Old Dominion University

ODU Digital Commons

Summer 2019

The Challenges Facing Women Leaders in Mid-Level Positions at Urban Community Colleges

Kia L. Hardy
Old Dominion University, kiahardyphd@gmail.com

THE CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN LEADERS IN MID-LEVEL POSITIONS AT

URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

Kia L. Hardy
B.A. May 2005, The College of William & Mary
M.Ed. August 2008, The College of William & Mary

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
August 2019

Approved by:

Mitchell R. Williams (Director)

Felecia Commodore (Member)

Kim B. Sibson (Member)

ABSTRACT

THE CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN LEADERS IN MID-LEVEL POSITIONS AT
URBAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Kia L. Hardy
Old Dominion University, 2019
Director: Dr. Mitchell Williams

Although women lead at higher rates overall at community colleges, they continue to lead at lower rates in senior-level positions compared to men within those institutions. Women serve as presidents in 36% of community colleges (ACE, 2017). Additionally, community college presidents are currently retiring at rapid rates, and this turnover in leadership is expected to continue (Phillipe, 2016; Shults, 2001; Tekle, 2012). As community colleges face current and future reductions in senior-level leadership, women in mid-level leadership roles should be considered to fill the leadership gap.

Previous studies have examined the leadership challenges faced by women leaders, but there has been a focus on presidents and vice presidents. There is a need to assess the leadership experiences of women in mid-level positions, specifically deans and directors, and to identify their unique mobility challenges. Gender differences, including the internalization of social norms and gender bias and stereotyping, can potentially impact women's leadership development and opportunities for professional advancement. This study provided a better understanding for community college leaders and practitioners, emphasizing the importance of more effective navigational tools, better leadership training and development, and inclusive and intentional leadership funnels and hiring practices for women mid-level leaders.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine women leaders in mid-level positions and their perceptions of the personal, professional, and organizational

challenges unique to them as leaders in urban community colleges, which tend to be larger and more complex than rural and suburban community colleges. Participants discussed these perceived challenges through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants also described how they have attempted to navigate these challenges. Ten women, in positions of dean or director, were purposively selected from three urban community colleges in one southeastern US state. One-on-one interviews were conducted, providing the women leaders with opportunities to tell their own narratives and describe their lived experiences as mid-level leaders.

Moustakas' (1994) seven-step phenomenological data analysis framework was used to examine the data. An analysis of the data revealed five major themes: (a) leadership progression, (b) work-life balance, (c) mentorship and professional development, (d) communication, and (e) institutional climate and organizational structure. Recommendations for community college practitioners and leaders include: encouraging and providing opportunities and support for mentorship; creating and funding professional development opportunities; and assisting women leaders with doctoral degree completion. Recommendations for further research include additional qualitative research focused on the following groups: women in mid-level positions in other regions of the country; women of color in mid-level positions; women in mid-level positions in suburban and rural community colleges; and men in mid-level positions in various community college settings.

Dedication

To the dad who never let me quit.

To the mom who has always been the wind beneath my wings.

To the sister who made me believe I was capable of anything.

To the son who warms my soul and lights up my life.

To the husband who taught me to be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

My family, my heart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the dedicated and supportive members of my dissertation committee. Dr. Felecia Commodore and Dr. Kim Sibson, I appreciate your guidance, insight, and attention to detail. I would like to give a very special thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Mitchell Williams, for your leadership, words of wisdom, and mentorship. Many times, you had more faith in me than I did myself throughout this challenging process, and I am indebted to you for your "gentle nudges" to keep me "moving along." I am grateful to ODU's Community College Leadership program, which has increased my passion for the mission of the community college more than ever before. Dr. Chris Glass, thank you for sharing your vision for the continued development of this wonderful program. Thank you to the amazing faculty and to Cohort 14, the best cohort ever and my friends for life.

Thank you to my TCC colleagues, my work family. Your kind words and frequent check-ins picked me up and gave me much needed energy on countless days. I am immensely grateful for my campus leadership for being understanding as I attempted to balance work with school. Thank you, Dr. Michelle Woodhouse, for seeing something in me and giving me an opportunity. Thank you, Dr. Jeffery Boyd, my first provost, for sharing your motivational quotes and keeping me in your starting five. Thank you, Mr. Emanuel Chestnut, my first dean and second provost, for your endless support, professional development talks, flexibility, and confidence in my abilities. I would also like to acknowledge my mentors at TCC, from whom I have been able to learn and model as a professional and doctoral student.

Last, but definitely not least, I want to express my sincere appreciation and love for my family, those by blood and those by choice. Thank you to my fram, for the gatherings, jokes, and delicious meals that gave me a chance to unwind in between reading and writing. Thank you

to my hype squad, my sistafriends, who while trying to balance it all, still find time to pick each other up. Thank you to my in-laws, Gwen and James, for providing extra support during my busy days. Thank you to my sweet sister, Kim, for taking the lead on the family activity and event planning when I was too busy to help (but I'm back now!). Thank you to my mom and dad, Phyllis and Mark, who have been my superheroes. I successfully made it through this process because of your willingness to do any and everything. Thank you to my son, Kai, who has been on this journey with me since eight months old and who will always know his mom as a doctor. Thank you to my husband, Cerone, who has been in the trenches with me, from start to finish, day in and day out, year after year. Thank you for being my rock.

This has been an incredible and life-changing experience, filled with ups and downs, laughter and tears, and triumph and defeat. The encouragement, support, and love from my village has been monumental during this academic journey. With you all, I made it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The number of women leaders in higher education has steadily increased, and notably, a larger proportion of women are employed at community colleges than at four-year postsecondary institutions (ACE, 2012; ACE, 2017). In 1986, 13% of all college presidents were women, and that percentage increased to 23% in 2006 and then to 26% in 2011 (ACE, 2012). By 2016, the percentage of women college presidents grew to 30% (ACE, 2017). Additionally, women presidents were more likely to be found at two-year schools where women leaders, who had previously accounted for 33% of community college presidents in 2011, led community colleges at a rate of 36% in 2016 (ACE, 2012; ACE, 2017). Despite the growth among women in senior-level leadership in higher education, these women remain underrepresented in their positions.

Although studies have examined the leadership challenges faced by women leaders, there has been a focus on senior-level leaders, namely presidents and vice presidents. There is a need to assess the leadership experiences of women in mid-level leadership positions, specifically deans and directors, and to understand their unique personal, professional, and organizational challenges. Identifying the different mobility challenges faced by women in mid-level positions will help administrators provide better navigational tools for these leaders, ensure their institutional climates are inclusive, and promote initiatives that cultivate diversity.

Moreover, the impending retirements of community college presidents is expected to result in a shortage of experienced executive leaders (Phillipe, 2016; Shults, 2001; Tekle, 2012). The development of mid-level leaders will be critical in filling the leadership gap. An in-depth analysis of the unique challenges of women in mid-level positions could assist with the

advancement of these leaders, creating a leadership pipeline with more women ready to serve in senior-level positions.

Background of the Study

A review of the current literature yielded studies on various challenges faced by women leaders, both within and outside of community college leadership. Research on gender bias and gender stereotyping has provided an overview of the challenges faced as a result of societal norms. Studies on organizational challenges have focused on navigating traditional, patriarchal hierarchies within institutions. Additionally, a number of studies have focused on the personal and professional challenges faced by women leaders, mainly senior-level leaders and faculty, within community colleges.

Although women in higher education have generally progressed through their careers at faster rates than their male counterparts, the quicker levels of advancement have not resulted in higher percentages of women presidents (Eddy, 2008). Organizational structures within higher education are generally prescribed by conventional, male-centered thinking. The idea that women lack required leadership qualities and skills is reinforced through societal norms, media, and masculine environments (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Additionally, the built-in hierarchical and patriarchal systems within community colleges are problematic impediments that affect upward mobility for women leaders (Gill & Jones, 2013).

Several researchers have focused on the personal, professional, and organizational challenges experienced by women community college leaders. Common personal challenges included work-life balance (Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Gill & Jones, 2013; Sherman Newcomb, Beaty, Sanzo, & Peters-Hawkins, 2013) and lack of initiative (Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Northouse, 2016). Professional challenges included mentorship (Ballenger, 2010;

Bower & Hums, 2013; Cejda, 2008; Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Gill & Jones, 2013; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008; Obers, 2014; Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013), professional development (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012; Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008), and mobility (Amey, Vanderlinden, & Brown, 2002; Eddy, 2008; McKenney, 2000). Organizational challenges included institutional climate and organizational culture (Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Gill & Jones, 2013; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008; Twombly, 1995), glass ceiling effect (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991), and good old boy networks (Ballenger, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017).

A review of the current literature highlights a need for further study of the challenges experienced by women in mid-level positions in community colleges. First, previous studies heavily focused on the journeys to leadership for women presidents, vice presidents, and chief academic officers. These journeys ended with positions in senior-level leadership, although there may have been challenges experienced along the way. Second, the expected continual turnover of community college presidents suggests a need for creating a more substantial leadership pipeline that includes effective leadership training as well as professional development, mentorship, and networking opportunities for mid-level leaders. Third, there is a need to understand the unique challenges faced by mid-level leaders in urban community colleges compared to those in suburban and rural community colleges.

Conceptual Framework

The first component of the conceptual framework derived from a review of the current literature on women leaders. The second component of the conceptual framework derived from the researcher's experiential knowledge and positionality. As a mid-level community college

administrator, woman, and doctoral student, the researcher's sensitivity to the participants' roles was heightened during the study. Hays and Singh (2012) described sensitivity as "the skill of using our insight – informed by previous knowledge and experience – to become more 'tuned in' to the data and arrive at an understanding of what the data are telling us" (p. 112).

The third component of the conceptual framework derived from this study's research tradition. This qualitative study was designed and conducted through the lens of feminist theory with a phenomenological research approach. Qualitative inquiry allows participants opportunities to construct meaning and make sense of their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that centers on the essences, or core meanings, of participants' shared experiences (Patton, 2002). Feminist theory is a paradigm researchers use to address and analyze issues involving patriarchy, hierarchies, dominance, and submission (Hays & Singh, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Using this theory as a framework for the study provided insight regarding the influence of these factors on the essence of the unique challenges faced by women in mid-level leadership roles in urban community colleges.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine women leaders in mid-level positions and their perceptions of the personal, professional, and organizational challenges unique to them as leaders in urban community colleges. Participants discussed their perceived challenges through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants also described their challenges as they related to their personal, professional, and organizational experiences and how they have attempted to navigate those challenges.

Research Questions

The researcher explored the following questions:

1. What are the perceived challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

   a. What are the perceived personal challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

   b. What are the perceived professional challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

   c. What are the perceived organizational challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

2. How do these women leaders navigate these perceived challenges?

Significance of the Study

Researchers have been anticipating and preparing for high succession rates of community college chief executive officers since 2001 (Phillipe, 2016; Shults, 2001; Tekle, 2012). This study's findings rendered insight into the development of women mid-level leaders by examining and documenting the lived experiences of these leaders. This study highlighted the perceived challenges faced by these leaders, providing insight to community college practitioners and leaders as well as women leaders hoping to ascend to senior-level administrative roles in community colleges.

The current study documented the perceived personal, professional, and organizational challenges faced by mid-level women leaders for community college practitioners and leaders. The changing landscape of the modern community college presents a need for administrators

who have different skill sets and leadership abilities than their predecessors (Aspen Institute & Achieving the Dream, 2017; Eddy, 2017). Common leadership development programs include state-level training, individual institutional programming, and university-based programs (Amey, 2006; Aspen Institute & ATD, 2017). Although university-based programs are believed to be effective ways to prepare future community college presidents (Amey, 2006; Eddy, 2017; Aspen Institute & ATD, 2017), the diversity of the students within these programs is not always recognized (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). This study's findings suggest a need for additional programming, training, and funding support from nationwide higher education and community college professional organizations.

Additionally, this study provides value to individual institutions, where administrators promote the importance of fostering inclusion and diversity. Senior-level community college leadership does not reflect the diversity of its student body. Students who attend two-year institutions are generally more diverse than those at four-year institutions (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2016), including 56% who are women and 52% who are minorities (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). It is important for senior leaders to analyze their colleges' cultural climates and institutional practices in order to determine best practices for effective professional development, specifically by creating clear leadership pipelines and mentorship and networking opportunities for mid-level leaders.

Day et al. (2014) suggested "recognizing the diversity aspiring leaders represent can help in refining leadership development programming given the different background experiences of those in the leadership pipeline" (p. 139). The Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream (ATD) (2017) asserted there should be an alignment between everyone involved in hiring and training future senior-level community college leaders. This study's findings encourage senior-level

leaders, college boards, and selection committees to examine their own hiring practices to determine if they foster the professional growth and leadership progression of women in mid-level positions.

Furthermore, this study proves significant for women leaders. The implications of this study maintain gender differences, in addition to personal, professional, and organizational challenges, impact the leadership trajectories of women in mid-level positions, specifically those in urban community colleges, which tend to be large and complex. It is beneficial for women to tell their own stories and learn about the experiences of other women in similar positions.

Overview of Methodology

This qualitative, phenomenological study used data collected through one-on-one interviews. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for additional discussion after each question. An interview protocol was used to ensure uniformity between the interviews. The interview protocol, along with the interview questions, are located in Appendix A. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in each participant's office.

Participants. A purposeful sample of women leaders in mid-level positions was selected from urban community colleges in one state located in the southeastern United States. The three selected community colleges were defined as urban institutions, meaning those institutions located in metropolitan statistical areas with at least one urban area with a population of 50,000 or more (U.S. Census, 2018). Although the colleges were considered urban, they did also consist of individual campuses located in nearby suburban and rural areas as well. Mid-level positions included roles of dean or director in academic affairs or student affairs departments.

Data Collection. Following Human Subjects and Institutional Research Board approval, participants, who were selected based on the study's criteria, were emailed an invitation to

participate (Appendix B). Those who agreed to participate were also sent an email to inform and prepare for the interview process (Appendix C) and an informed consent form, detailing the purpose, benefits, and risks of the research study (Appendix D). Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. A pre-interview survey was included in the email, which captured participants' demographic information (Appendix E).

This study used qualitative data collected through one-on-one, in-depth, and semi-structured interviews. The interview questions (Appendix A) were based on a thorough review of current literature and a theoretical blueprint created by the researcher. The questions were open-ended, allowing the leaders to share detailed and personal experiences. The researcher also asked follow-up questions, as necessary, to stimulate further discussion. The researcher took field notes, and the interviews were audio-recorded. In addition to interviews, qualitative data were also collected through document analysis. The researcher gathered participant information from institutional websites, LinkedIn accounts, curricula vitae, and online news articles with stories featuring the participants or their institutions. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants and their institutions, and participants were not specified as deans or directors, nor as working in academic or student affairs departments.

Data Analysis. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a transcription service. The researcher used Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis framework to explore and interpret the data collected through the interviews and document analysis. Moustakas' (1994) framework consists of seven steps: (a) listing and preliminary grouping, (b) reduction and elimination, (c) clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents, (d) final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application, (e) individual textural description, (f) individual structural description, and (g) textural-structural description of the meanings and

essences of the experience for each participant. The final step of analysis revealed a composite description of the lived experiences of women in mid-level positions in urban community colleges. Five major themes emerged after the data analysis: (a) leadership progression, (b) work-life balance and support structures, (c) mentorship and professional development, (d) communication, and (e) institutional climate and organizational structure.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are boundaries set by the researcher that narrow the scope of a study (Creswell, 2013). They are defined by the researcher as what will or will not be included in a study (Creswell, 2013). One delimitation of the study was the selection of the specific southeastern US state as the location for the study. A second delimitation was the focus on urban community colleges. Only administrators at three of the state's institutions were interviewed. Eliminating a majority of the state's institutions, including other institutions which were considered to be urban, narrowed the scope of the study.

A third delimitation was the selection of participants who were classified as mid-level leaders, serving in positions of deans and directors. This level of staffing is generally one to two levels below senior-level administration. Deans and directors in both academic and student affairs were analyzed for this study. An examination of the participants' perceived challenges, which may prevent or prove to be difficult for mid-level leaders to advance into senior-level roles, could provide insight into improving leadership development opportunities.

A fourth delimitation was narrowing the focus of the study to women leaders. There is a disparity between men and women within senior leadership in community colleges (ACE, 2017). Conducting in-depth, personal interviews with women, who are largely missing from senior leadership roles, provided a richer context for understanding the essence of the phenomenon.

Definition of Key Terms

A list of the definitions of key terms for this study is provided below:

1. *Administrative faculty*: For the purposes of this study, administrative faculty will be defined as staff members who "require the performance of work directly related to the management of the educational and general activities of the institution, department, or subdivision thereof. Incumbents in these positions exercise discretion and independent judgment and generally direct the work of others."

2. *Community college*: Two-year institutions where associate's degrees are the highest level of degrees awarded; also known as associate's colleges. Two-year institutions are further classified as urban-serving, suburban-serving, and rural-serving (Carnegie Classification, n.d.).

3. *Dean/Director*: For the purposes of this study, a dean or director will be defined as "an administrative officer who manages a major administrative function or area of responsibility such as learning resources, student services, management services, or an instructional division. Reporting responsibilities usually are directly to the vice president or a provost."

4. *Gender bias*: Feelings of prejudice and unfairness for women in leadership positions; incomparable treatment of men and women leaders (Bingham & Nix, 2010).

5. *Gender stereotyping*: The reinforcement of societal norms based on gender that are subconsciously and consciously emphasized to men and women from birth (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

6. *Glass ceiling*: "Those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991, p. 1).

7. *Good old boy network (or club)*: A male-only professional network that creates feelings of exclusion based on gender inequities and prevents networking and professional development opportunities for women (Ballenger, 2010).

8. *Leader*: For the purposes of this study, a leader will be defined as a community college administrator.

9. *Mid-level leadership*: For the purposes of this study, mid-level leaders will be defined as administrative faculty in roles of dean or director.

10. *Organizational challenges*: Challenges that are embedded in the hierarchical structures within community colleges. For the purposes of this study, these challenges include institutional climate and organizational culture (Dominici et al., 2009; Gill & Jones, 2013; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008; Twombly, 1995), glass ceiling effect (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991), and good old boy networks (Ballenger, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Yearout et al., 2017).

11. *Personal challenges*: Challenges that are internal and self-prescribed. For the purposes of this study, these challenges include work-life balance (Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Gill & Jones, 2013; Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013) and lack of initiative (Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Northouse, 2016).

12. *Professional challenges*: Challenges that serve as a barrier for receiving professional training and experiences. For the purposes of this study, these challenges include mentorship (Ballenger, 2010; Bower & Hums, 2013; Cejda, 2008; Eddy, 2008; Gamble

& Turner, 2015; Gill & Jones, 2013; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Leatherwood &

Williams, 2008; Obers, 2014; Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013), professional development

(Donohue-Mendoza, 2012; Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Leatherwood &

Williams, 2008), and mobility (Amey et al., 2002; Eddy, 2008; McKenney, 2000).

13. *Urban community college*: Urban community colleges are located in metropolitan

statistical areas (MAPs). MAPs must have at least one urban area with a population of

50,000 or more (US Census, 2018). Also referred to as urban-serving institutions

(Carnegie Classification, n.d.).

Chapter Summary

Although women in community colleges hold more leadership roles than women at four-

year colleges and universities, they still hold fewer senior-level leadership roles than men at

community colleges (ACE, 2012; ACE 2017). Much of the current research on women leaders

in community colleges is focused on senior-level leaders. As more community college

presidents retire or plan to retire in the coming years, it is important to have prepared leaders in

the pipeline. The nurturing and development of mid-level leaders is one way to fill the

leadership pipeline. This study examined the personal, professional, and organizational

challenges faced by women in mid-level positions in urban community colleges. Qualitative

data collected through in-person interviews and document analysis brought forth additional

insight regarding the unique needs of mid-level women leaders in these institutions.

This introductory chapter consisted of an overview of the current study, including the

background, conceptual framework, purpose statement, research questions, professional

significance, overview of methodology, delimitations, and definitions of key terms. Chapter

Two is a review of the current literature related to women in leadership, namely those in

community colleges. Chapter Three is the methodology for the study. Chapter Four provides a report of the study's findings. To conclude, Chapter Five includes a discussion of the study's findings along with implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine women leaders in mid-level positions and their perceptions of the personal, professional, and organizational challenges unique to them as leaders in urban community colleges. Participants discussed their perceived challenges through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants also described their challenges as they related to their personal, professional, and organizational experiences and how they have attempted to navigate those challenges.

This chapter includes a synthesis of relevant literature in the field as it relates to this study. First, the researcher will describe the method of the literature review and provide a brief synopsis of her findings. Second, the researcher will review the history of women in higher education, current community college leadership trends, and leadership in urban community colleges. Third, the researcher will explain the societal effects of gender bias and gender stereotyping on women in leadership. Fourth, the researcher will provide an overview of the literature as it relates to the perceived personal, professional, and organizational challenges faced by women leaders.

Method of the Literature Review

The researcher analyzed academic journals and textbooks collected through Old Dominion University's (ODU) Perry Libraries. The researcher also utilized online databases that included access to peer-reviewed scholarly articles. This study was focused on the following areas: women leaders and administrators; higher education, community colleges, urban community colleges, and four-year colleges and universities; personal, professional, and organizational challenges; and gender bias and gender stereotyping. As a result, the researcher

used the following key terms for Boolean searches in the library databases: female(s); woman OR women; leader(s); administrator(s); community college(s); college(s); feminist theory; feminism; university OR universities; challenge(s) OR barrier(s) OR impediment(s); gender; bias; stereotype OR stereotyping; career path(s); glass ceiling; mentor(ship); institutional climate; organization(al); urban; rural; and good ole OR old boy network OR club.

Findings in Brief

A review of the body of literature on women in leadership yielded studies about women both within and outside of community colleges. The researcher examined the past and current representations of women in leadership to underscore the current challenges faced by women leaders. The literature on gender bias and gender stereotyping focused on the negative stereotype-based expectations of women leaders and how they can be perceived in traditional, patriarchal institutions. The researcher analyzed the past, present, and future trends in community colleges to conceptualize the predicted leadership shortage. The literature review highlighted a gap in the literature for mid-level women leaders, and specifically, for those in urban community colleges.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Feminist theory initially developed and evolved as an extension of feminism and women's rights movements, including those for women's suffrage and equal civil rights (hooks, 2015; Rich, 2014). During the 1960s, a new form of feminism, radical feminism, grew as women coined themselves the "second sex" and expressed disdain for male dominance within the home and society as a whole (Rich, 2014). Early feminist theory focused heavily on gender, but radical feminist theory acknowledged the combination of gender, race, and class as a way of examining culture (hooks, 2015).

In the 1970s, feminist theory emerged as a new form of feminist scholarship (hooks, 2015). One prominent radical feminist, bell hooks (2015), explained:

Unlike the feminist scholarship that was focusing on recovering past history, forgotten heroines, writers, and so on, or the work that was about documenting from a social science perspective the current realities of women's lives, initially feminist theory was the site for the critical interrogation and re-imagining of sexist gender roles. It was to provide a revolutionary blueprint for the movement – one that when followed would lead us in the direction of transforming patriarchal culture. (p. xi)

Feminist theory has not only been put into practice, but it has also been applied to research studies that address and analyze issues involving patriarchy, hierarchies, dominance, and submission (Hays & Singh, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Regarding the use of feminist theory for social reform, hooks stated (2015):

One of the most affirming aspects of feminist movement has been the formation of an intellectual environment where there has been a sustained dialectal critique and exchange . . . There has been no other movement in social justice in our society that has been as self-critical as feminist movement . . . Just as our lives are not fixed or static but always changing, our theory must remain fluid, open, responsive to new information. (p. xiii)

The use of feminist theory, along with a phenomenological research design, was most appropriate for this study based on the interconnectedness between the two concepts. First, feminist theory and phenomenological design both draw upon the voices and experiences of individuals (Hays & Singh, 2012; hooks, 2015; Rich, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Second, both seek to find truth based on the perspectives and circumstances of individuals (Hays & Singh, 2012; hooks, 2015; Rich, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Third, both are impacted by the

relationship between the researcher and the participants (Hays & Singh, 2012; hooks, 2015; Rich, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted "feminist research emphasizes the importance of cultural affinity between the researcher and the conversational partners" (p. 21).

