated that perhaps she did not recognize the gendered component of obstacles she encountered. She said, "I guess I've never seen my gender as a barrier, and it may be out of out of my own ignorance. Maybe it HAS been a barrier for me and I just kept trudging on." Jeannette mirrored Anna's reflective statement, "I personally never thought I

experienced that, but maybe I was just naïve. Maybe people did have an issue with my gender.”

Despite the participants’ reluctance to identify gender as a significant barrier, they did identify gender as a pervasive element. For example, some participants cited pay inequity as a gender issue in higher education, but they were reluctant to label it a ‘barrier’ because they did not feel it hindered their ability to advance. The participants also chronicled multiple experiences in which gender was the basis for differential treatment, but they perceived these experiences as a source of frustration rather than a barrier to their advancement. However, because the participants recounted these experiences in response to questions about barriers, the events have been coded thematically and characterized as such.

Analysis and coding of participant interviews revealed three thematic categories of barriers encountered by the participants as they navigated the career pipeline in higher education. These thematic categories include institutional barriers, birdcage barriers, and internal barriers. Institutional barriers are barriers that directly relate to the participant’s employment experiences. They result from workplace policies, structural elements, or management practices that establish roadblocks for aspiring female leaders, either advertently or inadvertently. ‘Birdcage barriers’ are barriers directly related to the conflict between the participants’ personal and professional lives. These barriers allow participants to identify opportunities for professional growth and advancement, but they are unable to fully access these opportunities because of situational boundaries or limits. Internal barriers reside within the participant and result from disempowering internal dialogues that diminish an individual’s sense of self-esteem and agency.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers are barriers that directly relate to the participant's employment experiences. They result from workplace policies, structural elements, or management practices that establish roadblocks for aspiring female leaders, either advertently or inadvertently. Recurring subthemes in this thematic category include supervisors as barriers, being underestimated, gender norms/double bind, and sexism/sexual harassment.

Supervisors as barriers. Based on the participants' experiences, supervisors have the potential to be tremendous sources of support or nearly-insurmountable barriers. For the participants of this study, supervisors who functioned as barriers exhibited behaviors including being inflexible to the needs of female workers, micro-managing and limiting worker autonomy, placing workers in ethical quandaries, and failing to develop the potential of aspiring leaders.

When Marie experienced a family crisis, her supervisor's inflexibility presented a barrier to her ability to meet competing demands and maintain a positive working relationship with members of administration in an institution where she had invested two decades of employment. In her narrative, she describes the turmoil she experienced and the impact of her vice-president's rigid policy. This interaction had a lasting impact on her as an employee and caused her to question her desire to stay at the institution.

My brother, who I was very close to, was diagnosed with a very strange cancer, a very rare cancer, and I was caregiver for him. I had to go to my vice-president at that time because I was associate dean. I said, "Here's where I am and I have to take care of him." The vice-president was not supportive. She said, "Well, you

have to figure out how to do your job. I can't have you out of here.” I worked at that college for 20 years and I thought it would be the place I would retire from, but I said, you know, with this person being in that vice-presidency role, I don't like where it's going and I'm going to start looking.

Her vice-president's inflexibility altered the course of Marie's career. She felt forced to choose between her family and her work. Although her president overrode the vice-president's decision, Marie no longer felt a synergistic dynamic existed between her and the institution. Ultimately, she felt she needed to seek employment elsewhere and the institution lost its investment in a 20-year employee.

Jeannette's supervisor was unwilling to relinquish control of projects and assignments, which left her feeling quashed. She began to feel her contributions were not needed or valued, an experience which is often demoralizing to employees regardless of gender (Bolman & Deal, 2008). At one point, Jeannette began to rethink her career in higher education after seeing several supervisors, mostly female, who were unable or unwilling to delegate tasks to subordinates. She attributes this to a previous generation's struggle to break through the glass ceiling. She described the experience as stifling.

Before I decided I wanted to be a president, I worked for a supervisor who was a micromanager. It made me question whether I wanted to stay in higher ed. She absolutely sucked the life out of me, and I felt like a robot for a couple of years. That was very negative, working under the kind of leadership where you're just basically doing as you're told.

Jeannette believes she may have left the field of higher education and returned to manufacturing if the institution had not experienced a change in administration. When

the organization was restructured, Jeannette's new supervisor solicited her input in ways that sparked her creativity and motivated her to excel.

While some of the participants' supervisors established barriers through ineffective leadership practices like inflexibility and micro-managing, others hindered participants' progress by engaging in unprofessional or unethical behavior. Marie found herself at a crossroads when faced with such a dilemma. She describes being asked to engage in conduct that violated her ethical principles and broke the law, behavior that is in direct conflict with effective leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Someone I worked for asked me to do illegal and unethical things. There was one situation where I stood in front of that person and said, "No, I will not do what you're asking me to do. If you want to do it, you go do it yourself, and I will have my office cleared out tomorrow morning." There was a time in my life when I would never have said anything like that. I would have chosen to run and hide.

This person changed me personally and professionally, and I knew I had to leave. Marie acknowledges she may have been fearful of refusing an assigned task earlier in her career or felt she lacked the authority or power to say no. However, her leadership successes gave her a sense of agency and the voice to resist her supervisor's pressure. Although she chose to seek employment at another institution, she is proud she was able to leave without compromising her integrity.

In Ruth's experience, supervisors' unprofessional behavior is sometimes predicated on the notion of self-advancement. In their efforts to promote their own agendas or careers, her supervisors failed to develop the leadership potential of subordinates like Ruth, who sought opportunities for growth. Ruth believes this failure to

develop the potential of subordinates was a strategic decision intended to accentuate their own skills and abilities.

I had a couple of supervisors who were not good at mentoring. They preferred to advance themselves over helping subordinates advance. They didn't want to give anyone an opportunity to do anything they thought might outshine them. One of them tried to make sure subordinates had no contact with the president whatsoever, so the president never knew any of the good things the mid-level managers were doing. It was about keeping the spotlight on themselves. They thought the way to advance themselves was to hurt others rather than doing an excellent job themselves.

Ruth's response to these supervisors was not confrontational. She knew family obligations prevented her from relocating for advancement opportunities, so she could not afford to damage relationships with her colleagues. Instead, she looked for other opportunities to build her skills and increase her visibility on campus. In this way, she was able to slowly gain prominence without damaging professional relationships that might prove essential down the road.

Despite these negative interactions with supervisors, none of the participants indicated feeling individually targeted or attacked. They attributed their negative experiences to poor leadership, not overt sexism, in part because the offenders were both male and female. According to Ruth, "I've had terrible male supervisors and terrible female supervisors, and they were terrible in the same way. It wasn't just to me. They didn't want to give anyone an opportunity to do anything they thought might outshine them." Still, negative interactions such as the inflexibility of Marie's vice-president

disproportionately affect women because societal expectations place women in the role of care-giver. Notably, while Marie's vice-president was a female, the gender of the supervisor does not diminish the disproportionate impact of gendered policies and practices, nor does the supervisor's lack of ill-intent.

Being underestimated. For participants in this study, the low expectations held by others were not explicitly stated but were perceived as a result of nonverbal cues and a lack of verbal statements of support. The women attributed these low expectations to a variety of causes, including the peer relationship that develops when people work together for many years. Sandra believes both her colleagues and her supervisor doubted her ability to be an effective leader. She attributed some of her colleagues' doubts to being an internal candidate. Sandra explained by saying, "It's challenging when you are an internal candidate because we grew up professionally together. I think in some ways people still see me as the same Sandra who sat next to them in the faculty meetings." She believes internal candidates are disadvantaged in administrative job searches because, unlike an outside candidate, colleagues have observed the internal candidate's mistakes and are aware of any flaws or weaknesses. For example, a candidate who lacked assertiveness or was indecisive at the start of her career may feel plagued by that perception years later.

I had to work to overcome what I thought were other people's perceptions about me. There were people who were not sure I could do the job, many of them to be honest with you, so I had to work to overcome that. I remember the president commented that he made it an acting position because acting persons could not

apply for the position. That said to me, “I need you in this position right now, but I certainly would not entertain you being in this role permanently.”

Sandra was asked to serve in interim positions on more than one occasion and believes the pressure to excel in a new role without holding the full authority of the position hampered her ability to perform her best work. As a result, she later felt she needed to overcome hesitations her colleagues might have developed about her ability to function effectively as their president.

Both Sandra and Ruth now hold the office of president in the institution where they began their careers. Like Sandra, Ruth believes she was underestimated by her supervisors and colleagues, but she also believes others held low expectations because of her role as mother and primary caregiver for her children. In particular, she believes older faculty members, especially those with a traditional view of leadership and women’s roles in the workplace, were dismissive of her talents and her efforts.

As I moved up, there were some people who did not view me as a serious threat. For a while there were older, traditional people who thought I was just a mother doing this part time, not realizing how much I was putting into it. Some were surprised I could go from Associate Vice President to President. Others have been surprised over the years at how much experience I have and what I know, but that's fine. I just use that to my advantage.

Ruth describes herself as possessing leadership traits that align with feminine stereotypes, such as being calming and being able to soothe others. These traits may have reinforced her motherly image in colleagues’ minds. Ruth says, “I think I've always been very encouraging, almost mothering. ...Probably there are some gender stereotypical

characteristics in my leadership, like my patience. ...Sometimes I think, 'Well this is just like dealing with a toddler.'”

Early in their careers, Anna and Jeannette also encountered colleagues who doubted their abilities. They started their careers in industry rather than higher education. As young women in the nontraditional field of manufacturing, they felt they were not taken seriously. Anna says older males found it difficult to believe she had anything of value to offer their companies. Similarly, Jeannette recalls, “That happened to me when I first started working because I was a management coordinator and everybody was older than me.” Jeannette and Anna found ways to use the experience. The experience prompted Anna to begin her doctoral studies, while Jeannette was motivated to excel in order to prove herself. Jeannette recalls telling herself, “Learn your job. Learn what you’re doing. Show them you know what you’re doing.” For Anna and Jeannette, the social constructions of age and gender set them apart from their male colleagues in multiple ways, creating a point of intersection for multiple out-categories and making it more difficult for them to bridge demographic strata. Their experiences demonstrate the intersectional nature of traits such as gender, race, and age.

Gender norms and the ‘double bind.’ All participants described experiences reflecting the influence of gender norms on their career advancement. Their stories reflect the professional ramifications of physical appearance, gendered behavioral norms, androcentric views of leadership, and professional isolation. Marie and Sandra both discussed the impact of physical appearance on female leaders, particularly regarding perceptions of professional competence. As they describe it, image maintenance requires them to balance the competing expectations of professional image and personal

attractiveness. For Marie, this experience occurred as part of a leadership development program during a one-on-one consultation with a leadership expert.

At the time, I used to have really long hair, probably 4 or 5 inches below my shoulders. Another woman who is supposedly an expert told me, “If you want to be a president, you have to cut your hair. It's not professional to have hair on your shoulders.” So yeah, it's there. It's everywhere.

Sandra wears her hair short and dresses professionally, but finds herself subject to comments about her appearance. Sometimes these comments come when she is representing the college in a professional capacity.

I am told from time to time that I am “a beautiful lady,” and I say....”Thank you....?” They wouldn't tell the former president, a man, “Hey, you're handsome!” You know? Sometimes it's at a reception or something of that nature. It takes you aback for just a moment because you're really not expecting it. It's a compliment, yes, because who doesn't like to be told they're nice looking? But it's not something you expect in that particular situation. It's like, okay, how do I handle this? I have chosen to thank the individual and quickly move on. From my perspective, that's not the time, but it happens.

Complicating the matter, Sandra recognized the compliments on her appearance were intended to be flattering, but felt the context made them inappropriate. As a result, she was unsure of the appropriate response and suggested this conundrum is one rarely faced by male college presidents.

Rather than norms based on appearance, Anna describes internalizing gender-based behavioral norms. As a young woman just out of high school, she internalized the

message that women have to operate within a narrower range of acceptable behavior than men.

I worked in my dad's store growing up as a customer service rep. When I went to college, he said don't smoke. It looks so terrible when women smoke, and I thought isn't that sexist? Men can smoke but women can't, but you know what? There was some truth to it. I agreed with him. It did look worse. I think at that point I just accepted there will be things that if I do them and think it'll be interpreted like a man, it won't. I have to find that balance of femininity and masculinity.

Despite being told by her father not to smoke because it reflected poorly on her, Anna received contradictory advice about 'ladylike' behavior from her boss in manufacturing. She was urged to be less feminine and to exhibit masculine behaviors in order to fit into the industrial environment where few women worked.

When I was a young woman, just a new engineering graduate, I was supervising a shipping dock and my boss said, "Anna, you're going to need to learn how to cuss." I looked at him and said, "I don't think so." I said, "Just watch me." I kiddingly say I had a no cussing and no spitting rule on my shipping dock when I had mostly males who like to cuss and chew and spit.

Anna's experience demonstrates the double bind described by Carli & Eagly (2011). She was pressured to conform to behavioral expectations deemed appropriate for females, but this stereotypically feminine behavior did not align with the behavior necessary to gain the respect of her male subordinates, especially in a field where women are not traditionally employed. Still, Anna believes progress is being made. She

explains, “Our lane is narrower now than I think it will be for my daughters. But at least we have a lane. For a lot of years, there was no lane.”

In addition to constraints regarding appearance and behavior, participants felt judged on their status as mothers or as professional women without children. Ruth believes her abilities and commitment were underestimated due to her status as a mother. As a graduate student, she recognized the impact of being a wife and mother on people’s perception of her.

I had a professor in graduate school. I was his best online student, but once he met me and learned more about me, he determined I was just a southern housewife. He decided I must not be very bright and he became a different person altogether.

Jeannette shared a similar experience. She believes gender stereotypes caused supervisors to question her ability to reach goals or fully commit to projects. She describes an incident when she was the Director of Off-Campus Sites as well as a graduate student wanting to enroll in 12 credit hours over a summer semester. Her boss, the Vice-President of Academic Affairs, questioned her decision based on her role as wife and mother.

He asked me, “Well what about your kids?” I was like, “What about them? Their dad is going to take care of them.” From his perspective, he couldn't imagine how I was going to balance that. I'm sure he was thinking, “Don't you have to be home to cook dinner?”

In contrast, Marie felt that she was judged unfairly for being childless. She says her status as a woman without children affected performance expectations for her at work.

If you're a woman who doesn't have children, there are assumptions made that you're power hungry or that you chose not to have children. I actually had someone tell me one time... We were working a holiday and only needed a few offices covered. I didn't mind working it. I had already planned to work it, but another administrator said to me, "Well, you don't have kids to go home to, so you could work this day." I thought, "First of all, that was a really callous thing to say. Second, it's unbelievable you would assume I don't have something important to do." So it goes both ways, whether you have children or not.

For participants in this study, being the only female, or one of the few females, in an advanced leadership position created contradictory expectations which became more rigid as they progressed along the career pipeline and female representation diminished. Jeannette described being the lone female in many employment situations, causing her to be cast as 'Other.' She says, "I've been 'the only' in many situations, so I had to learn how to navigate very white, male-dominated environments, even in many of our service communities." The experiences of study participants included many elements that were influenced by gender and which the participants believed would not be applied to males, including expectations regarding appearance, expectations based on their status as parents, assumptions made about the conflict between work and care-giving, the effects of workplace solo status, and being underestimated from the outset. These expectations created an atmosphere in which study participants were immediately tasked with overcoming the obstacles of expectation held by supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates.

Sexism and sexual harassment. Participants in this study cited numerous examples of prejudice and stereotyping in the workplace. They became more animated and displayed more emotion when describing these events, but were reluctant to label these experiences as a ‘barrier.’ Notably, none of the women expressed surprise at their experiences. As Sandra explained,

I experienced sexism in this journey and it is disheartening. I don't want to say I'm accustomed to it, but I knew it was there and it didn't take me by surprise. I'd seen it before. You just keep moving.

According to Anna and Jeannette, differential treatment of women begins in the hiring process. In Anna’s experience, males and females are asked different types of questions in interviews, especially for positions with higher levels of responsibility.

‘So what makes you think you're qualified?’ Men never have to answer that question. That one is almost uniquely put to women. The fact that I would even have to take those questions early on just amazed me. If there's one real gender difference, I think it's that women still have to answer those kind of questions.

No one is surprised when men apply for a job. No one says to them, “Why in the heck did you apply?”

Similarly, Jeannette describes how her qualifications were discounted in the hiring process by a competing applicant. “I remember someone saying to me, ‘Well, you're a double minority. I know you'll be hired because you're black and female. They can check off two boxes.’” This experience demonstrates the interlocking systems of power created by race and gender in the workplace and their simultaneous influences.

Once on the job, study participants felt patronized or dismissed because of their gender. These experiences increased in frequency as the women advanced along the career pipeline and female representation diminished, leaving participants more isolated and making second-generation bias more difficult to combat. Marie described an encounter she had with a male subordinate.

I had one man who had a real issue with me giving direction or saying where I wanted us to go. He and I had a couple of really long talks and he was very polite, very professional, but it quickly became obvious. I don't think it was just me. I think it was any woman. One of the things I said to him was, "You need to understand you're going to be working with women as peers and colleagues, but also as supervisors. We need to help you get past this." He would stand there and shake his head yes, but then go back to his ways.

