

## ABSTRACT

MORRISSEY, SHARON ELIZABETH VANHOOK. Female Community College President's Career Development Processes: A Qualitative Analysis. (Under the direction of Dr. George B. Vaughan.)

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of female community college presidents' career development processes and of the experiences that influenced their decisions to become community college presidents. Although more women than ever are moving into the highest positions of leadership in community colleges, little qualitative information is available that describes their career development experiences. Traditional career development theory is inadequate for describing or predicting women's career development behavior. Researchers have identified the need for a theory of career development that accounts for the influences of gender-role socialization, multiple role responsibilities, and developmental learning to describe women's career choice behavior.

This study used a qualitative multiple-case study approach. Five female community college presidents shared their career development stories through in-depth interviews. The participants in this study were all serving in their first presidency and were the first female presidents at their respective colleges. The conceptual model that emerged from this study illustrates the four components of the women's career development experiences. The first component, Formative Experiences, describes the background and early career experiences that influenced the women's career choice decisions. The second component, Key Developmental

Experiences, describes the work roles, formal and informal learning, and mentoring experiences that helped the women gain technical and professional competence in community college administration. The third component, Multiple Role Challenges, describes the challenges of balancing family responsibilities with the demands of a career and the influence of those challenges on the women's career development. The fourth component, Career Achievement, describes the importance of work in the women's lives and their satisfaction in their roles as presidents.

The key findings of this study indicate that socialization experiences, lack of exposure to female role models in nontraditional roles, mentors, formal and informal learning experiences, self-efficacy related to the performance of complex job responsibilities, and multiple role challenges were factors that influenced the women's career development. Four of the five women indicated that their ambition to become presidents developed gradually as they moved into increasingly complex work roles.

**FEMALE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS'  
CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES:  
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

by

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## DEDICATION

Completion of this dissertation marks the achievement of a personal and professional goal. I would never have accomplished this goal without the love and support of my husband, Tim, and our daughter, Maggie. They have patiently endured my long hours of writing, given me support when I experienced frustration, and steadfastly encouraged me to achieve this goal.

Tim, thank you for your support, your patience, and your excellent meals. Maggie, thank you for recognizing and honoring my love of learning. I hope that I have inspired you to pursue your education as far as you can go and to strive for excellence in all that you do.

## BIOGRAPHY

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Sharon is married to Tim Morrissey. Their daughter, Maggie, is 13 years old.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, women have made astonishing progress in achieving top leadership positions in the nation's universities and community colleges. Between 1975 and 1995, the number of female presidents at all institutions of higher education increased from 148 to 379 out of over 3,000 institutions (Brown, 2000). In community colleges, the number of female presidents rose from 11 in 1975 to 41 in 1980 and to 102 by the end of 1989 (Touchton, Shavlik, & Davis, 1991). By 2001, women held 27.8% of all community college presidencies (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). Although women have made significant gains in achieving the community college presidency, men still outnumber women by almost four to one. Nonetheless, women have broken through the "glass ceiling" of the community college presidency.

In gaining access to the community college presidency, female presidents have moved into a career field that traditionally has been outside of society's expectations and roles for women (Schreiber, 1998). Researchers who study women's career development processes have found that women who succeed in achieving high-level corporate or administrative positions in business or education environments must overcome barriers related to gender and role socialization (Farmer & Associates, 1997; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Levinson, 1996; Schreiber, 1998). Based on an assumption that socialization processes influence women's career processes, researchers have begun to examine the roles of gender and social influences on

women's career development (Bierema, 1999; Farmer & Associates, 1997; Schreiber, 1998).

Weisman and Vaughan's (2002) recent study of community college presidents showed that female community college presidents tend to follow the same career pathways as their male counterparts, moving from chief academic officer to the presidency. However, research on career development indicates that these women will not have experienced the same career development processes that their male counterparts followed (Farmer & Associates, 1997; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Schreiber, 1998). While researchers have begun to develop propositions and constructs that lead toward a comprehensive theory of women's career development processes, little research has been conducted that examines the career development processes of female community college presidents.