This phenomenological study was designed and conducted through the lens of feminist theory, and more specifically, radical feminist theory as explained and demonstrated by bell hooks (2015). The hierarchical and patriarchal systems within community colleges have been longstanding and perpetuated over time. In an interview with Lutz (1993), hooks noted:

> I think this . . . always carries us back to the reality of structures of domination. And again, structures cannot be changed by the individual; there has to be collective resistance, because you alone cannot change the nature of structures. (p. 420)

History of Women in Higher Education

Women were first allowed to pursue collegiate education in the 1800s when Oberlin College and Antioch College permitted women to attend; however, classes and extracurricular activities were generally segregated (Parker, 2015). The schooling of women was a contentious topic as some believed education would make women more well-rounded in their caregiving and homemaking abilities, while others argued that it would alter their roles in society. Women's colleges were founded during this period with the goal of providing a liberal arts education; alumni went on to become professors and staff members at these institutions (Parker, 2015). The first position in higher education for women administrators was dean of women (Parker, 2015). Women administrators sought out additional graduate education to assist them in their professional development (Parker, 2015).

During World War II, women took advantage of the vacancies in colleges and conducted research, created student and professional organizations, increased vocational education, and contributed to academic literature (Parker, 2015). Unfortunately, when the men returned from war, the number of women academicians drastically decreased (Parker, 2015). A majority of institutional deans of women were replaced by deans of students, who were usually men (Parker, 2015). The impacts of the Great Depression and the war threatened to cease the momentum created by women scholars (Parker, 2015).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S. Code § 2000e) and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S. Code § 1681) were landmark legislative changes that impacted women in education. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination by an employer based on race, color, sex, origin, and religion (Geiger, 2016). Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was intended to ensure additional coverage against discrimination in schools in that it:

> protects students, employees, applicants for admission and employment, and other persons from all forms of sex discrimination, including discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity. All students (as well as other persons) at recipient institutions are protected by Title IX – regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, part- or full-time status, disability, race, or national origin – in all aspects of a recipient's educational programs and activities. (U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2015, p. 1)

Bulick and Frey (2017) conducted a review of the literature focused on historical and present working environments of women in higher education, both faculty and administrators. The researchers' review covered literature chronicling the Colonial period through 2012, which

also included a focus on women of color in particular. The findings showed there have been significant strides in achieving greater equity for women in education, but there is still progress to be made.

Women Leaders in Community Colleges

The percentage of women leaders within higher education has steadily increased, albeit at a slow rate. The American Council on Education (ACE) (2012; 2017) released survey data on American college presidents in 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016, and there have been several key findings regarding women in educational leadership over these years.

- In 1986, 13% of all college presidents were women. The percentage increased to 23% in 2006, 26% in 2011, and then 30% in 2016.

- The majority of growth in the field happened with White women, as women of color remained the most underrepresented among all college presidents, totaling just 5%.

- Women presidents were more likely to lead at two-year schools. Women leaders accounted for 27% of community college presidents in 2001, 29% in 2006, 33% in 2011, and then 36% in 2016.

- For master's degree-granting institutions, 29% of presidents were women, compared to 22% at doctoral-granting institutions in 2016.

- In 2016, 80% of community college presidents, regardless of gender, were White, 84% were married, and 42% were over the age of 61.

- In 2016, 36% of women community college presidents reported changing their career progression due to responsibilities related to caring for others compared to 23% of men community college presidents (23%).

- In 2016, the majority of women community college presidents (41%) surveyed
  previously served as chief academic officer, provost, dean, or another senior-level
  administrator within academic affairs.

Research supports the notion that more women are drawn to the community college sector (Cejda, 2008; Eddy, 2008). Not only are women more likely to lead at higher rates in community colleges, but the sector's core mission of open door access, building community, and commitment to teaching also resonates more with women (Cejda, 2008; Eddy, 2008). Townsend and Twombly (2007) asserted "women have been an important part of the community college student and employee base since its inception as the junior college, that numerically women are well represented, and that the climate, while not perfect, is relatively good for women" (p. 208). Gender parity in higher education administration is closest within the community college sector; however, there is still lack of equity between men and women in leadership (ACE, 2012; ACE, 2017; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Although women presidents are not the focus of the study, it is important to note their numbers as mid-level women administrators may aspire to become presidents.

Community College Leadership Trends

The state of the modern community college continues to shift as presidents retire, new educational policies are implemented, government funding is reduced, and student demographics and needs change. Regarding community college leadership, beginning in 2001, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) first began projecting half of the presidents, along with many chief academic officers, would retire by 2007 (Shults, 2001). A 2012 AACC survey revealed 75% of CEOs believed they would retire by 2022 (Tekle, 2012). An additional 15% believed they would retire between 2023 and 2027 (Tekle, 2012). In another AACC survey,

nearly 35% of acting CEOs indicated plans to retire by 2020 (Phillipe, 2016). Eighty percent of the CEOs indicated plans to retire by 2025 (Phillipe, 2016).

Community colleges were founded as institutions designed to serve the masses (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Students who attend community colleges are generally older and more diverse than those at four-year institutions (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Regarding student demographics, 52% of community college students are minorities, 56% are women, and 62% are part-time students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017a). Additionally, 36% are first-generation college students, 17% are single parents, 4% are military veterans, and 12% reported having disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2017b). Consequently, more academically underprepared students attend community colleges, and more than half of students are placed into developmental education (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010; Kosiewicz, Ngo, & Fong, 2016). A large concern for community college presidents is the rate of college completion (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2017).

Moreover, community college presidents must be prepared to effectively manage economic matters, such as affordability, student debt, funding, and economic and workforce development. Tuition rates have steadily increased over time, making college less affordable for those with high need (Ma & Baum, 2016).   Community college leaders are facing pressure from state governments who have steadily reduced funding, forcing administrators to do more with less (Romano & Palmer, 2016).   Legislatures have implemented performance-based funding models, using institutional performance metrics to demand accountability and transparency from institutions (D'Amico, Friedel, Katsinas, & Thornton, 2014). Finally, community college presidents must be prepared to find additional ways to finance their institutions by creating meaningful relationships with internal and external stakeholders (Eddy, 2017; Phelan, 2016).

As current community college presidents continue to retire, administrators will need to find qualified candidates who are able to handle the shifting academic, economic, social, and political challenges in the community college sector. In 2017, the Aspen Institute and Achieving the Dream (ATD) released a joint report, highlighting the essential qualities of an effective, modern community college president: (a) dedication to access and student success; (b) risk-taking to promote student success; (c) creating meaningful change; (d) strategic thinking and vision with internal and external stakeholders; and (e) securing and disseminating resources necessary for student success (Aspen Institute & ATD, 2017). The rising number of women in mid-level positions should be placed in institutional leadership funnels and adequately developed to meet the needs of today's community college.

Urban Community Colleges

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education developed a system for classifying colleges and universities, based on empirical data, in 1973 (Carnegie Classification, n.d.). Institutions are classified based on institution type, size, and location. According to the Carnegie Classification, associate's colleges (or community colleges) are two-year institutions where associate's degrees are the highest level of degrees awarded. Two-year institutions are further classified as urban-serving, suburban-serving, or rural-serving (Carnegie Classification, n.d.). Urban community colleges are located in metropolitan statistical areas (MAPs) (U.S. Census, 2018). MAPs must have at least one urban area with a population of 50,000 or more (U.S. Census, 2018).

Urban community colleges face different challenges than suburban and rural institutions (Lassiter, 2013; Myran & Parsons, 2013). Urban institutions serve more students with attributes that may create barriers to success, such as students who are minorities, first generation in

college, in need of academic remediation, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, of immigrant status, or learning English as a second language (Myran & Parsons, 2013). Moreover, urban community colleges tend to be located in or close to areas with higher concentrations of inner cities, crime, failing K-12 schools, poverty, and racial tension (Myran & Parson, 2013). Conversely, these urban areas are also centers of economic development, innovation, multiculturalism, and movements for social change (Lassiter, 2013; Myran & Parsons, 2013).

Myran and Parsons (2013) suggested urban community college leaders have the power to lead society to a multiracial democracy, "in which people of all races, religions, classes, and genders unite in support of principles of social justice and racial and civic equality" (p. 8). The researchers emphasized the following:

It is a call for new ways to address long-term, unresolved racial inequities. It is a call to confront and dismantle at last the residual impact of legalized discrimination from the past. It is a time to close the equity gap and achieve the yet-unfulfilled promise of equality for all. (Myran & Parsons, 2013, p. 8)

Lassiter (2013) asserted urban community college administrators will need to implement a multi-layered approach to leadership, conceptually similar to that of an onion, to deal with emerging social, economic, political, and technological challenges.

Urban community colleges serve greater numbers of historically marginalized students. Although there are concerns regarding the impending leadership shortage for all community colleges, there are specific and unique needs related to urban community colleges. A gap exists in the literature concerning leadership challenges for women leaders in urban community colleges. Fostering the personal and professional development of women leaders, another

marginalized group, could be essential in helping meet the needs of society and creating a pathway for a multiracial democracy.

Mid-Level Leadership Positions in Urban Community Colleges

For the purposes of this study, the researcher used one southeastern state community college system's definition for administrative faculty, which included roles of associate vice president, assistant vice president, dean, director, and coordinator positions. According to the system's manual, administrative faculty members are administrative officers who have supervisory responsibilities over major administrative units or departments. These administrative officers generally report to a vice president or provost.

For this study, only women in roles of deans and directors in three urban community colleges within this state system were examined. In this particular system, associate and assistant vice presidents are ranked at the same level and pay grade as deans and directors. However, associate and assistant vice presidents are likely to communicate and interact with college presidents and vice presidents more frequently than deans and directors, which could affect their perceptions of personal, professional, and organizational challenges. The researcher's goal was to understand the challenges faced by mid-level women leaders and how those challenges may impact them. Due to the differences in daily roles and responsibilities between the two groups, the researcher believed deans and directors more closely fit the description of mid-level leaders. Deans and directors in both academic and student affairs were analyzed in this study.

The Effects of Gender Bias and Stereotyping on Women Leaders

Research has indicated the leadership styles of women are advantageous for managing and directing complex organizations (Berkery, Morley, & Tiernan, 2013; Eagly & Carli, 2003;

Eagly, Gartzia, & Carli, 2014). Women tend to be considered transformational leaders who foster greater levels of inspirational motivation, trust, development, encouragement, and empowerment in their workers (Berkery et al., 2013; Martin, 2015; Zhang, Li, Ullrich, & Van Dick, 2013). Researchers consider transformational leadership as an advantageous leadership style for dynamic organizations (Berkery et al., 2013; Martin, 2015). Fritz and van Knippenberg (2017) found women tend to have higher rates of communal orientation, or stronger identification and affiliation through their organizations, than men, and this communal orientation increases their aspirations of leadership through interaction with their work. However, women continue to lead at lower rates than men.

Northouse (2016) compiled the reasons for the gender disparity in leadership into three different categories:

- Gender differences: style and effectiveness, commitment and motivation, self-promotion, negotiation, evolution

- Human capital: education, work experience, professional development, work and home conflicting obligations

- Prejudice: stereotyping, bias, vulnerability, outside pressures

Mawson's (2010) study showed gender differences can be observed early in human development. The researcher examined children's play through a case study to analyze leadership trends. He observed two Auckland (New Zealand) settings – one with 22 preschool students and another with 47 kindergarten students. Through the children's spontaneous collaborative play, the researcher found gender differences, and in particular, two emergent leadership styles. Boys were more likely to perform roles as dictators (more domineering), whereas girls tended to act as directors (more egalitarian) (Mawson, 2010).

Gasser and Shaffer (2014) asserted, "how women glean messages from the dominant US culture regarding what types of jobs are suitable for women and gendered expectations for behavior influence and constrain young women's career interests, self-efficacy, view of parenthood, and achievement motivation" (p. 347). According to Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003),

> one reason that gender roles have different implications for female and male leaders is thus that inconsistency often exists between the predominantly communal qualities that perceivers associate with women (e.g., friendly, kind, unselfish) and the predominantly agentic qualities that they generally believe are necessary to succeed as a leader (e.g., assertive, masterful, instrumentally competent). (p. 572)

Organizational structures within higher education are generally prescribed by traditional, male-centered thinking. The idea that women lack required leadership qualities and skills is reinforced through societal norms, media, and masculine environments (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Additionally, the built-in hierarchical and patriarchal systems within community colleges are problematic impediments that affect upward mobility for women leaders (Gill & Jones, 2013).

Even with legislative measures, such as Title VII Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S. Code § 2000e) and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S. Code § 1681), McEldowney, Bobrowski, and Gramberg (2009) found much of the stereotyping, discrimination, and bias of the past few decades was still prevalent in more recent years. The researchers suggested potential women leaders internalize feelings of inferiority, and in turn, do not feel qualified to seek higher professional advancement (McEldowney et al., 2009). Men may also internalize these sentiments and, because of stereotype cues, believe that women are not capable leaders, negatively affecting professional development, mentorship, and hiring opportunities

(McEldowney et al., 2009). These assumptions and categorizations of gender are learned and maintained by both men and women (McEldowney et al., 2009).

Stereotype threat is another challenge women face as leaders. Sturm, Taylor, Atwater, and Braddy (2014) found during the time of their study, women had higher levels of confidence than compared to women in previous years. However, even though women had more confidence and rated their own job performances positively, they tended to under-predict their bosses' ratings of them (Sturm et al., 2014). Similarly, McEldowney et al. (2009) surveyed a group of women college students and discovered these students believed that society depicted them as incompetent leaders who were unable to assume the same roles as men.

Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Nauts (2011) found that even women who are able to reject the internalization of stereotype threat may still experience the effects of status incongruity hypothesis. Women leaders who take on dominant roles (deemed to be more in line with those of men) face potential prejudice and discrimination because they threaten gender hierarchy norms (Rudman et al., 2011). In essence, women who can play the game and effectively lead in a less dominant – or more feminine – style are less likely to face discrimination. Relatedly, Vial, Napier, and Brescoll (2016) found women who were deemed overly masculine and authoritative had greater chances of being disliked and receiving backlash.

Bingham and Nix (2010) found four prevailing themes in their study on gender bias: "the extent to which women's work is valued and women are as committed to their profession as men; comparative treatment of men and women; the impact of familial responsibilities on women's work; and limitations on women's careers" (p. 6). The researchers asserted women did not believe they were on an even playing field with men, and they were perceived as being less committed, distracted with personal obligations, and ineffective leaders (Bingham & Nix, 2010).

Lammers and Gast (2017) conducted four experiments to analyze the effects of mainstream media's claims regarding gender and leadership on people's perceptions of women leaders. More specifically, the researchers examined the effects of claims that leadership skills, traditionally ascribed to women, make women better leaders than men. The researchers found that this interpretation of the positive claims of women being better and more effective leaders than men resulted in the inaccurate belief there was already equality between men and women in leadership. In turn, this inaccuracy could leave others to believe there was no need for interventions to achieve more equality, such as affirmative action.

Challenges for Women Leaders in the Literature

A review of the literature on the challenges faced by women leaders included studies in higher education as well as other professional sectors. The research included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs. Generally, qualitative designs were primarily utilized to gain a deeper understanding of women in leadership. A breakdown of key research designs follows.

Qualitative Studies

Gill and Jones (2013) implemented a qualitative, single case study approach to examine women community college leaders in West Texas. They noted women in this region only held 30% of community college managerial positions, compared to the national average, in which women occupied more than 50% of community college managerial roles. The researchers interviewed and observed two presidents and vice presidents to learn the challenges faced in their male-dominated hierarchical systems. Obers (2014) also used a case study research design to gain an understanding of women faculty members' challenges in career progression at a South

African university. The researcher implemented document analysis, survey, and in-depth interviewing.

Eddy (2008) examined the professional pathways of women community college presidents through a phenomenological research design and found several themes through one-on-one interviews. Similarly, Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) examined the leadership experiences of Black mid-level student affairs administrators at two- and four-year Midwest institutions through their phenomenological research design. Gamble and Turner (2015) also conducted a phenomenological study, consisting of semi-structured interviews with ten Black women in senior-level administrative positions in four-year institutions in Georgia. By focusing on both race and gender, the researchers highlighted the unique challenges specific to Black women leaders in higher education.

Cejda (2008) implemented a basic interpretive research design to understand the experiences of six women serving as community college chief academic officers (CAOs). This qualitative inquiry included one-on-one, in-depth interviews with women from three rural community colleges, two suburban community colleges, and one urban community college. After the initial interviews, the researcher continued with follow-up discussions with the participants. Sherman Newcomb, Beaty, Sanzo, and Peters-Hawkins (2013) examined their own experiences as young faculty members through an emergent study, centering on interpersonal dialogue. The researchers used a question-and-answer format to discuss and reflect upon their experiences as women in the academy, similar to the format of qualitative interview research designs.

Mixed Methods Studies

Donohue-Mendoza (2012) examined the relationship between supervision and career advancement for women community college leaders in executive and middle management administrative positions through a mixed methods study. The researcher focused on ineffective supervisory experiences that could possibly derail gender equity at the executive level in community colleges. The researcher used cluster purposive sampling to create a group of 55 mid- and senior-level leaders in two community college districts, Tosca and Venice, in northern California. The mid-level administrators completed the Synergistic Supervision Scale survey to determine perceptions of their supervisory experiences.

Similar to Donohue-Mendoza (2012), Leatherwood and Williams (2008) implemented a mixed methods design in which the researchers surveyed 58 presidents in the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) to examine their pathways to presidency. In addition to the quantitative data collected through surveys, the researchers obtained qualitative data through in-depth interviews with four NCCCS presidents, two women and two men. Glass and Cook (2016) examined and compared the career trajectories of 52 women Fortune 500 CEOs to their male counterparts through a mixed methods research design. The researchers first analyzed quantitative career trajectory data and then followed up with 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews to gain additional insight from the personal stories and experiences of some of the women CEOs.

Quantitative Studies

Chisolm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann, and Josephson (2017) analyzed the prevalence of women in leadership within pharmacy, healthcare, and higher education fields through a meta-analysis of existing research. The researchers found the following common barriers for women

in leadership: biases (conscious and unconscious), lack of initiative to pursue leadership, lack of mentorship, inability to support work-life balance, "lean out" experience, and lack of opportunities and networks (Chisolm-Burns et al., 2017).

McKenney (2000) also used a survey design to examine the career paths of chief academic officers in public community colleges and found gender was not a significant factor for mobility and institutional type with the career paths of chief academic officers in public community colleges. Conversely, the researcher found entry port, number of previous positions held, and the most recent previous position held to be the most significant influences on women administrators' career paths (McKenney, 2000).

Amey, Vanderlinden, and Brown (2002) focused their quantitative study on the career experiences of mid-level leaders – both men and women – to determine the typical career path to a community college presidency. The researchers used surveys to understand the connections to professional issues related to gender, race, and ethnicity. Although mid-level leaders were examined in Amey et al.'s (2002) study, there was not a focus on leaders in urban community colleges. Additionally, qualitative data allows leaders the opportunities to describe and explain their personal and professional journeys.

Perceived Personal Challenges

Women leaders often face personal challenges that are different from their male counterparts. These personal challenges include work-life balance (Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Gill & Jones, 2013; Sherman Newcomb, Beaty, Sanzo, & Peters-Hawkins, 2013) and initiative (Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Northouse, 2016).

Work-life balance. A common personal challenge for women leaders is maintaining balance between their personal and professional lives. Sherman Newcomb et al. (2013) shared

excerpts from their personal conversations as faculty, depicting the pressure, sadness, and guilt associated with work-life balance. Some of the faculty described feelings of "failure" with parenting because of their choices to seek professional advancement (Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013). They described the difficulty in being successful, present, and competent in multiple capacities (Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013). Similarly, participants in Gamble and Turner's (2015) study described the sacrifices they made in order to find balance between their roles at work and at home. They found it difficult to satisfy society's expectations of raising a family and sustaining a household while simultaneously completing the duties of competent and effective leaders at work (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Moreover, Gamble and Turner (2015) noted work-life balance stressors were not only experienced by women with children but also those without children.

The community college presidents in Eddy's (2008) study were heavily influenced by their families. The women explained the reasons for making career decisions that would not negatively impact their families, including waiting for a spouse to retire first or for their children to get older (Eddy, 2008). They believed a stable foundation at home would assist them in their dual role as an administrative leader (Eddy, 2008). Similarly, the women presidents and vice presidents analyzed in Gill and Jones' (2013) case study attributed their professional advancement to the support of their spouses. In order to manage their dual roles, they purposefully worked to integrate their personal and professional lives and include their families in work-related events (Gill & Jones, 2013).

Initiative. Eddy (2008) found one reason for a lack of women presidential candidates to be that many women do not initially set out to become presidents. Many of those who ultimately become presidents do so by chance because they find that after spending many years in various

administrative positions, presidency tends to be next in a sequence that makes sense (Eddy, 2008). Eddy (2008) also noted the women in her study acquiesced to the suggestions of others to pursue senior-level roles; they were all able to pinpoint a specific pivotal moment that led to their decision to pursue a community college presidency.

Regarding gender differences, women are less assertive, less likely to self-promote, and less likely to negotiate than men (Northouse, 2016). Gamble and Turner (2015) found most of the women leaders in their study regretted not taking more risks professionally and believed this negatively impacted opportunities for career advancement. These women explained the challenge of breaking gender norms and how they felt more comfortable exerting additional effort in their traditional work roles with the hopes that this effort would be eventually recognized (Gamble and Turner, 2015).

Perceived Professional Challenges

Women leaders also face professional challenges that are not normally encountered by male leaders. These challenges include mentorship (Ballenger, 2010; Bower & Hums, 2013; Cejda, 2008; Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Gill & Jones, 2013; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008; Obers, 2014; Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013), professional development (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012; Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008), and mobility (Amey et al., 2002; Eddy, 2008; McKenney, 2000).

Mentorship. Lacking women mentors who have paved the way and have illustrated examples of success is often cited as a challenge for women administrators and faculty (Ballenger, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013). Because there is a smaller percentage of senior-level women leaders, there is a shortage of

women to mentor other leaders in the pipeline (Linehan & Scullion, 2008). As a result, many women leaders in administrative roles in academia tend to have male mentors (Growe & Montgomery, 2000). Bower and Hums (2013) surveyed women working in intercollegiate athletic departments and found two areas of concern: lack of mentoring and networking. The shortcomings in these two areas were presumed to stem from the overall shortage of women leaders in intercollegiate athletics (Bower & Hums, 2013). The women felt they were missing out on opportunities to receive encouragement, support, career advice, and exposure (Bower & Hums, 2013).

Out of the four women in executive leadership roles studied by Gill and Jones (2013), three had mentors who were men, while only one had a mentor who was a woman. Gill and Jones (2013) ascribed mentorship by other women as a means to assist women leaders with managing work-life balance and navigating traditional male-centered hierarchies. The participants in Gamble and Turner's (2015) study reflected on the need for mentorship to cultivate leadership growth and development. However, as Black women in higher education, they believed the lack of Black mentors specifically created a barrier to career advancement (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Obers (2014) found the lack of senior-level women leaders in South African higher education institutions resulted in low levels of psychosocial mentoring. The researcher ascribed this form of mentoring as most advantageous for women in that it helps to build women's self-esteem and make them more likely to self-promote and self-advocate (Obers, 2014). Leatherwood and Williams (2008) did not find a significant difference in men and women's perceptions of access to mentorships in community colleges. However, the researchers did find more women believed access to mentors to be a barrier to community college presidency (Leatherwood & Williams, 2008).