In addition to feeling patronized at times because of her gender, Marie believes she was discounted by some of her peers and subordinates for behaviors that would be lauded in a male administrator.

When I would get animated about something or when I would try to make a point very passionately, I was treated differently than if a man was trying to make a point very passionately. If someone had said that to me before I got into those roles, I would have said, "You're just being too sensitive," but it was a very frustrating thing for me. If I felt very strongly about something, I was just being a woman. If a man feels very strongly about it, the response was, "By golly, we have to listen to this!" That was very frustrating for me moving up the line.

Although many of these interactions were described as subtle and perhaps unintentional, Marie also shared experiences that were overt, including scenarios in which sexist rhetoric was used to invalidate her stance on issues.

I'm being crude now, but I once had someone say to me, "You're really on a big one today. You must be PMSing." I thought I was going to go across the table at him. I usually don't get wound up about those kinds of things, but that day I thought, "No, I'm trying to make a very valid point here and you are not listening to me."

None of the participants reported challenging these masculinist actions or dialogues, even when the discourse became patently gendered. This finding is of particular importance because the vast majority of scenarios described by participants reveal passively gendered subtext rather than conspicuous discriminatory practice. Moreover, these events occurred in organizations with policies utilizing the rhetoric of inclusion in both formal and informal policy.

Only Anna reported a flagrant incident of sexual harassment, and her experience occurred in industry before she moved into higher education. However, the incident is worth including for two reasons. First, based on her interactions with other females over the years, Anna does not believe her experience is unique. She states, "I think most of us, virtually a hundred percent of women my age and older, would have a 'Me Too' story or two or ten they would be able to tell." Second, such experiences may potentially prompt women to leave employers or industries.

I did experience sexual harassment and things that... had I not been a little bit stubborn, I would probably have just left the field. ... It is one of the reasons I did

not take a job at that location... I'd had that terrible experience and to this day it gives me ill feelings...

Anna reports she did not feel scared in her encounters with the individual, and, in fact, in some ways she felt sorry for him. She describes the experience by saying, "It was pretty blatant, but again, I ...just figured I needed to stay away from that person and not go anywhere in private with him." Anna did not feel frightened or intimidated, yet she reports a visceral response when describing the event. This experience demonstrates the potential of a single workplace event to have a pronounced impact on an employee and the employing organization (Fraser, 2013).

Birdcage Barriers

Birdcage barriers interact to create a 'birdcage effect' in which aspiring female leaders can identify opportunities for professional growth or advancement, but have limited access to those opportunities due to situational boundaries. These boundaries, such as being primary caregiver for children, make it challenging for participants to capitalize on career-building activities or advancement opportunities. For example, Ruth described the importance of networking for career advancement in higher education, but networking events often occur in the evenings or at conferences to which an employee must travel. Competing obligations such as caring for children, caring for ailing or elderly family members, and fulfilling traditional gender obligations as wives may hinder women from fully participating in these events. As a result, women may feel constrained by a metaphorical birdcage that permits them to see opportunities and resources within their reach but prevents them from fully accessing them. Recurring subthemes that

emerged in this category include role conflict, being place-bound, and a lack of opportunities.

Role conflict. Role conflict was a universal barrier identified by all of the women in this study. Study participants described role conflicts that resulted from being an aspiring leader and a wife, mother, or daughter to ill/aging parents. In Sandra's experience, maintaining a healthy balance between career pursuits and marriage is challenging. These challenges become increasingly difficult as women advance along the career pipeline and are required to work longer hours and travel to multiple sites.

I do have a husband and I have to work very hard. I could see where it would be very easy to grow apart because we're not spending as much time together as we have in the past. I just got back in town Saturday evening. I'll be gone for the next two nights, and then I fly back out Saturday and I'll be gone for several days. Trying to make sure that I keep my marriage on track... I have to really think through that.

Similarly, Marie's experiences reflect the potential strain placed on the marriages of women who seek positions of leadership in higher education.

I was teaching, I was chair of a department, and I was taking classes every night from 5:30 to 10:30 with a two-hour drive. During that time, my husband did not see a whole lot of me, and then I took off for a year during my leadership fellowship and I left home.

For Anna, the marital strain was not the result of long hours and stressful demands at work. Instead, her relationship was negatively affected by her husband's discomfort with being married to a woman whose career rivaled or exceeded his own. She said, "I have

been divorced but I always say I learned a lot from my first marriage. My having an equal career was very difficult for him.”

In addition to the role conflict that resulted from being an aspiring leader and a wife, Anna, Jeannette, and Ruth had the additional stress of navigating the career pipeline while being mother to young children. Anna struggled with the competing demands of being a business owner, graduate student, wife, and mother with small children. She recognized the need to earn a doctoral degree, but she was not located in close proximity to a university. Pursuing her education required a lengthy commute, which then placed additional burdens on her to find adequate and reliable childcare.

When I started my doctorate I was driving 120 miles each way to the university. I did that throughout my whole PhD. I'd had a baby, so I would drop her off with my mom along the way. I'd go to the university, come back, and my mom would watch my oldest, and then my second one when she came. I feel like that's just part of being a woman.

Jeannette's experience was similar to Anna's. After deciding she wanted to be a college president and recognizing the need to pursue her doctorate, she spent a year finalizing all of the arrangements that would allow her to return to school. As a wife and mother of small children, Jeannette felt pulled between fulfilling her obligations to her family and pursuing her own dreams by continuing her education while still working full-time. In order to achieve her professional goals, Jeannette was forced to choose between the competing demands of work and home. She ultimately chose to compromise the societal expectations that accompany the roles of wife and mother, including cooking, cleaning, and maintaining her physical appearance.

At that time it was crazy because I was working full time, I was almost a full-time student, and my kids are three years apart. By the time I finished my doctorate, my youngest was going to kindergarten, so they were little when I was enrolled. He was the baby, so he might have been five. I probably started when he was 2 or 3. That's a very young age, and I still had to get them to dance and ball. I look back on it now. That's the same time I did the leadership program. Sometimes I don't know how I did all of it. Working out and eating right, that wasn't going to happen. I couldn't do it all. I am not that kind of Superwoman. My house was a disaster. As long as the clothes were clean...they may be in a pile on the floor, but they had been washed.

Ruth's decision to put her career on hold for seven years after she married and started her family created role conflict when she returned to the workforce. Additionally, she felt she lagged behind in her career compared to her colleagues as a result of removing herself from the workforce for seven years. Like Anna and Jeannette, Ruth soon realized she needed to complete her doctorate in order to advance, so she added the role of doctoral student while also a wife, mother, and full-time employee in higher education. She eventually achieved her goals, but acknowledges she experienced delays because she was pulled in multiple directions.

I think I probably would have moved up the career ladder faster as a male and if I wasn't the primary caregiver for my children. If someone had to go to the school and pick up a sick kid, it had to be me. My husband couldn't say, "I can't be here because my child is sick." That fell on me. I don't want it to sound like being the primary caregiver held me back. If I hadn't been, I do think I would have moved

up faster. I don't mind, though, because I felt like I had the best of both worlds.

... So in a way it was a hindrance, but in another way it was not, because it was

what I wanted to be doing. Still, I recognize I could have moved up faster if I

hadn't consciously chosen my family life over opportunities to enhance my career.

When Ruth's youngest child graduated from high school and she no longer felt constrained by competing obligations, her career gained momentum. As she describes it, "Realizing when [last child] hit high school, oh my goodness, there's all this free time in my life! There's no one looking for me to feed them when I get home. Now I can really do some things for myself. That was a big turning point."

Sandra does not have children and suggested this likely had an impact on her career trajectory. In her view, the conflicting demands of work and family place women in a position of having to choose one over the other.

I am married, but I do not have biological children, so I've not had to deal with that struggle. I don't mean to sound like motherhood is a struggle. I just mean that is not my experience and I'm grateful I did not have to choose between them. I think for me it would have been drastically different with children. I don't know that I would have pursued any type of leadership position because I'm very family-oriented. I would have probably felt like my family and my children needed to come first.

For women in leadership positions, role conflict and the pressure of competing demands are not always the result of having children at home. Marie experienced role conflict as a daughter of ill and aging parents. Her obligations as care provider for her parents while working full-time limited her ability to commit to additional projects at

work. At the time she held a dean's position and felt torn between professional and personal obligations.

My father had a stroke and became aphasic and bedridden. His mind was perfectly clear, but he couldn't talk. I cared for him for a year and a half. At the time, I was so focused on him that I didn't realize my mother was starting to show signs of dementia. He passed two years after his stroke, and then I moved into caregiving for my mother who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's-like dementia. ...It was a crazy few years. During that time my family was very important to me. I didn't take on things I normally would take on at work. I look back at those days now and I have no idea how I did what I did.

Regardless of the source, all study participants described cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects resulting from role conflict and their drive to meet the demands placed on them. Their stories depict women facing long commutes, little sleep, guilt over missed chores or family time, and near-constant fatigue. The language of their narratives also suggest they maintained ownership of gendered tasks even after relinquishing responsibility for their completion. For example, after soliciting assistance, participants remained accountable for coordinating and scheduling stereotypically feminine tasks such as meal planning, transporting children to caregivers, maintaining a schedule of children's activities, creating a chart for chores, etc. In retrospect, both Jeannette and Marie wondered aloud how they were able to "do it all."

Place-bound. According to the participants of this study, networking is an essential component of the higher education career pipeline. As Jeannette expressed, "It's not just who you know. It's who knows you." Networking events offer aspiring

leaders the chance to form career-building relationships with employees and administrators from other schools around the region/country. These relationships often present doors of opportunity in the recruitment and hiring processes. Ruth explained the impact of being place-bound.

A lot of networking goes on outside of your campus that helps you to move up. When my children were little, I didn't go to lots of conferences. I didn't move up to being a vice-president as fast as some people would have. You can do more if you can attend statewide meetings or conferences that are regional or national and really build up an outside network.

More than the limited networking opportunities, participants of this study expressed frustration at the inability to advance, a consequence of being unable to relocate. As Jeannette looked for opportunities to move into positions of greater authority, she realized such positions are sometimes few and far between, especially in rural settings. An aspiring leader who is unable to relocate may find herself with few options.

My kids, my husband, and my parents were my number one priority. I didn't want to move them, and that came up in discussions with my president. He told me, "You need to start looking at out-of-state jobs," and I said, "I don't want to move." He and I had a good relationship, so I could ask, "Who took care of your kids when you moved?" He said, "My wife." I said, "Okay, I don't have that same situation. I'm the one that's the primary."

Jeannette believes being place-bound slowed her ascension. “I knew it was going to take longer to get to my goal because the opportunities weren't going to be right there for me, and I wasn't willing to jump from state to state to get them.”

Ruth was also unable to relocate as her career progressed. In her case, role conflict was a factor, but the decision was also based on the family's finances.

You can definitely move up more if you are able to jump from place to place to place. I couldn't do that. I was married and I need to stay where my husband's job was, because he was the primary breadwinner.

She believes the combined effects of networking and relocating to build career experiences cumulatively shape the career trajectories of women who are able to do both. However, for women who are place-bound, opportunities are not as plentiful.

I think if you're able to do more networking, more moving around, and certainly if you're willing to move institutions - I was rather place-bound - you can move up faster. ...I recognize that I could have moved up faster if I hadn't consciously chosen my family life over opportunities to enhance my career.

Being place-bound can also stem from internal factors such as staying within one's comfort zone or lacking the confidence to relocate, especially if the move spans a significant distance. Marie explains,

I didn't see myself ever leaving [home state]. Quite honestly, it probably took me a year to get over it once I did. I set up barriers for myself. I thought I wanted a job in [home state]. ...For about a year after I left [home state], I thought I would never get over it, so yeah, I set up barriers for myself. After my parents both

passed, my husband said if you want to make a move, it's time for us to make a move out of state.

Jeannette, Ruth, and Marie all experienced the dual effects of being place-bound: limited access to networking opportunities and difficulty relocating for advancement opportunities. Family obligations restricted the travel required to access networking opportunities, especially when participants already struggled to maintain work-home life balance, and the inability to relocate limited opportunities for career advancement. Jeannette wanted to remain near her family of origin and she did not want to uproot her children. As the secondary breadwinner for her family, Ruth was bound geographically by her husband's job. Marie expressed a psychological attachment to place. Her rootedness was both circumstantial and emotional. This lack of mobility restricted these participants' access to job opportunities outside a certain geographic perimeter.

Limited opportunities. The triad of factors discussed thus far (role conflict, limited networking, and an inability to relocate) effectively restricted the participants' career opportunities and diminished their ability to progress along the career pipeline as quickly as individuals who do not face these barriers. Marie's role as primary care-taker for aging parents prevented her from accepting new responsibilities at work and kept her tied to a limited geographic area. For Ruth, being place-bound in a rural setting meant advancement opportunities were sparse. She described the moment she realized her opportunities were limited.

I realized all of a sudden, wow, I've done all of these things. My president has indicated he thinks I have the right temperament and I'm a natural leader at many

of these things, but I'm not moving up here. My vice-president isn't leaving. My president is not leaving. There's nowhere to go.

Jeannette's experience with limited opportunities was also frustrating, perhaps more so because her career did not follow the typical trajectory for administrators in higher education.

That lack of opportunity, and I had some good ones... but when I was ready to move the job wasn't necessarily there. I had to wait for opportunities, but I wanted to progress faster. I took a very non-traditional route that I think benefited me greatly, but there weren't always plentiful positions and the pathway wasn't clear. It wasn't like I knew my next job. I had to carve it out and figure out how to navigate higher ed. There wasn't a road map.

The birdcage barriers identified in this study worked in tandem to impact study participants' career paths and trajectories. Participants experienced role conflict as a result of the competing demands between their work and personal lives. These competing demands restricted participants' access to networking and advancement opportunities, subsequently hindering or delaying their career progression. As a result, participants were constrained in a metaphorical birdcage from which they could view available opportunities but were unable to fully utilize them to their benefit.

Internal Barriers

In addition to institutional barriers and birdcage barriers that impede an individual's professional development, participants shared numerous stories that suggested their careers were influenced by disempowering internal dialogues. These dialogues created barriers within the participants by generating feelings of uncertainty

about their abilities or levels of preparation. For aspiring female leaders, these inhibiting internal dialogues may be influenced by external factors such as the hegemonic discourse of leadership or an androgenized view of leadership traits (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Collinson & Hearn, 1996), but the resulting internal barriers themselves resided within the participants. The results of these disempowering dialogues are internal ideations that may diminish an individual's sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Participants in this study reported internal barriers including self-doubt, feeling a need to be perfectly qualified, and requiring external validation before pursuing advancement opportunities.

Self-doubt. Unlike the experience of being underestimated by others, some participants identified limitations they placed on themselves. In retrospect, they found it easy to recognize self-defeating thoughts and behaviors. Sandra states, "I will tell you first and foremost my biggest barrier was my mindset and my thoughts." The self-doubts expressed by the participants reflect women who underestimated their abilities and failed to recognize the value of their strengths. Sandra recalls contemplating whether she belonged in higher education.

There was something about working at an institution with true educators that made me feel a little intimidated, and, from my perspective, inferior. I'm not as smart as they are, even though I had a master's degree as well. In education I felt like an imposter, in some ways, because I felt like other people were smarter than I was. These people wanted to be educators. They studied and prepared to be teachers. I went to college and did well, but education was not my plan, so I didn't see myself on the same level as other people here.

Marie believes her lack of self-confidence kept her from developing her full potential early in her career. She states,

I probably was an obstacle to myself in some ways. Growing up a country kid, I thought I'd done well. I was a college teacher. ...I made it harder for myself because of things going on in my mind, so that was a barrier, the lack of confidence. I think I could have pushed much earlier. I mean if I had more self-confidence. ...I do think I hindered my progress. ...I think if I had made the decision and thought "Hey, you are worthy," I would have moved more quickly up through the ranks. And isn't that something a lot of women deal with? Deeming ourselves worthy?

Buttressing Sandra's and Marie's lack of confidence was an inability to recognize their own leadership potential. This devaluing of their strengths was reinforced by the pervasive acceptance of a masculinized version of effective leadership predicated on Great Man theories (Chin, 2011). Sandra says she struggled with seeing herself as a leader until she experienced a paradigmatic shift while participating in a leadership program as a doctoral student.

I still struggled with seeing myself as a leader. We took the strength finders assessment and I can recall telling the instructor I had wimpy strengths. My colleagues were 'strategic' and 'visionary' but my strengths were 'empathy' and 'harmony.' From my perspective, I was still holding on to the 'Great Man' theory of leadership. You know, me on the white horse and I'm coming to save the day. I have all the answers and I know what to do. I knew that wasn't me. I didn't have

all the answers. I wasn't that smart. I don't know everything to do, so I am not a leader.

Both Sandra and Marie expressed self-doubts that reflect the discordant perceptions of leadership and stereotypically feminine traits. While Marie struggled to deem herself worthy of holding a leadership role, Sandra failed to see value in strengths she considered inconsequential. These doubts illustrate the trivialization of the feminine and the elevation of the masculine in dominant views of leadership and the impact these views may have on women who internalize them. Sandra later commented that talking about her early career experiences sparked memories of thoughts and feelings she had forgotten. She reflected on the internal dialogue that would weave its way through her thoughts when she contemplated taking on new leadership roles.