### Research Purpose

Studies of female presidents' career pathways have established trends and provided rich, descriptive demographic data about female presidents' family influences, educational backgrounds, marital status, age, mentors and role models, and career pathways (Buddemeier, 1998; Touchton et al., 1991; Vaughan, 1989). In 1989, Vaughan surveyed female presidents to identify the barriers they had encountered on the pathway to the presidency and found that the women perceived discrimination in the workplace, double standards, gender bias in interviews, and marital or maternal barriers to their career development. In 1998, Buddemeier found that female

community college presidents continued to perceive the same kinds of barriers in their career progression as those identified by Vaughan a decade earlier.

These evocative studies lead to further questions about women's developmental preparation for the community college presidency. What are the motivators that lead women to choose the community college presidency as a career? What positive and negative roles do other people play in their career development processes? What are the barriers that women have overcome and how did they do so? In what other ways has gender influenced their career development?

The purpose of this study was to examine women's developmental preparation for the community college presidency using qualitative methodology in order to develop rich descriptions of the women's lived experiences. Three overall research questions, based in social learning theory, focused this study on the career development experiences of female community college presidents:

1. What are the formative experiences, such as family background, gender-role socialization, and early work roles, that influence a female community college president's career development?
2. What are the key developmental factors, such as mentors and role models, barriers, and developmental learning experiences, that influence a female community college president's career development?
3. What are the personal factors, such as skills and abilities, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and career-family conflicts, that influence a female community college president's career development?

The general approach to this research study was to develop greater understanding about the career development of female community college presidents through an in-depth multiple case study involving female presidents selected from a state system. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the qualitative researcher seeks “answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning” (p. 8). Based on an assumption that career development processes are social experiences involving complex interactions between personal characteristics, environmental influences, and developmental factors, this research study utilized qualitative processes to clarify the complexity of the career development and choice processes for female community college presidents. Merriam (2001) described the multiple-case study as a research approach “anchored in real-life situations [that results in] a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon” (p. 41). The case-study approach provides a broad insight into women’s career development processes and expands our understanding of their experiences.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on social learning theory and its implications for women’s career development processes. Applied to career development, social learning theory is used to identify and understand the personal and environmental factors that shape a person's decisions about careers (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Within this conceptual framework, this study examined the background, environmental, and personal experiences of selected female community

college presidents in order to gain a better understanding of how these experiences influenced their career development and their choice of the community college presidency as a career goal within a traditionally male-dominated, hierarchical culture.

Until recently, the administrative structure of community colleges has been male-dominated. Twombly (1995) looked at the images of leadership in the literature about community colleges and found that gendered images, such as “commanders, builders, managers, heroes, blue chippers, and visionaries” predominated (p. 68). Twombly argued that the strong, militaristic images portrayed in the literature shape ideas and conceptions about community college leaders and become standards for determining who has access to power. These traditional images make it difficult to envision women in community college leadership roles. Indeed, before 1970 few community college leaders were women, and male domination of administrative positions was taken for granted (Frye, 1995). Even a decade ago, there were states that had not yet appointed a woman to head a public college or university, and only 10% of higher education’s executive leaders were women (Tisinger, 1991). In a study of community college presidents conducted in the 1980s, Vaughan (1986) found that most community college presidents were “white males from largely blue-collar backgrounds” (p. 235). In 1991, Tisinger analyzed reasons for the absence of women in the role of executive leaders in higher education and concluded that the presidency was viewed as “not a woman's job” (p. 1).

During the past decade, women have succeeded in moving into executive leadership positions, and researchers have begun to examine how they have been

successful in corporate, male-dominated cultures. Research shows that women's leadership styles differ from men's and that women bring different values and expectations to the workplace. Women's leadership and workplace values are based on inclusiveness, intuition, connectedness, collaboration, and empathy (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), while men's leadership and workplace values are based on hierarchy, competition, and elitism (Bierema, 1999). To examine how women adapt and develop their leadership abilities in a male-dominated work environment, Bierema (1999) conducted a multi-case study of corporate executive women. The results of her study indicate that the women who succeeded in progressing from low and mid-management to executive leadership positions experienced several stages of development, including a phase of learning how to succeed in a "culture that has been created and controlled by white male executives" (p. 107).