Professional development. Gamble and Turner's (2015) study highlighted the significance of relationships with current or previous bosses who provided professional development opportunities for women leaders. Positive relationships resulted in increased motivation, assistance with navigating challenges and barriers, and aspiration for career growth (Gamble & Turner, 2015). A few of the study's participants reported negative managerial experiences as a result of only working for male supervisors (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Donohue-Mendoza (2012) found mid-level managers were not being prepared and trained adequately by their supervisors. They believed their potential had not been realized, and they were not encouraged to seek professional development, educational opportunities, or promotional advancement (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). The researcher claimed poor and minimal supervision ultimately causes an entire academic institution to suffer (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). In contrast, some researchers discovered women leaders were still able to develop as leaders despite negative professional experiences (Eddy, 2008; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008). The instances of poor leadership and support taught them what not to do as leaders (Eddy, 2008; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008).

Mobility. Eddy (2008) found "women working as mid-level administrators may be most greatly affected by mobility factors within a single institution" (p. 51). Some of the women presidents in Eddy's (2008) study opted to remain working in the same institutions, forgoing the pursuit of other lucrative professional opportunities, instead of moving their families to new locations. One president ascribed her previous decisions not to leave her current institution, which resulted in a lack of diverse leadership experiences, as a reason for not being selected for other presidential positions (Eddy, 2008).

Amey et al.'s (2002) survey revealed half of their research participants utilized mentorship, nearly one-quarter were promoted to presidency within their same institution, and most followed academic trajectories on the pathway to presidency. Subsequently, Amey et al. (2002) also found the pathway was beginning to open up beyond the traditional academic route. In another study analyzing the pathway to the presidency, McKenney (2000) showed women tended to move more quickly along their career paths than men. However, the faster professional movement did not result in higher rates of presidency roles for women (McKenney, 2000).

Perceived Organizational Challenges

Women leaders encounter organizational challenges that are embedded in the hierarchical and patriarchal systems upon which community colleges were built. These challenges include institutional climate and organizational culture (Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Gill & Jones, 2013; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008; Twombly, 1995), glass ceiling effect (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991), and good old boy networks (Ballenger, 2010; Eddy, 2008).

Institutional climate and organizational culture. The dramatic and unprecedented growth of the American community college system of the 1960s and 1970s stemmed from patriarchal and male-dominated thinking of its male founders (Twombly, 1995). Although the number of women leaders within community colleges has steadily increased, the historical, male-centered hierarchies have not changed as quickly (Eddy, 2008). Dominici et al. (2009) presumed, although positive strides were being made in higher education, the overall climate in higher education was still somewhat chilly for women. The lack of institutional climate and cultural awareness ultimately perpetuates the hierarchical structures in community colleges, in

turn creating barriers and challenges for aspiring women leaders (Gill & Jones, 2013). The ingrained patriarchal systems in institutions of higher education produce residual feelings of oppression for members outside of the majority groups. Smith (2016) explained:

> Diversity in leadership represents values concerning equity in both hiring and retention. Any institution that simultaneously describes itself as open and committed to diversity, yet has the faculty or leadership demographic common today, could be seen as disingenuous and hypocritical. (p. 391)

The exclusionary feelings based on gender are not always recognized or experienced by men. Leatherwood and Williams (2008) found only the women participants in their study described gender inequities and inequalities as obstacles to attaining their current positions. Some women felt because of their institutional climates, they were believed to be better fits for supportive roles instead of chief leadership positions.

Likewise, the presidents and vice presidents in Gill and Jones' (2013) study explained their institutional climates were not as welcoming, but they noted positive changes were slowly being made. Although these women did not report overt personal discrimination, they believed discriminatory practices were still present at their institutions (Gill & Jones, 2013). In order to combat the feelings of exclusion and dominance, the women leaders actively forced themselves to take on more traditional male leadership roles (Gill & Jones, 2013).

Glass ceiling effect. The terminology, "glass ceiling effect," was first introduced in the 1980s, but in 1991, the U.S. Department of Labor formally defined the glass ceiling as "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991, p.1). Through Title II of the Civil Rights Acts of 1991 (P.L. 102-

166 § 1, 105 Stat. 1071), the U.S. Department of Labor established the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, a 21-member bipartisan body, to analyze the barriers and provide recommendations for eliminating them (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). The 1991 Federal Glass Ceiling Commission's chair, Secretary of Labor, the Honorable Robert B. Reich, explained "the glass ceiling is not only an egregious denial of social justice that affects two-thirds of the population, but a serious economic problem that takes a huge financial toll on American business," and "equity demands that we destroy the glass ceiling" (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 4). Reich also stated, based on the Commission's recommendations, "if America's businesses fully utilized the nation's human capital, they would be making a solid investment" (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 5).

The glass ceiling effect is an invisible and implicit form of bias that exists in the workplace, despite the enforcement of antidiscrimination laws, such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S. Code § 2000e), which prohibits discrimination of employees based on their sex, race, color, national origin, and religion (EEOC, n.d.); the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (29 U.S. Code Chapter 8 § 206(d)), which mandates men and women receive equal pay for equal work; and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S. Code § 1681), which prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs and activities (OCR, 2015). Cotter et al. (2001) developed a test to measure the glass ceiling effect. The researchers determined a glass ceiling inequality:

- Represents a gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee;
- Represents a gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome;

- Represents a gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels; and

- Represents a gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career. (Cotter et al., 2001, pp. 657-661)

In addition to the glass ceiling effect, Glass and Cook (2016) found women were more apt to face glass cliff promotions, or promotions into positions where success would be unlikely. Moreover, some women intentionally sought out more risky advancement opportunities to prove their leadership abilities (Glass & Cook, 2016). Second, the researchers found more support was given to CEOs with dual roles, who also served as chair of their boards. Women were less likely to serve simultaneous roles and therefore experienced more challenges to their authority (Glass & Cook, 2016). Third, the researchers learned women faced more scrutiny because they tended to be promoted to more difficult environments with less support, and as a result, lasted for shorter tenures than men (Glass & Cook, 2016).

Good old boy network. Similar to the glass ceiling effect, the good old boy network (also referred to as good old boy club) is another organizational barrier faced by women in leadership. The good old boy network is a phenomenon that causes women to feel excluded from beneficial networking and development opportunities (Ballenger, 2010). Ballenger (2010) noted some women felt as though they were outsiders in their own institutions; they were secluded from these groups where male leaders only networked, socialized, and confided with other male colleagues. Similarly, Eddy (2008) noted it is essential for women to learn to successfully navigate the circles of male domination at their respective institutions. One

president in Eddy's (2008) study explained she learned to play golf as a way to infiltrate her community college's foundation board's old boy club.

Gaps in the Literature

The literature includes qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research on women in leadership – both inside and outside of higher education – as well as the factors that impact and challenge women leaders, including gender bias and gender stereotyping. Regarding leadership in community colleges, previous research has focused mainly on career pathways of senior-level women leaders (Cejda, 2008; Eddy, 2008; Gill & Jones, 2013; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008). There has also been a focus on the career pathways of women teaching faculty and their challenges with conducting research and obtaining tenure (Obers, 2014; Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013).

However, there is a gap in the literature for mid-level women leaders in higher education as whole, and specifically, those in community colleges in dean or director positions. There is a second gap in the literature for mid-level leaders in urban community colleges. Research on urban academic institutions, including community colleges, was focused on the lack of resources, academic unpreparedness of minority students, low rates of faculty-student engagement, and low student success levels (Lassiter, 2013; Myran & Parsons, 2013).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research related to the challenges faced by women leaders in community colleges through a synthesis of the studies on the history of women in higher education as well as historical and current community college leadership trends. The literature focuses on specific personal, professional, and organizational challenges faced by women leaders through qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research designs.

This literature review indicates a need for further research on mid-level women leaders. There are several studies focused on women in leadership in higher education, but there is a strong focus on senior-level leaders and not mid-level leaders. There is also a need to concentrate on the leadership experiences of mid-level women leaders in urban community colleges. The development of rising women leaders in community colleges is needed, particularly with the impending retirement of current presidents.

In Chapter Three, the researcher will address and justify the methodological decisions for the study. The study's research design, setting and context, participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and limitations will be explained in greater detail.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine women leaders in mid-level positions and their perceptions of the personal, professional, and organizational challenges unique to them as leaders in urban community colleges. Participants discussed their perceived challenges through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants also described their challenges as they related to their personal, professional, and organizational experiences and how they have attempted to navigate those challenges.

In this chapter, the researcher addresses and justifies the methodological decisions for the study. First, the research questions will be revisited. Second, the researcher will explain the rationale for using qualitative methodology to design and conduct the study. Third, the researcher will explain the appropriateness of phenomenology as the research tradition and feminist theory as the research paradigm for the study. Fourth, the researcher will discuss the significance and context of the research setting as well as the sampling and selection of participants. Fifth, the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures will be explained. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the delimitations and limitations of the study.

Research Questions

As described in Chapter Two, much of the literature on women's leadership in higher education is focused on women leaders in faculty or senior-level administrative roles. Although the career paths and professional challenges of women presidents, vice presidents, and chief academic officers in four-year and two-year institutions have been analyzed, there is a gap in the literature for women in mid-level leadership positions, and specifically, for those in community

colleges. There is also a gap in the literature for women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges. Urban community colleges have different social, economic, and political characteristics than suburban and rural community colleges, and these differences may result in challenges that are unique to mid-level women leaders in these institutions. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the perceived challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

   a. What are the perceived personal challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

   b. What are the perceived professional challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

   c. What are the perceived organizational challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

2. How do these women leaders navigate these perceived challenges?

Epistemology

An epistemological standpoint provides the framework for the question, "how do we know what we know?" (Patton, 2002). Phenomenological research is rooted in the epistemological theory of constructivism, also referred to as interpretivism. Through the constructivist viewpoint, "concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and themselves" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 10). Merriam (2009) described interpretive research as an assumption that "reality is socially

constructed …[and]… there is no single, observable reality" (p. 8). Knowledge is not meant to be found, but instead, it can be interpreted through multiple realities (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher attempted to conduct this study without any predetermined belief of the outcome. The challenges faced by women in mid-level positions are best expressed by the women who are currently in these mid-level positions. The researcher sought to interpret the experiences of the women leaders based on their lived experiences.

Research Design

This qualitative study was designed and conducted with a phenomenological research approach through the lens of feminist theory. Corbin and Strauss (2008) noted, "committed qualitative researchers tend to frame their research questions in such a way that the only manner in which they can be answered is through qualitative research" (p. 13). Van Maanen (1979) defined qualitative research as "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (p. 520). According to Merriam (2009), there are four characteristics of qualitative research: (a) the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; (b) the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; (c) the process is inductive; and (d) the product is descriptive.

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that qualitative researchers do not control or manipulate data to determine why a phenomenon exists (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative studies "allow researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). Rubin and Rubin (2012) asserted there is a "focus on depth rather than breadth" in qualitative research and that qualitative researchers "care less about

finding averages and more about understanding specific situations, individuals, groups, or moments in time that are important or revealing" (p. 2). Qualitative inquiry ultimately provides participants with opportunities to construct meaning and make sense of their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) added that a qualified qualitative researcher should embody the following characteristics: "a questioning stance with regard to your work and life context; high tolerance for ambiguity; being a careful observer, asking good questions, thinking inductively; and comfort with writing" (p. 17).

Research Tradition

A phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that centers on the essences of shared experiences (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) described an essence as a phenomenon's core meaning, and fully understanding the essence would serve as the defining characteristic for a phenomenological study. A phenomenological approach allows a researcher to study a topic, in a novel way, through the lenses of those who have directly experienced the phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). As stated by Moustakas (1994), a "phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved" (p. 58).

The researcher used heuristic inquiry, an approach within phenomenological research, to guide the study. Moustakas (1990) described heuristic research as "a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery" (p. 15). The focus of the current study was to understand the essence of the challenges of women in mid-level leadership positions at urban community colleges. By using the systematic approach of heuristic inquiry, the researcher was able to use the study's guiding research questions and remain with those questions until the answers were discovered and illuminated (Moustakas, 1990). Through this

process, the researcher continuously revisited the data and the participants, seeking verification "that the explication of the phenomenon and the creative synthesis of essences and meanings actually portrayed the phenomenon investigated" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 33).

Theoretical Perspective

This qualitative, phenomenological design was implemented through a feminist theory paradigm. Hays and Singh (2012) noted "feminists seek to address and dismantle methods by which 'patriarchy' may play into qualitative inquiry," and "gender is an organizing principle in understanding and reporting research findings" (p. 41). Researchers using a feminist theory approach tend to hone in on issues of dominance and submission (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Many feminist researchers "have been more comfortable with qualitative interviews that allow the interviewees to talk back, to challenge cultural assumptions embedded in the questions, and to answer from their own experience" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 21).

Rubin and Rubin (2012) highlighted the common themes of feminist theory in qualitative research, and the themes are outlined in Table 1. A feminist perspective highlights the importance of gender relationships (Patton, 2002). Rubin and Rubin (2012) asserted "some feminist researchers claim not only that women should interview women but also that interviewers need to be in the same position as the interviewees" (p. 21).

Role of the Researcher, Positionality, and Potential Biases

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The researcher of this study is a Black woman who has worked in higher education for 14 years. She is currently in a mid-level leadership position within student affairs at an urban community college in the southeastern region of the US. The researcher's current institution is the

Table 1

Topics and Viewpoints of Feminist Theory in Qualitative Research

Topic	Viewpoint
The Nature of Reality	Reality is interpreted through gendered lenses, often in ways that reflect existing male/female hierarchies.
Types of Knowledge Sought	The goal is to describe particular events, processes, or culture from the perspective of the participants. Interested in contending and overlapping versions of reality; many truths possible. Emphasis is on how gender relations and gender dominance impact social behaviors.
The Role of the Researcher	A respectful listener or observer who is empathetic toward those being studied.
Implications of Findings	Research is undertaken to increase understanding of gender-based differences and dominance patterns, usually with the goal of reducing gender-based inequalities.

Source: Rubin and Rubin (2012)
Note: Adapted from Chart 2.1, Positivism, Naturalism, and Its Variants

only community college setting in which she has worked. She has held positions as an academic counselor and dean of student services. The researcher has future aspirations of attaining a senior-level leadership role. Additionally, she was familiar with the other urban community colleges in the study, and she was familiar with some of the participants ultimately selected for the study.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) contended objectivity in data collection and analysis is a myth and not possible to achieve. As a mid-level administrator in a similar type of community college as those in the study, the researcher's sensitivity to the participants' roles was increased during

the study. Essentially, the "researcher's own perspective must also be made explicit" (Patton, 2002, p. 129). Patton (2002) stated "evaluators and researchers should strive to neither overestimate nor underestimate their effects but to take seriously their responsibility to describe and study what those effects are" (p. 569).

Although the researcher's previous experiences could have affected data analysis, it also allowed the researcher the ability to interpret and understand the significance of the data more easily (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It was important for the researcher to remain aware of her potential biases and preconceptions throughout the duration of the study. Merriam (2009) emphasized, "rather than trying to eliminate these biases or 'subjectivities,' it is important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of the data" (p. 15). Two elements of heuristic inquiry are (a) "the researcher must have personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon under study," and (b) "heuristic inquiry focuses on intense human experiences, intense from the point of view of the investigator" (Patton, 2002, p. 107). This is significant because it underscored the researcher's ability to gain an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

Research Setting and Context

This study took place at three urban community college campuses in one southeastern state in the US. Urban locations were used as a result of their larger sizes and organizational complexities. As a result, the researcher had access to a wider and more diverse selection of women leaders for the study. The researcher used community colleges in this state due to convenience of location. The researcher performed the interviews in person, and being able to easily commute to the locations was important. Each participant was interviewed in her own office on her individual campus.

Although the three community colleges were located in different parts of their state and varied in size, they were more similar than different. Each of the community colleges were large enough to comprise multiple campuses. Despite being considered urban locations, the colleges' service areas included students from urban, suburban, and rural areas. All of the colleges had student populations that were majority women. They also offered both degree-seeking courses and workforce development programs. Two of the community colleges were designated as minority-serving institutions, meaning they served a higher population of minority than majority students.

Participants

The sample for the study was purposefully selected in order to meet the criteria for the study. Patton (2002) explained "purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 230). The researcher's goal was not to make generalizations about the experiences of mid-level leaders but instead to collect details and understand the essence of the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this particular study because it is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77).

More specifically, the researcher used criterion sampling, a form of purposeful sampling, in which participants met the predetermined criterion for the study (Patton, 2002). For this study, the participants needed to be women, in positions labeled as dean or director, and working in one of the three selected urban community colleges. Ten participants were identified, recruited, and ultimately selected for the study. The researcher's goal was to gather sufficient

data to reach saturation, which is a point where the researcher does not detect any new ideas, themes, or constructs (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As explained by Corbin and Strauss (2008),

> Though total saturation (complete development) is probably never achieved, if a researcher determines that a category offers considerable depth and breadth of understanding about a phenomenon, and relationships to other categories have been made clear, then he or she can say sufficient sampling has occurred, at least for the purposes of the study. (p. 149)

The researcher determined saturation was met through the interviews with the selected ten women leaders.

Instrumentation

The researcher used one-on-one, in-depth interviews to understand the lived experiences of the women leaders in the study. Patton (2002) noted "qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 341). In this study, the researcher created and utilized a theoretical blueprint, outlined in Table 2, to craft 15 open-ended interview questions (Appendix A). The blueprint was based on the study's research questions and conceptual framework, as well as a review of the literature on women leaders. After a review of the literature, the researcher discovered a focus on personal, professional, and organizational challenges. Common personal challenges included work-life balance and initiative. Professional challenges included mentorship, professional development, and mobility. Organizational challenges included institutional climate and organizational culture, glass ceiling effect, and good old boy networks.

The theoretical blueprint supported the content validity of the interview questions and ensured participants addressed each of the study's research questions. As outlined in Table 2,

the first two interview questions allowed for discussion regarding the participants' academic and professional backgrounds and career goals. Questions 3, 4, and 6 addressed the participants' personal challenges experienced in their positions. Questions 7, 8, and 9 addressed the participants' professional challenges. Questions 11, 12, and 13 addressed the participants' organizational challenges. Question 5 focused on the navigation of personal challenges. Questions 10 and 15 focused on the navigation of professional challenges. Question 14 focused on the navigation of organizational challenges.

Table 2

Theoretical Blueprint for Interviews

	Challenges Experienced – Interview Question Numbers	Navigation of Challenges – Interview Question Numbers
Background	1, 2	
Personal challenges	3, 4, 6	5
Professional challenges	7, 8, 9	10, 15
Organizational challenges	11, 12, 13	14

Additionally, the researcher checked the construct validity of the interview questions with a panel of experts in the field as well as through a pilot test with other mid-level women leaders outside of the study. All 15 interview questions were kept, and one revision was made based on the feedback from the leaders in the pilot test. This revision included adding a second question for clarification regarding the intended meaning of professional motivation in Question 6. An

interview protocol was created to ensure uniformity between the ten interviews (Appendix A). To add, the pilot study was also used to provide feedback for the pre-interview survey. The one revision included alphabetically ordering the race and ethnicity selections for Question 2 of the survey.

The interviews were semi-structured in an effort to maintain focus during the discussions, while still providing participants opportunities to freely express their unique experiences. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing for fluid dialogue between the researcher and each participant. The open-ended questions also allowed the researcher the flexibility to follow up with additional probing questions, or probes, during each interview. Patton (2002) explained the importance of probes is that they "are used to deepen the response to a question, increase the richness and depth of responses, and give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired" (p. 372).

Document Analysis

In addition to collecting data through one-on-one interviews, the researcher mined data through a process of document analysis. Merriam (2009) described documents as important sources of data and defined them as "public records, personal papers, popular culture documents, visual documents, and physical material and artifacts" (p. 162). For this study, the researcher accessed online documents related to the participants, including institutional directory information, LinkedIn accounts, program documents, curricula vitae, and news articles focused on the participants or their institutions.

Data Collection

The researcher gained approval from the Old Dominion University Human Subjects Committee and the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of each institution before beginning the

data collection portion of the study. Selected participants' contact information was collected

from the institutions' faculty and staff directory websites. The researcher emailed an invitation

to participate to the selected participants, which provided information regarding the background

and description of the study as a means to solicit participation (Appendix B). The researcher

continued with recruitment until ten women agreed to participate in the study.

Upon participation agreement, the researcher then worked with the participants to

schedule interviews at their offices on their college campuses. The researcher sent an email

detailing preparation for the interview (Appendix C) and an informed consent form (Appendix

D) to each participant. The informed consent form documented the study's procedures and risks

as well as the participants' rights. Participants were provided the opportunity to ask questions to

the researcher.

Interviews were conducted between January and March 2019. The shortest interview

lasted 32 minutes, and the longest interview lasted for just over one hour. To ensure uniformity

between the interviews, the researcher used an interview protocol (Appendix A). After each

interview, the researcher discussed the timeline for the study in detail. The researcher explained

to each participant the possibility of follow-up questions after reviewing the transcribed

interviews. Any follow-up questions would be emailed to the participants with requests for

additional discussion or clarification. Interviews were audio-recorded, and the audio files were

transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service.

General Protection for Humans Subjects

The researcher provided the participants with an opportunity to review their transcribed

reports before beginning data analysis. The audio files were destroyed after the conclusion of the

study. All documentation related to the study was stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer.

In an effort to protect the privacy of the participants, the researcher did not include personally identifiable information. Pseudonyms were used for the participants and their community colleges to maintain confidentiality. The geographic locations of the community colleges were only described as being located in the same southeastern US state. Participants were not specified as dean or director or by their job titles. The researcher did not specify whether participants' positions were located in academic or student affairs.

Data Analysis

Corbin and Strauss (2008) argued the "analytic process, like any thinking process, should be relaxed, flexible, and driven by insight gained through interaction with data rather than being overly structured and based only on procedures" (p. 12). Before beginning with data analysis, the following phenomenological practices were employed (Merriam, 2009):

- *Epoché*: abstaining from judgment and setting aside previous experiences to fully understand the participants' perspectives; and

- Bracketing: temporarily blocking out the researcher's bias and assumptions regarding the focus of the study.

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher implemented Moustakas's (1994) seven-step process for phenomenological data analysis: (a) listing and preliminary grouping, (b) reduction and elimination, (c) clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents, (d) final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application, (e) individual textural description, (f) individual structural description, and (g) textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience for each participant.

Step One: Listing and Preliminary Grouping

Each interview was first transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. The researcher then began with the initial step of listing and preliminary grouping, or horizonalization. Horizonalization is the process of assigning equal value to each statement, or horizon, that is relevant to the topic and research questions (Moustakas, 1994). For this step, the researcher read each interview transcription multiple times and reviewed the data from her previous document analysis. The researcher then combined all of the interview transcriptions onto one master document and highlighted every expression relevant to the lived experiences of women mid-level leaders in urban community colleges.

Step Two: Reduction and Elimination

After listing and preliminary grouping, the researcher narrowed down the list of expressions, or codes, further through a process of reduction and elimination into categories. According to Moustakas (1994), these invariant constituents can be determined based on specific requirements. If the expressions "contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it" or it is "possible to abstract and label it," then these expressions are considered invariant constituents (Moustakas, p. 121). Any expressions that did not qualify were eliminated. Additionally, expressions that were "overlapping, repetitive, and vague" were also eliminated (p. 121).