I think that was the biggest barrier I had to overcome... my own negative thinking about my abilities. Did I really even have anything to bring to the table? Would anyone want to hear me? Would anyone trust me to lead them?

Feeling the need to be perfectly qualified. This subtheme reflects participants' observations that females often feel they must be perfectly qualified before they will apply for, or even consider, a higher-level position. Both Jeannette and Anna expressed high levels of self-esteem but had reservations because of their unique career trajectories. They didn't doubt their ability to do the job, but they doubted their preparedness. Anna believes this is a problem that plagues women. In her observations, "Women will say over and over again, 'I'm not ready.'" Anna, in particular, believes this mindset is a common hindrance for aspiring female leaders. She says, "If a woman doesn't have every 'i' dotted and every 't' crossed in her career, if she hasn't played every single role

that would lead up to that position, she feels somehow she's not qualified.” She says she experienced this phenomenon in her own career, but in hindsight she realizes the skewed nature of those self-assessments.

It took people nudging me... In retrospect, I look back and I think, “Oh my gosh, I was very qualified.” The only thing I wasn't qualified in was the actual job itself.. Well, no one is qualified until they get there!

Jeannette believed her career trajectory needed to follow the standard course before she could advance. Using similar verbiage to Anna, Jeannette stated,

I felt like I had to hit certain markers or have certain titles first. You know, as females we tend to have to check off everything. You know the thinking, “I'm a dean. I've got to be a vice-president before I could be a president.”

For Marie, being perfectly qualified extended beyond holding the requisite titles. She also believed she had to be in those positions for an appreciable amount of time. She explains by saying “I had been a vice president for less than two years and I thought, ‘Well, they're not going to look at me.’”

Both Anna and Jeannette described themselves as confident individuals from a young age, saying they believed they could achieve any goal. Their comments suggest less self-doubt than other study participants, yet anecdotally they expressed greater adherence to the belief they needed to be perfectly qualified before applying for higher-level jobs. Anna and Jeannette both believe this mindset is less problematic for males. Anna explained,

Women don't apply until they feel fully qualified. They will say over and over again, "I'm not ready," and I always jokingly say a man will get up in the morning, look in the mirror, and say, "Today, I think I'll run for president."

Jeannette suggests the difference in men's and women's mindsets may be attributable to the gendered nature of the career pipeline in higher education. She describes reaching the office of president as a journey, not a sprint, but in her observations men's and women's journeys differ.

They see me doing it and they want to come talk to me and they're ready to do it tomorrow, but they don't have any of the skills or experience to get there. I mean I've been here 20 years. You see some men just hop in and like seven years later they are a president. How did that happen?!

Needing external validation. All of the study participants provided narratives suggesting they required prodding or encouragement by others before they were willing to apply for higher-level positions. For example, in an acknowledgement of her distinct qualifications, Anna said, "...with a little more nudging I really looked at what I brought to the picture and I saw I had a very unique perspective." Among the participants, Marie articulated this mindset most clearly.

There was a part of me that felt someone needed to come to me and say, "I need you to do this" to be worthy to do it. I couldn't go out there myself and say, "I think I can do a really good job for you."

Marie's husband prodded her in the direction of a presidency long before she could envision herself in the role. She stated, "My husband kept telling me, 'You need to be a

college president,' which was funny to me. So it was in his mind much more than it was mine."

Participants often responded to the initial suggestion with reluctance or hesitation. For Ruth, the idea was first suggested by her president.

Sometime after becoming associate vice-president, I started talking to our current president and he suggested I would be good in that role. He said, "You know, you would make a good president because you already have experience with the media and politics," but I felt, oh no no...

Sandra responded initially with doubt, even though she had pursued her doctorate specifically for administrative leadership opportunities.

Before I applied for my current position, there were presidencies at other schools in our state. My husband asked, "Are you going to apply?" I said, "No, I have no desire, no interest." He didn't understand it because I had gone to school to prepare myself for whatever was coming next.

Sandra's and Marie's self-doubts made it difficult to view themselves as capable of effectively leading a college. They needed an external voice to affirm their abilities. In contrast, Jeannette had a strong sense of self-esteem but needed an external voice to contradict her belief that she needed to be perfectly qualified before she could apply.

I was a finalist for the presidency at [college name]. When that position first came open, I had made up my mind that I was not applying because I didn't think I was ready. I was a dean and, in my mind, I needed to be a vice-president. How was that going to happen? But my president made me apply. One day her assistant called me and said, "She wants to take you to lunch." At lunch she said "You're

going to apply. You said you want to be a president and you're ready.” Then, to just throw my name in the hat and be named a finalist... I was blown away.

Uniquely, Sandra recognized her need for external validation early in her career and took proactive steps to combat her self-doubt. She described cultivating relationships with mentors and role models in an attempt to “...surround myself with people who could help me form the narrative in my mind that this was actually possible.” These individuals helped Sandra see herself as a leader when doubts invaded her thoughts, and they encouraged her to apply for positions as they became available.

Table 3

Barriers Reported by Female Community College Presidents

Theme	Basic Description	Subthemes
Institutional barriers	Barriers that are experienced on the job and related to organizational culture and management practice. Result of workplace policies, structural elements, or management practices that establish roadblocks for aspiring female leaders, either advertently or inadvertently.	Supervisors as barriers Being underestimated Gender norms and the double bind Sexism and sexual harassment
Birdcage barriers	Factors that interact to create a ‘birdcage effect.’ Aspiring female leaders can identify opportunities for professional growth or advancement, but have limited access to those opportunities due to situational boundaries.	Role conflict Place-bound Limited opportunities
Internal barriers	Barriers that reside within the individual. Result of disempowering internal dialogues that diminish an individual’s sense of self-esteem and agency.	Self-doubt Feeling the need to be perfectly qualified Requiring external validation

Table 4

Participants' Experiences with Barriers (by subthemes)

Type of Barrier and Subtheme	Participants
Institutional barriers - subthemes	
• Supervisors as barriers	Marie, Jeannette, Ruth
• Being underestimated	Anna, Sandra, Jeannette, Ruth
• Gender norms and the double bind	Anna, Marie, Sandra, Jeannette, Ruth
• Sexism	Anna, Marie, Sandra, Jeannette
• Sexual harassment	Anna
Birdcage barriers - subthemes	
• Role-conflict	Anna, Marie, Sandra, Jeannette, Ruth
• Place-bound	Marie, Jeannette, Ruth
• Limited Opportunities	Marie, Jeannette, Ruth
Internal barriers - subthemes	
• Self-doubt	Marie, Sandra, Ruth
• Needing to be perfectly qualified	Anna, Marie, Jeannette
• Needing external validation	Anna, Marie, Sandra, Ruth

Sources of Support

Participants in the study identified a variety of supports they encountered while navigating the career pipeline to reach their current position, as well as personal traits and strategies that helped them tenaciously persist. First and foremost, all of the women in the study acknowledged the invaluable influence and encouragement of other individuals. Participants cited the influence of others beginning as early as childhood, particularly the support and encouragement of parents. Most of the sources of support identified by the women involved relationships with other individuals, both in their professional and personal lives. The essential nature of these relationships to the women's success prompted Sandra to participate in this research.

...as I have been helped, I want to help, which is one of the reasons I did not hesitate to agree to the study. If there is anything we can do, particularly as women, to help each other navigate this path, then I certainly want to do that.

As with barriers, the sources of support identified by study participants can be classified thematically. Institutional sources of support describe those sources of support that are experienced on the job. They are the result of workplace policies, structural elements, or management practices that support women's career aspirations and leadership development, either advertently or inadvertently. Personal sources of support are relationships with individuals or organizations outside the workplace that comprise the participants' support system. These relationships formed a support system for study participants and helped moderate the effects of barriers. Individual traits/strategies originate within the individual. This thematic category includes personal characteristics, cognitive frameworks, and behaviors that allowed participants to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity. These traits and strategies do not rely on external validation, although they may have been fostered by external influences. Semantic analysis of this thematic category suggests its subthemes may not truly be described as sources of support. Rather, they are cognitive frameworks and tactical strategies employed by study participants to counter barriers, but because participants cited these elements in response to questions about sources of support, they are categorized as such.

Institutional Sources of Support

All of the participants in this study identified elements of the workplace that supported their advancement to positions of leadership. The institutional elements that emerged from analysis of participants' narratives include management practices,

leadership personalities, and relational factors rather than formalized policies. Many of the women noted the contrast between supportive individuals and individuals who established barriers. For example, when discussing supervisors, participants noted the polarity of leadership styles between those who fostered their professional growth and those who hampered their progress. Recurring subthemes under institutional sources of support include supervisors as sources of support, mentors, leadership programs, and interviews as confidence builders.

Supervisors as sources of support. When discussing support provided for them by supervisors, study participants identified numerous traits that contributed to their success. They described being given autonomy by their supervisors and gaining confidence because their supervisors trusted their professional judgment. They also described supervisors who recognized their leadership potential before they saw potential in themselves. These supervisors were willing to create opportunities that allowed them to develop their capabilities and build new skills. Participants also described supervisors who were responsive to the needs of subordinates and were flexible in crisis situations.

Study participants stressed the importance of freedom in the workplace, particularly the freedom to make decisions about how goals are achieved and how work is accomplished. This type of autonomy was an important facet of the professional growth and development of study participants. Anna specifically commented on the importance of autonomy to her as a young professional.

I was lucky... My bosses gave me a lot of autonomy and they were very supportive. I'd have ideas, and as long as I could demonstrate it could be done within budget or I could find the support, "Go do it."

Jeannette experienced the contrast between a supervisor who allowed employees little control over the direction of their tasks and a supervisor who allowed her to make decisions and utilize her own discretion. She was allowed this autonomy for the first time when a new president took over her institution, and she remembers the impact this new freedom had on her professional development.

With the reorganization and new president, it was like, “No, these programs are yours. You can grow them.” That was a free moment... It was freeing. I remember my new supervisor saying, “Stop shaking your head and agreeing with me. I want to know what you think.” I said, “I haven't had to think in two years. Give me a second.” Boy, when I did, that's when things really took off, because I could be innovative and I could be creative. That's when I decided I can stay here and I want to lead here.

Jeannette and Anna describe autonomy as a necessity for aspiring female leaders in order to cultivate their leadership skills and facilitate the integration of leadership into their personal identities. According to study participants, supervisors who allow subordinates to function autonomously are demonstrating their trust in subordinates' competency and professionalism, and conveying this trust to others in the organization. This message fosters an organizational culture that values both masculine and feminine voices. According to Jeannette and Anna, being allowed to function independently boosted their confidence, sparked their creativity, enhanced their ability to solve problems, and boosted their morale on the job.

The role of supervisors was especially crucial for those participants who did not self-identify as leaders and who lacked self-confidence early in their careers. For these

participants, supervisors shaped their view of themselves and their role within the organization. Sandra states, “When I think back on it, the president at that time saw something in me that I didn't even see in myself...” Ruth had a similar experience, which she describes by saying, “When my first president said to me, ‘The things that you're talking about would make you a good president,’ he really made me think of my skills in a new way.” These supervisors facilitated the participants’ self-awareness and helped them develop their leadership identities holistically.

Supportive supervisors not only recognized their subordinates’ leadership potential, but they created opportunities to help them flourish and grow. Ruth’s supervisor began by giving her small assignments and then gradually assigning her tasks with increasing levels of responsibility.

My first vice-president was the one who started me out by giving me a small responsibility for a committee, and then another one, and another one, and another one. She gave me opportunities to learn more and do more. Each time I did well, she'd give me another one. Also my president would take notice of who was a leader and who should move up. He made a point to get to know me, and he gave me more responsibilities in certain areas so I could begin proving myself.

Similarly, Marie’s president sought out opportunities to build her skills and assigned her tasks that complemented her natural skill set. By using a gradual-release approach, these supervisors slowly built Marie’s and Ruth’s self-confidence. Notably, neither Ruth nor Marie approached their supervisors to request these opportunities. Instead, the supervisors took notice of employees who displayed leadership potential. These

supervisors then approached the participants with opportunities designed specifically to develop their unique strengths. Marie says,

...she changed my professional life and I would say she also changed my personal life. In her third or fourth year as president, she called me to her office. I was sitting on cabinet as a dean. She called me to her office one day and said, "I'm going to recommend you for a program that I think you need to participate in." It was called the [name of leadership program] and she was a past participant. She said, "I think you need to be in this program and I'm going to recommend you for it."

Incorporating leadership into one's identity may be challenging for women who lack female role models in leadership positions (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). For the women in this study, especially Marie and Sandra, relationships with supportive supervisors shaped their personal identity and helped them envision themselves in leadership roles.

Study participants lauded supervisors who recognized the unique demands placed on female employees, especially the role conflict women often experience when they are torn between professional and personal obligations. For Ruth, this meant an employer who would hire her at age 30 and help her 'catch up' professionally after being out of the workforce as a full-time employee for seven years. Jeannette's employer recognized the lack of opportunities available to an aspiring leader who was place-bound so he "...committed to helping me get where I wanted to go." She could not relocate to accept advancement opportunities, so he created a new position with her in mind.

Had it not been for my president boldly creating a new position, I might still be director of off-campus sites. I might still just be dreaming about being a president,

because that position gave me the experience I needed to become a dean. I would not have been able to go from the Director of Off-Campus Sites to the Dean of Extended Services without that piece. Those were critical experiences that helped solidify my pathway.

Marie's president allowed her to work a flexible work schedule when she found herself in the role of caregiver to her father, mother, and brother, as well as when she was pursuing her doctorate. Her vice-president, however, was less accommodating.

I had to go to my vice-president at that time. I was a dean at that point and I said, "I have to take care of him." The vice-president was not supportive. She told me, "Well, you have to figure out how to do your job. I can't have you out of here."

So I went to the president and said, "I may have to go part-time. What would you be willing to do?" She just looked at me and she said, "You do what you need to do for your family. I know you're going to do your job as well."

All of the study participants identified supervisor support as a factor in their professional growth. Participant narratives reveal that supervisors who encouraged subordinates, allowed them to work autonomously, cultivated their leadership potential, showed flexibility, and helped female workers balance competing demands elicited feelings of loyalty from study participants and engendered a renewed commitment to their institution. Participants also report using these experiences to shape their own approaches to leadership.

Mentors. Participants lauded mentors who invested significant time in teaching and training their mentees. These mentors also delegated appropriate responsibilities according to their subordinates' skill level. As mentees, study participants were allowed

to observe their mentors on the job in both routine and crisis situations. Participants describe their mentors as a diverse group of individuals who were open-minded and committed to the mentoring process.

The mentors described in this study did not fit any particular characteristics or demographic. They were described as a heterogeneous group composed of different ages, races, and genders. Sandra specifically discussed the benefit of having mentors from different demographic groups.

It was really interesting to take the same need to different people and get different perspectives on it. One would say you're overreacting, the other would say I know exactly how you feel, and the third might say something totally different.

This diversity extended beyond demographic characteristics to include diversity of thought. Marie credits her supervisor's willingness to be open-minded to new and different ideas, a characteristic identified by Zachary (2012) as important to the mentoring process. Marie says her first mentor "...supported a lot of my crazy ideas that another president may have pooh-poohed."

Participants' mentors also demonstrated a willingness to commit to long-term mentoring relationships in order to cultivate the leadership potential of a subordinate. According to Haines (2003), mentor-mentee relationships typically last five to ten years or more. Anna describes one of her first mentors as an ongoing influence in her life.

I've had lots of mentors. One in particular is a gentleman I still go to on a regular basis. I liked his style of leadership. It was very collaborative and very low ego. He was very much about engaging others and seeking the wisdom of others. He was just a very thoughtful leader, so I've often gone to him.

Marie's mentor took her under his wing shortly after she was hired and nurtured her career as his own advanced.

The first person who hired me into higher education has been a mentor to me.

When I was a faculty person, he was my chair. When I was a chair, he was my dean. When I became a dean, he was the vice president. A couple of years after he became a president, he hired me into my first vice presidency.

For both Anna and Marie, the mentor-mentee relationship eventually evolved into a friendship built on professional respect and courtesy, a stage Haines (2003) describes as a transformation. Their relationships with these mentors spanned decades and continued across multiple employers, eventually culminating in a friendship based on mutual trust and respect.

For some of the participants, the mentor-mentee relationship developed organically, but Sandra and Jeannette both assertively requested a mentoring relationship with individuals they admired. For Sandra, this was a strategic decision.

I suppose one of my conscious decisions was to try to surround myself with people who did not mind pouring into me. ..I had to surround myself with people who would help me see who I am or who I could be.

Jeannette looked for mentor-mentee relationships with people who held the types of positions she sought. She explains, "Every time I got an opportunity to interact with a college president, my first question was, 'Are you willing to be a mentor?'" So I had several in my portfolio who did not mind letting me see the job." One of Jeannette's goals in the mentoring relationship was to gain insight into all aspects of the job, so she asked her mentor for opportunities that would expand her perspective.

He would just pull me in meetings with him, take me with him on visits. When we were talking to potential donors or if he had meetings at the Board of Regents, he would let me come. He allowed me inside the office to see the work. That gave me a greater sense of the scope of the job.