While women are succeeding in achieving executive leadership positions, classical career development theory appears to be limited in explaining women's developmental processes (Bierema, 1999; Farmer & Associates, 1997; Schreiber, 1998). Classical career development theory dates back to 1909, when Parson proposed that career choice is a process of matching a person's interests and abilities with a compatible work experience (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Schreiber (1998) argued that while men are socialized to explore multiple career interests and to develop fully their abilities, women's opportunities for developing interests and abilities are limited by socialization processes which encourage them to pursue

gender-appropriate, caregiver professions such as librarian, teacher, social worker, secretary, and nurse. In addition, Schreiber observed that traditional career development theories are based on an implicit assumption that career progression occurs in an uninterrupted, upward advancement through hierarchical job stages. However, because women tend to move in and out of their professions as their life circumstances change, they experience career interruptions that may negatively affect career advancement.

Until the 1960s, research in the social sciences used male subjects, and the theories and models that emerged were applied to the lives of women without consideration of how women learn, develop, and create knowledge (Bierema, 1998; Schreiber, 1998). Only in the past two decades have social learning theorists begun to acknowledge that women and men develop differently and that theories that emerge from studying male experiences may be irrelevant for explaining female experiences or female behavior. Schreiber (1998), Bierema (1998), and Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998) describe the inadequacies of classical career development theories in explaining women's career development processes.

In her study of corporate executive women, Bierema (1999) found that Holland's career development typology model, which is based on Parson's classical trait-factor match model, did not adequately describe the career development of the women in her study, many of whom "wound up in executive careers by happenstance, or by listening to what their male mentors advised them to do" rather than by matching interests and abilities with career opportunities (p. 117). In a longitudinal

study of women's career development, Farmer (1997) found that women experience complexity in career development because of sex-role socialization and societal expectations about appropriate roles for women, which lead them to limit their career choices. The results of Farmer's study suggest that socialization affects career choices and motivations, especially for women who are socialized to be homemakers and raise children (Farmer, 1997).

Farmer and Associates (1997) used social learning theory as a theoretical framework to examine women's career development experiences. Farmer's conceptual model for women's career motivation includes the personal and environmental factors that influence women's career achievement, either by inhibiting or facilitating career motivation. The personal variables in Farmer's model are related primarily to gender role socialization, academic self-esteem, success or failure self-concept, and home-career conflict. The environmental variables are related primarily to family support, socialization experiences, and discrimination in the community and at work. Farmer based her model on Bandura's 1969, 1978, and 1986 research on social learning, which views learning as a triadic-reciprocal interactive process between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences. Social learning theory assumes that behaviors change over time as a result of new experiences, ideas, and self-concepts. Social learning theory also assumes that the individual is an agent in his or her learning.

Like the corporate women described by Bierema who have "ventured into a culture they did not create" (1999, p. 108), female community college presidents find

themselves in an academic administrative culture that has been dominated by men for many decades. To better understand how women have achieved success in a male-dominated academic administrative culture, this study examined female community college presidents' career development experiences through the lens of social learning theory by adapting Farmer's (1997) theoretical framework. This study examined the factors that influenced female community college presidents' career development. The factors studied include background experiences, gender role socialization, work experiences, formal and informal learning experiences, role models and mentors, and career-family conflict.

#### Significance of the Study for Research and Practice

More women than ever are moving into the highest positions of leadership in community colleges. Vaughan (1989), Buddemeier (1998) and others have described the pathways that lead women to the presidency, but little qualitative information is available that describes the lived experiences of women who rose through the ranks of community college faculty and administration and into the presidency. This study was designed to explore the nuances of female presidents' career development experiences and to describe the factors that influenced their career development.

The study has several implications for practice. First, the study describes how the female presidents have made meaning of their career development experiences, and these descriptions provide a broader understanding of the significant factors that influenced their career development processes. The findings from this study also may

help to inform women aspiring to become community college presidents about potential influences on their career development. In addition, academic leaders in higher education institutions may use the study's findings to build awareness of the social and cultural factors that influence women's career development processes.