Step Three: Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents

During the third phase of analysis, the invariant constituents were grouped into clusters with thematic labels (Moustakas, 1994). Each of the invariant constituents were reviewed and placed into groups based on similar categories. The clustered and labeled groups formed the "core themes of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The researcher determined these

themes to be: (a) leadership progression, (b) work-life balance, (c) mentorship and professional development, (d) communication, and (e) institutional climate and organizational structure.

Step Four: Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application

After clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents, the researcher validated that each of the invariant constituents and core themes were relevant to the participants' experiences. Validation was determined by reviewing each participant's data file and checking to see if the invariant constituents and themes were "expressed explicitly" or "compatible if not explicitly expressed" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Those that were not explicit or compatible were removed (Moustakas, 1994). Based on this review, the previous invariant constituents were maintained.

Step Five: Individual Textural Description

During the fifth phase of analysis, the researcher developed individual textural descriptions for each participant (Moustakas, 1994). The established codes and themes were reexamined by again reviewing the individual participants' data files. Individual textural descriptions were created by using direct quotes from each of the participants' interview transcriptions (Moustakas, 1994). The verbatim expressions confirmed the established codes and themes and supported the researcher's interpretation of the essence of the challenges faced by women leaders in mid-level positions in urban community colleges. The written individual textural descriptions for each participant are shared throughout the researcher's report of findings in Chapter Four.

Step Six: Individual Structural Description

During the sixth phase of analysis, the researcher developed individual structural descriptions for each participant, which "provide a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, themes, and qualities" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 135). The researcher reexamined the

individual textural descriptions and used "imaginative variation" to connect the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The individual structural descriptions are documented throughout the researcher's report of findings in Chapter Four.

Step Seven: Textural-Structural Description of the Meanings and Essences of the Experience for Each Participant (Composite Description)

The final step of Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis process yielded a composite description of the meanings and essences of the participants' experiences as women leaders in mid-level positions in urban community colleges. The researcher provided a synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions for the participants as a group. The researcher organized the composite descriptions by the research questions guiding the study as well as the five emergent themes in Chapter Four.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the quality of the research findings, the researcher addressed the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. The researcher enhanced the quality through member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, thick description, and an audit trail.

Member checking. Member checking involves allowing participants to review the data and confirm the researcher's interpretation of their narratives (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher allowed participants to remain engaged throughout the research process to ensure an accurate portrayal of the findings. The researcher suggested the participants review the interview transcripts and communicated with them for clarification.

Triangulation. The triangulation of different methods means "comparing and integrating data collected through some kind of qualitative methods with data collected through some quantitative methods" (Patton, 2002, p. 556). Although this study was qualitative in

nature, the researcher used a brief survey (a quantitative method) to collect demographic data on each of the participants before meeting with them. The triangulation of qualitative data sources includes "comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods" (Patton, 2002, p. 559). Patton (2002) provided examples for implementing the triangulation of qualitative data sources:

- Comparing observations with interviews;

- Comparing what people say in public with what they say in private;

- Checking for the consistency of what people say about the same thing over time;

- Comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view; and

- Checking interviews against program documents and other written evidence that can corroborate what interview respondents report. (p. 559)

The researcher used two qualitative methods, document analysis and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, to gain insight into the experiences of the participants.

Peer debriefing. The researcher added to the credibility of this study by gaining feedback from peer reviewers who were familiar with studies of women's leadership in community colleges as well as her dissertation committee made up of faculty members. Peer debriefing took place throughout the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Creswell and Miller (2000) contended "peer reviewers can provide written feedback to researchers or simply serve as a sounding board for ideas" (p. 129).

Thick description. The researcher offered detailed descriptions of the study's setting and participants. Creswell and Miller (2000) explained:

The purpose of a thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events

being described in a study. Thus, credibility is established through the lens of readers who read a narrative account and are transported into a setting or situation. (p. 129)

Audit trail. The researcher maintained an audit trail throughout this study. The audit trail "describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). The researcher kept memos for the duration of the research process.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are defined by the researcher as what will or will not be included in a study (Creswell, 2013). There were four delimitations in the current study. First, there was a narrow regional focus on one state in the southeastern US. Second, the study was focused on urban community colleges. Although there were other community colleges in the state, which were considered to be urban institutions, only three community colleges were selected. The particular state and community colleges were selected due to convenience of scheduling and conducting the in-person interviews. Urban institutions were selected because of their size and complexity in structure and organization.

Third, participants included those who were classified as mid-level leaders in positions of deans and directors. Fourth, only women leaders were chosen as participants. The current study was designed to examine the perceived challenges of women in mid-level positions that may impact leadership progression. Understanding the essence of these challenges will provide insight into removing potential barriers and providing better professional development opportunities for women leaders in community colleges.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations include factors outside of the researcher's control that could potentially impact the study (Creswell, 2013). A potential limitation to this study was the instrumentation used to collect data. The researcher took measures to increase the validity of the interview questions, including using a theoretical blueprint, reviewing the interview questions with fellow colleagues in the field, and conducting a pilot test with other mid-level women leaders outside of the study. However, it is possible some participants may have interpreted the questions differently or described their challenges in ways that were inconsistent with the researcher's notion of challenges.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher addressed the methodological decisions for the study. The participants included ten women leaders in mid-level positions in urban community colleges. The three selected community colleges were all located in the same state in the southeastern US. Each of the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted in person at the campus location of each participant. Following the interviews, the audio files were transcribed by a transcription service. After reviewing the interview transcripts, the researcher analyzed the data as delineated by Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis process.

In Chapter Four, the researcher will highlight the findings of the study. The researcher will present the perceived personal, professional, and organizational challenges as expressed by the women leaders. The findings will be organized by the emergent themes, as they relate to the study's research questions, from the participants' narratives.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine women leaders in mid-level positions and their perceptions of the personal, professional, and organizational challenges unique to them as leaders in urban community colleges. Participants discussed their perceived challenges through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants also described their challenges as they related to their personal, professional, and organizational experiences and how they have attempted to navigate those challenges.

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings from the study. The researcher used Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis process to explore and analyze the lived experiences of the mid-level women leaders. Five themes emerged as a result of the data analysis: (a) leadership progression, (b) work-life balance and support structures, (c) mentorship and professional development, (d) communication, and (e) institutional climate and organizational structure. This chapter will be organized by the five themes, as well as the associated subthemes, as they relate to the study's research questions.

Participant Demographics

A total of ten participants were interviewed between January and March 2019. All participants were women in mid-level positions at three urban community colleges in the same southeastern US state. Table 3 outlines general information about the participants, including pseudonyms, which will be used in place of their actual names. Each participant was serving in a role of dean or director at her institution and had at least a master's degree. For the purposes of this study, the research did not specify participants as either deans or directors. Five of the participants earned doctoral degrees. Three of the participants had served in their roles for over

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Education Level	Years of Experience in Current Role	Future Career Aspirations
Lynn	Doctorate	10+	Remain in current role until retirement
Mirna	Doctorate	1-5	Vice President or leadership through public service
Sue	Doctorate	10+	Remain in current role until retirement
Caroline	Master's	1-5	Unsure
Vanessa	Master's	10+	Unsure
Allison	Doctorate	5-10	Vice President
Beverly	Master's	1-5	Unsure
Michelle	Doctorate	1-5	Dean or Associate Vice President
Vivian	Master's	1-5	VP
Joanne	Master's	1-5	Dean or Director

10 years. One participant had assumed her current role for five to ten years, and six participants had served in their roles for one to five years. Four participants worked in academic affairs departments, and six participants worked in student affairs departments.

Age, race, ethnicity, and marital status were not part of the study, but demographic information was collected through the pre-interview survey (Appendix E). One participant identified as Asian, four as Black or African American, and five as White. Regarding age ranges, one participant was over 60 years old, five participants were in their 50s, three were in their 40s, and one was in her 30s. Regarding marital status at the time of the study, eight participants were married, one participant was divorced, and one was single and never married. Of the participants who were married, one had previously been divorced before remarrying.

Participant Profiles

Participant profiles were developed based on data from the interviews. Information collected through document analysis prior to the interviews, including LinkedIn accounts, curricula vitae, institutional websites, program documents, and articles found online focused on the participants, were also used. A summary of each of the ten participants' personal and professional characteristics is included. Pseudonyms are used in place of the participants' names.

Lynn. Lynn began her professional journey in K-12 education as a middle school teacher. She soon realized that although she had a passion for teaching, her passion was not at the K-12 level. After getting married, she was able to stop working and attend school full-time, taking classes toward a doctoral degree. She became pregnant, gave birth to her first child, and decided to take a break from school for two years. She then became pregnant with her second child, but shortly after giving birth, she and her husband separated. Lynn returned to teaching in K-12, while simultaneously looking for jobs at the postsecondary level. She was finally able to land a job at a four-year college, but she was committed to the idea of completing the doctoral

degree she had started. However, she knew as a single parent, working full-time and completing the degree would be difficult.

Lynn decided to quit her job and focus her attention on her children and school. After finally completing her degree, she worked at a junior college and then a community college, picking up key skills that would prove significant in her current role. Although she held positions at several different institutions, she never relocated. She wanted to ensure her children remained within close physical proximity to her ex-husband. As a result, some of her positions at institutions that were further away required long commutes. She was willing to make that sacrifice for her family.

Lynn's ultimate goal was to become a mid-level leader, and she has been in her current role for over 10 years. She has witnessed firsthand the many changes within the community college sector. She thoroughly enjoys her job, which she referred to as "just peachy," but she is also aware of its associated challenges. Lynn ultimately remarried, and she has continued to work, as her husband is now retired. Her children have grown older, and she now maintains a busy schedule, both professionally and personally, by choice. She also regularly visits and checks in on her aging mother, who lives on her own. She is content in her administrative role and has no intentions of moving up at her institution. She has a productive and positive relationship with her supervisor and staff, and she plans to continue working, passionately and intentionally, until she retires.

Mirna. Mirna married her husband during the dissertation phase of her final year of graduate school. Once completing her doctoral degree, the couple relocated to a new state. After having children, they decided they were not going to move again; they would remain in the same area to raise their family. Mirna found a teaching job, first at a four-year university, and

then next at a community college, about which admittedly she knew very little. Mirna described the years with two young children at home as personally challenging. She was working full-time, and her husband, a medical doctor, had decided to pursue additional graduate degrees. To add, her husband's elderly parents, who were both ill and required constant care, moved in with them. Mirna described herself and her husband as the "true sandwich generation," taking care of young children and aging parents at the same time.

Mirna attributed the freedom to pursue her personal and professional passions to the support of her husband, who she referred to as an "equal partner." She also spoke fondly of her professional mentors and their suggestions for her to assume progressive leadership roles, sometimes in positions that had just been newly established. Significant professional development experiences aided with additional learning opportunities and networking opportunities. Her willingness to try different things led to the decision to move from teaching into administration. Mirna has been in her current position for more than one year, but she previously served in a related mid-level position for nearly five years. Mirna explained her career goals have recently shifted. Five years ago, her ultimate goal was to become a community college vice president, but now she has desires to continue her pursuit of social justice through other pathways.

Mirna is aware of the evolution of the community college and the impending organizational shifts within her institution, but she remains positive. She stated that change is always to be expected. She and her husband now live alone, as her husband's parents are both deceased and their children no longer live at home. Mirna is taking advantage of this time to focus on her own personal and professional endeavors.

Sue. Sue has a passion for education and has worked in the field for over 35 years. She began teaching in K-12 and then moved on to a position at a university. After almost a decade in that role, she decided it was time to make a career change. She had applied and interviewed for a job at a community college that would give her the opportunity to build a new program at the institution, but time passed without hearing back about the job. She believed that was a sign to take a break from working full-time and apply to a Ph.D. program. After being accepted into the doctoral program, as well as agreeing to a graduate assistantship, she finally heard back from the community college, and she was offered the position. She consulted with her father, a former vice president of student affairs, who advised that she may possibly never get an offer like this again.

Sue decided to accept the position at the community college and has since worked to build and leverage her organizational unit as a crucial part of her institution. Her work focuses on professionally developing and mentoring college women and connecting them with leaders in the community. She stresses the importance of understanding intercultural communication and multicultural workplaces. Sue is uncertain about the current state of her institution and concerned about its future direction with the ongoing economic, enrollment, and leadership fluctuations.

Sue is married, with no children, but spends most of her time at home caring for her aging, elderly parents. During the interview, she emphasized the difficulties of balancing work with her responsibility as her parents' caregiver. She described the experience as navigating "completely uncharted waters."

Caroline. Caroline transitioned into higher education after working in various public health fields. As a first-generation college student, she began her educational journey at a

community college and ultimately earned her bachelor's and master's degree. She married, had two kids, and took a short break from full-time work to stay at home. After growing tired of being at home, she went back to work in the health field for several years and then began a job at a community college where she was able to combine academics with her health profession. She is currently in an administrative role, but she is uncertain about her future career goals and believes she is at a crossroads. Although she is open to moving up professionally, she understands that her options are limited at her institution and without having a terminal degree.

Similar to Mirna, Caroline and her husband cared for her parents, both with terminal illnesses, while their children were still at home in grade school. Caroline described the emotional, mental, and physical duress of balancing the responsibilities as a wife, mom, daughter, and full-time working professional. She also discussed the impact of her parents' ultimate deaths and the way her perspective on life changed, affecting both her personal and professional life. Caroline's children are no longer living at home, and she and her husband now live alone.

Caroline enjoys her job and loves what she does, but she is uncertain about the foreseeable future at her institution. She is concerned about the communication and decision-making among senior-level leadership during such unprecedented economic times for community colleges in general. She explained her attempt to balance being a team player but also openly voicing her opinions and concerns at work.

Vanessa. Vanessa has worked her entire career in education, both at the university and community college levels. She has mainly lived in the same region for most of her life, with the exception of time spent at her alma mater obtaining her bachelor's and master's degrees. Most of her professional experiences have been in the community college, and she has worked in her

current role for over a decade. She is extremely passionate about college students and helping them to find paths to success. She discussed the challenges of working with families and students who know very little about the education process and attempting to empower them through the process.

Vanessa is married with two children. One child is still at home while attending college, and the other child is away at college. Her husband is now retired. However, Vanessa explained that when he was working, his job consisted of long hours and a substantial amount of required traveling. His professional demands left her at home with their children, as she tried to balance full-time work. Vanessa described the chaos of having to "be everything to everyone." Now that she has more personal freedom, she noted that she has focused more on herself. She has become more involved with the community and social activities in which she used to participate, and she is also considering taking classes toward a doctoral degree.

Vanessa described her institution's current climate as tense due to budget reductions, reductions in staff, employment uncertainty, and changing academic structures. She has remained positive through the impending academic and organizational changes and has maintained her focus on her students and helping them achieve success. She has also attempted to keep her staff's morale high by making personal connections and promoting office social events.

Allison. Allison has worked domestically and internationally in the education field, first in early childhood programming and then in community college administration. She entered into the community college as a faculty member and progressively took on additional leadership roles, which led to her current position as a mid-level leader. Allison is married with two children, one who is in elementary school and the other in middle school. She worked to

complete her doctorate while her children were in preschool. She describes herself as being extremely focused and structured.

Allison is motivated by the people in her organizational unit and the students she serves. She would like to continue advancing professionally to the next level, but she does not have specific goals or ideas of what or where that next level may be. She explained all of her career changes and advancements have happened organically. She either stumbled into the opportunity, or she decided it was simply something she could do and accepted the position. Allison considers herself an inclusive and servant leader and believes communication is essential for progress.

Allison believes her institution is currently striving hard to make improvements despite current difficult economic and enrollment conditions. She discussed the impacts of employee layoffs, reduced budgets, and organizational restructuring on the morale of the college, but she feels hopeful due to increased communication and transparency among institutional leaders. In her opinion, the open lines of communication and encouraged involvement of all members of the campus community has improved the institutional culture.

Beverly. Beverly's professional background consists of work in corporate, nonprofit, and education fields, including K-12 and community college positions. Her bachelor's and master's degrees are business-related, which she believes has allowed her to look at education through a different lens than many of her peers. She entered the community college first as a faculty member and continued taking on various leadership roles, ultimately landing in her current mid-level administrative role. Beverly has less than a year of experience in this role, and she expressed the challenges of finding balance with her new responsibilities. She still has a

passion for teaching, and her career goal is to find a position that effectively combines teaching with administrative duties.

Beverly is married with two children, who are both in college. When her children were infants, she elected to stay home for several years. She does not regret the decision, but during the interview, she reflected on how her professional trajectory may have been different if she did not take a break from working. Beverly stressed the importance of her strong family dynamic and her commitment to her religion and spirituality. She explained her uncertainty regarding her ultimate career goals, as climbing the corporate ladder was no longer her priority. Instead, she is seeking satisfaction in her professional work as well as more flexibility in her schedule.

Beverly explained her institution is dealing with the same hardships that are now commonplace nationally among community colleges. She identified some of these hardships as shrinking budgets, low enrollment, and limited involvement between administration and workers. These environmental influences have impacted her institution negatively, but she feels there are a "good core of people" who have the ability to affect positive change.

Michelle. Michelle's professional experience has consisted of roles within the K-12 and community college sectors. Her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees are all related to education. Michelle stated that she is still "figuring things out" as far as her career goals, but she would like to work next as a dean or associate vice president. She feels qualified academically and professionally for these positions, but there has been little opportunity for advancement at her institution. She admitted she was disappointed because she believed completing a terminal degree would quickly open doors for her.

Michelle has two children, one in elementary school and one in middle school. She also recently married. She explained the importance of her family support system and detailed how

her perception of work-life balance has changed since getting married. She described the need to make the decision, as a self-professed "workaholic," to leave work at the office and focus on her family when at home. Michelle discussed the importance of mentors in her life, both formal and informal, and how they have impacted her as a leader. She is using those lessons to navigate the current professional and organizational challenges at her institution. Michelle described herself as a life-long learner and as being open to continually learning more, personally and professionally.

Vivian. Vivian began her professional journey in the corporate sector. Her bachelor's and master's degrees are focused in business areas. She transitioned into higher education after feeling professionally dissatisfied in previous roles. She claimed she landed her first job in the community college "on accident" because it was not the position for which she had applied. Nonetheless, she accepted the job and realized she was good at it and extremely happy with her responsibilities. Her enthusiasm for her field stems from the fact that she is able to change the lives of people. She considers higher education as a tool that transforms her students' life trajectories and, and as a result, impacts them and future generations forever.

Vivian has never been married and has no children. She described herself as highly motivated, somewhat for herself, but more so for other people. Although Vivian has a demanding job, she asserted she has a good work-life balance. She has professional aspirations of becoming a community college vice president and is working to complete a doctoral degree. She believes her viewpoints and expertise are valuable, and she owes it to herself and her students to be involved in important discussions and policymaking. Vivian described her institution's environment as changing dramatically and quickly. She has had ongoing

opportunities to work closely with senior-level leaders at her college to do what is in the best interest of the students and the institution.

Joanne. Joanne began her professional journey directly after high school by enlisting in the military and then entered college as a nontraditional student. After working in a health-related field with no opportunities for advancement, she went back to school and completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in financial-related fields. She worked in various positions within different community colleges before working in her present mid-level role. Although she has progressively advanced in leadership roles, she does not envision herself moving into a senior-level position. She is comfortable with middle management and prefers to focus on the needs of her students.

Joanne is divorced and has no children. She claimed she has always been work-oriented because she has no children or nearby relatives. She described her self-worth as being based on her job performance. She stated she has always had an unhealthy work-life balance. While in college, she continued to work and excel academically and professionally. She admitted the lack of balance negatively impacted her marriage. Joanne discussed her perceptions of professional obstacles and barriers in relation to her previous experiences in the military. She also described having increased levels of discomfort due to institutional politics and hierarchy.

Data Analysis

Moustakas' (1994) seven-step framework was followed to analyze the data provided by participant interviews. The analysis included: (a) listing and preliminary grouping, (b) reduction and elimination, (c) clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents, (d) final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application, (e) individual textural description, (f) individual structural description, and (g) textural-structural description of the meanings and

essences of the experience for each participant. The five emergent themes were then organized

by one or more of the study's research questions:

1. What are the perceived challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level

   positions at urban community colleges?

   a. What are the perceived personal challenges that are unique to women leaders in

      mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

   b. What are the perceived professional challenges that are unique to women leaders

      in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

   c. What are the perceived organizational challenges that are unique to women

      leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

2. How do these women leaders navigate these perceived challenges?

Table 4 provides an illustration of the emergent themes in relation to the research questions.

Composite Descriptions by Research Questions and Themes

The following sections contain composite descriptions of the meanings and essences of

the participants' experiences as women leaders in mid-level positions in urban community

colleges by research questions and themes. Individual textural descriptions include direct quotes

from each of the ten participants. Individual structural descriptions connect the experiences of

the participants. The researcher synthesized the textural and structural descriptions to provide a

composite description for each research question and correlating theme.

RQ 1a: What Are the Perceived Personal Challenges That are Unique to Women Leaders

in Mid-Level Positions at Urban Community Colleges?

After analyzing the data, two themes emerged in relation to the first research question

regarding perceived personal challenges: (a) leadership progression and (b) work-life balance.

Table 4

Emergent Themes in Relation to Research Questions

Theme	Perceived Personal Challenges	Perceived Professional Challenges	Perceived Organizational Challenges	Leaders' Navigation of Perceived Challenges
Leadership Progression	X			X
Work-Life Balance	X			X
Mentorship and Professional Development		X		X
Communication		X		X
Institutional Climate and Organizational Structure			X	X

Subthemes for the theme of leadership progression included: (a) career goals, (b) education, (c) mobility, and (d) initiative. Subthemes for the theme of work-life balance included: (a) family responsibilities and (b) relocation.

Theme 1: Leadership progression. All participant interviews began with an in-depth description of the leaders' academic and professional backgrounds. Six participants were administrators serving in student affairs departments, and four participants were administrators serving in academic affairs departments. Every participant earned at least a master's degree, and five participants also earned a doctoral degree. One participant shared she was currently enrolled in a doctoral program, and two participants stated they were planning to begin doctoral coursework in August 2019. Six of the participants spent the duration of their careers in education, while four of the participants entered education after first working in other fields. Six

participants stated they had only ever worked within the community college sector of higher education, and four stated they had worked at both two-year and four-year institutions. In addition to serving as higher education administrators, five of the participants also had K-12 education experiences.

One commonality among the participants was progressive leadership experiences in higher education. The participants all reported overseeing various departments or faculty members and "wearing many hats." The participants also openly discussed their ultimate career goals. Although some participants had more concrete plans and expectations than others, all participants had at a minimum contemplated their professional futures. Following are excerpts from the participant interviews, detailing the participants' leadership progression and career goals.

Mirna initially planned to teach at a small liberal arts college after completing her doctoral degree. However, there were very limited tenure-track positions in her city. After realigning her interests with her career goals, she found a position at her local community college and became enamored with its institutional model that supported the ideals of social justice. Mirna's ability to progressively advance has been a result of being open-minded and willing to take on opportunities to develop new skill sets.

Similar to Mirna, Sue's career development has progressed because of her willingness to take on new roles. After starting in K-12 education, she transitioned into a position conducting student programming at a university but, after several years, her excitement for the position waned. She resigned and began working at her current community college, where she started her department from the "ground up." She shared:

When I say ground up, I mean I walked into [my community college], there was a room

with a box, and it had a desk in it . . . I didn't even know how to get somebody to put that

desk together.

Allison's orientation to the community college was a result of her family relocating from

overseas back to the US due to her husband's military orders. While living abroad, she worked

for various nonprofit and for-profit early childhood programs. Coincidentally, she landed a full-

time faculty position in the early childhood academic program at her current community college

before ultimately obtaining her current administrative position. Allison stated:

I think with all of my career changes or advancements, I've either stumbled into

something, or it just occurred to me suddenly, one day, that it's something that I could do.

I'm less of a planner.