Research suggests mentor-mentee relationships differ in their formality and focus, with mentorships of younger protégés being more formal and lasting for a longer period of time (Reid, 2007). Similarly, the nature of mentor-mentee relationships differed among study participants and were more enduring when established early in the protégé's career. One of Jeannette's mentors focused on giving her insight into the role of a college president and identifying gaps in her experience, while another emphasized professional networking and building relationships. She said she feels fortunate to have had more than one type of mentoring relationship and described the differences between the two, acknowledging each was beneficial in its own way.

My first mentor was very direct. When I took the newly created position, he said, "This is a short time. Do not plan to retire in this job. This is only for you to build experience and get out." My second mentor's approach was different. She spent more time with me. She said, "Hey, I'm going to nominate you to be an institutional member" of different organizations or associations. She helped me get out a little bit more, because she said I needed to build a national network. My first mentor was more bullet point, "You need to get some significant accomplishments." My second mentor tried to develop me as a person and would call me out on things more than my first mentor. My first mentor would take me

with him, but my second mentor would *send* me, “You go represent the college. You go serve in my role,” so they had different styles.

All of the mentoring relationships described by study participants extended beyond the requisite pairing of a senior faculty member with a new instructor as a resource person. The focus of these mentoring relationships was helping the protégé develop her full potential. For some, this included re-writing an internal dialogue that inhibited personal growth. For others, it meant finding opportunities to gain essential leadership experiences while traveling a non-traditional career path. Jeannette’s mentor encouraged her to apply for jobs when she did not feel prepared or qualified. According to Jeannette, “I felt like I had to have certain titles first, but I had a champion who said, ‘Your title does not matter. You've done the work, you're ready.’ That’s where my president was so important.” Regardless of the nature or focus of the relationship, study participants agreed the experience is vitally important. In Sandra’s words, “The mentor piece is invaluable. It is absolutely invaluable.”

Leadership programs. Individuals who participate in leadership programs develop their leadership identity and develop a network of peer support (Ibarra, et al., 2013). Likewise, participants in this study cited participation in leadership programs as an essential element for integrating leadership into their personal identities, especially in light of the relative dearth of female role models in top administrative positions in higher education. Leadership programs also introduced the participants to alternative leadership theories, including those that incorporate stereotypically feminine characteristics. These nontraditional views of leadership helped the participants re-conceptualize the notion of their own strengths as leadership attributes. Perhaps most importantly, leadership

programs offered participants an opportunity to meet other aspiring leaders who were experiencing the same frustrations and challenges. These relationships became part of the participants' professional support system as they navigated the career pipeline.

Marie says the program "...changed my professional life. It really made me stop and think. It opened my eyes to a whole world of higher education I'd never seen and it made me rethink a lot of things." During the program, she says the idea of becoming an administrator gradually established itself.

Working with other presidents all over the country put the seed in my mind, "This is a job I could do if I wanted to." I hadn't thought I would ever be a college president, but then I started thinking, "Well, I could be if I ever felt the need to be." So it was during that program I would've had the first inkling.

For Sandra, the program reframed her view of leadership in a way that included her personal skills and abilities. This reframing shifted her from a 'Great Man' view of leadership to a view that incorporated concepts from transformative and integrative models.

The strength-finders assessment actually reminded me there are different types of leaders. I mean, who wouldn't want a leader who listens to them and tries to see things from their perspective? Who wouldn't want a leader who ensures your voice is heard and uses it to inform her decisions? My eyes were opened to new possibilities, and once I realized I could be a leader and opportunities are available, I was a changed individual.

Jeannette described the multifaceted nature of leadership programs and the benefits participants receive. Unlike Marie and Sandra, Jeannette entered the program

knowing she wanted to serve in a leadership role, and she had already incorporated leadership into her personal identity. For her, the greatest benefits of the program were relational.

More than the leadership programs themselves were the relationships I built. It's not just who you know. It's who knows you. After that program, there were people that began to know who I was. On my last search committee, I knew of several of the people, but I didn't realize they knew of me.

Ruth's experience was similar to Jeannette's. Although she already saw herself as a leader, the leadership program helped her form a support system with a like-minded cohort of individuals who understood the challenges of navigating the career pipeline in higher education.

I formed three or four really good friendships with people who were similar to me in outlook. We continue to help each other. We've even served as references for each other over the years. Getting to meet colleagues and others through the leadership program and form friendships? That was important.

Marie benefitted from her leadership program in multiple ways. She experienced a paradigmatic shift in her view of leadership that allowed her to incorporate leadership into her own personal identity, and she benefitted interpersonally by building a support system with a cohort of colleagues from the program she attended.

One of the things that happened to me during that fellowship year... There was a group of eight or nine of us that became incredibly close. We're still close today. One of those people was a woman who was very introverted, more so than me. She has helped me overcome many of my barriers because so many of mine are

self-inflicted. We talk about them and she seems to understand them. That has really helped me.

Study participants all reported they were selected for participation in leadership programs and sponsored by their supervisors or presidents. This proactive approach to recruiting participants for leadership programs conveyed the supervisors' support for participants and belief in their potential. This vote of confidence was one of several precipitating factors that prompted participants, particularly Marie and Sandra, to consider administrative roles. The professional evolution of study participants in response to the combined influences of multiple institutional supports demonstrates the synergistic effects of these supports on women's career trajectories and the need for a variety of intentional strategies to cultivate the leadership skills of aspiring female leaders.

Interviews as confidence builders. The rigorous interviews that occur as part of the presidential search process provided valuable feedback to study participants and boosted their confidence in their level of preparedness. As Ruth explained,

I somewhat randomly applied for a presidency and got an interview, which built my confidence. Once that confidence was validated by the interview, I knew I was ready. Just two years prior, I wouldn't have imagined I would be doing that. I think the more presidential interviews you do, the better you get at it. It's exhausting and it's very thorough, but you learn what to expect.

Going through the search and interview process also boosted Marie's confidence. She stated, "That's when I realized I'm doing the things a search committee wants to see, and

like I said, it surprised me. I didn't get the job, but when I was told I was a semifinalist, I was shocked.”

For participants who were unsure about their level of preparedness and qualifications, receiving positive feedback from search committees and advancing in the search process solidified their conception of themselves as presidential material. For others, the search committee’s feedback identified gaps in experience that helped the participant prepare for the next search. The process helped Jeannette distinguish between gaps/weaknesses she needed to address and those that were less important to presidential search committees. This focused her efforts and helped her overcome the belief that she needed to be perfectly qualified.

Going through a search and being a finalist solidified that I was ready. I still needed to build some significant accomplishments and I was able to do that with the development of a new campus. It gave me a lot of confidence that I could do the work, even though I didn’t know everything.

As a result of her familiarity with the search process and the positive feedback she received from the search committee, Jeannette’s confidence was boosted and she improved her performance in subsequent interviews. She said, “I didn't think I had a chance in the world to be a finalist, so going through that process really helped me with the next search.”

The institutional sources of support identified by participants suggest that institutional contexts influence the development of aspiring female leaders. The presence of proactive supervisors and mentors who were willing to invest in developing the leadership potential of subordinates assisted study participants in acquiring both practical

leadership skills and a leadership identity. Leadership programs further developed participants' leadership skills and conferred the relational benefits of a cohort of peers experiencing similar challenges and frustrations. These institutional supports eventually led to presidential interviews, which provided participants' with valuable feedback and boosted participants' confidence in their preparedness for advanced leadership roles.

Personal Sources of Support

Beaty and Pankake (2001) report the vast majority of female leaders rely on personal support systems to achieve work-home life balance. When asked to identify their sources of support, all five study participants identified individuals or organizations in their personal support system. These responses were given early in the interview process and recurred often, being mentioned more frequently than work-related sources of support such as supervisors and mentors. For participants of this study, their personal support systems were a source of comfort and encouragement when they encountered barriers, frustrations, and self-doubt. These sources of support also provided much-needed practical assistance with obligations such as household chores and child care. Study participants unanimously attributed their own persistence in navigating the career pipeline to these sources of support. Specifically, participants identified members of their family of origin, their spouse, and their religious faith as the most meaningful and crucial sources of support for their goal achievement.

Family of origin. Mirroring Beaty and Pankake's earlier findings (2001), participants frequently referenced their families of origin, especially when the conversation turned to issues of self-esteem. The women talked about the ways in which their families of origin shaped their belief in their ability to achieve their goals, as well as

their beliefs about appropriate roles for females. Anna particularly cited her father as a tremendous influence in her life. She expressed her gratitude for the time she spent working in the family business. Although she gained many transferable workplace skills, the thing she remembers most is her father treating her with respect and listening to her opinions.

We would argue about who was right on what sale we were going to run or what we were going to do. We could have those conversations. I think girls who don't have that relationship with their dad, it's harder for them. I was very confident not only because I worked with people in the store, but I knew I could go toe-to-toe with my dad as we talked through issues or problems or politics or whatever. We could have those adult conversations and I think knowing you have that person... that person who respects you as a human being and has not pigeonholed you and is willing to treat you like a peer (to a point) really prepared me to go further.

When she expressed an interest in engineering in high school and encountered ambivalence from her school guidance counselor, her father encouraged her. This encouragement to step outside of society's prescribed gender roles stayed with her as she took on a variety of challenging nontraditional roles throughout her career.

I said, "Dad, I think I want to be an engineer," and my dad was so supportive. That is what it took because the school wasn't. No one had ever mentioned the word to me as a woman, but having a father who was supportive of me taught me I could take that step.

Jeannette and Sandra both cite their mothers as their strongest supporter and the individual who most shaped their personal identity. Jeannette said, "I have to say my

mother was probably the greatest influence in my life. She just gave me a great sense of self. She is probably my number one source of support.” Sandra credits her mother with developing her social competency and self-esteem, as well as championing her leadership self-identity.

My mom was my biggest supporter, my biggest fan, my biggest cheerleader growing up. She always saw more in me than I could see in myself, and I am extremely grateful to have a mom with the wisdom to call out the leader in me, the person who was more than I saw.

Sandra’s mother was her encourager, but she was also a guiding presence in Sandra’s professional life. Sandra describes her mother as very wise and intuitive. She specifically recalled her mother’s advice about establishing relationships with mentors and leaders who might foster Sandra’s leadership potential.

My mom made a comment when I was an undergraduate. I was telling her about a professor I met on campus and how impressed I was. My mom suggested I talk to her and see if she would consider mentoring me. I was young and said, “I can’t do that!” but she said, “Yes. Yes, you can.” She said if you were that impressed with her, then she is someone who might be able to help you get where you want to go. She said, “Surround yourself with people you want to be like.” That stuck with me.

Anna, Jeannette, and Sandra all attributed their career success in whole or in part to their family of origin, particularly their mother or father. Chief among their attributions was the individual’s influence in the development of their sense of agency and personal identity. Although other factors were cited among and between the

participants, the core characteristic of these family members was the way in which they instilled in the women a belief that they were capable of achieving their goals. They also countered socialized gender roles by encouraging the participants to pursue a variety of fields, including those traditionally reserved for males.

Spouse. Spousal support affects both career commitment and satisfaction for female leaders, especially in midlife (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005). The women in this study emphasized the need to maintain balance between work and home life while acknowledging the crucial role spouses play in facilitating their career advancement.

Study participants discussed the stress that accompanies leadership roles in higher education and the impact a supportive spouse has on an aspiring leader's career trajectory. Anna's first marriage ended in divorce, and the contrast between her first and second husbands illustrates the benefit of spousal encouragement.

... I learned a lot from my first marriage. My having an equal career was very difficult for him. My husband now is wonderful. He is very capable and supportive of anything I wanted to do. Probably no one cheered me on more than he did. If that's what I wanted to do, he was going to be there. I can bounce anything off of him and he'll be thoughtful about it and not be intimidated in the least by anything I say or do.

Marie's husband recognized her leadership potential and encouraged her to apply for presidential positions before she had integrated leadership into her personal identity. His encouragement provided the impetus she needed to search for new opportunities and step beyond the limitations she placed on herself.

My husband said, “Well, apply! They can't do more than say no.” I had been a vice president for less than two years and I thought, “They're not going to look at me,” but he said it would be good practice. He decided long before I did that I was going to be a college president. He's always been a cheerleader. He's the person who told me I could when I didn't believe I could. That family support is so important.

The women's spouses not only provided encouragement, but were also willing to share household duties and responsibilities, including those tasks usually socially assigned to females. Sandra describes the transition that took place in her marriage as she took on increasing levels of responsibility at work.

My husband was the one who really encouraged me to apply. Once I stepped into an administrative role, we didn't even sit down and talk about it. He just assumed additional responsibilities. He became the individual who would go grocery shopping and pick up around the house. We really almost switched those traditional roles.

Jeannette's desire to avoid relocating meant long commutes as she looked for advancement opportunities. Within her institution, her responsibilities spanned multiple campuses, which meant a 45 to 120 minute commute each way every day. In order for Jeannette to be able to pursue her goals, her husband changed careers.

I was midway through coursework for my dissertation and he decided to run his own business so he could stay home. He left a career in banking, much to my dismay at the time, but it ended up being a good thing because it allowed me the freedom to get up early and get out of the house. When the kids were sick, he

stayed home with them. Without that support from him, I would have missed out on opportunities.

In addition to encouragement and sharing household chores, Marie and Ruth voiced appreciation for their husband's provision of a safe haven where they could take refuge from the day's stresses and would be reminded to care for themselves. Marie's husband reminded her of the need for self-care. She said, "My husband tells me that I make sure everyone else takes care of themselves, but I don't take as much care of myself." Ruth's husband encouraged her to persist when she encountered obstacles and frustrations during her challenging journey.

One time I wanted to quit in the midst of my doctorate, and my husband kept saying, "Don't do it. Don't quit." I think I really would have quit if he hadn't encouraged me. My husband not letting me quit solidified the idea that he was behind me.

Participant narratives suggest an important connection between support systems and the ability to maintain work-home life balance. The 'village' narrative emerged among participants who had strong support from their spouse and their family of origin. For these participants, the individuals in their support system collaboratively shared the responsibility for helping them reach their goal. This collaborative approach reduced participant stress levels and diminished the effects of role conflict, including guilt and self-doubt. Jeannette says her husband, "...did not hinder me in any way. He only supported me and believed in me."

Spiritual faith. Anna, Jeannette, and Sandra discussed spirituality as a source of strength that provides a feeling of peace. Their spiritual beliefs give them courage to

overcome professional challenges, and the principles of their faith guide their decision-making. Anna attributes much of her composure and confidence in decision-making to her faith.

I always want to make sure, as I'm doing things, that they aren't ego-driven.

During tough times as a leader, we all have to make tough decisions. When you have that strong spiritual foundation, you know you don't control outcomes, but you know you've discerned the decision. You've done it in the most ethical manner, and then whatever happens, happens.

Participants who trusted they were being divinely led on their journey felt both a sense of peace and a sense of personal responsibility. Sandra explained,

It felt like I was I wasn't driving. I was just a passenger in the vehicle, like the new cars that are out now. You don't have to drive because they'll drive for you. I felt like I was in a Tesla and someone had programmed my destination for me. The vehicle was taking me where I needed to go. That's the best way I can describe it, other than to say I am a Christian. I believe and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, and so from my perspective, I'm where I am supposed to be. I believe this journey I've been on, I have been divinely led here.

Much like Sandra, Jeannette senses a guiding presence when she reflects on her career path. She believes her failures, as well as her successes, were crucial to the final outcome.

God did this. This is nothing that I did. He placed me on the hearts of people to do things for me and He opened doors for me that I couldn't imagine. I really do believe He has called me to this work and it was for such a time as this that I'm

supposed to be at [name of current college]. Everything from that first classroom experience to meeting [mentor's name] to not being selected at [name of another institution]. That search process gave me so much more confidence going into this one. All of those experiences led to this moment.

These participants strive to exemplify a leadership style that integrates emotional intelligence and spiritual awareness into their practice. Importantly, none of the participants discussed their particular denomination and did not advocate practicing religion in the workplace. Instead, they describe their faith as the foundation for ethical and moral decision-making, believing that today's relational and holistic leadership styles are more intuitive than prescriptive. Their spirituality serves as a defining tool as they establish themselves in their leadership practice and a guiding tool as they make workplace decisions, especially those with moral or ethical implications.

For participants in this study, personal sources of support were crucial for goal achievement. The women required collaborative assistance from a variety of supports to close the gap between the numerous demands placed on them and their available resources. These sources of support helped the women navigate common barriers and alleviate workplace stress. In addition, a combination of institutional and personal supports were identified as essential to satisfaction in both work and home life.

Individual Traits and Strategies

For the purposes of this study, individual traits and strategies refer to personal characteristics, cognitive frameworks, and behaviors that strengthened participants' perseverance, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. These traits and strategies do not rely on external validation, although they may have been fostered by external influences.

Analysis of participant narratives identified the following recurring subthemes in this category: having a thick skin, being proactive and open to new experiences, possessing a sense of agency, and finding their own leadership persona. Although these traits and strategies may not customarily be identified as sources of support, they emerged thematically from participants' responses to queries about supports and, for this reason, are categorized as such.

Thick skin and adaptability. Study participants frequently mentioned the need for aspiring female administrators in higher education to have a 'thick skin,' and they acknowledged the importance of not being disheartened or discouraged by experiences with sexism, sexual harassment, being underestimated by colleagues, etc. They use the term 'thick skin' to describe a type of resilience that allows them to transcend doubts and persist in the face of adversity.