The study's findings may also have implications for research. Researchers who study women's career development see a need for the development of a comprehensive theory on women's career development that takes into account gender, sex role socialization, career experiences, and learning (Bierema, 1998; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Schreiber, 1998). The descriptions from this study may lead to further research that will contribute to the development of such theory.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the topic area, framed the purpose focus for the study, provided a theoretical conceptual framework appropriate for the focus of the study, described the use of qualitative research and the multiple-case study approach, and outlined the significance of the study for research and practice.

Chapter Two examines the relevant literature that was used as a foundation for this study of female community college presidents' career development processes.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence female community college presidents' career development processes. This chapter reviews the literature relevant to this research study. The major areas of research are divided into three sections. The first section summarizes the literature on career development theory and its application to women's career development processes. The second section reviews the literature on social learning theory as a means for identifying and understanding the gender and socialization issues related to women's career development. Finally, the third section examines the literature on the community college presidency as it relates to career pathways, barriers to career progression experienced by female community college presidents, and the role of mentor relationships in overcoming career barriers.

#### Career Development Theory

##### *Overview of Classical Career Development Theories*

Vocational development theory emerged in 1909 with Parson's simple idea that if people actively engage in vocational choice rather than relying on chance, they will be more satisfied with their careers (Brown & Brooks, 1996). The factors in Parson's theory are (1) a self-knowledge of aptitudes, abilities, interests, and resources; (2) an understanding of the advantages, disadvantages, and requirements for different

occupations; and (3) the ability to understand how aptitudes and abilities relate to job requirements. World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II produced a need to match individuals with jobs they could perform successfully. Thus, researchers developed tests to measure interests, aptitudes, and personalities and to match those traits to job factors. Parson's ideas about active engagement in vocational decision-making and about matching aptitudes and abilities to job skills underlie most modern theories of career development (Brown & Brooks, 1996).

A significant shift in vocational choice theory occurred in 1951 when Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, and Herma proposed that career development is a lifelong, developmental process (Brown & Brooks, 1996). In 1953, Donald Super expanded the concept of career choice as a developmental process with the publication of a theory that combined Parson's theory with developmental psychology and sociological theory (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997). Super's theory was later expanded to encompass a "life-span, life-space" approach to career development that attempted to match a person's abilities and traits throughout his or her life stages with career interests (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). Super attempted to develop a comprehensive picture of multiple-role careers and to identify their determinants and interactions.

In 1959, John Holland extended Parson's trait-factor match theory by developing a typology of personality traits, interests, aptitudes, and occupations (Spokane, 1996). Using six personality or interest types, Holland's model was designed to explain the interactions of certain personality types with specific

occupational environments and to predict behavior that would occur in those environments (Spokane, 1996). This model, also called the “person-environment fit” model, assumed that a person moved in and out of work environments when there was no longer a perceived “fit.” Holland’s typology for matching personality types to occupations was widely used for several decades and was considered “the most influential model of vocational choice making currently in existence” (Brown & Brooks, 1996, p. 3).

The theories of Ginzberg et al., Super, and Holland are significant because they establish the premise that vocational behavior is a developmental process that involves matching aptitudes and abilities with occupational factors.

#### *Overview of Theories Related to Women’s Career Development*

Researchers have studied women’s work patterns and vocational choice behaviors since the 1950s. Most of the research was conducted in three stages, which spanned the four decades between 1950 and 1990. These stages have been identified by Fitzgerald, Fassinger, and Betz (1995) as pre-theoretical stages. During these stages, the study of women’s career behaviors focused on career vs. homemaking orientation, traditionalism of choice, and career salience.

Because women who worked outside the home in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were considered unique, researchers focused on the characteristics that differentiated career-oriented women from homemakers in an effort to study why women pursued careers outside the home. The research conducted during this stage focused on

understanding women's career-versus-homemaking orientation. Researchers developed questionnaires and inventories designed to classify women as either family- or career-oriented and to explain their work behaviors. In 1963, Sobol developed a typology to explain a woman's choice of whether or not to work outside the home (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Sobol's typology identified three conditions for career-oriented women: enabling conditions, such as spouse's salary; facilitating conditions, such as educational level and previous work experience; and precipitating conditions, such as self-concept and gender-role preferences.