As previously documented, four participants worked in previous roles outside of

education first. Additionally, these participants – Caroline, Beverly, Vivian, and Joanne – have

only worked for two-year institutions and have no experience in four-year institutions.

Caroline's career journey commenced in health care and eventually led to a faculty role at her

community college. She explained her current administrative role was not something for which

she was looking, but to her, it seemed to make sense as she had progressed through different

leadership roles.

Unlike the other participants, Joanne's initial career began in the military. She described

her time in the Army as a great experience that provided the financial means to attend college.

She attended her local community college and became licensed as a veterinary technician.

Unfortunately, Joanne was disappointed with the glass ceiling as a veterinary technician after 13

years of working in the field. After returning to school for her bachelors in finance, Joanne

worked in roles at two community colleges, first in lower-level administrative roles before being hired in her current mid-level position. She commented on her experience:

> As a veteran and at our college here, I thought there was a lot of growth . . . I have accelerated at [my institution] . . . I was very fortunate in moving up the ranks here. I'd like to think that my hard work and education got me there.

Comparatively, Beverly and Vivian also have academic and professional backgrounds in business-related areas. Vivian explained she ended up in higher education after losing her passion working in the finance industry. She applied for a position at a community college and was ultimately hired for a different position than which applied. She continued progressing and was hired in a mid-level leadership role at another community college. Although she leads an entire department, she explained her willingness to take on any role – big or small – as she has the same expectations for herself as she does for her staff.

Career goals. The researcher asked the participants to describe their ultimate career goals. Four participants discussed aspirations of professional advancement to senior-level positions. Two participants, who have been in their current roles for over 10 years, explained they were content with remaining in their positions until retirement. Three participants claimed they were unsure of their future career goals. One participant expressed a desire to either stay in a middle-level position or possibly step down into a position with fewer leadership responsibilities.

Three of the four participants who expressed interest in moving into more advanced leadership positions had all earned doctoral degrees. Allison explained that although she has aspirations to move into a senior-level role, she still has time to figure out what that particular role will be. She asserted:

When you are interested in [mid-level] positions like this, people say, 'Well, do you want to be a president one day?' You always get that question. I don't know. Some of the reasons I don't know, have to do with feeling like I want to do a little bit more research into what my style of leadership is and what is needed. At the moment, my career goal is to balance my career with my family.

Vivian, who is still working on her doctoral degree, expressed the belief that being in a senior-level leadership position will allow her to make even more of an impact with students than she currently does.

Unlike the previous participants, Lynn and Sue expressed contentment with remaining in their current positions until they ultimately retire. Lynn explained she loves her position, and she would like to work until she's 70 years old. She detailed:

As much as I do believe I could be a vice president, I'm really happy with who we have . . . I will be really happy to spend out my career [in my current position]. If things were a little bit different, if there was someone I was dissatisfied with, or thought would eminently leave, maybe I would feel differently.

Sue also expressed her satisfaction with her position as well as the importance of completing her professional "bucket list" before retiring. She stated:

My career goals are to really help this unit, not just survive, but survive and thrive. I wake up every day still – knock on wood – and come in here, and I still think about what's left to do . . . It's really important for me to make sure that [this department] stays dug in.

Caroline, Vanessa, and Beverly expressed uncertainty in their next career steps, especially now that all of their children are either enrolled in or graduated from college.

Caroline admitted to not knowing "what she wants to do when she grows up." She also cited her age as a factor because she does not have a desire "to work forever." Vanessa revealed she has enjoyed being at her current institution and does not plan to leave. Beverly discussed the possibility of combining administrative and teaching roles in the future.

Unlike the other participants, Joanne explained she is "at a crossroads right now" and is considering going back into her initial field of finance, but she would like to continue working in higher education. She also mentioned the possibility of stepping down from mid-level leadership. She asserted:

> I think that I am about as high as I am comfortable going, even if the opportunity was there. For instance, we have an executive position open here, and I would not even put my hat in the ring. I actually foresee in the future that I would end up working a step down from where I'm at.

Education. Participants' academic achievement was discussed in each interview. The participants described their education levels, including the type of degrees attained and when the degrees were completed. All participants discussed the significance of a doctoral degree, whether or not they had earned one, as well as the need to obtain a doctoral degree in order to move into senior-level positions. Of the five participants with doctoral degrees, four participants earned their degrees before entering their mid-level positions. Out of the four participants with doctoral degrees and who also have children, three completed their degrees before having children or when their children were young and had not yet entered grade school. One participant professed she has no aspirations for senior-level leadership, and therefore, she did not wish to ever pursue a doctoral degree.

Lynn completed her doctorate years before beginning her mid-level position, but she experienced various challenging life changes during the process. She began her doctoral coursework before getting married and having children. While completing her degree, she married and gave birth to two children. As she neared the end of her degree, she was a working, single mom with two children. In order to complete her doctorate, she had to petition her dissertation committee for additional time and quit her job in higher education that had taken her three years to obtain. Luckily, she was able to reenter the field after graduating.

Michelle believed obtaining a terminal degree would accelerate achieving her career goals. She intentionally transitioned into one particular role in order to complete her doctorate, explaining, "I didn't feel like I would be able to finish because I would throw myself into my work [in my previous position]." Michelle confessed she was disappointed with her career prospects after finishing her degree. She professed, "I thought that when I completed my doctorate degree that I really wouldn't even have to apply for things. I just thought that people would just come and ask me."

Vivian, a participant currently enrolled in a doctoral program, explained how the demands of her mid-level position were interfering with her ability to complete her degree. She explained that she lacked the energy after working long hours and often bringing her office work home at night. Caroline and Vanessa mentioned similar concerns regarding pursuing a doctoral degree at this point in their careers. Both participants questioned whether the time and cost outweighed the benefit of having a terminal degree. Caroline shared that although she understands a higher degree would be necessary to move up professionally, she was not sure how many more years she would be working before retirement. Vanessa expressed similar sentiments but also mentioned the potential positive feelings of personal achievement in earning a doctorate.

Furthermore, Caroline and Vanessa admitted regret for not pursuing doctoral degrees earlier in their careers. When asked one thing professionally she wished she had done differently, Caroline answered:

I wish I had completed my doctorate when I tried before, but the reason that I couldn't do it was, the first time my mom got sick and died. The second time my dad got sick and died. At that point, my husband said to me, 'Please, don't do this because I'm next.' [laughs]

Likewise, Vanessa lamented:

I would have pursued my doctorate before having children, or at least while they were very, very young. I thought that when they were babies, that it couldn't get any busier. I was wrong. When they're not moving around as much, I would have been afforded more opportunities. I think I would have done that.

Mobility. The participants were asked to describe their perceptions of professional mobility at their institutions. Most of the participants believed the current state of their colleges, to include dwindling student enrollment, reduced budgets, and forced organizational restructuring, has created barriers for upward career movement. Vanessa shared:

I think the leadership opportunities that would be more available would be things like committee chairmanships. I think that's about it. We're cutting positions, and we're wheeling things down. People who have one task now have two and things like that. There's not much upward mobility in position here.

Similarly, Allison asserted:

There's just not many opportunities now . . . I think as opportunities come, me, personally, I'm always asked, 'Are you next? Are you doing it? Is it your turn?' There's

always that, but the opportunities are few and far between, and there's a lot of us.

There's a lot of us [mid-level leaders] here [at my institution].

Sue, Beverly, and Vivian expressed confidence in their ability to gain additional

leadership responsibilities, despite challenging economic times for their institutions. Sue stated:

I've had opportunities. I've had offers of opportunities that I've turned down because I

just don't want to. I am not interested in building ladders just to climb them when I'm

really happy where I am.

Beverly shared Sue's viewpoint and described the change in her professional aspirations.

Although she expressed certainty in being able to gain additional leadership opportunities, her

passion is not linked to "climbing the corporate ladder," but instead having a positive impact on

others while personally making herself happy. Vivian attributed her confidence in mobility to

the belief that she is in a rare position, and her skillset makes her valuable to the institution.

Caroline conveyed frustration with her institutional leadership's inability to navigate its

current challenges and how it has impacted her potential professional growth. She explained that

if opportunities were available, either at her institution or another one, she would be open to

those opportunities. She commented:

. . . If a job fell in front of me that was something I was attracted to, would I leave [my

institution]? Yes, in a heartbeat. Would I stay at [my institution], but leave my current

role? Yes. Can I keep my current role and move into a different department? Yes.

There are some things I most definitely could do, but there would have to be a change

here. I feel like timing-wise right now, [my institution is] just in a holding pattern.

We're paralyzed in a holding pattern, and that's discouraging.

Initiative. The researcher asked the participants to describe their professional initiative. Participants shared both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that pushed them to pursue progressive leadership opportunities. Most of the participants specifically expressed being internally driven. Mirna described her own self-motivation, stating:

> . . . I've always been a competitive person, so I think I motivate myself in the sense. I'm not competitive against others. I'm competitive against myself. As I mentioned earlier, I love challenges. Something that allows me to develop new skills, look at the world and issues through new lenses.

Beverly detailed how she motivates herself. She also shared that some of her self-motivation stems from her gender and race. Beverly stated:

> Not only am I a woman, but I'm also an African-American woman. Those two things push me even harder to always be at the top of my game, just because there's a sense of achievement that has to be achieved or accomplished. There is this sense that status quo is not going to be enough.

Similar to Beverly, Michelle also made connections between her self-motivation and gender. She explained that women can be their own worst critics and tend to criticize themselves before anyone else does.

Some participants described their professional initiative as a result of other people. They are extrinsically motivated by their colleagues, staff, and students to continue breaking barriers and paving the way for future leaders. Allison explained she is driven by a mixture of her direct reports, students, and task completion. Sue described how she is motivated by the aspiring women leaders in her department. She explained:

I'm surrounded by really smart, really talented, really driven women. To be able to just get out ahead of them and clear the space so that they can be left alone to do what they love to do, has been what keeps me getting up every morning and coming in.

Joanne provided a different type of response than the other participants. Rather than being motivated by herself or others, she is driven by the idea that opportunities are endless and available to everyone. She asserted:

. . . There's a ton of other people around us that can do our job. It's not that all of a sudden, we got this job, and that makes us smarter or prettier or able to lead. I look around me and know that there's other people that can do my job. That keeps me, I think, grounded. I'm not here because I'm the best and the brightest. I'm here because I got lucky enough to grab a hold of some coattails and got pulled up a little bit.

Theme 2: Work-life balance. All of the participants cited work-life balance as a challenge, either currently or previously, in their lives. Most participants were aware of the imbalance and in the process of finding ways to juggle all of their responsibilities, while a few had already made impactful changes. Commonalities, such as family responsibilities and relocation, were also discussed in the participant interviews.

Busyness, professionally and personally, was mentioned by every participant. Most of the participants normally maintained a full schedule both in and out of work. Sue summed up her challenge of work-life balance by stating, "My hair is on fire. If I'm at work, the system is blinking red at home. If I'm at home, the system is blinking red at work." Unlike Sue, Lynn purposefully remains overly active by choice. In addition to her regular administrative duties, Lynn teaches for various colleges and universities, actively participates in her church's activities,

and works part-time in retail. She explained she has "gifts and talents" and wants to share them, even if it means she is very busy.

Allison expressed her disdain for the term, "work-life balance," because she does not feel it is truly possible to achieve balance, especially as a woman. She stated:

> Trying to meet the needs of everybody around me is a personal challenge. I think that goes along with being female, sometimes. I think another personal challenge for me . . . is that, by nature, I'm a pleaser. Somebody, a female leader, once told me years ago, that that's just an oxymoron, and there's not a balance.

Similar to Allison, Beverly expressed the idea of women leaders, specifically, overextending themselves and "spreading themselves thin." She also laughingly admitted her work-life balance is "probably very, very lopsided leaning towards work," especially due to being in her role for just shy of one year.

Joanne ascribed not having children as a reason for being hyper-focused on work. She described her job as her identity, asserting:

> I have always been very, very work-oriented because I don't have children. I think that plays a role, and so I take a lot of my self-worth in what I do. I know people say you are not what you do, but in my case I am. I'm very, very, very prideful to say I work [at my institution].

Caroline, Vanessa, Michelle, and Vivian discussed ways they have tried to manage all of their personal and professional responsibilities. Caroline explained her parents' deaths completely changed her outlook on life. Instead of constantly "racing," she decided "life is too short," and she need to "take a step back and smell the roses." Caroline commented:

I don't want to be the hare anymore. The tortoise works just fine, and guess what? We both get there. It makes me a happier person because I am not running around like that, and I'm not going to run around like that.

Vanessa mentioned her balance improving as result of a combination of factors. First, her children are older and now both in college, leaving her more flexibility with her time. Second, she made an intentional decision to leave job-related work at the office and not bring it home. Lastly, she has become more involved in social activities in which she previously stopped participating. Michelle discussed how recently getting married changed her perspective on work-life balance. She commented, "When I'm at home, I focus on my family because they do deserve that time and attention."

Mirna shared her perspective on balancing the demands of work with her personal life. She has never felt the need to separate her personal and professional roles. Mirna declared:

I chose to do what I do not because it's a job. It has to be a calling. I don't have a clear work-family, work-life separation. I've never felt the need for that. Work often doesn't feel like work to me. It's always with me. It's always conscious. It's not something that I put down and then pick up at a certain time. It's just who I am, and I think I'm not unique. I think for many of us, especially those who work in community colleges, but even other faculty, it's the passion for our discipline, the love of our subject that brings us in, and then we are engaged with that whole life of research in our field, working with students, developing our institutional goals.

Family responsibilities. For most of the participants, work-life balance included maintaining a home and handling family responsibilities. Many of the participants commented on the difficulty of being "everything to everyone," including their spouses, children, and

parents. Seven of the participants discussed the challenges associated with raising children while working. Four of the participants shared their experiences caring for elderly parents. Two of the participants specifically discussed the hardship of caring for terminally ill and dying parents.

Lynn detailed her struggle with childbearing, as she spent four years going through infertility treatments while working and attending graduate school. Vanessa discussed different challenges as a working mother with a husband whose job required him to travel for weeks at a time. Because of her husband's job, Vanessa described the "lion's share" of home responsibilities falling on her, particularly with her son, who struggled academically through high school. She described it being her job to help him stay on task as "the educator and the mom" because she knew "how to reach [her] kid a little better."

Allison believed that because she gave so much of herself to others at work, she was not able to give as much of herself at home. She noted:

The biggest challenge for me is that in this [mid-level leadership] role, people just need you . . . They need you to be on and to be positive, which I think is important and that's what I strive to do, but I don't have any more of that when I get home sometimes. Sometimes, I just need to go away by myself and reset. I worry that my family doesn't get the best of me every night.

Four participants described their experiences serving as caretakers for their parents. Mirna discussed the challenge of caring for her husband's parents, who were suffering from Alzheimer's disease and cancer, while raising young children. During the same time, her husband returned to school to pursue two graduate degrees back-to-back. Despite working full-time while caring for her children and in-laws, Mirna explained her family understood her personal need to positively balance work and home. She shared:

. . . My family's been very much a part of [my career]. They've seen that. My children have always grown up knowing that I am working on class stuff or grading papers or working on what I'm going to be doing with my students, and that's just been normal.

Sue described her experience caring for her aging, ill parents as "navigating completely uncharted waters" and similar to having "toddlers at home alone." Caroline assisted with the care of her husband's sick parents until they both eventually died. Lynn and Vanessa's parents are not ill and are able to live on their own, but both participants still feel obligated to check in on them regularly. Lynn described her relationship with her mother, commenting, "I try to go up once a week to spend the night at her house. To do her grocery shopping. I bring her food for the week when I come that I fixed at home." Similarly, Vanessa expressed the need to "put [her] eyes" on her parents who live close to her job and home.

While most of the participants discussed navigating the challenges of caring for family members, a few participants discussed things they may have otherwise done if their family dynamics were different. Beverly reflected on the time she and her husband discovered she was pregnant after she had recently been accepted into law school. She made the decision to stay at home with her child instead of pursuing a career as a lawyer. She insisted she did not regret the decision, and she also thought it was interesting that she ended up finding her calling in education, which she deemed to be a "mommy-type job."

Caroline discussed oscillating between full-time and part-time jobs, as well as staying home for several years with her children. She acknowledged the influence of being a mother and its effect on her career choices. She wanted to devote the best of herself to being a committed and present mother. She explained:

I have this philosophy, and it's not a judgment. It's just a philosophy for myself, that you

can't do everything great. There has to be a balance, and something's gotta to give, and

what's going to give. I didn't want to go there.

Joanne shared the belief that her distant relationship with her family and lack of children

forced her to be overly committed to her career. She also believes being so focused

professionally negatively impacted her marriage, leading to a divorce. She described:

When I was a student, I had a terrible work-life balance. I used to work and study and go

to bed and work and study and go to bed, and I'm sure that didn't help my marriage. I'm

sure it didn't. I had my head in the books for a decade.

Relocation. Several of the participants discussed being unwilling to move for a career

opportunity because of their families. Seven participants stated they had lived in the same area

since they began their careers. Out of those seven participants, two previously worked for an

institution that was more than an hour-long drive away from their home. They were both willing

to drive, but not to move, for a job opportunity.

After divorcing her first husband, Lynn shared she initially stayed in the same city as her

ex-husband so her children could be close to him. Years later, she admitted she made the choice

to remain in that location for herself as well. She described:

I, probably, at about age 50-ish, became more upfront with saying I am choosing. I took

ownership of what I'd been doing for a long time and said, 'I am choosing to be

geographically bound, and that's all right with me.' There may be better opportunities,

there may be more fun, there may be more growth somewhere else, but I am choosing to

be geographically bound.

Similarly, Caroline stated she was not willing to move because of her family. She shared that she recognized she was "self-limiting to a certain extent." Likewise, Vanessa expressed an unwillingness to move, even if the move resulted in attaining a senior-level position. Mirna explained she and her husband decided they would remain in the same city to raise their children. Because they were not open to relocating, Mirna had to broaden her career prospects.

Unlike the previous participants, both Allison and Beverly discussed being open to relocating. Allison has relocated several times, internationally and domestically, due to her husband serving in the military. Beverly believes a future move is imminent because of her academic field of business. She explained having the freedom and being more prepared to relocate due to her children no longer being in school.

RQ 1b: What Are the Perceived Professional Challenges That Are Unique to Women Leaders in Mid-Level Positions at Urban Community Colleges?

Two themes emerged in relation to the second research question regarding perceived professional challenges: (a) mentorship and professional development and (b) communication. Subthemes for the theme of mentorship and professional development included: (a) being mentored, (b) mentoring others, and (c) lack of professional development. There were no subthemes for the theme of communication.

Theme 3: Mentorship and professional development. The participants all emphasized the importance of mentorship and professional development as mid-level leaders. All ten participants indicated they had a mentor during at least one point in their career. At the time of the interviews, five participants currently had at least one mentor. These five participants all had mentors who were women in senior-level leadership roles, either at their institution or in another organization. Five participants stated they did not have a mentor. Of those five without a

mentor, four participants expressed a desire to find a new mentor. Three participants were assigned mentors through a statewide professional network for women. Nine participants had experience mentoring others, specifically women.

Regarding professional development, every participant reflected on previous experiences. All ten participants had varying professional development opportunities throughout their career, but seven participants described a lack of professional development opportunities in their current roles due to decreased funding and reduced budgets. Only two participants stated their professional development experiences had not been negatively impacted by their institutions' financial status. A majority of the participants explained their opportunities for professional development are now mainly orchestrated through the state community college system, and those opportunities are limited. Four participants described having to create their own opportunities.

Being mentored. Participants shared their different experiences being mentored by others. The majority of participants described their previous and current mentorships as developing organically. Some mentors had served as participants' supervisors, while others served more as peer mentors. Most participants were in support of formal mentorship programs at their individual community colleges, but they did not want participation to be mandated.

Lynn reflected on her previous mentors, and she recalled:

I would say [they] mostly [were] men. Some of my experience, I won't say all of it, but some of my experience here, women wouldn't help you. If you didn't find an understanding male, the women, they wouldn't help you. It was, 'I got this far. I did it on my own. Good luck, honey,' kind of thing.

Lynn's current mentor is her supervisor, a woman in a senior-level position at her institution. She explained how their relationship developed out of mutual respect and admiration for one

another. Lynn did not agree with the notion of assigning mentors. She stated, "I'm not one that wants to be being given a mentor. That just sounds awful to me. It's like, 'here's your best friend.' I think to myself that chances of this working are slim to none."

Mirna discussed a positive mentorship experience with a woman administrator in a senior-level role at her institution. She shared that she's been hugely influential in shaping her professional journey. After Mirna's mentor asked her to take on a new leadership role, she stayed by her side, "guiding [her] through those steps because she had been through similar processes in her own professional experience," so she knew where to give advice and support.

Beverly shared she has always had a mentor in every position she has held. She explained some of her mentors may not have known they were her mentors, but she learned from both their positive and negative experiences and applied them to her own leadership roles. Michelle described the natural development of her relationship with her mentor, a senior-level administrator at her community college, as happening through "osmosis." She commented, "because she saw something in me, I latched on."

Vivian discussed her two mentors, both of whom are women in senior-level leadership positions in other organizations. She expressed:

> [One] is my, get-yourself-together-and-get-on-this-thing, we-need-you-to-finish, kind of person. Then I have a girlfriend of mine, that's like, "Okay, you've sat in this long enough." They handle me differently, and I approach them differently because of that. I can talk to them about anything – personal, professional, anything.

Sue, Caroline, Vanessa, Allison, and Joanne reported not having a mentor at the time of this study, but they all disclosed having mentors at some point in their careers. Sue expressed

that although she is "flying alone right now," she was positively impacted by a former mentor. She commented:

> . . . I was just awestruck with her because it felt like she could just get anything done. She was just one of those people who would walk into a situation and just say, 'I'm going to do XYZ.' She always said to me, 'You just have to walk in the room, tell them what you're going to do, and do it. Don't ever ask for permission. Just do it.' That was really helpful to me in the early days.

Caroline stated:

> I think I could have a mentor. I don't think I do . . . I don't find that that culture exists at [my institution]. It might in little small pockets, but it's not a culture [here] . . . I make note of a lot of things that I wouldn't do, if you want to call that mentoring from afar.

> ***Mentoring others.*** Nine participants shared experiences mentoring others. These

participants believed it was their responsibility to mentor aspiring leaders, particularly those who already showcased leadership potential, as well as those who vocalized their desires for professional advancement. The participants expressed the importance of being supportive, open, and genuine.

Lynn asserted, "It's my job to help them get there. It's my job to provide them opportunities to help them do that as best I can." Mirna also felt the onus was on her as a leader to support future leaders. She proclaimed:

> I think that's critically important, and it's something that I do consciously with some who ask me and then also some who I see tremendous potential. I especially am conscious of the need to be supportive for women, especially when they are at that position that I was

at a decade or so ago, when they have children and are making those difficult choices about work and balance and family commitments . . . Men need it, too.

Sue stressed the importance of providing professional development opportunities for the women on her staff and women student leaders. She explained she tries to connect them with national organizations and then give them "room to go and grow with those organizations." Caroline asserted her role as a mentor does not include simply telling someone what to do. She emphasized the importance of providing sufficient information by giving women the "history" of an organization to allow for better decision-making.

Allison revealed her reasoning for intentionally seeking out chances to mentor and "grow" people within her institution. She detailed:

It's not built-in in this institution at all which is why this year, I decided since I've been in this role for so long, I'm going to grow other people this year. It occurred to me as a servant leader that I could be of some use. I started by reaching out. I'd asked around, 'Are you interested in moving up? Let's talk about it.'

Beverly and Michelle highlighted the importance of honesty and authenticity during mentorship. Beverly maintained the importance of giving back and ensuring she is modeling the right example. Similarly, Michelle affirmed the importance of accurately portraying her experiences as a mentor. She said, "It's being who I am, and being authentic to myself, and being true to the game. Being honest, and being open and saying, 'Hey, this is how it is…the good, bad, and the ugly.'"