Some of the women developed a thick skin in response to being "Other" early in life. Jeannette's mother tried to prepare her as a young girl for the discrimination she would likely experience.

My mom always told me, "You're black. You're female. You have to outwork everybody. You already have two strikes against you, so you just have to overcome it and you have to show them you can do the work." It was more of an understanding that I was going to have to outperform my counterparts. I'm not saying bias doesn't happen. I know it does. I think it's just a general sense of getting over it.

Sandra echoed Jeannette's sentiments. In Sandra's interview, she describes her ability to remain unaffected by the type of institutional bias that restricts equal access to opportunities for women and people of color.

For those of us who are female and, even more specifically, those of us who are African-American females, it's part of life. It's something we know is going to occur. I don't want to say I'm accustomed to it, but you know it's there. It doesn't take me by surprise. I'd seen it before. You just keep moving. Those of us who are women have experienced it, subtle and not subtle. It is unfortunate that we have to... not just settle and take it... but we learn how to cope with that disappointment, that anger, that frustration. We've learned how to keep moving. We've learned it's a coping skill you need in order to move forward and not go insane...

Similarly, Anna believes most women in the workforce experience instances of discrimination or harassment to varying degrees, but those who advance are able to persevere and move forward.

We've purposefully let it go. We've not let that get in our way. We just treated it as a 'live and learn' situation, understanding that we have to be the adults. We have to be more adult sometimes than the men we work with.

Marie's response to encountering bias differed from Anna's, Sandra's, and Jeannette's. She described a childhood spent with male siblings and peers, including some who used gender-based rhetoric to tease her despite sharing a familial affection. These early interactions taught her not to "...take stuff like that too seriously..." She also discussed her successful early career experiences with males who readily accepted her

input and leadership. As a result of these earlier interactions, Marie developed a reluctance to automatically associate gendered comments with mal-intent. When she moved from public schools to higher education, she expected her collaboration to be similarly well-received and to be treated as an equal, so she did not initially recognize some of the subtle dialogic differences her input received in comparison to her male colleagues, particularly when males were given more credence and their ideas were given more attention. Although she sees these differences in retrospect, Marie believes her naiveté served her well. For her, having a ‘thick skin’ meant giving people the benefit of the doubt. As she saw it, she was working with good people who, in her assessment, did not understand they treated her differently and who had no discriminatory intent.

I don't get wound up about those kinds of things because I grew up with brothers. Things like that usually don't bother me. I know those issues are out there and I advocate for breaking down those barriers. I want to see women in leadership roles. There shouldn't be any difference in the way women are treated or the way their comments are received, but I also don't look for things. I don't sit around wondering, “What's Mr. So-and-So going to do to make me mad today?”

Marie's story suggests her expectations of equity may have influenced her perceptions of discrimination and created a degree of attributional ambiguity. Even when she recognized differential treatment, she purposefully and thoughtfully chose to avoid assigning intent. She attributes her ability to forge relationships with a diverse group of colleagues, in part, to this reluctance to attribute instances of differential treatment to ill will.

Like Anna, Sandra, and Marie, Jeannette referenced the need to develop a thick skin and not be dissuaded by troublesome behaviors, but her strategy for accomplishing this goal differed from the other participants. Jeannette discovered she could break down barriers by trying to understand the culture and history of an organization, including the demographics of its people.

You're always true to who you are as a person, but you have to adapt. I think people who don't do that well aren't as successful. I'm very relational and I find a way to connect with people no matter what they look like. I'm kind of a chameleon. I can fit into my environment. I've seen some women, and I've certainly seen some African-American women, who can't assimilate. I am always true to myself. I'm just very observant of my situation and try to make sure I understand the norms and culture of the environment. I intend to value that and be respectful of it.

Jeannette advocates adapting to the environment and understanding the culture without adopting bias. She believes this type of cultural understanding is essential in order for college presidents to meet the needs of an institution's service areas. In contrast, Ruth sometimes perceived she had to 'go along to get along' in ways that created internal moral conflicts. Ultimately, she learned to view these choices as strategic compromises, a way to concede the battle in order to win the war.

Most things are not blatant, but women would do well to recognize different types of people have different expectations and need to be handled in different ways. You can just barrel through those differences and ignore them, or you can use them to your advantage. It's a personal choice and sometimes it's a moral choice.

If it was a person I could manage or manipulate by dumbing myself down, then sometimes I did that. I thought it through, and I decided the ends I wanted to achieve justified the means at the time.

The participants consistently and repeatedly used phrases such as ‘shouldn’t have to, *but*’ and ‘shouldn’t make a difference, *but*.’ Upon further clarification, the women agree their attempt to navigate the career pipeline in higher education was successful, in part, because of a thick skin and an ability to adapt when faced with the ‘*but*’ situations. As Ruth states, “Smart women have often learned how to go on if something is kind of insulting. It’s just water off a duck's back. You ignore it and go ahead and let time prove who you are. You just need a thick skin.”

Proactive and open to experiences. Women who achieve leadership roles in higher education demonstrate persistence in the face of adversity and courage when making difficult decisions (Darden, 2006). They are also willing to take risks and are open to new experiences (Darden, 2006). The participants in this study identified their persistence, their willingness to take on a variety of responsibilities, and their continual search for new opportunities as crucial elements for being viewed as leaders on their campuses. For some, accepting new assignments was merely part of their efforts to do the best job possible. Others intentionally sought out opportunities to build their skills and fill gaps in their skill set. Ruth believes the desire to seek out opportunities and find ways to become involved on campus is innate for leaders in higher education.

People who are leaders are leaders before they’re leaders. You find you’ve been leading people even though you didn't formally have the position. Even as a faculty member, I would wind up being on the committee that did this or the

committee that did that. I was always present. If Student Support Services had something to honor their students and invited faculty, I would be there. If faculty were invited to an African-American history event, I went because I wanted to support students and colleagues.

Like Ruth, Marie discovered she was inadvertently building her leadership skills just by pursuing her interests.

I always wanted to learn and figure out how to do things better. I like to be involved locally, but I like to be involved at the state level and the national level as well. I want to be continually learning, and I always want to figure out, “What's the best way to do things?” but that changes, so you have to continually put yourself out there. Well in doing that, I was gaining skills for a presidency.

Sandra did not initially seek a career in higher education, but later realized the field was a good match for her skills and talents. Once she decided to stay in higher education, she realized there were many areas where she needed to grow, both personally and professionally, in order to advance. Her choice to seek out new opportunities to fill those gaps was tactical.

I remember telling myself, “If you are going any further, if another door opens, there's no place for you to go because you're not prepared.” The door opened and I was able to walk into the office as *interim* CAO, but I could not stay. I realized I needed to prepare myself. That opened my eyes to the fact that opportunities might present themselves and I needed to be ready.

Because Anna started her career in manufacturing as an electrical engineer, she offered a unique perspective. Her career path included jobs in manufacturing, public

service, and higher education. In her experience, most skills are transferable, and she found she was readily able to transfer her leadership abilities across industries. Her diverse skillset prepared her to advance in many fields, not just the one employing her at the time.

If you educate yourself and gain competencies in multiple areas, if you're willing to learn, if you're willing to try things, you will have great opportunities. You should assume what you know in one field will apply across different fields. It does and it will.

Participants did not wait to hold a particular job before seeking opportunities to learn the skills associated with that position. They identified opportunities and pursued them with intent, although the intent was not necessarily career advancement. The women in this study primarily sought ways to grow professionally, and they described both vertical and lateral multiskilling. Laterally, they looked for opportunities to acquire skills from other disciplines, and vertically, they sought opportunities to enhance their leadership abilities by acquiring higher-order administrative skills.

Agency. Female leaders in higher education demonstrate belief in their ability to achieve goals and effect change (Terosky, O'Meara, & Campbell, 2014). Contrasting the moments of self-doubt shared by study participants, the women also shared stories intimating their belief in their ability to achieve the goals they established for themselves and their organizations. Anna says her husband "...will always say I believe I can do anything." Both Anna and Jeannette describe confidence in their power to influence the external world and act in accordance with their goals to generate positive change.

Jeannette does not recall a time in her life when she did not believe she could achieve her goals. She says,

I think it's just a general sense I've had since I was a little girl that I could do anything I wanted to do. I could be anything I wanted to be. I'd have to work hard. I'd have to stay focused. I'd have to do the job.

This sense of agency extends to shaping the perceptions of others. Rather than engaging with her critics, Ruth trusted her performance would prove her detractors wrong. She said, “You need to trust in yourself. Trust that time will bear out who you are and what your skills are.” A sense of agency allowed these participants to display characteristics that are expected of leaders, such as strength and decisiveness. Notably, study participants who frequently referenced feelings of intentionality made fewer mentions of self-doubt.

Finding one’s own leadership persona. Authenticity is important for leaders, but may be difficult for women to achieve in the workplace because of rigid behavioral constraints and dichotomous social constructions for the roles of ‘female’ and ‘leader.’ Most participants in this study did not initially aspire to the office of college president nor to an advanced leadership role, leaving them free to present themselves authentically without pressure to conform to androcentric paradigms. Even though their early leadership behaviors were not performative, neither were they well-established. Participants’ leadership personas matured with time and experience, evolving to become increasingly authentic over the course of their careers. They learned from their supervisors and used those lessons to incorporate – or eliminate – traits based on their observations. Ruth explained,

I had two bad supervisors who stand out. They stand out because they are what I didn't want to be. They taught me to be a better supervisor. They taught me I want to mentor people below me. They taught me to emphasize I want people to do well. I learned from those negative experiences, as well as the positive ones. Jeannette learned that different personalities respond to different strategies, so she became adept at altering her approach to fit the needs of the employee. Rather than expecting subordinates to respond to her style, she utilized empathy to be responsive to theirs.

Along the way, you never stop evolving in your leadership style. I learned that everybody doesn't want to be led like I do. I had to adjust over the years to get the best out of people. I had to adjust my style.

Aspiring female leaders are expected to display a socially acceptable mix of strength and authenticity, a task made more challenging by the rigid behavioral constraints placed on women in leadership positions (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Part of Ruth's leadership evolution included overcoming gendered societal norms, especially regarding appropriate ways to communicate with others. As she assumed increasing levels of responsibility, she learned to assert herself in a leadership capacity when questioned or critiqued.

I've grown at being firmer. I've never been an indecisive person, but I'm realizing all these people are subordinate to me and sometimes I don't have to justify a decision. I can just say, "Nope, this is the decision I've made. This is how we're doing it and I'm not apologizing."

Anna learned this lesson early in her career, especially as a young female leader in a male-dominated manufacturing facility. After being told she needed to use profanity to get the workers' attention, she decided to lead authentically rather than adopt behaviors that felt false. Her success shaped her beliefs about leadership moving forward. She said, "It's okay to have a female style of leadership. You don't need to lead like a male. You don't have to look like a guy to be an effective leader. Lead with your own strengths. You have to find your own style of leadership and then don't be apologetic about it."

The participant narratives in this study highlight individual traits, cognitive schemas, and behaviors that contributed to the participants' ability to successfully navigate the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. Developing a thick skin helped the women persevere in the face of barriers and differential treatment. Participants also cited being open to new experiences and seeking out new learning opportunities as important factors in being perceived as a leader on campus and learning to perform administrative tasks. For study participants, this openness to new experiences was facilitated by a sense of agency and intentionality related to their career advancement. Because the participants believed in their ability to control outcomes and achieve goals, they willingly pursued new challenges. This sense of agency and efficacy gave participants the confidence to eschew masculinized prescriptions of leadership and forge their own leadership persona.

Table 5

Sources of Support Reported by Female Community College Presidents

Theme	Basic Description	Subthemes
Institutional supports	Sources of support experienced on the job. Workplace policies, structural elements, or management practices that support women’s career aspirations and leadership development, either advertently or inadvertently.	Supervisors as sources of support Mentors Leadership programs Interviews as confidence builders
Personal supports	Sources of support experienced outside of the workplace. Relationships with individuals or organizations outside the workplace that comprise the participants’ support system. These relationships form a support system for study participants and helped moderate the effect of barriers.	Family of origin Spouse or significant other Religious faith
Individual traits and strategies	Individual traits and strategies originating within the individual. Personal characteristics, cognitive frameworks, and behaviors that strengthened participants’ perseverance, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.	Thick skin and adaptable Proactive and open to new experiences Sense of agency Finding one’s own leadership persona

Table 6

Participants’ Experiences with Sources of Support (by subthemes)

Type of Barrier and Subtheme	Participants
Institutional supports - Subthemes	
• Supervisors as a source of support	Anna, Marie, Sandra, Jeannette, Ruth
• Mentors	Anna, Marie, Sandra, Jeannette
• Leadership programs	Marie, Sandra, Jeannette, Ruth
• Interviews as confidence builders	Marie, Jeannette, Ruth

Table 6 (Continued)

Personal supports – Subthemes	
• Family of origin	Anna, Sandra, Jeannette
• Spouse	Anna, Marie, Sandra, Jeannette, Ruth
• Religious faith	Anna, Sandra, Jeannette
Individual traits and strategies – Subthemes	
• Thick skin and adaptable	Anna, Marie, Sandra, Jeannette, Ruth
• Proactive, open to new experiences	Anna, Marie, Sandra, Ruth
• Sense of agency	Anna, Jeannette, Ruth
• Finding one’s leadership persona	Anna, Jeannette, Ruth

Document Analysis

The interpretation of meaning by its very nature is context-bound. Therefore, utilizing multiple data sources for triangulation is both complementary and supplementary (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, document analysis included participant dissertations, press releases, institutional websites, and personal documents (resumes, curriculum vitae, etc.). These written records were useful in corroborating timelines for participants’ employment positions and major accomplishments. In phenomenological studies that emphasize the lived experiences of a small group of study participants, the usefulness of document analysis is limited primarily to triangulation in order to preserve the confidentiality of study participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Many written records reveal participants’ identities or incorporate personally identifying information, such as geographic locations. For this study, document review specifically included participants’ curriculum vitae, professional publications, and institutional websites, which provided verification of much of the information provided by participants in their interviews. Press releases were also analyzed and provided an additional layer of generalized insight into the context of the institutions where

participants are employed. The press releases yielded relevant data about three of the five institutions represented by study participants. One institution had been harshly criticized in years prior to the participant's appointment for a lack of accountability in the presidential search process while a second institution was going through a contentious merger at the time of the participant's hire. A third participant was hired after the dismissal of the prior president. The significance of these events will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Summary

This study examined the educational backgrounds and career pathways of five female community college presidents in a select three-state region of the eastern central portion of the U.S. The study also explored the participants' lived experiences as they navigated the career pipeline in higher education and their perceptions of the barriers and sources of support they encountered along the way. Chapter four presented the findings of the study based on analysis of participant interviews for recurring themes. Thematic analysis revealed three categories of barriers (institutional, birdcage, and internal) and three categories of supports (institutional, personal, and individual traits/strategies). Chapter five will explore these findings in the context of current literature. Chapter five will also offer recommendations based on study findings, using critical feminism and Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Model as frameworks for interpretation.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of female community college presidents. A lack of diversity in leadership generates a homologous view of leadership and leadership traits (Ibarra et al., 2013), limiting both the institution and its constituents from realizing their full potential. Homogeneity in leadership also fails to provide marginalized populations with the role models needed to integrate leadership into their personal identity (Ibarra et al., 2013). Women remain underrepresented in higher education leadership despite multiple initiatives designed to increase female representation (Ward & Eddy, 2013). The persistence of female underrepresentation despite these initiatives suggests other barriers may exist for aspiring female leaders. Thus, a study of the perceptions and lived experiences of women recently appointed to the office of community college president was warranted.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine and describe the career paths, barriers, and sources of support perceived by women who have navigated the career pipeline and ascended to the office of community college president. This study was guided by four primary research questions:

1. How do female community college presidents describe their educational background?
2. How do female community college presidents describe their career pathway from initial employment to presidential appointment?
3. What barriers, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive as they navigate the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?

4. What resources and sources of support, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive while navigating the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?

Participants consisted of five female community college presidents from the eastern central region of the United States. All participants were appointed to the office of president less than five years prior to their participation in the study to ensure the timeliness of study findings. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to elicit participant responses to the research questions. As interviews were transcribed, the textual data was coded and analyzed to extract recurring themes using a modified van Kaam method. A polyphonic approach to narrative inquiry was used to weave together a composite picture of the phenomenon of navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. The researcher and participants functioned as co-creators of meaning to produce a negotiated narrative based on the integration of multiple perspectives.

Research Question 1: How do female community college presidents describe their educational background?

All five study participants have doctoral degrees that were earned after they were in the workforce full-time. Anna and Marie possess a doctorate of philosophy, or Ph. D. Sandra, Jeannette, and Ruth have a doctorate of education, or Ed. D. None of the participants share the same area of expertise. Participants' areas of expertise include engineering, educational curriculum/instruction, educational administration/supervision, educational policy studies, and community college administration. These findings are consistent with previous research (American Council on Education, 2012; Steinke, 2006) which reports female college presidents are more likely than male college presidents to

possess a doctoral degree. Steinke (2006) asserts that a doctoral degree helps female administrators gain credibility among faculty members.