The second pre-theoretical stage focused on traditionalism of choice. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, working women had become the norm rather than the exception, and researchers shifted the focus of their studies to the degree to which women's career preferences were traditional or nontraditional. "Traditional" careers were regarded as those in which women predominated, such as teacher, nurse, and secretary. "Nontraditional" careers were regarded as the male-dominated fields that required stronger and more consistent career commitment and involvement (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). During this stage, researchers' interests shifted from why women worked to what professions they chose and whether or not those professions matched traditional career concepts.

The third phase of research in women's career development occurred during the late 1980s and the 1990s. During these recent decades, researchers focused on the woman's desire to work, or her career salience, regardless of financial necessity (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Researchers examined the importance of career to the

individual in order to understand better why women chose to work. They also attempted to assess the relative importance of career and family in the person's life. Also during this stage, researchers began to identify barriers to women's career goal achievements.

During these pre-theoretical stages of women's career development study, the researchers attempted to discern why women worked, to classify their career choices as traditional or non-traditional and to understand the importance of work in their lives. Donald Super's 1957 work on women's life-career patterns provides an excellent example of this pre-theoretical research (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). In describing women's life-career patterns in the mid-1950s, Super identified seven categories for describing women's life-career patterns: (1) the stable homemaker pattern; (2) the conventional career pattern of women who worked until marriage; (3) the stable working pattern of women who did not marry but who worked throughout their adult life span; (4) the double-track career pattern of women who combined family and work; (5) the interrupted career pattern of women who worked after raising their children; (6) the unstable career pattern of women's irregular cycle of movement in and out of the workforce; and (7) the multiple-trial career pattern of an unstable work history (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Super's career categories for women were widely accepted and used by other researchers for the next four decades.

Significant changes in career development theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as theorists incorporated cognitive and social learning theories into career development theories in an effort to explain how people make career decisions. Three

career development theories have significant bearing on the study of women's career development processes. These are Krumboltz's 1979 social learning theory of career decision making; Gottfredson's 1981 theory of circumscription and compromise; and Hackett and Betz's 1981 application of self-efficacy theory to women's career development behavior. While each theoretical approach provides insights into women's motivations and behaviors, none of these theories is comprehensive in explaining women's career development.

Krumboltz based his social learning theory of career development on Bandura's social learning theory of behavior (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996). Krumboltz proposed four categories of factors that influence career decision-making: (1) inherited qualities and characteristics that affect people's ability to achieve certain educational and occupational goals; (2) environmental conditions and events outside of people's control that affect career decision making, including social, cultural, political, and economic forces; (3) instrumental and associative learning experiences that are unique to each person and that result in a chosen career path; and (4) the person's task approach skills, which result from interactions among learning experiences, inherited characteristics, abilities, and environmental influences. Each person's unique career path results from the complex interaction of genetic factors, environmental influences and events, instrumental and associative learning experiences, and the person's task approach skills. Krumboltz developed this social learning theory of career decision making to address the questions of "why people enter particular educational programs or occupations, why they may change

educational programs or occupations, and why they may express various preferences for different occupational activities at selected points in their lives" (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996, p. 237).

Gottfredson's (1996) theory of circumscription and compromise also assumes that career choice is a developmental process. The theory was developed to explain why people of different genders and races and social classes differ in the kind of jobs they desire. Gottfredson regarded vocational choice as a process of eliminating and narrowing options that begin in childhood. She also believed that people compromise their aspirations based on their experiences. Gottfredson's theory assumes that processes of circumscription and compromise begin in childhood and that these processes are influenced by gender-role socialization, number and diversity of experiences and activities, and educational influences. She described "circumscription" as "the progressive elimination of unacceptable alternatives to create a social space" (p. 187). "Compromise" described the process by which people "relinquish their most preferred alternatives for less compatible but more accessible ones" (p. 187). Gottfredson's theory was one of the first to look at socialization influences on career choice behavior.