Joanne was the only participant who did not have experience mentoring others. She suggested a possible reason for her lack of mentorship, stating:

I think I'm so busy getting ahead, maybe that's what people see with me. Hopefully, I don't elbow people out of my way, but I definitely think I could take some more time to help grow somebody to the position.

Lack of professional development. As previously mentioned, most participants believed professional development opportunities were extremely limited and rare. All ten participants referenced annual conferences and meetings orchestrated through their state community college system. Four participants mentioned creating their own opportunities, such as researching outside funding for events, attending free webinars online, or informally collaborating with colleagues in different departments at their community colleges or other institutions.

Lynn responded:

Professional development has kind of ebbed and flowed here over the years. I must say I've had some really good opportunities . . . Now, we're really on the low budget end of that and basically, if you want to go online and listen to some presentation after six or eight weeks, they'll give you a little piece of paper saying you've done something. I have not done any of those. I don't generally feel those are worth my while.

When asked to recount any professional development opportunities she has had, Caroline replied, "The ones I created myself." Comparably, Vanessa explained, "A lot of what I do now is to just scour the internet and inform myself on things that are out there professionally because there's not much that the college can offer for that."

Allison recalled a meaningful, week-long intensive national event she attended, nearly five years ago, shortly after beginning in her current mid-level role. She disclosed, "It used to be that as administrators, we would kind of take turns going to stuff, and then there were budget cuts, and nobody traveled anywhere. Then sometimes, our leadership just didn't have a focus on

that." Allison shared she has attempted to continue her professional development through attending statewide conferences and serving on statewide committees. Beverly responded she had only attended one professional development event since entering her mid-level position. Other than that opportunity, she expressed disappointment with the lack of training and having to "learn by fire."

Vivian, Mirna, and Joanne had more positive recent professional development experiences than the majority of the group. Mirna shared that despite the financial state of her institution, she tries to find and take advantage of any opportunities for professional development. She commented:

> . . . I've always been very conscious about . . . making sure I stay engaged . . . taking opportunities to go to conferences, but not just attend, but also to present because I know attending can sometimes just be passive, but if I'm presenting papers, then I'm motivated to be actively thinking about a particular issue or project or concern . . . I became engaged also in a couple of journals.

Joanne admitted she has been awarded countless opportunities, and she is appreciative of the chance to continue to grow as an administrator. She proclaimed:

> Everything and anything . . . I have had so many professional opportunities . . . That's a lot of money that somebody put in to keep me trained and on top of things. To just take that and move somewhere else, it feels a little unloyal. [laughs]

Theme 4: Communication. Participants discussed the professional challenge of communication in their roles as mid-level leaders. Seven participants expressed the challenge of building and maintaining relationships. Seven participants mentioned having difficulty with

openly communicating with colleagues. Two participants shared their feelings of loneliness and isolation as mid-level leaders.

Some participants mentioned the pressures of serving different constituent groups as a mid-level leader. Allison stated:

> You can't be a strong leader and keep everybody happy. While I have always known that, it's in conflict with serving people sometimes, and so, you got to find that balance . . . Learning that I can't fix things for people . . . those kinds of things, are personal development and interpersonal relational issues that have been personal challenges for me. Learning to navigate that and establishing relationships may take a little longer. It may take a little bit more time to understand each other.

> Beverly commented:

> . . . You definitely have the challenge of meeting those who report to you, meeting their needs at the same time as meeting the needs of those who you report to. Certainly, that's always a challenge of a middle manager. Because you have this kind of two directional communication, leadership responsibility. Sometimes it's hard to balance those two.

Additionally, other participants highlighted the stress of making appropriate comments or suggestions at suitable times to the correct people. Lynn admitted she has been extremely mindful of voicing her opinions at work. She disclosed that she will reflect back on conversations held at work and be consumed with the idea that she may have been misinterpreted or have offended someone. Lynn expressed having to "work to keep [her] mouth shut."

Similar to Lynn, Michelle has remained cognizant of her words in professional settings and advises other women leaders to do the same. She commented, "You want to make sure that when you leave the room that people listened to what you said and felt like, 'Oh, what she said

makes a lot of sense.'" Vanessa also shared the challenge of establishing herself as someone who is knowledgeable with worthy ideas, particularly with new senior-level leadership.

Caroline considers herself an excellent communicator and believes this skill has helped her to advance professionally. Nonetheless, she shared an observation about not always being well received by her colleagues. She stated:

I'm probably too blunt. I don't know that that's appreciated up here either, but it is what it is in my current role . . . There should be a culture of being honest within what I would think would be your team, but I don't feel that that's true in this situation.

Joanne shared:

. . . The business books will say women make better leaders because we are honest and able to, not love unconditionally, but reprimand the environment we're in . . . They say women, we have the ability to be great leaders because of our personalities and being able to connect. I do try to connect. I'm friendly, but I'm also hard to get to know. It's a weird dynamic.

Lastly, two participants confessed feeling lonely and isolated in their mid-level leadership positions. Caroline discussed feeling like an outsider in her own department. She stated:

It's like all of a sudden, wait a minute, I'm trying to be a team here, but there's no one listening. That's lonely . . . There is no personal, real interaction. Even within this office, you're a different animal. Your spots are different than everyone else's spots.

Likewise, Beverly expressed sentiments of isolation and seclusion. She commented:

I think one of my personal challenges is just feeling this sense of being alone. I find that in my role currently, I haven't necessarily built a network of people who have my same way of thinking or background process. I think right now I just feel very isolated. I

know that in time, as I build my network and just get to know more people and meet with
more people, that that network will grow.

**RQ 1c: What Are the Perceived Organizational Challenges That Are Unique to Women
Leaders in Mid-Level Positions at Urban Community Colleges?**

One theme emerged in relation to the third research question regarding perceived
organizational challenges: institutional climate and organizational structure. Subthemes for this
theme included: (a) networking and (b) leadership pipeline.

Theme 5: Institutional climate and organizational structure. Overall, participants
described their institutional climates using descriptors, such as tense, nontransparent, lacking
trust, and low morale. The participants attributed these feelings to declining enrollment, reduced
budgets, personnel layoffs, organizational structure, rapid changes, and lack of openness and
transparency. Eight participants were optimistic for positive change in their institutional climate
and organizational structure. Two participants were not as hopeful for a timely change in their
institutional climate and organizational structure.

Despite their college's climate being described negatively, most participants remained
hopeful for positive change. Vivian described her college's institutional climate as "changing
dramatically and fast." Lynn claimed she has actually enjoyed the excitement of all the moving
pieces, but she understands there are others – specifically those who are short-staffed and unable
to fill positions – who are really feeling the stress.

Mirna shared feelings of hope regarding her college's ongoing evolution. She noted her
appreciation for her administration's willingness for all voices to be heard and considered during
decision-making efforts. She explained there has been a collaborative effort and hierarchies have
been non-existent. Allison stated she understands her institution is going through a challenging

time, but she feels it has the right leadership to get things moving back in a positive direction. She described her college's culture as improving and expressed the belief that the right leadership is in place to provide better communication and transparency.

Michelle stated, "I think for the most part, people are grateful to be working, but I do think it has become stressful, and it does become a lot when you're asked to [take on] multiple responsibilities." Despite these feelings, Michelle explained that having to undertake these additional responsibilities could be seen as a positive. According to her, people have the opportunity to step up, be agents of change, learn new skills, and add to their résumés.

Other participants expressed less confidence in a timely positive improvement with their institutional climate. Joanne said, "I feel like folks are like, 'Better look out for myself because nobody else is right now.' As a leader, that's a tough place to be in to show support." Sue described her college's climate as being "tone deaf and irrelevant" with "no direction to it." Caroline proclaimed:

> I don't like the climate at all. I don't think there's teamwork really. I think that there's
> dictates . . . It's unhealthy. There's a lot of good people that work here. A lot of good
> people that work here, but our climate is unhealthy. It's full of artifice. Everybody goes
> around with a smile on their face, and it's not true.

Vanessa commented that her institutional climate is currently "tense." She shared:

> I think people are really uncomfortable. Unsure. As you talk to people, they're
> concerned. They don't feel like things are transparent . . . I definitely feel the pressure of
> it. We've lost several part-time positions and one full-time position . . . I think,
> sometimes, what happens is everything looks fine because we're making it work.

Networking. The researcher asked participants to describe their experiences networking with senior-level leaders. All ten participants shared experiences networking with senior-level leaders at their own community colleges. Five participants wished they had more networking opportunities within their institution. Nine participants discussed opportunities they had to network with senior-level leaders at other institutions. Seven participants expressed comfort and confidence when networking with senior-level leaders. Three participants shared feelings of discomfort when interacting with senior-level leaders and preferred not to have networking opportunities with them.

Most participants commented on their ability to comfortably speak with senior-level leaders within and outside of their community colleges. Mirna shared that her institution does not have many formal networking opportunities, but she regularly engages with faculty and staff of all levels at college events. She expressed appreciation for networking with other presidents and senior-level leaders at other community colleges, mainly through her committee service and work on editorial boards. Vivian discussed her ease in working one-on-one with senior-level leaders, including her college's president. She described her president as being very vocal and student-focused, making it easier to communicate and share ideas.

Although Lynn expressed comfort in networking with senior-level leaders, she commented on understanding her role in her mid-level position:

I'm respected, but I know my place. I guess that's a nice summation. I get along well. I can pull [networking] off, but I also understand that I'm a measly dean in some of these meetings, but I'm happy where I am. I don't feel too much of that rub.

Allison shared when she first arrived at her institution, she was nervous around senior leadership and wanted to remain "under the radar" and go unnoticed. As she started participating

in statewide professional development activities, she realized the presidents and vice presidents were welcoming and collegial. She commented:

> I feel more has been required of me as a leader to step up, speak up, and put myself out there in company with those that are higher-level leaders than me. My comments are welcome, and we're all at the table together.

Several participants expressed uneasiness when interacting with senior-level leaders. Michelle shared that she is very careful and observant in those situations. Caroline admitted she does not like networking at all. She stated:

> Can I do it? Yes. Have I done it? . . . If I purposely did it, it would not be for enjoyment. It would be for some type of strategic goal that I had. That's what it would be for. I think it's because life is too short to not have honesty. It's a political game, and I don't do politics.

> Joanne responded:

> I am uncomfortable with senior-level leadership . . . So I still, sometimes, around higher leadership, I tend to take a little bit of a back seat. It's hard for me to make small talk. I just stood next to the president . . . and just felt like, 'hum-did-a-hum-did-a hum-did-a-hum-did-a.' I wish I was a little bit better about networking.

Sue shared how her association with senior-level leadership at her institution has changed. She asserted:

> I was always in direct contact with executive-level leadership until our most recent president left. Now, it just feels like a ceiling has been built . . . Again, for me, where I am right now, that's fine because my focus is purely on my area and what I can do to make sure that we are strengthened.

Leadership pipeline. The researcher asked participants if their community colleges have a leadership pipeline for aspiring women leaders. The researcher also asked how this process could be improved. None of the participants believed their colleges had a sufficient leadership pipeline for aspiring women or men leaders. Seven participants mentioned leadership development opportunities outside of their institutions, either through the state's community college system or a statewide professional organization for women.

Lynn acknowledged that although her institution does not have a prescribed leadership funnel, her institution is doing a "pretty good job" of getting women "up there" into senior-level roles. Currently, many of those roles are interim positions, and Lynn is uncertain as to who will be chosen for the full-time, permanent positions. She mentioned additional areas for improvement include the promotion of women of color into senior-level positions as well as the promotion of entry-level staff into higher-level roles when available.

Mirna shared a special program at her community college:

I don't know that we have a clear gender-based leadership program, though I know we've tried to start it off and on . . . There's a cohort that's selected every year, and they go through a leadership training program [during] a year-long process. In those ways, we are supporting different aspects of development for leadership.

Caroline recalled a time when she asked another administrator about a succession plan at her community college but did not receive a straightforward answer. She stated:

A number of years ago, I contacted someone in a leadership position and asked them what were we doing for succession at the institution because we were seeing program directors, leaders, whether they were male or female, mostly female, retiring or leaving . .

. Our process is so convoluted that you could be without leadership for nine months to a year . . . I don't think it's intentional . . . We can't look ahead.

Vanessa and Michelle both expressed that hiring decisions – specifically appointments to interim positions – are made arbitrarily. Vanessa commented that everyone should have an equal opportunity to be selected because it can be "discouraging" to those who are "hand-picked." Michelle suggested the importance of having an advocate who is "in your corner" at the table during hiring discussions. Regarding the leadership dynamics at her institution, Allison shared her institution's challenge in retaining its talented aspiring leaders:

> There aren't very many opportunities. I don't think I have seen anybody, but one, rise to the VP level from the faculty level in 11 years. Again, that may not be a goal for everybody, but that also means there's not a pipeline . . . It's a different philosophy, and I don't know that we need to have it.

RQ 2: How Do These Women Leaders Navigate These Perceived Challenges?

All five themes emerged in relation to the fourth research question regarding the leaders' navigation of perceived challenges.

Theme 1: Leadership progression. The most daunting personal challenge associated with leadership progression seemed to be obtaining a doctoral degree. For the five participants who had not earned a doctoral degree, the decision to pursue one was difficult. Additionally, the lack of degree seemed to correlate with the uncertainty of their ultimate career goals.

Vanessa and Beverly proclaimed their intentions of enrolling in doctoral programs within the current year. Vanessa stated, "I've said to my boss that I wanted to get a leg up on the doctorate. I've said it . . . I spoke it into existence. He had me put it on my professional development plan." Accordingly, Beverly shared, "I've decided to go back for my doctoral

degree [and] probably will be starting that this summer." Vivian discussed having completed the entirety of her doctoral coursework but having to navigate the challenge of writing her dissertation. She described conversations with her current supervisor involving creating a plan to make time to finish writing her dissertation.

Theme 2: Work-life balance. Eight participants mentioned navigating their perceived personal challenge of work-life balance with the support of their family members, friends, and colleagues. Nine participants also discussed dealing with their busy schedules by changing their mindsets and managing their own personal expectations. Other participants implemented specific practices or removed themselves entirely from certain situations. Four participants acknowledged the significance of their spirituality and affiliation with religious organizations in staying centered and balanced. Two participants explained they mentally reset by traveling and taking vacations.

Several participants mentioned specifically the support of their spouses throughout their professional journeys. Allison described the importance of receiving alternative and unbiased feedback from her husband regarding difficulties at work, as he offered an "outside perspective." Mirna referred to her husband as an "equal partner" several times throughout her interview. She proclaimed:

> He's always been very, very supportive of my career and any work that I've done . . . I've really, really depended a lot on my husband's willingness and openness to being an equal partner in the dynamic. Even at the height of his personal responsibilities, where he was taking care of his parents and also going to school, he never once abdicated household responsibilities, which I just have immense respect for him for that.

Other participants relied on the support of colleagues at work and friends. Even during

the most stressful moments, while caring for her sick in-laws and raising her young children,

Mirna reported always being uplifted by her supervisors and coworkers. Vivian commented that

the colleagues in her department were like family to her and her "sister friends" outside of work

help to keep her grounded and focused. Vanessa shared that her decision to relink with friends

and recommit to previous social organizations has been helpful as she attempts to focus back on

herself. She stated:

> You're so many things to so many people that you tend to forget what you need . . .
>
> Reconnecting with things that were important to me, like my organizations . . . I've tried
>
> to be sure that I am connecting with friends, the same ones or different ones, at least once
>
> every other week, just to kick back and relax, to try to destress.

Several participants communicated that a change in mindset had been necessary for

managing work-life balance. Sue described how she tries to "just stop the world from moving"

and "take a deep breath, and step back, and realize that nothing is forever and just get through the

moment" because "in the end, things always work out." Beverly explained how her previous

goals of gaining additional credentials and titles have shifted to effectively managing her time

and creating a flexible schedule. Vivian explained she uses visualization as a technique for

remaining focused, such as a calendar with important deadlines and goals written on her walls at

home.

Caroline discussed her refusal for "work to exceed [her] personal life" and described it as

a result of being by both of her parents' sides for the duration of their illness and then ultimately

seeing them die. She reflected:

I think because of that experience, that I'm a more patient person in a lot of ways . . .

Patient in a way that sometimes I'll just be like, 'Well, I'm not investing in that,' and

walk away…make a decision, walk away. Not think about it anymore. It probably

sounds pretty harsh, but it works.

Vanessa also mentioned how her experiences with death have caused her to prioritize her

responsibilities differently, enjoy the time she has, and realize "this stuff really is not all that

serious."

Theme 3: Mentorship and professional development. Regarding mentorship, seven

participants articulated they would continue using or seeking mentors, formally or informally, to

navigate the perceived challenges faced as mid-level leaders. Nine participants stated they

would continue serving as formal or informal mentors for aspiring leaders. Regarding

professional development, seven participants mentioned creating or requesting opportunities for

themselves, despite their institutional financial concerns or limited opportunities available for

professional development. Four participants discussed purposefully trying to find professional

development opportunities and share them with other staff members, especially those in lower-

level positions.

Caroline explained how she has actively sought out professional development

experiences on her own by creating relationships and sharing ideas with leaders in her same role

at other colleges. Michelle discussed using her doctoral degree as a means of staying connected

to others outside of her institution and contributing to higher education, specifically by "taking

[her] dissertation on the road" and presenting at conferences. Lynn expressed the importance of

continuing to share opportunities with her staff, albeit minimal opportunities. Mirna claimed that

she has "been good with what she has been offered" for professional development, but now she

has focused on creating experiences for other faculty within her college. Sue discussed the impact of a capstone leadership program developed by her department, specifically for women students at her college, with a goal of "planting the seed early."

Allison detailed how she has made a commitment to assert herself more when it comes to requesting more opportunities. She stated:

I have learned to make sure I assert myself a little bit more. There's a conference that I may be interested in going to, and I'll need to seek a nomination. I've decided to do that. We still don't have money, but you have to ask anyway. You have to advocate for yourself, and in the busyness and all of the stuff I described earlier about the job, you just do the job. You have to stop and make sure you pay attention to yourself as a professional.

Theme 4: Communication. Participants discussed their attempts to navigate the professional challenge of communication in their roles as mid-level leaders. Seven participants expressed tools they have used to effectively communicate and maintain positive relationships with their colleagues. Two participants shared their plans for escaping the feelings of isolation and loneliness as mid-level leaders.

Lynn previously disclosed her insecurity related to her outspokenness and frankness at work and admitted she will "wake in the middle of the night and fret about it." She described one of her techniques for "battling her inner critic" as researching what others have done to increase their confidence. She stated, "It's helpful to know other people feel that way and how they deal with it, [such as] breathing deeply and [watching] YouTube videos."

Caroline shared a valuable lesson she learned at a seminar regarding identifying and eliminating noxious relationships and described how she will "still pull it out on occasion."

Allison explained she has attempted to navigate through her challenges with effective communication and relationship-building by being more verbal and talking through things. She also proclaimed that for her, "getting people information faster makes people less worried and therefore, improves morale."

Michelle imparted the importance of constantly evaluating herself and accepting that she can be "emotional" and "sensitive" at times. She explained how she makes sure to research and contemplate before making decisions so that she is comfortable and not swayed by emotion. Joanne expressed her technique of intentionally working to be more positive. However, she did admit that being overly positive could have a downside because being "more complimentary than corrective" may cause people to be more complacent instead of being forced to stretch and grow.

Finally, participants, who previously disclosed feeling isolated and detached, shared their thoughts. Caroline and Beverly disagreed the onus should be placed on them to find a solution, but because of the organization of their institutions, they believed they had no choice but to act first. Caroline described "recognizing where the gaps are" and working to fill them in.

Theme 5: Institutional climate and organizational structure. Out of all five themes, the fifth theme of institutional climate and organizational structure proved to be the most difficult challenge to navigate for the participants. The participants believed their current institutional climates to be rooted in circumstances beyond their immediate control, such as declining enrollment numbers, strained budgets, inability to hire necessary staff, copious institutional initiatives, and lacking leadership pipelines. Five participants explained how they have enacted positive efforts, which they could control, within their own departments.

Lynn shared how she has attempted to create a more compassionate culture at her community college by organizing a "care team" providing resources for students and staff in need. Vanessa discussed ways she has helped to "keep the mood light" and improve the morale among staff within her department, including orchestrating office celebrations and engaging personally with her staff. Joanne communicated how she "takes a minute to say thank you" and verbally acknowledges staff members for their efforts.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine women leaders in mid-level positions and their perceptions of the personal, professional, and organizational challenges unique to them as leaders in urban community colleges. This chapter included a breakdown of the participant demographics and profiles, an overview of the data collection and analysis process, and the researcher's findings in relation to the study's research questions. Five emergent themes were revealed: (a) leadership progression, (b) work-life balance, (c) mentorship and professional development, (d) communication, and (e) institutional climate and organizational structure.

The researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten women in dean or director positions. The participants were purposefully selected from three urban community colleges located in one southeastern US state. The ten interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. The researcher used Moustakas' (1994) framework as a guide for analyzing the interview transcripts. Moustakas' (1994) seven steps for data analysis included: (a) listing and preliminary grouping, (b) reduction and elimination, (c) clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents, (d) final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application, (e) individual textural description, (f) individual structural description,

and (g) textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience for each participant. A synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions for the participants as a group were presented in relation to the study's research questions and the five emergent themes.

The final chapter will present a summary of the study, findings related to existing literature, and conclusions of the study. Implications for action, recommendations for practitioners and leaders, and recommendations for further research will be discussed. The researcher will also provide concluding remarks.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Although women at community colleges lead at higher rates than those at four-year colleges and universities, the percentage of women leaders remains disproportionate compared to men (ACE, 2017). In 2016, only 36% of community colleges were led by women presidents (ACE, 2017). There is a gap in senior-level community college leadership, which has resulted from a predicted increase in the turnover rates of college presidents (Shults, 2001; Tekle, 2012), as well as the changing landscape and needs of the modern community college. Community college leaders require different qualities and skill sets to manage the shifting academic, economic, social, and political pressures within their institutions (Aspen Institute & Achieving the Dream, 2017; Eddy, 2017). Currently, women are underrepresented in senior-level leadership, but the development of women in mid-level leadership positions could help to fill the leadership gap.

Women leaders face different challenges than their male counterparts, and these challenges have been analyzed in the literature within and outside of educational leadership. Several researchers examined the effects of gender bias and gender stereotyping on women leaders as a result of the built-in patriarchal and hierarchical systems within higher education (Bingham & Nix, 2010; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2011; Vial, Napier, & Brescoll, 2016). Other researchers focused on the personal, professional, and organizational challenges faced by women leaders. Work-life balance (Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Gill & Jones, 2013; Sherman Newcomb, Beaty, Sanzo, & Peters-Hawkins, 2013) and initiative (Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Northouse, 2016) were common personal challenges. Mentorship (Ballenger, 2010; Bower & Hums, 2013; Cejda, 2008; Eddy, 2008; Gamble &

Turner, 2015; Gill & Jones, 2013; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008; Obers, 2014; Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013), professional development (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012; Eddy, 2008; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008), and mobility (Amey, Vanderlinden, & Brown, 2002; Eddy, 2008; McKenney, 2000) were noted as professional challenges. Institutional climate and organizational culture (Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Gill & Jones, 2013; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008; Twombly, 1995), glass ceiling effect (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991), and good old boy networks (Ballenger, 2010; Eddy, 2008, Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017) were reported as organizational challenges.