Research Question 2: How do female community college presidents describe their career pathway from initial employment to presidential appointment?

Allowing for institutional variations in job titles and layers of administration, three study participants (Marie, Sandra, and Ruth) followed a traditional career path to reach the office of president. Although they held different positions upon first hire (public school teacher, project coordinator, and adjunct faculty member), their careers followed similar paths once they became full-time faculty members. As full-time faculty members, these participants were appointed department or division chair. After serving as department/division chair, Marie and Sandra were both named associate deans. Eventually they were appointed dean of academic affairs before ultimately being named college president. Ruth did not hold the title of associate dean or dean. However, she had additional departments added to her purview as department chair, which made her chair over the two largest departments at her institution. She was then named associate vice-president of general studies before being named college president.

The remaining two participants, Anna and Jeannette, followed non-traditional career paths to reach the office of president, although only Anna gained the majority of her experience outside of higher education. As a young faculty member, Jeannette recognized she had a passion for education but was drawn to administrative roles. After being a full-time faculty member and department chair, she was appointed director of off-campus sites. She next served as executive assistant to the president. In this role, her president and mentor provided targeted opportunities to develop her leadership skills.

She was later appointed dean of extended services, followed by associate vice-president, before being named college president. Anna is a true outlier who provided a different perspective on navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. She was an engineer in industry before opening her own consulting business. She then worked in government and public service, overseeing collaborative initiatives between communities, governments, and institutions of higher education, before being recruited for the position of college president (see Table 2).

Research Question 3: What barriers, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive as they navigate the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?

Data analysis of participant interviews yielded three categories of barriers: institutional barriers, birdcage barriers, and internal barriers (see Table 3). Institutional barriers are barriers that directly relate to the participant's employment experiences. They result from workplace policies, structural elements, or management practices that establish roadblocks for aspiring female leaders, either advertently or inadvertently. The following subthemes emerged within this thematic category: supervisors as barriers, being underestimated, gender norms and the double bind, and sexism/sexual harassment. Birdcage barriers are barriers directly related to the conflict between the participants' personal and professional lives. These barriers allow participants to identify opportunities for professional growth and advancement, but they are unable to fully access these opportunities because of situational boundaries or limits. Subthemes that emerged in the category of birdcage barriers include role conflict, being place-bound, and having limited opportunities. Internal barriers reside within the participant and result

from disempowering internal dialogues that diminish an individual's sense of self-esteem and agency. Subthemes that were identified in this category include self-doubt, feeling the need to be perfectly qualified, and requiring external validation.

Research Question 4: What resources and sources of support, gender-related or non-gender-related, do female community college presidents perceive while navigating the career pipeline from initial employment to presidential appointment?

Data analysis of participant interviews yielded three categories of supports: institutional supports, personal supports, and individual traits/strategies (see Table 5). Institutional sources of support are experienced on the job. They are the result of workplace policies, structural elements, or management practices that support women's career aspirations and leadership development, either advertently or inadvertently. The following subthemes emerged within this thematic category: supervisors as sources of support, mentors, leadership programs, and interviews as confidence builders. Personal sources of support are relationships with individuals or organizations outside the workplace that comprise the participants' support system. These relationships formed a support system for study participants and helped moderate the effect of barriers. Subthemes that emerged in the category of personal supports include family of origin, spouse, and religious faith. Individual traits/strategies originate within the individual. This thematic category includes personal characteristics, cognitive frameworks, and behaviors that allowed participants to overcome obstacles and persevere in the face of adversity. These traits and strategies do not rely on external validation, although they may have been fostered by external influences. Subthemes that were identified in this

category include: having a thick skin and being adaptable, being proactive and open to new experiences, having a sense of agency, and finding one's own leadership persona.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study substantiate previous research indicating aspiring female leaders face an array of obstacles. In 1995, the U.S. Department of Labor released its Glass Ceiling Commission report, which suggested women's underrepresentation in advanced leadership roles is the result of a combination of social, business, and governmental barriers that hinder women's professional advancement. Twenty-four years later, participants in this study identified an amalgam of workplace barriers, birdcage barriers, and internal barriers. However, despite the overlap between existing literature and the narratives of this study, participant stories reveal new perspectives that enhance researchers' understanding of the experience of navigating the higher education pipeline to reach the office of community college president. In particular, the women in this study did not perceive their gender to be a barrier to success. They merely identified it as a factor influencing their career progression. Study findings also suggest: (a) intrusive recruitment efforts may be needed to encourage aspiring female leaders, (b) much of the differential treatment directed at female leaders is best described as second-generation bias rather than the overt discrimination, and (c) the career development of aspiring female leaders in higher education is significantly influenced by the competing demands of work and motherhood, potentially dissuading some women from pursuing leadership opportunities.

Barriers

Qualitative analysis of participants' interview transcripts revealed three categories of barriers: institutional barriers, birdcage barriers, and internal barriers. Although much of the existing research could be similarly categorized, important differences emerged. As in earlier studies, study participants described differential treatment, a chilly work environment, and gendered expectations for leadership behavior, but they characterized these events as subtle rather than overt. In their experience, they did not feel hindered by discriminatory organizational practices or policies. They had access to leadership programs, strong personal support systems, and mentors who invested in their professional growth. For these reasons, study participants were reluctant to identify gender as a barrier. Instead, they described it as an *influence* or *factor*. This, by definition, describes the nature of second-generation bias (Ibarra et. al., 2013). When compared to first-generation gender bias, second-generation bias is subtle and easy to dismiss (Ibarra et al., 2013), which creates attributional ambiguity (Brower, Schwartz, & Jones, 2019). Attributional ambiguity produces uncertainty about whether negative events and interactions occur because of an individual's minority status or if there are other credible explanations (Brower et. al., 2019). When looking at their workplace experiences in retrospect and identifying examples of second-generation gender bias, both Marie and Jeannette expressed attributional ambiguity when stating they may have been naïve in believing their gender had never been a hindrance. Examples of second-generation gender bias in the workplace appear throughout the participants' narratives as demonstrated by numerous descriptions of interactions with others that reflected androcentric views of leadership. Second-generation gender bias is also evident in the

participants' descriptions of birdcage barriers and internal barriers which reflect systemic acceptance of social constructions of gender and leadership.

Institutional barriers. Many of the barriers identified as subthemes can broadly be described as variations of second-generation gender bias (Ibarra et al., 2013). The narratives of all five study participants contained elements representing a masculinized view of leadership and subsequent role conflict experienced by women navigating the career pipeline in higher education. As participants advanced in their careers, they increasingly faced dichotomous expectations that impacted their ability to present themselves authentically (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These expectations included being both feminine enough to conform to stereotypical gender roles and masculine enough to be perceived as an effective leader (Carli & Eagly, 2011). They also faced the low expectations of others as well as judgments about their physical appearance and their status as wife, mother, or caregiver (Sandler, 1999).

Encountering others who held low expectations for them was a barrier identified by four of the five participants. Low expectations for female workers is a common barrier that hampers women's advancement in the workplace, yet it often goes unnoticed or unacknowledged (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 2004; Sandler, 1999). Sandra believes she was underestimated by her peers as an internal presidential candidate, Anna and Jeannette both believe they were underestimated early in their careers as young females in nontraditional fields, and Ruth felt underestimated because of her status as a wife and mother. These perceptions align with Brunner's (2004) description of the widespread acceptance of masculinized views of leadership and the obstacles this widespread acceptance creates for aspiring female leaders. Brunner (2004) characterized this

gendered portrayal of leadership as a barrier that obstructs our view of women as effective in the workplace, especially in leadership roles. With the exception of Anna, none of the participants reported being advised to align their leadership style with stereotypically masculine traits, as detailed by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011). They do, however, believe they were perceived as weak and less effective because of their gender and their leadership styles, a phenomenon described by Blount (1998). Although participants described themselves as possessing communal characteristics associated with transformative leadership styles, these characteristics contradict the dominant masculinized view of leadership. This, in turn, creates high expectations for females in nurturing roles but low expectations in leadership positions (O'Connor, 2010). As a result, female leaders may feel forced to choose between willfully adopting the dominant representation of leadership and perpetuating the status quo or refusing to present a performative version of themselves as leader and risking being presumed ineffective (Carli & Eagly, 2011).

In addition to facing the low expectations of others, participants felt judged on their physical appearance and their status as mothers or as professional women without children (Brunner, 2004; Sandler, 1999). Both Marie and Sandra received comments about their physical appearance, while Jeannette's supervisor asked who would care for her children while she worked full-time and took a full course load in graduate school. Ruth was dismissed by a doctoral professor after he learned she had been a stay-at-home wife and mother. Jeannette also experienced judgments based on her status as a mother, while expectations for Marie were raised because she did not have children. These experiences support the findings of Eagly and Karau (2002), who suggest that masculine

frameworks of leadership cause superiors and subordinates to devalue aspiring female leaders because they may be perceived as inadequate from the outset. Participants' narratives also demonstrate the sometimes subtle influence of social constructions of gender and the intersectional nature of gender, race, and age (Griffin, 2009; Ibarra et al., 2013). For example, as young females working in nontraditional fields, Anna and Jeannette struggled to bridge the markers of difference in multiple outcategories, whereas a young male or an older female may have more easily bridged their differences across a single demographic outcategory (Griffin, 2009).

Participants' experiences with institutional barriers illustrate the ways in which female leaders face increasing scrutiny as they advance in their careers while expectations for their appearance and behavior become more rigid (Chin & Trimble, 2015). This scrutiny is exacerbated by the isolation female leaders experience as they move forward and female representation diminishes, a phenomenon described by Jeannette, who said she found herself 'the only' in many situations (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). This solo status (Ballenger, 2010) and other instances of second-generation bias described by the participants contribute to an overall "chilly climate" (Sandler, 1999) and diminish opportunities for women to progress through the career pipeline (Ballenger, 2010). A chilly climate does not necessarily imply intent and may result from conditions such as having few women in leadership roles (Sandler, 1999), as when Jeannette describes compensating for her solo status by acclimating to the culture of white male-dominated environments. Although participants acknowledged these micro-inequities, they did not perceive widespread discrimination. Marie specifically hesitated to use words like 'bias' because, in her words, she was "...working with good people."

However, Ibarra (et al., 2013) found even when no discriminatory intent exists, such micro-inequities may hinder the development of female leaders. The experiences detailed by study participants match those identified by Sandler (1999) as having a miniscule effect individually but a damaging effect cumulatively, especially when they diminish women's self-esteem, self-confidence, and career aspirations. Specifically, the following micro-inequities listed by Sandler (1999) were identified in participants' narratives: (a) focusing on a woman's appearance, (b) viewing marriage and parental status as a disadvantage for women, (c) using humor in a hostile manner, (d) not taking women's work or comments as seriously as men's, (e) having lower expectations for women's job performance, and (f) attributing a woman's hire or job success to affirmative action. Still, the damaging cumulative effect described by Sandler was not perceived to be a significant barrier by study participants.

In light of the androcentric perspective of most leadership theories (Chin, 2011), exploring organizational barriers from the perspective of women is crucial to understanding the essence of female leadership. These barriers illustrate the paradox of invisibility and extra-visibility for aspiring female leaders (Spangler, 2011). Participants' fitness for leadership was evaluated through the lens of gender, meaning their performance was hyper-scrutinized, while their input was simultaneously dismissed or devalued. Their leadership ability was judged based on their physical appearance, their conformity to gender norms, and their status as wife or mother. According to these narratives, females who occupy a realm traditionally reserved for males are expected to legitimize their presence by incorporating traits and characteristics aligning with masculine views of leadership. Participants' narratives also reveal that instances of bias

increased in frequency as the women advanced along the career pipeline, reflecting the ways in which positions of power remain a male prerogative and bestow a male advantage (Griffin, 2009).

Birdcage barriers. At some point in their journey, all study participants struggled to maintain balance between their professional responsibilities and their roles as wives, mothers, and daughters, a common dilemma for female leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Glass, 1995). All study participants cited instances of work-home life conflict resulting from their struggle to fulfill competing obligations in both domains. Participants' experiences align with Eagly's (1987) social role theory and the impact of gender on work and family expectations. Social role theory posits that societal norms prescribe normative behaviors based on gender. As individuals observe others' adherence to prescribed gender roles, they form beliefs that are internalized. These internalized beliefs provide a foundation for establishing behavioral expectations for others and for self. For participants in this study, the incompatible demands of multiple roles created tension when fulfilling the responsibilities of one role interfered with the demands of another (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Participants felt others made assumptions about their abilities and commitments, while at the same time they were exerting pressure on themselves to meet the overwhelming demands of multiple roles. Ruth and Jeannette believe their leadership potential and commitment to work were questioned because they held competing roles as mothers, while Marie believes her commitment was questioned when she became primary caregiver for ill and aging family members. These experiences support research by Jacobs and Gerson (2004), who assert that work-life balance may be age- and life-stage dependent, making it especially complex for females in leadership

positions who are navigating the career pipeline in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. This also supports the findings of Lockwood (2004), who stated that work-life balance has a decided influence on women's career advancement, setting up barriers to success if not anticipated and proactively managed.

Although participants identified the competing demands of work and home life as an obstacle to their progress, they describe it as navigable. Despite this navigability, the conflict between woman-as-leader and woman-as-mother (or wife or child) created circumstances that limited participants' access to opportunities for professional growth and advancement. Jeannette, Marie, and Anna marveled in hindsight at the sheer volume of responsibilities they shouldered while navigating the career pipeline. These experiences exemplify the triple burden experienced by many career women in dual-earner families: household duties, paid labor, and childcare provider. This triad of obligations requires many women to work a 'second shift' to fulfill home and family obligations after working at their full-time paid positions (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). These competing obligations may prevent aspiring leaders from pursuing leadership roles, especially if they lack a strong support system (Chavez, 2011; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Ligeikis, 2010). This finding reflects the findings of Jacobs and Gerson (2004), who state that women's multiple roles increasingly conflict with work performance when women work over fifty hours per week, a common experience for study participants as they held full-time employment and pursued their doctoral degrees.

Participants' narratives reflect earlier research that found competing obligations in the personal lives of women trying to navigate the career pipeline in higher education may function as obstacles by limiting their access to networking and job opportunities

(Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Jeannette and Marie were unable to pursue employment opportunities outside a restricted geographic range, a circumstance which negatively affects women's ability to advance in higher education (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Ruth had fewer chances to network at conferences and seminars. Marie's family crisis necessitated working from home temporarily, a situation which created conflict with her immediate supervisor. For female leaders, familial obligations and the quality of these relationships create a complex dynamic that intersects with participants' work life (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). These intersecting elements can lead to career stagnation if a woman is unable to participate in networking opportunities and build professional connections or if she is unable to change jobs in order to incrementally increase her level of responsibility (Ligeikis, 2010). Analysis and coding of participant interviews revealed this potential stagnation is the aggregate result of several interacting circumstances which are related by dialectic causality. These interacting circumstances limit opportunities for aspiring female leaders in higher education by restricting their access to opportunities through the creation of a metaphorical birdcage bounded on all sides by the competing demands of multiple roles.

Internal barriers. All study participants described self-limiting internal dialogues that hindered their career advancement, either explicitly or implicitly. Sandra and Marie identified their self-doubt as a barrier, while Anna, Jeannette, and Ruth described subtle thought patterns that inhibited their progress. For Sandra and Marie, the widespread acceptance of masculinized versions of leadership caused them to devalue their communal strengths. Anna and Jeannette described having a healthy self-esteem but still felt the need to be perfectly qualified before they could apply for advanced

positions. Ruth struggled with finding a voice of authority in leadership roles when she was valued and praised for soothing others' discontent.

Sandra and Marie believed they lacked idealized, stereotypically male leadership traits and therefore did not recognize their leadership potential. This cognitive frame bears out the work of O'Connor (2010), who suggests the wide acceptance of masculine views of leadership and the underrepresentation of women in top positions reinforces entrenched beliefs and maintains the status quo. As a result, aspiring female leaders like Sandra and Marie who do not conform to the masculine stereotype may fail to incorporate leadership into their personal identity and feel ill-suited or ill-qualified for leadership roles (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). Anna and Jeannette both expressed high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy, yet they felt the need to be perfectly qualified before expressing interest in leadership positions. Their narratives support data suggesting men will apply for positions if they meet approximately 60% of the qualifications, while women are reluctant to apply unless they meet 100% of the qualifications for the position (Sandberg, 2015). This belief is also indicative of perfectionistic expectations which dissuade women from pursuing opportunities that present the possibility of failure. The internal dialogues of self-doubt and feeling the need to be perfectly qualified caused all five study participants to require external validation. Marie characterized this need for external validation as an inability to deem oneself worthy of holding a leadership position. Marie's characterization aligns with research by Chesterman, Ross-Smith, and Peters (2005), who found many female leaders in higher education are reluctant to apply for leadership positions without encouragement

and endorsement of their credentials by others, particularly the endorsement of immediate supervisors.

Participants' self-defeating internal dialogues led to the internal barriers of self-doubt, feeling the need to be perfectly qualified, and requiring external validation. For aspiring female leaders, self-defeating internal dialogues are reinforced by the pervasive acceptance of a masculinized version of effective leadership predicated on Great Man theories (Chin, 2011) and by the gendered language of modesty required of women in the workplace, which requires them to attribute their success to something other than their own hard work and effort (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This external attribution, in combination with widely accepted masculinized views of leadership and the hypervisibility of women in leadership roles, undermined participants' sense of agency and self-efficacy while fostering hesitations that inhibited their career advancement.