Hackett and Betz, in 1981, proposed that expectation of self-efficacy is a major influence in career decision making (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Efficacy expectations, as defined by Albert Bandura in 1977, are the beliefs one has concerning his or her ability to successfully perform a given behavior. Efficacy expectations are influenced by experiences related to performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal

persuasion, and the degree of anxiety that is associated with the behavior. Hackett and Betz found that “self-efficacy can influence the degree to which individuals utilize their abilities, develop a range of interests, and consider an expanded rather than restricted range of career options” (Fitzgerald et al., p. 98). Hackett and Betz’s model of self-efficacy may help to explain women's persistence and success in male-dominated fields.

Each of these theories contributes to our understanding of women’s career development processes, but none can fully explain women’s career development experiences. While Krumboltz’s theoretical framework incorporates inherited traits and abilities, environmental events and conditions, learning experiences, and task-approach skills, it does not include the influence of socialization on women’s career development (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Gottfredson’s theory of circumscription and compromise is a gender-based model which attempts to describe how individuals narrow their career choice alternatives and compromise between their preferences and their environmental realities (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). While Gottfredson introduced the important idea of compromise as a way to explain women’s downscaling of their aspirations, subsequent research based on her model has highlighted the need for modifications in the theory (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Hackett and Betz’s self-efficacy theory seemed promising for describing career development behavior, but it did not account for the outcomes expectations which might contribute to behavior. For women, especially, “self-efficacy may not translate into behavior if the behavior is not

expected to be rewarded or if the opportunities to implement behavior are seen as limited” (Fitzgerald et al., p. 99).

*Issues Related to the Study of Women’s Career Development Processes*

In a review of dominant career development theories, Stitt-Gohdes (1997) concluded that traditional career development theories “reflect the dominant makeup of the professional work force of 20 or 30 years ago: white, middle-class males. Indeed, women, people of color, and the poor have been methodically omitted from career development research” (p. 13). Other researchers agree that the application of current career development theory to explain women’s career development is limited. Fitzgerald et al. (1995) viewed women’s career development as uniquely different from men's because of the influence of work and family in their lives, and they noted that

Researchers and theorists in the area universally and unselfconsciously investigated men's vocational interests, described their career patterns, and sought to explain their vocational behavior--with women representing (sometimes literally) only a footnote to their work (p. 67).

Brown and Brooks (1996) agreed, stating that “traditionally, [career development] theories have been developed by white males of European descent, and, not surprisingly, the theories have been most useful as a basis for understanding the behavior of white males of European descent” (p. 7).

Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998) described the literature on women's career development as “extrapolated from studies that have been conducted on middle-class white men. Such studies discounted the experiences of women, persons of color, and members of the working class and other socio-economically disadvantaged groups” (p. 86). Bierema (1998) found that “career development models based on white male experience are inadequate to describe women's patterns of exiting and entering the workforce multiple times, and differences in education, class, and race have a bearing on women's career development prospects and progress” (p. 97).

Schreiber (1998) also found that existing career development theories were inadequate for explaining women's career development processes. Traditional career development theories, such as Holland's typology model, suggested that career choice was a process of matching a person's interests and abilities with a compatible work experience. Critics believe that while this model might work for white, middle class men who have multiple opportunities to develop broad interests and abilities, the theory does not adequately describe women's career choice behavior because women's socialization processes limit their opportunities for developing interests and abilities (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Schreiber, 1998). Because women are socialized to be responsible for family and to pursue gender-appropriate professions such as librarian, teacher, social worker, secretary, and nurse, their opportunities for developing all potential interests are limited (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998).

The issue of gender socialization has been used as a lens for examining women's social, political, and economic disadvantages. Townsend (1995) notes in the

introduction to a collection of articles titled *Gender and Power in the Community College* that the chapter authors worked from an assumption that gender is socially constructed and that gender socialization tends to stereotype women in ways that disadvantage them “because certain characteristics seen as feminine are viewed as less desirable than characteristics commonly viewed as masculine” (p. 2).

One gender and social role expectation for a woman is that of primary caregiver, and women traditionally have been expected to sacrifice their careers in order to fulfill this role. Research shows that marriage and parenthood are negatively related to women's career success and that interference from family to work is greater for women than for men (Schreiber, 1998). While having a family is regarded as positive for men's careers because it represents stability, a family may be a career liability for women because career interruptions may cost women in terms of promotions, participation in training or professional development activities, or involvement in strategic committee work (Schreiber, 1998).