Although the current literature includes studies on the challenges faced by women leaders in community colleges, the focus has been mainly on senior-level leaders and faculty. This study provided an analysis of women in mid-level leadership positions and assessed their perception of personal, professional, and organizational challenges in their roles. Additionally, women in urban community colleges, which tend to be larger and more complex in structure with a diverse population of constituents, face challenges that are different from those in suburban and rural community colleges. Recognizing and acknowledging the different leadership challenges faced by women in mid-level positions will help administrators create more inclusive and supportive institutions for professional development and growth.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine women leaders in mid-level positions and their perceptions of the personal, professional, and organizational challenges unique to them as leaders in urban community colleges. Participants discussed their perceived challenges through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants also described their

challenges as they related to their personal, professional, and organizational experiences and how they have attempted to navigate those challenges.

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the perceived challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

    a. What are the perceived personal challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

    b. What are the perceived professional challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

    c. What are the perceived organizational challenges that are unique to women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges?

2. How do these women leaders navigate these perceived challenges?

Significance of the Study

The current and impending leadership gaps in community colleges have been discussed for more than two decades (Phillippe, 2016; Shults, 2001; Tekle, 2012). The findings of this study highlight the perceptions of women in mid-level leadership positions at urban community colleges. The in-depth conversations with these leaders indicate their perceived personal, professional, and organizational challenges faced in their roles. This study provides valuable insight, which impacts community college practitioners and leaders as well as mid-level women leaders with aspirations of professional advancement.

The results from this study provide community college practitioners and leaders with a better understanding of women leaders' challenges. Current and future community college presidents require different leadership qualities and skill sets than previous leaders, and this

study's findings suggest a need for more professional development, mentorship opportunities, and funding for education from institutions, state systems, and regional and national community college professional organizations. For individual community colleges, understanding women mid-level leaders' perceptions of institutional climates is beneficial in electing to continue or modify current practices and policies. Senior-level administrators also must recognize the importance of effective leadership pipelines in order to retain and develop future senior-level leaders, focusing particularly on professional development and mentorship opportunities.

Additionally, this study's results are beneficial to mid-level women leaders. It is important for women leaders to hear the stories of their peers and to share their own stories as well. Gender differences can potentially impact opportunities for professional advancement for women leaders. Navigating the specific personal, professional, and organizational challenges, that are unique to women in mid-level positions in large and complex urban community colleges, require training, encouragement, support, and understanding.

Review of Methodology

This qualitative study was designed with a phenomenological approach. According to Moustakas (1994), the objective of a phenomenology is "to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (p. 13). Patton (2002) described essences as "the core meaning mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced" (p. 106). In order to best understand the perceived challenges of women in mid-level leadership positions at urban community colleges, the researcher would need to serve as the instrument and hear the stories of these women directly. Feminist theory was used as the study's framework, which allowed the researcher to

discern the impact of patriarchy, hierarchies, dominance, and oppression on the participants'
experiences as women in mid-level leadership roles in urban community colleges.

The study took place at three urban community colleges in one state located in the
southeastern US. The locations were chosen based on their size, complexity, and proximity to
the researcher. The researcher used criterion sampling, a type of purposeful sampling in which
participants were selected based on the predetermined criteria for the study. The ten participants
were women in mid-level positions of dean or director, in either academic or student affairs
departments, at one of the three selected community colleges. To maintain confidentiality,
pseudonyms were used for the participants and their community colleges.

The researcher created an interview protocol, consisting of 15 open-ended questions,
based on a theoretical blueprint. The researcher tested the interview protocol with a pilot study
of three women in mid-level positions in urban community colleges. Following the pilot study,
in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the ten selected participants in their
own offices. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by a
transcription service. Data were also collected through document analysis by mining data from
institutional websites, LinkedIn accounts, program documents, online news articles focused on
the participants or their colleges, and curricula vitae. Moustakas' (1994) seven-step
phenomenological data analysis framework was used to analyze and interpret the interview
transcripts.

Summary of Major Findings

A thorough analysis of the data revealed five major themes: (a) leadership progression,
(b) work-life balance, (c) mentorship and professional development, (d) communication, and (e)
institutional climate and organizational structure. Related subthemes included (a) career goals,

(b) education, (c) mobility, (d) initiative, (e) family responsibilities, (f) relocation, (g) being mentored, (h) mentoring others, (i) lack of professional development, (j) networking, and (k) leadership pipeline. At the time of the study, all ten participants were women leaders in roles of dean or director with progressive leadership experiences within academic or student affairs. All participants had a master's level degree of education. Half of the participants also had doctoral degrees. Those who did not have the additional degree expressed doctoral degree attainment as a personal challenge.

All participants reported work-life balance as a major personal challenge at some point in their lives. The majority of the participants discussed family responsibilities, including caring for children and aging parents and maintaining busy schedules. Most of the participants mentioned techniques they have used or are currently using to navigate this challenge, such as receiving support from family members, friends, and colleagues, changing their mindsets, managing expectations, or focusing on themselves personally or socially.

All participants expressed the importance of mentorship and professional development. Each participant revealed she had been mentored at some point, but at the time of the study, only five participants currently had mentors. Nine participants believed it was also their responsibility to mentor others, namely women with leadership aspirations. Regarding professional development, most participants expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of opportunities available to them due to various factors, such as budget constraints or professional development not being a priority for their institutional leadership.

In addition to the professional challenges related to mentorship and professional development, participants cited challenges with communication. A majority of participants discussed the difficulty in sustaining relationships with other staff members. Some participants

mentioned the challenges of open and honest dialogue with colleagues or feeling lonely and isolated at work.

Regarding organizational challenges, all participants rated their current institutional climates as unfavorable. The participants cited several reasons for the negative ratings, including declining student enrollment, organizational structures, staff shortages, budget reductions, and personnel downsizing. The majority of participants described feelings of hopefulness that their institutional climates would improve for the better. The organizational challenges of institutional climate and organizational structure seemed to be the most difficult challenges to navigate, as most participants also expressed dissatisfaction with networking opportunities and lack of a formal leadership pipeline for aspiring leaders, including men and women.

Findings Related to the Literature

The results of this study revealed the essence of the shared experiences of women in mid-level positions in urban community colleges. The researcher interpreted the unique challenges of the mid-level leaders as they shared their narratives through interviews. The following section presents the study's findings and describes how they relate to existing literature. The findings are organized by the study's five emergent themes and their related subthemes.

Theme 1: Leadership progression. In the present study, all ten participants had progressively advanced through different leadership experiences before landing in their current mid-level roles as deans or directors. Six participants had worked their entire careers within the field of education, while four previously worked in areas outside of academia. Regarding experience specifically in higher education, four participants had experience working at four-year institutions, but the majority had only worked for two-year institutions.

The current study supported the findings of Cejda (2008), Eddy (2008), and Townsend and Twombly (2007), indicating the notion of women being drawn to the community college sector. Women support the core mission of community, open door access, and commitment to teaching (Cejda, 2008; Eddy, 2008). Townsend and Twombly (2007) described women as being essential to the base of the community college, both as students and employees. This study's participants described their passion for their students, faculty, and staff as major reasons for being in their positions.

This study confirmed the findings of Eddy (2008), Northouse (2016), and Gamble and Turner (2015), affirming women are less assertive than men and tend to comply with suggestions from others to pursue progressive leadership roles. Some participants in the current study were initially appointed to their positions on an interim basis before being officially hired permanently. Regarding initiative for senior-level advancement, Eddy (2008) noted many women do not initially have goals of becoming community college presidents. Oftentimes it is by chance, and after years of upward progression in academic or student affairs leadership roles, a presidency seems to be the next logical step (Eddy, 2008). Northouse (2016) described women, when compared to men, as less assertive, less likely to advocate for themselves, and less likely to negotiate in their positions. In line with Gamble and Turner's (2015) study, women in the present study believed continuing to work hard in their current roles would eventually lead to them being recognized for senior-level leadership opportunities.

Each participant in the current study had at least a master's degree level of education, and five participants had additionally earned doctoral degrees. The remaining five participants described the personal challenges related to completing doctoral degrees. Four participants expressed desires to advance into senior-level positions, three participants were unsure of their

ultimate career goals, and two wished to remain in their current mid-level roles until retirement. Gamble and Turner (2015) found women leaders believed their careers had been negatively impacted by an unwillingness to take more risks professionally.

Theme 2: Work-life balance. Participants in this study described maintaining full and busy lives, both personally and professionally. The findings in the present study were consistent with work-life balance challenges depicted by Sherman Newcomb et al. (2013), Cejda (2008), Eddy (2008), Gamble and Turner (2015), and Gill and Jones (2013). All ten participants expressed work-life balance as a previous or current challenge. The participants also identified their biggest challenge as juggling dual roles at work and at home. Similarly, faculty in Sherman Newcomb et al.'s (2013) study shared feelings of sadness, guilt, and failure while attempting to be successful and present in their personal and professional lives. Participants in Gamble and Turner's (2015) study described the difficulty in meeting society's expectations of successfully maintaining a household and effectively leading at work.

Previous studies indicated women leaders' career decisions were influenced by the needs of their families (Cejda, 2008; Eddy, 2008; Gill & Jones, 2013). The current study supported this notion. Several participants in the current study proclaimed an unwillingness to relocate for advanced job opportunities due to caring for children or aging parents, although they understood this would limit them professionally. Eddy (2008) found women in mid-level positions to be greatly affected by remaining in one institution, which could result in less diverse leadership experiences. Two participants in the current study expressed they were not able to pursue doctoral degrees required for senior-level positions because of the time dedicated to their families. Another participant indicated that it was not possible for her to be outside of her home more than she already was in her mid-level position, and if that was a requirement for attaining a

senior-level position, she would not be able to acquiesce for a few more years when her children are older.

The present study supported Eddy's (2008) finding that women presidents attributed their effectiveness as leaders to a stable home life. Likewise, the senior-level women leaders in Gill and Jones' (2013) study expressed the importance of integrating their careers with their personal lives. One participant in the present study shared that her family has always been a part of her career, and her children have grown up understanding her work responsibilities as being normal. This study's participants also discussed attempting to navigate the challenges of work-life balance through various methods, including scheduling personal vacations, not bringing office work home in the evenings, using calendars and planners, and setting boundaries when accepting additional responsibilities at work. Moreover, this study also confirmed the importance of spousal support for women leaders (Eddy, 2008; Gill & Jones, 2013). Some participants described their spouses as being equal partners and assisting with family-related duties, including those typically ascribed to women.

This study is consistent with Gamble and Turner's (2015) finding that work-life balance is a challenge for leaders who have children and those who do not. Three of the mid-level leaders in the current study do not have children, but they still expressed challenges with work-life balance. One participant described her biggest challenge as finding time to complete the remaining dissertation requirement for her doctoral degree. Another participant confessed the imbalance of being so focused on her career that her marriage was negatively impacted and ultimately led to a divorce.

Theme 3: Mentorship and professional development. The findings of the current study supported previous literature findings on the importance of mentorship and professional

development. Women mentors provide examples of success and paths for aspiring leaders (Ballenger, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Gill & Jones, 2013; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Sherman Newcomb et al., 2013). Participants in the current study described those who had served as mentors to them, including senior-level administrators, supervisors, peers, and community leaders. The participants emphasized the significance of mentorship and professional development as leaders. They believed mentorship could be formal or informal, but relationships needed to be organic and not forced. The participants also believed as mid-level leaders, the onus was on them to pay it forward and offer mentorship to aspiring leaders in the pipeline.

The current study supported the findings of Gill and Jones (2013), who noted that women mentors tend to be models for balancing work and personal life as well as navigating institutional hierarchies. Participants in the current study noted they have had several mentors who offer different benefits. Some mentors have provided professional advice and guidance, while others have provided personal and emotional support. This study also confirmed the findings of Eddy (2008) and Leatherwood and Williams (2008), who asserted leaders were able to benefit and learn from negative and positive professional experiences. Participants in the current study expressed appreciation for mentors who were genuine and real with them and explained they were able to learn from "the good, the bad, and the ugly."

The present study's findings supported Bower and Hums' (2013) notion that women leaders who did not have mentors felt they were losing opportunities to receive beneficial career advice, exposure, and support. Several of the participants, who did not have a mentor at the time of this study, commented feeling as if they were on their own. One participant, who did not have

a mentor at the time of the study but wished to have one, professed feelings of envy for those who have been positively impacted by mentorship.

The findings of this study contradicted the assertions of Linehan and Scullion (2008) and Growe and Montgomery (2000). Linehan and Scullion (2008) found that because the pool of senior-level women leaders is smaller, there are fewer senior-level women leaders to mentor others in the pipeline. Likewise, Growe and Montgomery (2000) explained women leaders in higher education tend to have more men as mentors. Mid-level leaders in the current study described having positive experiences with both men and women as mentors, but the participants had more women as mentors than men. One participant stated before meeting her current mentor, who is a woman in a senior-level position at her institution, she had traditionally preferred men as mentors due to negative past experiences with women mentors.

Regarding professional development, this study confirmed Gamble and Turner's (2015) findings, which emphasized the importance of supervisors providing professional development experiences for aspiring women leaders. This study's participants believed the onus was on them as leaders to provide professional development opportunities for their staff, especially in recent times when the opportunities have been limited due to institutional financial constraints. Due to the current lack of professional development opportunities, participants explained they have had to create their own opportunities or settle for free workshops and webinars.

Theme 4: Communication. The current study's findings supported the findings of Northouse (2016). Prescribed gender roles impact women and their ability to lead (Northouse, 2016). Several participants in the present study reported professional challenges involving communication. Some participants disclosed tendencies to second-guess themselves when sharing opinions and publicly making decisions due to fear of being judged or saying the wrong

things. Other participants described feelings of loneliness and isolation at work due to their

middle management positions. One participant felt she was shunned because her "spots were

different" from other members in her department. She explained her preference for being

upfront and honest, but some of her staff interpreted her communication style as being "too

blunt."

The present study's findings were consistent with Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van

Engen's (2003) finding that women are expected to be friendly and unselfish, but the expectation

of successful leaders is that they are assertive and commanding. The study also confirmed the

findings of Vial et al. (2016), who suggested women leaders who are considered to act in overly

masculine ways are more likely to be disliked. Some of the participants in the current study

described the pressure of establishing and sustaining relationships. Several participants

expressed the difficulty in attempting to be everything to everyone, a common expectation of

women in general. One participant explained there is a need to always be "on" and be positive,

even when that positivity does not create meaningful learning opportunities for staff members.

Theme 5: Institutional climate and organizational structure. The findings of this

current study contradicted the earlier findings on women leaders' perceptions of institutional

climate by Dominici et al. (2009), Gill and Jones (2013), and Townsend and Twombly (2007).

In regard to previous studies on institutional climate, Dominici et al. (2009) found the overall

climate in higher education to still be chilly for women. The senior-level leaders in Gill and

Jones' (2013) study did not feel their institutional climates were welcoming to women, but they

believed positive change was imminent. Townsend and Twombly (2007) asserted although

community colleges' climates were not perfect, they were still good places of employment for

women due to higher representation.

When asked to describe the culture of their institutions, participants in the current study only referred to the negative effects of recent community college trends. Participants expressed organizational challenges resulting from their colleges' institutional climate and organizational structure were particularly stressful. Most participants believed their institutional climates have been negatively impacted by current community college trends, such as declining student enrollment, initiative fatigue, reduced budgets, staff reduction, and changes in organizational structure and leadership. Participants did not report feelings of exclusion or discrimination based on their gender, but instead they reported these feelings based on position level. The participants felt, as mid-level leaders, pressure to continue to lead as usual while their staff morale levels have plummeted.

Although participants in the current study described their institutional climates in a negative light, most were hopeful for positive change. The participants believed changes in leadership were leading to increased communication and transparency. They also described new opportunities for college-wide collaboration, which had not been as prevalent before, due to institutions feeling the pressure to make radical improvements to deal with negative trends. One participant indicated that every key constituency had a voice in policy development and decision-making at her institution. The participant had previously worked at a four-year university and, in comparison, believed there was less hierarchy in two-year institutions.

The current study's findings were inconsistent with the findings of Ballenger (2010) and Eddy (2008) on discriminatory networking. Likewise, participants in the current study did not make reference to the idea of good old boy networks at their institutions as noted in earlier studies. The participants did discuss the lack of formal leadership pipelines and limited networking opportunities at their community colleges. However, the participants believed this

was problematic for all aspiring leaders, including both women and men. Some participants did express feeling secluded from senior-level leadership, but they believed this was based on leadership level, not gender. Several participants noted their institutions' interim appointments and hiring practices seemed arbitrary at times. Others commented their colleges' leadership funnels were narrow, and their administrative leaders did not always do a good job retaining talented and promising mid-level leaders.

Unanticipated Findings

During the current study, participants reflected on experiences as mid-level community college leaders. An unanticipated finding was that participants did not directly mention experiences related to gender discrimination, glass ceiling, or good old boy networks. Several participants who reported limited professional development programs, lacking networking opportunities, and ineffective leadership funnels also commented that these experiences were lacking for both women and men in mid-level positions at their institutions. Additionally, many participants believed there was more of a separation between senior-level and mid-level administration, rendering it difficult to communicate and collaborate.

A possible reason for this could be the impact of current community college conditions. As mentioned previously, institutions are struggling with low student enrollment, financial reductions, personnel layoffs, and rapid changes in organizational structure and leadership. This time of decline within community colleges nationwide is coinciding with women moving into mid-level roles at higher rates. The present issues are overshadowing some of the challenges women already face in their leadership roles.

It is important to note that this unanticipated finding is not an indication that gender bias, stereotyping, and discrimination in higher education no longer exist. Additionally, participants

may have previously experienced bias, stereotyping, and discrimination, but because they were not directly asked during the study, they may not have shared that information. It will be worthwhile to monitor community college leadership trends as conditions continue to change, for better or for worse.

Moreover, feminist theory was used as a framework for this study to highlight the impact of patriarchy, hierarchies, dominance, oppression, and submission as expressed through the participants' narratives. The framework allowed the researcher to determine the influence of those factors on the essence of the unique challenges faced by women in mid-level leadership roles. Although the participants did not directly communicate experiences involving discrimination or bias, they did discuss specific leadership challenges related to gender differences. These challenges included meeting the stereotypical expectations ascribed to women, including wearing multiple hats, feeling obligated to be kind and positive to direct reports, being "everything to everyone," and struggling to balance dual roles at home and in the workplace. Some participants also described feelings of uncertainty and discomfort when communicating at work due to the fear of saying the wrong thing or being misunderstood. These feelings stem from embedded patriarchal and hierarchal norms, and they have led to additional challenges for the women leaders in this study.

Discussion

Feminist theory is used to seek truth through the voices, perspectives, and experiences of individuals (Hays & Singh, 2012; hooks, 2015; Rich, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The current study provided participants with the opportunity to tell their stories, and through their experiences, it is evident that additional support is needed from community college practitioners and leaders to promote positive leadership development in mid-level women leaders. As

emphasized by bell hooks, "structures cannot be changed by the individual; there has to be collective resistance, because you alone cannot change the nature of structures" (Lutz, 1993).

As administrators seek to fill the current and future leadership gap in community colleges, it is necessary to focus on the challenges faced by women in mid-level positions. These mid-level leaders are waiting in the pipeline for opportunities to progress into senior-level roles. The following section contains implications for practice, recommendations for practitioners and leaders, and recommendations for further research. The implications and recommendations are based on the findings of this study.

Implications for Practice

Although research focused on women leaders has continued to expand within the literature, the present study focused on filling a gap in the literature by specifically investigating the personal, professional, and organizational challenges impacting women and their professional trajectories. These women leaders in mid-level positions consistently find themselves caught in the middle – personally, as they serve in dual roles at work and home, and professionally, as they navigate between the senior-level leaders to whom they report and their own direct reports. To compound those challenges, these mid-level leaders must also deal with the constant academic, political, social, and fiscal pressures faced by today's community colleges.

As community colleges continue to look for incoming presidents and vice presidents who are equipped to handle the needs of the modern community college, women in mid-level positions should be considered. However, because of the unique needs of these women – particularly those in complex, urban institutions – additional leadership training and development is needed. Creating an effective leadership pipeline, filled with the right professional development and networking opportunities, could make this possible. The current study's

findings suggest several implications for practice to help women in mid-level positions successfully navigate their challenges in hopes of professional advancement within community colleges.

To begin, the current study's findings suggest actions to reduce the personal challenges faced by women in mid-level leadership positions. The findings indicate women's perceptions of personal challenges include determining their next steps in leadership progression, earning the required doctoral degree for senior-level advancement, balancing career and personal lives, and unwillingness to relocate for senior-level career opportunities. Senior-level administrators should understand the personal challenges faced by mid-level women leaders. To combat these challenges, flexibility, additional guidance, alternative work options, and tuition assistance should be considered when possible. Traditional organizational structures, policies, and practices should be examined and altered to create more inclusive environments that promote growth and development for those seeking senior-level leadership.

It is also important for aspiring and current women leaders to reflect on their ultimate career goals and create a general plan for pursuing those goals. They should consider ways to balance their personal and professional responsibilities, including seeking support from other women with similar experiences. For those women who have not earned a doctoral degree prior to entering their mid-level roles, they should consider the impact of pursuing a doctoral degree, including the amount of time for completion, the cost of tuition, the amount of time remaining in their careers, and the effect on their work-life balance.

Second, the findings of the current study suggest actions to limit the impact of professional challenges faced by women in mid-level positions. The findings reveal women's perceptions of professional challenges include finding mentorship, lacking professional

development opportunities, and ineffective communication. Community college leaders and practitioners need to understand the benefits of adequate mentorship and professional development experiences as a means of cultivating and retaining prospective senior-level leaders. Support from these leaders should include programmatic and financial support. College leaders should also understand the importance of communicating openly and honestly with their mid-level leaders, as this transparency will help them maintain better relationships with their faculty and staff.

This study also emphasizes the importance of mid-level women leaders seeking out mentors for themselves and reaching out to mentor other aspiring leaders, both formally and informally. Women in mid-level positions are facing limited professional development opportunities, and they must be prepared to take the initiative to create opportunities and find funding on their own. Some women feel frustrated with communication challenges, noting difficulty in maintaining honest and open relationships as well as feeling lonely and isolated at work. Women leaders should take time to reflect and consider the leadership and communication styles that will help them navigate these challenges.

Third, the current study's findings imply actions to reduce the organizational challenges faced by women leaders in mid-level positions. Recent community college trends have factored into women leaders' negative perceptions of their institutional climates and organizational structures and have led to feelings of tension, low morale, and lack of transparency. It is important for community college leaders to understand the organizational challenges faced by women in mid-level leadership positions, which result from their institutional climates and organizational structures. Institutional leaders must be forthcoming and transparent. They should encourage continuous communication and collaboration among all constituents. Senior-

level administrators should find opportunities to include various levels of faculty, staff, and students on decision-making and planning groups when possible. They should also find ways to build morale and promote community – possibly through college-wide events and celebrations – even when current situations seem dismal. Most importantly, institutional leaders must understand and acknowledge the physical and mental states of their mid-level leaders, as these leaders are in the trenches with their staff members – coordinating new and ongoing college, state, and national initiatives, directing faculty and staff who feel overworked and underpaid, and managing departments with limited budgets.

To add, women mid-level leaders must consider ways to encourage and uplift themselves and their direct reports, despite uncertainties due to declining student enrollment, reduced budgets, personnel layoffs, and changing organizational structures that lack upward mobility. Women must find strategies to navigate other perceived organizational challenges, such as narrow leadership pipelines, by finding ways to network with senior-level administrators.

Recommendations for Practitioners and Leaders

The current study provided participants with a chance to tell their own narratives and describe their lived experiences as mid-level women leaders. Giving these women a platform allowed them to be heard and to voice their concerns and needs. Based on the study's findings, there are several recommendations for community college practitioners and leaders. These recommendations include: (a) encouraging and providing opportunities and support for mentorship, (b) creating and funding professional development opportunities, and (c) assisting women leaders with doctoral degree completion.