Barriers Summary. The participant narratives in this study shed new light on the gendered phenomenon of navigating the career pipeline in higher education. Unlike the overt discrimination experienced by previous generations of women in the workplace, the participants in this study perceived little or no intentional bias over the course of their careers in higher education. Much of the differential treatment they described consisted of second-generation gender bias in the form of micro-inequities. These micro-inequities coalesced with gender role expectations and internal doubts to limit participants' access to advancement opportunities and deter participants from pursuing available opportunities. One factor contributing to the persistence of micro-inequities and second-generation gender bias in the workplace is the continued dominance of androcentric leadership theories that emphasize the masculine experience. These theories have formed

the basis for dominant leadership ideologies since their 19th-century inception and continue to be perpetuated in leadership literature (Rost, 1991). As masculine conceptions of leadership, these theories cast female leaders and feminine styles of leadership as anomalies. This portrayal of women as incompatible with leadership roles is then internalized by both men and women in the workplace, hindering women from incorporating leadership into their personal identity and deterring workers from viewing women as effective leaders (Chin, 2011).

Sources of Support

Data analysis of participant narratives yielded three categories of support: institutional, personal, and individual traits/strategies. These findings largely align with existing research on the gendered phenomenon of navigating the career pathway in higher education by reiterating the importance of supervisor encouragement, workplace mentors, leadership programs, and a strong personal support system. This study also contributes a unique perspective regarding the importance of the presidential search process as a confidence builder and the perception of personal traits and strategies as a source of support for female leaders' goal achievement. Although 'traits and strategies' may seem semantically incongruent as a source of support, all study participants included examples of personal traits and strategies in response to questions about sources of support. For this reason, they have been included as a subtheme in this thematic category.

Institutional sources of support. According to Ward and Eddy (2013), the culture of an institution influences women's willingness to pursue leadership opportunities in higher education. When the organizational culture appears closed to aspiring female leaders, women are reluctant to pursue leadership roles, but an

organizational culture that values the female voice and supports the aspirations of aspiring female leaders encourages women to pursue leadership opportunities. Participants in this study identified four sources of support within their institutions that created an atmosphere of inclusion and helped them overcome the barriers they encountered. These sources of support include supervisors, mentors, leadership programs, and participating in presidential searches. Significantly, these findings suggest today's female leaders find support where previous generations encountered barriers. Among the barriers listed in the Glass Ceiling Commission's 1995 report are a lack of professional mentors/sponsors and blatant sex discrimination. Women in this study did not perceive widespread blatant sex discrimination nor did they cite a shortage of encouraging supervisors or professional mentors. In contrast, study participants expressed gratitude for the many people who encouraged them to pursue leadership opportunities and who were willing to mentor them in the process. This experience is particularly significant in light of Ward and Eddy's (2013) observation that women in academia are less apt to pursue leadership opportunities when the culture of the organization conveys ambivalence. Supportive supervisors and mentors, as well as female access to formal leadership programs, contradict the notion that administrative positions are gender-bounded.

The findings of this study support earlier research indicating supervisors have a tremendous impact on employee development and attitude because of the power supervisors wield over subordinates (Costello, 2015). According to Zachary (2012), supervisors and mentors have an especially substantive impact on the career development of aspiring female leaders. Participants in this study cited the importance of supervisors

in creating an atmosphere that encouraged their professional growth and career advancement. Supervisors played a crucial role in developing the leadership capabilities of study participants by cultivating their unique leadership skills and nurturing participants' view of themselves as leaders (Costello, 2015). Participants especially noted the importance of having input in decision-making and being allowed to function autonomously. Their experiences support Bolman and Deal's (2008) assertion that supervisors who promote employee autonomy improve work performance and contribute to employees' morale and well-being (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Participant narratives indicate supportive supervisors utilized leader-member exchanges that demonstrated inclusion and trust (Northouse, 2018). Part of this exchange included working with participants to create opportunities to expand their leadership skills and accommodating competing demands in order to ease the conflict women experience when they are torn between professional and personal obligations (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These supervisors accommodated demands placed on participants as mothers and care-takers, as well as their inability to relocate for career advancement. By providing opportunities for the participants to balance the competing demands of their personal and professional lives, these employers advanced the leadership skills of aspiring female leaders while supporting their ability to contribute to the overall mission of the institution (Cheung & Halpern, 2010).

Zachary (2012) reported that both mentors and supervisors shape the career trajectory of aspiring leaders, but study participants differentiated between the role of a supervisor and a mentor. Participant narratives suggested a supervisor's role is to create an open climate and provide opportunities for growth, while the mentor's role may

include any or all of the following: modeling effective leadership behaviors, sharing knowledge, providing instruction and feedback, encouraging protégés to take risks, and offering career advice. Notably, despite differentiating between the two roles, relationships described by participants as most beneficial were with supervisor-mentors who occupied both roles simultaneously and therefore had the authority to assign leadership opportunities while helping them navigate the terrain.

The mentoring relationships described by participants included both formal and informal associations that crossed age, race, and gender lines. This supports Chavez' 2011 study, which found that mentoring is an essential component of leadership development but the gender of the mentor is not a relevant factor. Mentors were especially important to the career advancement of study participants because their encouragement partially mediated the effects of the androcentrism which pervades leadership discourse. Mentors also created opportunities for study participants to compensate for the restrictions imposed by birdcage barriers.

Reiterating the findings of Sullivan (2000), study participants reported their supervisors fostered the development of their leadership skills while guiding their career trajectories and shielding them from potentially career-damaging missteps. One way these supervisors assisted participants was by facilitating their entrée to limited-access opportunities, including recommending them for acceptance into formal leadership programs. These leadership programs aided participants in developing their leadership identity. Participants also described the importance of these programs in developing a network of peer support, a finding reported earlier by Ibarra, et. al. (2013). Supervisors also encouraged participants to apply for jobs outside their institution when participants

were ready to advance but internal opportunities were not available. Applying for these jobs allowed the women to participate in presidential searches, which honed their skills as applicants and provided valuable feedback about participants' strengths and weaknesses as presidential candidates. This finding is supported by Chesterman et al. (2005), who discovered that some female administrators only applied for leadership positions as a way to gain experience with the interview process and were often shocked to be named a finalist or receive a job offer.

As organizational power-holders, supervisors and mentors have a great deal of influence over the careers of subordinates (Costello, 2015). For the participants in this study, supervisors and mentors had the power to disseminate information, solicit input, and assign value to the feminine voice. This power shaped the culture of their organizations and influenced subordinates' perceptions of women's roles within these institutions. By investing in their institution's human capital, these supervisors and mentors helped meet the collective needs of study participants, including their senses of safety, acceptance, belonging, and esteem (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Participants' narratives show that institutional sources of support, specifically the combined effects of supervisor encouragement, mentor advocacy, and participation in leadership programs, helped the women integrate leadership into their personal identities, develop their leadership skills, and advance along the career pipeline. This finding corresponds with research by Dreher and Ash (2000), who report that aspiring leaders with role models, mentors, and advocates advance more quickly and receive more promotions at shorter intervals than those without these supports. This also demonstrates the reciprocal nature of the relationship between organizations and individuals, as the

institutions reaped the benefits of participants' talents and skills, while the participants received opportunities for professional growth and rewarding work (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Personal sources of support. Aspiring female leaders overwhelmingly rely on personal support systems (Beaty & Pankake, 2001) to balance competing demands. Chavez (2011) found the support and encouragement of family is a crucial element for the professional success of female college presidents. Participants cited both their families of origin and their spouses as crucial factors in their career achievements, and participants expressed gratitude for the support they received from their spouses and families as they navigated the career pipeline. For the college presidents in this study, navigating the career pipeline meant participating in a combination of evening and weekend events, traveling to conferences, teaching classes on multiple sites at various times of the day, spending off hours grading or working on institutional projects, and continuing their education at the doctoral level. All of these activities took time away from marital and family relationships. The stress caused by maintaining this type of schedule for years has the potential to cause discord at home and, as Anna experienced, social constructions of gender amplify this discord among couples whose husbands have internalized social messages of traditional gender roles (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005). Participants' partial attribution of their success to spousal support reflects Gordon and Whelan-Berry's (2005) assertion that spousal support significantly impacts career achievement and satisfaction for female leaders. These findings also mirror the work of Eagly and Carli (2007), whose research concluded that aspiring female leaders substantially benefit from the support of social support systems.

Social systems such as family, friends, and social organizations provide aspiring female leaders with support and encouragement, which increases their persistence in the face of obstacles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Although participants most frequently cited their spouse and family of origin as elements of supportive social systems, religious faith was also a recurrent subtheme. Three participants articulated their belief in a higher power, as well as their belief in a higher purpose for their ascent to the office of president. This faith gave the participants a sense of peace about their career trajectories and, because they used the tenets of their faith to make ethical leadership decisions, their decision-making. Relying on the tenets of their faith as a framework for decision-making also helped participants combat self-doubt because their decisions were framed by an external set of moral principles. Participants' feelings of efficacy when relying on their faith as a guide for leadership practice aligns with Reave's (2005) study, which reported a demonstrable connection between spiritual values and effective leadership in over 150 studies.

Internal traits and strategies. When asked about the sources of support they encountered on their journey, participants offered extensive anecdotal data that highlighted the internal traits and strategies of having a thick skin, adapting to the environment, being proactive and open to new experiences, possessing a sense of agency, and finding one's own leadership persona. Participants' discussion of these traits in response to queries about sources of support suggests the women perceive these traits and strategies as supportive of their goal achievement. For this reason, internal traits and strategies are included as a subtheme under the heading "Sources of Support." Research suggests female administrators in higher education need persistence, self-motivation,

perseverance, charisma, determination, authenticity, knowledge, passion, and a strong work ethic to overcome gender-related barriers (Darden, 2006; Drury, 2010). Like participants in this study, the women in Darden's (2006) study said female leaders in higher education need to develop a 'thick skin' as they navigate the career pipeline. Female participants in Drury's 2010 study cite the need to adapt when environments are predominantly male. The women in this study described a variety of behaviors and mental frameworks that illustrate Drury's (2010) and Darden's (2006) findings. Sandra explained that childhood experiences conditioned her to anticipate sexism and racism. Therefore, she was not surprised when such events occurred and was mentally prepared to let the events roll off her. Anna felt the best approach was to persevere, take the high road, and be the bigger person. Marie developed a thick skin for gendered rhetoric while growing up with brothers and male cousins who sometimes teased her affectionately. Her childhood experiences helped her adapt to male-dominated environments and prevented her from perceiving ill intent, even when she received differential treatment. Ruth believes a savvy female leader should recognize the ego needs that drive gender bias and use this knowledge to inform effective practice. Jeannette views any leadership opportunity as a gift and uses her passion and authenticity to adapt to the needs of different demographic groups. These cognitive schemas provided participants with individual frameworks that allowed them to deflect the slights and differential treatment they encountered as they navigated the career pipeline in higher education.

Importantly, the experience of navigating the career pipeline in higher education differed slightly for participants of African-American descent. These participants recognized the intersection of race and gender, an interaction described by Griffin (2009)

as a complex multi-dimensional issue facing women of color as they build their careers. Their interviews reveal anecdotal evidence of both racism and sexism, which reflects the inflation of bias that occurs when an individual holds membership in multiple outgroups. In such scenarios, power holders need not act with malice or intent. The end result remains the perpetuation of advantage for members of the dominant group (Griffin, 2009). These study participants described developing a thick skin as a coping mechanism to deflect slights and differential treatment based on both gender and race.

In addition to developing a thick skin, women who successfully navigate the career pipeline in higher education are courageous, willing to take risks, and don't shy away from making career changes when necessary (Darden, 2006). Participants in this study expressed the need to be proactive and open to new experiences. Whether they were actively seeking professional mentors, pursuing additional training and education, attending on-campus events outside of their division/department, or volunteering for new leadership roles, the five women in this study demonstrated their willingness to acquire new skills and accept new responsibilities, even when those skills and responsibilities were outside their comfort zone. This finding reiterates the conclusions of Herwatic's 2016 study in which study participants recognized the need to be prepared when opportunities present themselves, as Sandra did when she told herself, "Opportunities could present themselves and if they do I'd better be prepared." Herwatic's (2016) participants, like the participants in this study, felt it necessary to take advantage of learning opportunities as they became available, even if they did not feel ready to do so. In this way, study participants developed the necessary skills to advance in their

institutions while demonstrating their professionalism and reliability to peers and colleagues.

Belief in one's ability to achieve goals and effect change is another defining characteristic of women who are able to successfully navigate the career pipeline in higher education (Terosky, O'Meara, & Campbell, 2014). Participants in this study either described having a healthy sense of self-esteem and belief in their ability to direct their own path from a young age, or they explained how they gradually developed their senses of self-esteem and self-efficacy with support and encouragement from others. Eventually, all of the participants came to see themselves as leaders, and they did so authentically, using their individual leadership strengths rather than conforming to a prescribed model.

Authenticity is especially crucial for female leaders (Hopkins & O'Neil, 2015). Aspiring female leaders are expected to display a socially acceptable mix of strength and authenticity, a task made more challenging by the rigid behavioral constraints placed on women in leadership positions (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Over the course of their careers, study participants found their leadership styles evolved to become more authentic. Participants in this study did not adhere to dominant masculinized perceptions of leadership. Instead, they identified opportunities to make their relational skills an advantage in the workplace. Because four of the five participants did not initially aspire to reach the office of president, they had no incentive to adopt an inauthentic style of leadership, even as their leadership persona was evolving. Instead, participants continued to present their authentic selves while honing their strengths and learning from their mistakes. By the time they reached advanced leadership positions, their leadership

personas were well-established based on their authentic selves, and they had turned their stereotypically feminine traits into relational strengths.

Other Significant Findings

Gender as a factor, not a barrier. A substantive body of research exists to demonstrate the presence of gender-based barriers for women who attempt to navigate the career pipeline in higher education (Ballenger, 2010; Balram, 2012; Campo, 2018; Carter, 2009; De Welde & Stepnick, 2015; Johnson, 2016; Madera, 2017; Maranto & Griffin, 2011), yet the women in this study did not perceive their gender to be a barrier to their advancement. Anna stated, “As we step forward... there are very few barriers today... males are much more sensitive.” Instead of a barrier, study participants described gender as a *factor* or an *influence*. Participants specifically referenced gendered issues, such as underrepresentation, pay inequity, and second-generation bias, but they parsed their explanations carefully to differentiate between a relevant *factor* and an actual *barrier*. Marie specifically said she experienced frustration as a result of differential treatment, but qualified her statement by saying, “I’ve worked with good people... I don’t even know if they were aware they were doing it.” Through the processes of co-creating meaning and member checking, the researcher was able to determine that participants were frustrated at times by the gendered nature of their experiences and by their differential treatment, but they do not believe these experiences significantly hindered their ability to achieve their goals, nor do they feel their gender presented a substantial obstacle to their progress. This distinction offers a noteworthy contribution to the existing body of research, because, unlike previous studies (Bortz,

2014; Herwatic, 2016; Steinke, 2006), none of the participants denied the influence of gender, but neither did they assign it principal importance.

Aspiring female leaders may need intrusive recruitment. This study reinforces earlier research which found the underrepresentation of women in advanced leadership roles reinforces an inherently masculine view of leadership (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). When combined with social constructions of gender, this masculine view may prevent females from incorporating leadership into their personal identity (O'Connor, 2010). In this study, participants all reported they required encouragement at some point in their careers from other individuals to pursue certain leadership roles. Anna was approached by a board member and encouraged to apply for the president's position. Marie was recruited by her president to participate in a leadership program. Sandra was asked to move from a program coordinator to a faculty member. She was later enlisted to assume the role of interim academic officer. Jeannette was encouraged by her supervisor to apply for positions before she met all of the required qualifications. Ruth's supervisor gradually asked her to assume tasks requiring increasing levels of responsibility in order to build her leadership skills. These findings suggest female employees may not recognize the value of their strengths, and they may not see themselves as possessing leadership potential. As a result, passive efforts to identify aspiring female leaders, such as sending a campus-wide email to promote a new leadership program, may elicit a low response rate from females, but this low response rate may represent a lack of confidence rather than a lack of interest. As Marie explained, "There was a part of me that felt someone needed to come to me and say 'I need you to do this' to be worthy to do it. ... And isn't that something a lot of women

deal with? Deeming ourselves worthy?” Without intrusive recruitment and encouragement, many qualified and capable female leaders may not reach their full potential (Chesterman, Ross-Smith, & Peters, 2005).

Today’s institutional gender bias is second-generation. Many of the institutional barriers identified as subthemes in participant narratives can broadly be described as second-generation gender bias. Unlike first-generation gender bias that intentionally excludes women, second-generation gender bias is subtle, covert, and perhaps unintentional (Ibarra et al., 2013). Examples of second-generation bias identified in this study include the following:

- lack of mentors and role models;
- chilly organizational climate;
- solo status;
- organizational policies that disadvantage women, especially those in caregiver roles;
- devaluing female input and female leadership traits;
- language that elevates the masculine and diminishes the feminine;
- failing to purposefully cultivate female leadership potential.