Since career success is usually measured by one's level of commitment to one's work, women who have to balance family and work are viewed as less committed to their work than are men (Schreiber, 1998). The traditional linear, planned, and predictable career pattern that is associated with developmental career theory suggests a consistent, uninterrupted movement from one career stage to the next (Schreiber, 1998). This description, however, is inconsistent with women's experiences. The career pattern for women is more interrupted, nonlinear, and unplanned. Because “traditional measures of career success include continuity and

commitment to one's work, women are often viewed as less interested in their career development" (Schreiber, 1998, p. 8).

Schreiber (1998) believed that women's diverse career development patterns were "representative of the complex process of managing multiple roles throughout their lifespan" (p. 5). Throughout her lifespan development, "a woman will encounter a multitude of issues related to sex role stereotyping, sex discrimination, and multiple role expectations that will significantly affect her [career] choice" (p. 6). The social assumption that women who work outside of the home are still primarily responsible for the maintenance of home and family creates "serious career obstacles in the form of overload, stress, and role conflict" for women (Fitzgerald et al., p. 73).

Women's career development experiences are unique because of the influence of work and family in their lives (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). While traditional models are useful for examining women's career patterns, they do not account for women's gender socialization, their limited exposure to role models and mentors, and their efforts to balance demands of family and career (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998). Researchers agree that a model of career development that adequately describes women's career development experiences currently does not exist, and they recognize the need for a comprehensive theory that acknowledges and integrates multiple role responsibilities, sex role socialization, career choice, career experiences, and learning to describe women's career behavior (Bierema, 1998; Brown & Brooks, 1996; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Schreiber, 1998).

## Social Learning Theory and Women's Career Development

Osipow & Fitzgerald (1996) described the application of social learning theory to career decision making as “one of the most significant developments in career theory” (p. 167). In 1986, sociologist and researcher Albert Bandura defined social cognitive theory as “a model of triadic reciprocity in which behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other” (p. 18). Bandura’s model assumes that behavior is a result of the interaction between the person and the environment; people influence their environment, and their environment influences the way they behave (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Social context, especially modeling and mentoring, is important in social learning theory. Social learning theory assumes that behaviors change over time as a result of new experiences, ideas, and self-concepts. Social learning theory also assumes that the individual is an agent in his or her learning.

Applied to career development, social learning theory is used to identify and understand the personal and environmental factors that shape a person's decisions about careers. Personal influences may include inherited characteristics, such as race, gender, and abilities. Environmental influences may include social climate, individual experiences, and opportunities available to the individual. Family resources and support, role models, and educational opportunities may be considered as environmental variables (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996).

Several researchers have applied the concepts of social learning theory to career development. Krumboltz’s social learning theory of career development was

reviewed earlier in this chapter, as was Hackett and Betz's self-efficacy model of career development. This section will examine Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1996) social cognitive career theory, an emergent comprehensive theory of career development, and Farmer's (1997) social learning framework for career development and choice.

### *Social Cognitive Career Theory and Women's Career Development*

Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1996) proposed social cognitive career theory as a unifying framework for other theoretical approaches to career development. Derived from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, the career theory incorporates personal characteristics, learning experiences, social and contextual influences, self-efficacy expectations, and person-environment interests to explain career choice and career development.

Lent et al. (1996) incorporated into their theory Bandura's triadic reciprocal model of the personal attributes, external environmental factors, and behaviors that interactively influence choices and behaviors. Lent et al. identified self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals as the personal factors that influence career choice behavior. Self-efficacy beliefs evolve from a person's assessment of his or her own capabilities, and outcome expectations are "the imagined consequences of performing given behaviors" (Lent et al., p. 381). Goals determine the extent of a person's engagement in a particular activity. In the social cognitive interactive model, "goals are assumed to influence the development of self-efficacy, while self-efficacy and

outcome expectations, in turn, affect the goals that one selects and the effort expended in their pursuit” (Lent et al., p. 382).