Encourage and provide opportunities and support for mentorship. Mentorship experiences are crucial for women and their leadership progression. Women in mid-level

leadership positions find value in having role models who help them navigate the personal, professional, and organizational challenges they face as leaders. Mentorship programs, whether formal or informal, are beneficial to leaders, their institutions, and the community college system as a whole because they prepare women for senior-level advancement at institutional, state, and national levels. Community college practitioners and leaders should be open to supporting mentorship efforts, financially and programmatically, on small and large scales.

Innovative modes of mentorship development should be considered and developed, such as virtual mentorship programming through the use of technology. Mid-level women leaders could have the opportunity to meet with other community college administrators in an online environment through a series of meetings, including an in-person meeting at a state or national conference. It would benefit women to develop relationships with other leaders within and outside of their current environments.

Create and fund professional development opportunities. Professional development opportunities are limited for mid-level women leaders at institutional, state, and national levels. There is little to no formal training for dean and director positions. Most women progressively ascend through leadership roles as faculty or administrators into their middle management positions. Ongoing training is needed to ensure women leaders are adequately developing their leadership and managerial skills, understanding current community college trends, and remaining up-to-date with national best practices.

As college budgets have been reduced, professional development funding has also been reduced. The creation of and funding for more professional development opportunities is recommended to limit the personal, professional, and organizational challenges faced by women in mid-level leadership positions. As previously mentioned with mentorship programs,

innovative modes of professional development should also be developed. Instead of commonly used webinars and presentations, funding could be directed to develop dynamic and interactive trainings, workshops, and seminars, where leaders could connect and interact in an online environment with other community college professionals in different regions, states, or countries.

Assist women leaders with doctoral degree completion. Promotion to senior-level community college leadership generally requires the acquisition of a terminal degree. For women in mid-level leadership positions, pursuing a doctoral degree, while balancing career and personal responsibilities, can be a daunting task. Institutional leaders should offer support and flexibility to encourage women to complete this endeavor. Tuition assistance should be provided, including options other than traditional tuition reimbursement, which can still be an obstacle for those who are not able to provide upfront financing.

Recommendations for Further Research

As community colleges continue to experience turnover among presidents and other senior-level leaders, the urgent need to fill the leadership gap with qualified and experienced leaders, who are equipped to handle the shifting needs of the modern community college, will persist. Women remain underrepresented in senior-level administrative positions within community colleges. Women in mid-level positions will be critical in filling the leadership gap. Additional empirical study focused on these leaders will provide additional understanding and insight regarding their challenges and developmental needs.

The researcher suggests recommendations for further qualitative research focusing on the personal, professional, and organizational challenges of mid-level leaders. First, further research should be conducted with women in mid-level positions in other regions of the country than the southeastern US. Although most community colleges are experiencing similar pressures, there

may be unique situations based on locality. Second, additional research should be focused on women of color in mid-level positions. Two participants in the current study commented on the internal and external pressures they have felt in their positions, not only as women, but as women of color.

Third, further research should be conducted with women in mid-level positions in suburban and rural community colleges. There are more rural community colleges than urban, and leadership in rural community colleges may present different challenges for women. Additionally, rural colleges provide more opportunities for mid-level leaders who are seeking their first senior-level positions due to the number of candidates seeking employment in those geographical areas with lower populations. Finally, further study should focus on the challenges faced by men in mid-level positions in various community college settings. Several participants in the current study commented that some of the professional and organizational challenges were common to men and women. One participant believed new parents, both men and women, faced similar personal challenges when dealing with work-life balance.

Concluding Remarks

The growth of women leaders in community colleges continues to increase, but women remain underrepresented in senior-level leadership positions. The American community college system, which expanded at dramatic rates beginning in the 1960s, is currently experiencing severe declines in enrollment, changes in educational policies, reduced government funding, and shifts in the needs of its constituents. Moreover, community college presidents and other senior-level administrators are retiring and changing positions at rapid rates, creating a noticeable gap in leadership.

Community college leaders and practitioners must consider women in mid-level positions to fill the leadership gap. There is a need to identify and understand the personal, professional, and organizational challenges faced by these women. Women leaders face different barriers than men leaders. By better understanding the unique challenges of women, community college administrators can provide better training, professional development, and mentorship opportunities. They can establish policies and practices that facilitate leadership progression among women leaders. They can ensure their community college environments, which have long been organized based on patriarchal hierarchies, are diverse, welcoming, and inclusive.

References

American Council on Education (ACE). (2012). *The American college president 2012*.

    Washington, DC: American Council on Education, Center for Policy Analysis.

American Council on Education (ACE). (2017). *The American college president 2017*.

    Washington, DC: American Council on Education, Center for Policy Analysis.

Amey, M. J. (2006). *Breaking traditions: New community college leadership programs meet 21st*

    century needs. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.

Amey, M. J., Vanderlinden, K., &. Brown, D. (2002). Perspectives on community college

    leadership: Twenty years in the making. *Community College Journal of Research and*

    Practice, *26*(7), 573-589.

Aspen Institute, & Achieving the Dream. (2017). *Crisis and opportunity: Aligning the*

    community college presidency with student success. Washington, DC: Authors.

Ballenger, J. (2010). Women's access to higher education leadership: Cultural and structural

    barriers. *Forum on Public Policy Online*, *2010*(5), 1-20.

Berkery, E., Morley, M., & Tiernan, S. (2013). Beyond gender role stereotypes and requisite

    managerial characteristics. *Gender in Management*, *28*(5), 278. doi: 10.1108/GM-12-

    2012-0098

Bingham, T., & Nix, S. J. (2010). Women faculty in higher education: A case study on gender

    bias. *Forum on Public Policy Online*, *2010*(2), 1-12.

Bower, G. G., & Hums, M. A. (2013). Career paths of women working in leadership positions

    within intercollegiate athletic administration. *Advancing women in leadership*, *33*, 1-14.

Bulick, N., & Frey, S. (2017). The working woman in higher education: Reflections of the past,

    hope for the future. *Reference Reviews*, *31*(2), 1-7.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (2010). Carnegie classification:

    Descriptions: Basic classification. Retrieved from

    http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/basic.php

Cejda, B. D. (2008). In their own words: Woman chief academic officers discuss the community

    college and their experiences. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, *6*(3), 171-

    185.

Chisolm-Burns, M. A., Spivey, C. A., Hagemann, T., & Josephson, M. A. (2017). Women in

    leadership and the bewildering glass ceiling. *American Journal of Health-System*

    Pharmacy, *74*(5), 312-324.

Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S. Code § 2000e

Clayborne, H. L., & Hamrick, F. (2007). Rearticulating the leadership experiences of African

    American women in midlevel student affairs administration. *NASPA Journal*, *44*(1), 123-

    146.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA:

    Sage Publications.

Cotter, D. A., Hermsen, J. M., Ovadia, S., & Vanneman, R. (2001). The glass ceiling effect.

    Social Forces, *80*(2), 655-682.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five*

    approaches (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into*

    practice, *39*(3), 124-130.

Day, D. V., Fleenor, J. W., Atwater, L. E., Sturm, R. E., & McKee, A. (2014). Advances in

    leader and leadership development: A review of 25 years of research and theory. The

    Leadership Quarterly, 25(1), 63-82. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.004

Dominici, F., Fried, L. P., & Zeger, S. L. (2009). So few women leaders. *Academe*, *95*(4), 25–27.

Donohue-Mendoza, M. (2012). The supervision and career advancement of women in

    community college administration. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community*

    College, *19*(2), 38-46.

Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2003). The female leadership advantage: an evaluation of the

    evidence. *The leadership quarterly*, *14*, 807–834.

Eagly, A. H., Gartzia, L., & Carli, L. L. (2014). Female advantage: revisited. In S. Kumra, R.

    Simpson, & R. Burke (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of gender in organizations*. New

    York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational,

    transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: A meta-analysis comparing men and

    women. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129*(4). 569-591.

Eddy, P. (2008). Reflections of women leading community colleges. *The Community College*

    Enterprise, *14*(1), 49-66.

Eddy, P. L. (2017). Preparing community college leaders to meet tomorrow's challenges.

    Journal for the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education, *2*, 127-145.

Equal Pay Act of 1963, 29 U.S. Code Chapter 8 § 206(d)

Federal Glass Ceiling Commission. (1995). *Good for business: Making full use of the nation's*

    human capital. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor.

Fritz, C., & van Knippenberg, D. (2017). Gender and leadership aspiration: The impact of

    organizational identification. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, *38*(8),

    1018-1037.

Gamble, E. D., & Turner, N. J. (2015). Career ascension of African American women in

    executive positions in postsecondary institutions. *Journal of Organizational Culture,*

    Communications, and Conflict, *19*(1), 82-101.

Gasser, C. E., & Shaffer, K. S. (2014). Career development of women in academia: Traversing

    the leaky pipeline. *The Professional Counselor*, *4*(4), 332-352. doi: 10.15241/ceg.4.332

Geiger, R. L. (2016). The ten generations of American higher education. In M. Bastedo, P.

    Altbach, & P. Gumport (Eds.), *American higher education in the twenty-first century* (pp.

    3-33). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gill, K., & Jones, S. J. (2013). Fitting in: Community college female executive leaders share

    their experiences – a study in West Texas. *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher*

    Education, *(6)*1, 48-70. doi: 10.1515/njawhe-2013-0004

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative

    research. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Glass, C., & Cook, A. (2016). Leading at the top: Understanding women's challenges above the

    glass ceiling. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *(27)*1, 51-63. doi: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.09.003

Growe, R., & Montgomery, P. (2000). Women and the leadership paradigm: Bridging the gender

    gap. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, *17E*.

    Retrieved from http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic Journal Volumes/Growe,

    Roslin Women and the Leadership Paradigm Bridging the Gender Gap.pdf

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Hooks, b. (2015). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. New York: NY: Routledge.

Hoyt, C. L., & Murphy, S. E. (2016). Managing to clear the air: Stereotype threat, women, and leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *27*(3), 1-13.

Kosiewicz, H., Ngo, F., & Fong, K. (2016). Alternative models to deliver developmental math: Issues of use and student access. *Community College Review*, *44*(3), 205-231.

Lammers, J., & Gast, A. (2017). Stressing the advantages of female leadership can place women at a disadvantage. *Social Psychology*, *48*(1), 28-39.

Lassiter, W. L. (2013). Capacity building: Reshaping urban community college resources in response to emerging challenges. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2013*(162), 85-92.

Leatherwood, L., & Williams, M. (2008). Gender and career paths. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, *6*(4), 261-273.

Linehan, M., & Scullion, H. (2008). The development of female global managers: The role of mentoring and networking. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *83*(1), 29-40. doi:10.1007 /s10551-007-9657-0

Lutz, H. (1993). Feminist theory in practice: An interview with bell hooks. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *16*(4), 419-425.

Martin, J. (2015). Transformational and transactional leadership: An exploration of gender, experience, and institution type. *Portal: Libraries & the Academy*, *15*(2), 331-351.

Mawson, B. (2010). Gender and leadership in children's play. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *35*(3), 115-123.

McEldowney, R. P., Bobrowski, P., & Gramberg, A. (2009). Factors affecting the next generation of women leaders: Mapping the challenges, antecedents, and consequences of effective leadership. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, *3*(2), 24-30. doi:10.1002/jls

McKenney, C. B. (2000). *Women chief academic officers of public community colleges: Career paths and mobility factors* (Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (UMI No. 9963524)

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Moustakas, C. E. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Myran, G., & Parsons, M. H. (2013). Overview: The future of the urban community college. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2013*(162), 7-18.

Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Obers, N. (2014). Career success for women academics in higher education: Choices and challenges. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *28*(3), 1107-1122.

Office for Civil Rights (OCR), U.S. Department of Education. (2015, April). *Title IX resource guide*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-title-ix-coordinators-guide-201504.pdf

Parker, P. (2015). The historical role of women in higher education. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research*, *5*(1), 3-14.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Phillippe, K. (2016, April). AACC CEO Survey: Compensation. Washington, DC: American
Association of Community Colleges.

Rich, J. (2014). *Modern feminist theory* (2nd ed.). Penrith, CA: Humanities-Ebooks.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.).
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Rudman, L. A., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Nauts, S. (2012). Status incongruity and
backlash effects: Defending the gender hierarchy motivates prejudice against female
leaders. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *48*(1), 165-179.

Schudde, L. T., & Goldrick-Rab, S. (2016). Extending opportunity, perpetuating privilege:
Institutional stratification amid education expansion. In M. Bastedo, P. Altbach, & P.
Gumport (Eds.), *American higher education in the twenty-first century* (pp. 84-105).
Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Sherman Newcomb, W., Beaty, D. M., Sanzo, K., & Peters-Hawkins, A. (2013). Finding our
stride: Young women professors of educational leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*,
23(4), 664-684.

Shults, C. (2001). *The critical impact of impending retirements on community college leadership*.
Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.

Smith, D. G. (2016). The diversity imperative: Moving to the next generation. In M. Bastedo, P.
Altbach, & P. Gumport (Eds.), *American higher education in the twenty-first century* (pp.
375-399). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Sturm, R. E., Taylor, S. N., Atwater, L. E., & Braddy, P. W. (2014). Leader self-awareness: An
examination and implications of women's under-prediction. *Journal of Organizational
Behavior*, *35*(5), 657-677. doi: 10.1002/job.1915

Tekle, R. (2012). *Compensation and benefits of community college CEOS: 2012*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. (n.d.). About Carnegie Classification. Retrieved from http://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/index.php

Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, P.L. 102-166 § 1, 105 Stat. 1071

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S. Code § 2000e

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S. Code § 1681

Townsend, B. K., & Twombly, S. B. (2007). Accidental equity: The status of women in the community college. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *40*, 208–217.

Twombly, S. B. (1995). Gendered images of community college leadership: What messages they send. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *89*, 67–77.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2018). *About metropolitan and micropolitan*. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/metro-micro/about.html

U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *Fall 2015 Enrollment Survey*.

U.S. Department of Labor. (1991). *A report on the glass ceiling initiative*. Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). (n.d.). *Facts about sexual harassment*. Retrieved from https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/fs-sex.cfm

Van Maanen, J. (1979). Reclaiming qualitative methods for organizational research: A preface. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *24*(4), 520-526.

Vial, A. C., Napier, J. L., & Brescoll, V. L. (2016). A bed of thorns: Female leaders and the self-reinforcing cycle of illegitimacy. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *27*(3), 1-15.

Yearout, T.A., Williams, M.R., & Brenner R.J. (2017). Impediments to the advancement of

women at community college. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership.* doi:

10.13014/K25H7DF7. ISSN: 2379-2191

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction

Hello. My name is Kia Hardy, and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I am interested in exploring the perceived challenges faced by mid-level women leaders in urban community colleges. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your personal experiences at your institution. There are no right or wrong answers. I want you to express your honest feelings. I will be audio-recording this interview, as I will not be able to capture everything you say through my notes. Your answers will remain confidential, and you will not be personally identified by your name or institution. Before we begin, here is an informed consent form. Please review this document. It provides an overview of the study and explains your rights as a participant. If at any time you want to stop the interview, you can do so. The interview will last for about an hour, and I will ask you 15 open-ended questions. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? If not, I will get started with the first question.

Interview Questions

1. Describe your academic and professional background.

2. What are your career goals, and how do you plan to attain them?

3. What, if any, personal challenges have you experienced in your current position?

4. How would you describe your work-life balance?

5. What strategies have you used to navigate personal challenges that have impacted your career?

6. How would you describe your professional initiative?

7. How have mentors influenced your professional journey?

8. Describe your experiences mentoring other aspiring female leaders?

9. What types of professional development opportunities have you been afforded in your current position?

10. In what ways have you attempted to increase mentorship or professional development opportunities?

11. How are aspiring female leaders funneled through your institution's leadership pipeline? How do you think this process could be improved?

12. How would you describe your college's cultural climate?

13. Describe any times when you have been able to network with senior-level leaders at your college?

14. How do you perceive your ability to gain additional leadership opportunities at your institution?

15. Based on your professional experiences to date, what is one thing you would have done differently?

Conclusion

This concludes the interview. Thank you for your openness and honesty. If I have any follow-up questions, I will reach out to you via email. After this interview is transcribed, I will send you a copy to review before proceeding with the data analysis. If you do not wish to review the transcription, that is okay. If you have any questions for me regarding the study, please contact me via phone or email. I appreciate you taking the time to contribute to my research study by detailing your leadership experiences.

APPENDIX B

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE EMAIL

Greetings:

My name is Kia Hardy, and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Community College Leadership Ph.D. program at Old Dominion University. My research involves the personal, professional, and organizational challenges facing women deans and directors, namely at urban community colleges. I am interested in the experiences of women in mid-level positions, inside and outside of the workplace, especially at larger, more complex organizations.

Based on your directory information on [participant's institution's] website, you fit the qualifications for my study, and I would like to interview you. I can send you more information on the study, including an informed consent form detailing your voluntary participation. The names, titles, and departments of the participants and the various community colleges in my study will not be identified in my dissertation, only the feedback and general themes I find during my research. The interview will most likely take around 45 minutes, but I would like to schedule a meeting for an hour just in case.

I understand that you are very busy in your role, but I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you. Is there a good time to meet with you in the next few weeks? I would prefer to interview you in your office, so I could meet you as early or as late as you need, depending on your availability during your work day.

I appreciate your consideration.

Best,
Kia Hardy

APPENDIX C

PREPARATION FOR INTERVIEW EMAIL

Greetings:

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I look forward to meeting with you in your office on (date) at (time). In preparation for our interview, please review and sign the attached consent form. In addition, please also print and complete the attached brief survey. As a reminder, the interview should not last for more than an hour.

I look forward to seeing you.

Best,
Kia Hardy

Attachments: Informed Consent Form
                    Pre-Interview Survey

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: The Challenges Facing Women Leaders in Mid-Level Positions at Urban Community Colleges

INTRODUCTION
The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research and to record the consent of those who say YES. The proposed study is "The Challenges Facing Women Leaders in Mid-Level Positions at Urban Community Colleges." Subjects will participate in a one-on-one interview.

RESEARCHERS
Dr. Mitchell R. Williams, Associate Professor, Ed.D, Old Dominion University, Educational Foundations and Leadership
Kia Hardy, Doctoral Degree Candidate, Old Dominion University, Educational Foundations and Leadership – Community College Leadership

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
Although studies have examined the leadership challenges faced by women leaders in community colleges, there has been a focus on senior-level leaders, namely presidents. There is a need to assess the leadership experiences of women leaders in mid-level administrative positions and to understand the unique personal and professional challenges faced at this administrative level. Identifying the different mobility challenges faced by women leaders will help administrators provide better navigational tools for women, ensure that their institutional climates are inclusive, and promote initiatives that cultivate diversity.

If you decide to participate, you will join a study involving research on women mid-level leaders and their perceptions of challenges in urban community colleges. Your responses will allow researchers to determine ways for institutions to better understand the challenges faced by women leaders and to foster support and professional development for women in mid-level positions. If you say YES, then your participation will last for the duration of a one-hour interview. A minimum range of eight women will participate in separate interviews.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
RISKS: If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of potentially being linked back to your interview responses. Negative responses could be damaging to your professional status. However, the researchers will reduce these risks. The community colleges and participants will not be identified in this study. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain confidentiality and protect their identities. In addition to changing the names of the community colleges, the geographic locations of the community colleges will only be described as being located in one state in the Southeastern United States. Participants will not be individually described by their specific job titles. Additionally, the recorded interview tapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed. All documentation related to the study will be stored in a password-protected file in the researcher's office.

BENEFITS: The main benefit to you for participating in this study is to help the researchers understand your experience as a woman in a mid-level administrative position. Others may benefit by better understanding the challenges faced by women leaders and by fostering better professional development for women in mid-level positions.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS
The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information confidential. The researchers will remove identifiers from the information that may link back to you. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is okay for you to decide to leave the interview after the session begins. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe your answers do not reflect the necessary criteria for the study.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of any harm, injury, or illness arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Kia Hardy at 757-822-1421, Dr. Laura Chezan, the current IRB chair, at 757-683-7055 at Old Dominion University, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460, who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you and that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. Mitchell R. Williams: 757-683-4344
Kia Hardy: 757-822-1421

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. Laura Chezan, IRB Chair, Darden College of Education and Professional Studies, 110 Lions Child Study Center, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529, 757-683-7055.

Importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researchers should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	**Date**
Parent / Legally Authorized Representative's Printed Name & Signature (If Applicable)	**Date**
Witness' Printed Name & Signature (If Applicable)	**Date**

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	**Date**

APPENDIX E

PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY

The Challenges Facing Women Mid-Level Leaders at Urban Community Colleges

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. In preparation for our face-to-face interview, please complete the following short survey to provide more personal background information.

1. How old are you?

   a. 20-29

   b. 30-39

   c. 40-49

   d. 50-59

   e. 60 or older

2. What is your race and/or ethnic background?

   a. American Indian or Alaska Native

   b. Asian

   c. Black or African American

   d. Hispanic or Latino

   e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

   f. White

   g. Two or more races

3. What is your marital status?

   a. Married or in a domestic partnership

   b. Single (never married)

   c. Divorced

    d. Separated

    e. Widowed

4. How many children under the age of 18 do you have?

    a. 0

    b. 1

    c. 2

    d. 3

    e. 4

    f. 5 or more

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

    a. Bachelor's degree

    b. Master's degree

    c. Doctoral degree

    d. Professional degree (MD, JD)

    e. Other _____

6. How many years have you been in your current position?

    a. 1-5 years

    b. 5-10 years

    c. More than 10 years

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT THANK YOU EMAIL AND INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT REVIEW

Greetings:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study exploring the perceived challenges faced by women mid-level leaders in urban community colleges. The information you shared is significant and beneficial to this research.

As I mentioned when we met, I am providing you with a copy of the interview transcript. Please take a moment to review the attached document. I want to be sure I was able to capture your thoughts and did not miss anything.

Note that any identifiers, such as your name, institution, specific department or title, or location will be omitted in my final report.

Please let me know by [date within one week of email] if there are any changes you feel should be made.

If you have any questions for me regarding the study, please contact me via phone or email. I appreciate you taking the time to contribute to my research study by detailing your leadership experiences.

Best,
Kia Hardy

Attachment: Interview Transcript

VITA

KIA L. HARDY
Old Dominion University
Darden College of Education, 120 Education Building
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
Norfolk, VA 23529

EDUCATION

Ph.D., 2019, Community College Leadership, Old Dominion University
M.Ed., 2008, Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership (Higher Education Administration),
    The College of William & Mary
B.A., 2005, Sociology, The College of William & Mary

EXPERIENCE

2018-Present	Interim Dean of Student Services
	Tidewater Community College, Norfolk, VA
2014-2018	Lead Counselor
	Tidewater Community College, Norfolk, VA
2014-2018	Instructor, Student Development Course
	Tidewater Community College, Norfolk, VA
2011-2014	Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions
	North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC
2008-2011	Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Admission
	The College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA
2005-2008	Assistant Women's Basketball Coach
	The College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Hardy, K. (2018, May). Understanding Factors Impacting Student Success. Tidewater
    Community College Learning Institute, Portsmouth, VA.
Hardy, K. (2017, May). Advising 101. Tidewater Community College Learning Institute,
    Virginia Beach, VA.

SERVICES

- Virginia Network Senior Leadership Seminar, American Council on Education, 2019-2020
- VCCS Academic Management Seminar (VAMS) for New Deans and Directors, Old Dominion University, 2018
- Council of Deans and Directors, Virginia Community College System, 2018-2019
- Advising Steering Committee (JLARC Response), Virginia Community College System, 2018
- Advising Task Force, Tidewater Community College, 2017-2018
- Chancellor's Leadership Academy, Virginia Community College System, 2017