Second-generation bias is particularly insidious because its subtle nature makes it difficult to discern. As a result, both men and women may deny or be unaware of its existence. In particular, women may deny being the victims of discrimination and are better able to perceive discrimination on a societal level than a personal level (Ibarra et al., 2013). Crosby (1984) discovered women are prone to deny their own discrimination, even when they are being discriminated against and are keenly aware of sex

discrimination in general. Participants in this study augment earlier findings because they do not deny the role of gender, but they also do not report pervasive bias. Instead, participant narratives revealed the women in this study acknowledge gender as an influential factor that shaped their experiences but deny that it hindered their ability to achieve their goals. This differentiation is significant in the existing body of research. Marie specifically addressed the way gender influences human interactions by saying, “I do think some of it is just how we interact with other people. I'll give you a public teaching example. We've known for 30 years that we very subtly, and not because we're bad people, but we reinforce young boys when they are working with math and science, and we reinforce young girls with reading and art. We've known we do it for 30 years. Research has told us, but guess what, we still do it. It's just those roles.”

No children or significant help with childcare. Participants in this study all had significant help with childcare or they did not have children, yet they still explicitly cited role conflict and work-home life balance as barriers to reaching the office of president. These findings support Cheung & Halpern's (2010) conclusion that children may influence a woman's decision to pursue an advanced leadership role and, once there, may impact her level of job satisfaction. Eagly and Carli (2007) suggest the ability to balance work and home life is essential in women's ability to reach senior leadership positions, regardless of the industry. Within the context of community colleges, Ligeikis (2010) found that women may feel they have to sacrifice family in order to reach the office of president, which leads some women to abandon the idea. Of the five women in this study, Marie and Sandra did not have children, Anna and Jeannette had significant help from their support systems, and Ruth was able to stay at home when her children were

small. Ruth reported that her oldest daughter reaching high school was a turning point in her career because she felt she was able to pursue her goals without feeling guilty or struggling as much with competing demands. Sandra stated she may not have pursued an advanced leadership position if she had children. These narratives corroborate earlier studies which suggest that resolving the conflict between professional and family obligations is essential for aspiring female leaders (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ligeikis, 2010).

Short-term organizational climates may affect the presidential search process. As part of triangulating this study's findings, press releases covering the institutions represented by study participants were analyzed. Of the five institutions represented, three experienced press-worthy controversies prior to the participants' hires. One institution was harshly criticized in years prior to the participant's appointment for its closed communication and lack of accountability in the presidential search process. A second institution was experiencing a contentious merger at the time of the participant's hire, and the participant was told her appointment was based, in part, on her reputation for having a cool head and a calming demeanor. This substantiates the participant's assertion that she was selected because she demonstrated many communal leadership traits. A third participant was hired to replace a president who was released from his position amidst a firestorm of controversies over aggressive behaviors and combative management practices. These controversies presented a unique opportunity for aspiring female leaders because they chronicled the administrative and personnel problems using stereotypically masculine terms. As a result, the controversies may have contributed to a

favorable climate for female presidential hopefuls who professed an open, communal style of leadership.

Recommendations

The dual frameworks of critical feminism and Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Model provide a contextual framework for interpreting the barriers and sources of support described by study participants and offering recommendations for institutions and aspiring female leaders. Participant narratives highlight the pervasive influence of gender on the phenomenon of navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. Although participants were reluctant to identify gender as a barrier, they consistently acknowledged gender as a factor or influence. As such, any recommendations must account for the gendered nature of the phenomenon. The recommendations presented here seek to empower aspiring female leaders and create democratizing change in ways that offer women equal power, voice, agency, and representation (Frost & Elichao, 2014). Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Model (2008) addresses organizational structure and culture from four perspectives in order to gain a greater understanding of the multiple dynamics at work. When applied to higher education, the structural frame looks at an institution's hierarchy and policies; the human resource frame is concerned with the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the institution and people; the political frame emphasizes politics, power-holders and alliances; and the symbolic frame considers the institution's history and culture (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Study findings suggest the rigid hierarchy of higher education continues to serve as a barrier to females, especially those who pursue non-traditional routes to positions of

leadership, but having a mentor who is willing to flatten the hierarchical structure and invest in aspiring female leaders somewhat mitigates this barrier. From a human resource perspective, a lack of role models and the chilly climate created by second-generation gender bias may discourage aspiring female leaders from pursuing administrative positions. Supervisors who intrusively recruit women, invest in cultivating their skills, and demonstrate flexibility can shape the organizational culture and create a more open environment for females. Political power holders also influence the organizational culture. Those who keep authority confined to a small homogeneous group perpetuate the status quo, but those who assign substantive tasks to females and create a community of trust establish a culture of shared power between genders. This evolution of an organization's culture also impacts its symbolic culture by fostering cohesion and dissolving boundaries for members of outgroups who may have been excluded from positions of power, either intentionally or unintentionally. When viewed cumulatively along with participant narratives, these findings provided context for the following recommendations.

Recommendations for Institutions of Higher Learning

Although all public colleges and universities establish statements/policies designed to value diversity and prevent discriminatory practices, these espoused beliefs may not be reflected in organizational practice. Participant narratives suggest an institution's espoused theories may be contradicted by unintentional second-generation gender bias, which influences the organizational climate and is inhospitable to aspiring female leaders. The following recommendations emerged as a result of the coding and analysis of participant interviews. These recommendations are framed theoretically by

the tenets of critical feminism and by Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Model. Their purpose is to warm the chilly climate created by second-generation gender bias.

Proactively seek out prospective female leaders. This study indicates female employees may not recognize their own leadership potential, especially if there are few women in leadership roles within the organization. In such settings, women may require active encouragement and recruitment before they deem themselves worthy of assuming a leadership role. With administrative support and opportunities for experiential learning, women are increasingly likely to incorporate an element of leadership into their personal identity. Therefore, institutions may benefit from proactively identifying aspiring female leaders and providing graduated opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

Provide mentors to scaffold female leaders to higher levels of leadership. The mentoring relationships that aided participants in this study extended beyond the traditional assignment of a resource person for new faculty members. These relationships were ongoing and intrusive. Mentors encouraged mentees, advocated for them, created new learning opportunities, and identified ways to address mentees' weaknesses. They guided their mentees and helped them avoid dangerous missteps, while encouraging them to assume responsibilities beyond their comfort zones. Institutions can utilize mentors to help mentees become adroit at managing relational dialectics while applying global and analytical thinking within the context of a changing campus climate. Because some participants cited difficulty building a professional network, institutional mentors should help mentees build social capital by fostering a network of connections at all levels within the institution, including the institution's governing bodies and primary constituents.

Sponsor aspiring female leaders' participation in formal leadership

programs. Participants in this study touted the many benefits of participating in formal leadership programs. They cited a greater sense of self-efficacy, support from a cohort of aspiring leaders, expansion of their professional network, and a paradigmatic shift that altered their view of leadership and helped them self-identify as leaders. When recruiting participants for leadership programs, organizations should recognize that the dominant androcentric paradigm inhibits prospective female leaders' ability to recognize their leadership potential and inhibits them from responding to passive solicitations. Instead, aspiring female leaders may require active or intrusive recruitment. An encouraging supervisor or mentor may provide the necessary validation for aspiring female leaders who have not yet incorporated leadership into their personal identity.

Support aspiring female leaders' ability to integrate work-home life roles.

All of the participants reported struggling at times with maintaining work-home life balance. These struggles hindered their professional development and undermined others' belief in their dedication. Institutions may benefit from strategically designing programs and policies that support work-home life balance, such as flexible work schedules, on-site childcare, the ability to work from home when emergencies arise, and allowing spouses and/or children to accompany employees when traveling. To avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes, efforts to support work-home life balance should benefit both male and female employees. The value of work-home life integration should be embedded in campus culture, and employees who access these programs should not be made to feel their commitment to the institution is questioned.

Recommendations for Aspiring Female Leaders

Expand your view of leadership. Research demonstrates the efficacy of leaders who exhibit a combination of agentic and communal traits, yet masculine conceptions of leadership persist (Barbuto & Gifford, 2010; Carli & Eagly, 2011; Van Wart, 2010). Due to the prevalence of these masculine conceptions, aspiring female leaders may fail to integrate leadership into their personal identity (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Women who aspire to leadership roles should intentionally alter their mental models to include other styles of leadership, including transformational, authentic, servant, and synergistic leadership.

Be proactive. The findings of this study indicate aspiring female leaders should proactively manage their career development. The institutions reflected in participants' narratives differed in their strategies for developing the leadership skills of employees, with some being remiss or making only cursory attempts. This suggests women traveling the career pipeline in higher education should become self-advocates. Marie and Jeannette both sought out individuals willing to serve as mentors and asked for opportunities to assume leadership roles. Ruth supported her larger campus community by increasing her level of engagement. She also built a network of relationships that included students, colleagues, supervisors, community leaders, and constituents. Marie participated in professional development activities, enrolled in classes, and attended professional conferences. Aspiring female leaders should consider these and other activities that will raise their professional profile while demonstrating increasing levels of leadership and responsibility.

Anticipate role conflict and competing demands. As participants in this study navigated the career pipeline in higher education, they struggled to balance the demands of multiple roles that competed for their time and attention. Their roles as leader, wife, mother, caregiver, graduate student, and daughter pulled these aspiring leaders in multiple directions and created internal conflict. Women who hope to obtain advanced leadership positions in higher education should anticipate these demands and pre-empt internal conflict by recruiting helpers to share responsibilities for home, family, and childcare. Study participants benefitted from sharing their goals with spouses, siblings, parents, and friends, garnering their support and soliciting assistance. Having reached the office of president, participants readily acknowledged the collaborative effort needed in order for them to successfully achieve their goals.

Expect to encounter second-generation bias. Study findings reveal that female leaders are likely to experience micro-inequities as they advance along the career pipeline. Participants in this study all experienced differential treatment based on gender at varying points in their career, and all found a coping mechanism that allowed them to maintain their focus and continue moving forward. Aspiring female leaders may benefit from acknowledging such events could occur, anticipating their response, and determining an appropriate course of action in advance.

Resist self-defeating thoughts and dialogues. Participant narratives reveal the influence of self-limiting internal dialogues, even in participants with a history of goal achievement and healthy self-esteem. The women revealed a variety of negative ideations including failing to see themselves as leaders, feeling the need to be perfectly qualified, and needing the validation of others before considering themselves

worthy of advancement. Aspiring female leaders should take inventory of their internal dialogues and identify messages that are self-defeating. They should replace these thoughts with positive language and seek the guidance of trusted mentors who can provide an honest assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. This external feedback can provide a measuring stick for discovering areas requiring growth while negating unwarranted self-doubt.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study raise several possibilities for future research. Relevant issues identified in participant narratives include the importance of work-home life balance for aspiring female leaders, the impact of second-generation gender bias, and the need for institutions to cultivate the leadership potential of female employees. Participant narratives reflected Jacobs and Gerson's (2004) assertion that work-life balance is especially complex for females in leadership positions, as well as Lockwood's (2004) finding that work-life balance has a decided influence on women's career advancement and may pose a significant barrier if not proactively managed. Future research should explore the extent to which this conflict prevents females from pursuing leadership roles and which efforts by institutions effectively support women's leadership aspirations. Future research should also explore strategies employed by current female leaders to achieve work-home life balance. A second topic for further exploration is the prevalence of second-generation gender bias and the ways in which it influences the career paths of females who aspire to leadership roles. Maranto and Griffin (2011) found the chilly climate that results from second-generation gender bias informally marginalizes women. This subtle and informal bias is reflected in study participants' willingness to label

gender an influence in their career progress rather than a barrier. Future studies should examine the impact of second-generation gender bias, its prevalence in higher education, and whether existing nondiscrimination policies effectively address this type of bias. Finally, this study illustrates Ibarra et al's (2013) finding that women's general sense of leadership identity is rarely intentionally cultivated, which leaves women feeling ill-prepared for leadership roles. Future studies should examine the impact of intrusive recruitment on aspiring female leaders, as well as the effects of intentional efforts to identify and cultivate the leadership potential of aspiring female leaders.

Summary Statement

This qualitative study explored the education and career trajectories of five female community college presidents, as well as the barriers and sources of support they perceived as they navigated the career pipeline to reach the office of president. All of the women pursued their doctoral degrees while working full-time. Their career trajectories differed slightly, but four of the five participants negotiated the rigid hierarchy commonplace in postsecondary institutions. Along the way, they encountered institutional barriers that often manifested as second-generation gender bias. They also encountered an amalgam of personal circumstances that created a metaphorical birdcage around the participants, allowing them to see opportunities for growth and advancement but preventing them from fully accessing these opportunities. While these institutional and birdcage barriers impacted participants' career trajectories, participants also cited their own self-limiting ideations as a significant barrier. Despite the presence of these barriers, study participants were able to continue their ascent with a combination of supports including supervisors, mentors, personal support systems, spiritual faith, and

individual traits and strategies. These findings suggest community colleges would benefit from intentional efforts designed to identify aspiring female leaders and develop their leadership potential. The presence of role models and mentors, combined with strategies to combat second-generation gender bias, may help female employees integrate leadership into their personal identities. Participation in leadership development programs may help women cultivate their leadership skills while offering a cohort of like-minded colleagues. Aspiring female leaders should prepare to encounter resistance when their leadership goals challenge traditional hegemonic discourse. They should seek out professional mentors willing to sponsor their professional growth and identify individuals in their support system who are willing to help them achieve work-home life balance. Additionally, aspiring female leaders should seek ways to combat self-defeating internal dialogues and replace them with an expanded view of leadership. This study, and others preceding it, indicate the need for collaborative efforts between educational entities and aspiring female leaders in order to increase women's accessibility to advanced leadership positions in higher education.

APPENDIX A: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

September 22, 2018

Hello!

My name is Andrea Deal and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Kentucky in Education Sciences. The focus of my study is female community college presidents and their experiences navigating the career pipeline to reach the office of the presidency. I am writing to you in the hopes that you will be willing to be interviewed regarding your experiences. I will be conducting individual interviews that will last approximately 60 minutes, as well as a second phone interview (approximately 30 minutes) to provide an opportunity for follow-up questions and clarification. The initial interviews will either take place face-to-face at your school or via Skype at a time that is convenient for you. Your participation would be greatly appreciated and will contribute to the growing body of literature on the experiences of females who have successfully navigated the career pipeline in higher education. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email and I will be in touch shortly to arrange the meeting time(s) and to provide you with more details.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to the possibility of working with you on the study!

Sincerely,

Andrea Deal

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND GUIDE

Before we begin, I have a few background questions to ask. Then we can start our conversation.

- What is your age? _____
- How many years have you worked in higher education? _____
- How long have you held the office of president? _____

Introduction

Welcome and Opening Comments	Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on the experiences of females who have successfully navigated the higher education career pipeline to reach the office of community college president. In this interview, we will focus on your educational background, your career progression, barriers you experienced, and sources of support that helped you along the way.
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Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions

Q1: Tell me about your educational background and preparation.

Q2: Describe your career pathway to the presidency.

Tag 2A: Tell me about when you first began to entertain the

idea of
becoming a
college president
and what
prompted those
thoughts?

Tag 2B: In what
ways, if any,
were your career
choices
influenced by
the goal or idea
of becoming
president?

Tag 2C: In what
ways, if any, did
your gender
shape your
career choices?

Q3: Tell me
about any
barriers you
encountered as
you progressed
along this career
path.

Tag 3A: How
did these
barriers impact
your career
advancement?

Tag 3B: What
were your
feelings when
you encountered
these barriers?

Tag 3C: How
did you
overcome these
barriers?

Q4: Describe
any sources of
support that
helped you
successfully
navigate your
career pathway.

Tag 4A: In what
ways did these
sources of
support help
you?

Tag 4B: How
did you utilize
them to achieve
your goals?)

Q5: Are there
any other
thoughts or

experiences you
want to share?

Q6: Is there
anyone else you
recommend for
participation in
this study?

Conclusion

Appreciation
and Next Steps

Thank you for your time today. I will transcribe our interview and send you an electronic copy. Please read through the transcription of our conversation and note any areas you feel are inaccurate or not reflective of the tone of the discussion. Also, please take notes about anything that you feel we omitted or any additional bits of information you think would be relevant to the study. Once you have had a chance to review the transcript and make notes, we will schedule a time for our follow-up phone conversation.

Do you have any
final questions
for me before I
go?

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Central Missouri State University

B. S. –Psychology/Vocational Rehabilitation (1993)

Professional Experience

Madisonville Community College 1994 – present

Faculty Member and Subject Area Coordinator 2005-present

Counselor 1999-2005

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Special Projects Coordinator

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Conference Presentations

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Pop Culture Association, September 2012

“Baker Boys and Warrior Girls: The Hunger Games and Anti-Hegemonic Discourse”

Ky Philological Association, March 2011

“Bloodlust: Temptation, Restraint, and ‘Safe’ Sex in the Twilight Series”

AAWCC, February 2010

“The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pantsuit: Sexism, Misogyny & Women in American Politics”

National Association of Developmental Education, March 2010

“Partnering for Success: Integrating Study Strategies and Academic Reading”

League for Innovations, March 2008

“What’s the buzz? Contextualized Learning and Content Literacy in a Learning Community!”