Social cognitive career theory also incorporates issues of gender, interests and self-efficacy, external influences, and barriers. Gender is viewed as the socially constructed aspect of a person’s experience that shapes his or her learning opportunities, interpersonal relationships, and career choices (Lent et al., 1996). Lent et al. believed that children learn to match their behaviors to conceptions of gender-appropriateness at an early age. In addition, they believed that children and adolescents develop skills and form a sense of their task efficacy as well as a set of beliefs about what will happen if they perform these tasks through repeated exposure to diverse activities. Competency in performing these activities and achieving desired outcomes shapes self-efficacy and influences occupational interests. Lent et al. believed that girls are more likely to develop self-efficacy for female activities than for traditional male activities due to biased access to opportunities for practicing and observing particular behaviors.

Social cognitive career theory also acknowledges that both external and internal factors affect career choice decisions. Lent et al. described the contextual factors that influence career behavior as “distal” and “proximal.” Distal influences include opportunities for interest and skill development, gender-role socialization processes, career role models, and academic potential. Proximal influences include familial support, financial support, job availability, and other environmental conditions that affect career choice, such as hiring discrimination and the “glass

ceiling.” The model assumes that a person who perceives insurmountable barriers to career success will be unable to act on his or her occupational interests and goals.

Lent, Brown, and Hackett attempted to integrate career self-efficacy research into social learning theory as it applies to career development. However, the social cognitive career theory is too new for conclusive supporting studies to have emerged (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). In addition, social cognitive career theory fails to address fully the interaction of variables of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status with career development and the choice-making process (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Future research in these areas will determine whether this emergent theory will be a unifying framework for career development theory.

#### *Social Learning Theory and Women's Career Development*

In 1977, Helen Farmer and Associates applied social learning theory to a framework for examining women's career development experiences (Farmer & Associates, 1997). Farmer based her work on emerging studies that indicated that women experience more complexity in career development because of societal expectations about women's roles and because of sex role socialization, which leads women to limit their career choices. Farmer's conceptual model for examining career choice behavior includes personal characteristics, environmental variables, and background factors. Like the Lent et al. social cognitive career theory, Farmer's model is based on Bandura's 1986 research on situational learning, which emphasizes

learning as an interactive process between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences.

Farmer published the results of a longitudinal study of diversity and women's career development in 1997. Farmer acknowledged similarities between her framework and those of Krumboltz (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1991) and Lent et al. (1996), and she also described differences of emphasis in the foci of the three theoretical frames. While Krumboltz's framework emphasized the associative and instrumental learning concepts that affect career development, Farmer focused on "sex role socialization processes as these affect beliefs, attitudes, and self-concepts, which in turn affect motivation, choices, and behaviors, especially for women" (p. 5). Lent et al. focused their social cognitive career theory on concepts related to self-efficacy, such as outcome expectations and goals, and the ability to predict career choice based on self-efficacy variables. While Farmer's framework included self-efficacy, this concept was not central to her theoretical conception.

Although the theories of Krumboltz (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1991) and Lent et al. (1996) differ from Farmer's framework in their foci, all three frameworks share common elements of Bandura's social learning theory. All of the models incorporated the triadic reciprocal interaction between the person, the environment, and the resulting behavior. In addition, the concept of personal agency, which is one's ability to shape his or her attitudes and feeling and to anticipate outcomes and plan ahead, is embedded in the three models (Farmer, 1997).

Farmer's (1997) conceptual model for women's career motivation included the personal and environmental factors that influence women's career choice behavior, either by inhibiting or facilitating career motivation. The personal influences are primarily related to sex-role socialization, fear of success, risk-taking behavior, and academic self-esteem. The environmental influences are related to family support or lack of support, parental expectations, and socialization experiences in the school and community. Farmer also considered background factors of gender, social status, ethnicity, and age as they influenced personal beliefs. In summary, Farmer examined two aspects of career development that related to social learning theory: (1) How the personalities of the individuals as shaped by cognitive and background aspects affect their learning and career choices, and (2) How the experiences that people have in their families, schools, and communities affect their learning and career choices.

*Towards a Comprehensive, Constructivist Theory of Women's Career Development*

Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) noted that "the field of women's career development has moved far beyond the stages of identification, description, and classification of relevant variables--generally considered the earliest stages of research and theory building" (p. 256). Further, they noted that an integrated theory of women's career development has yet to emerge. Brown and Brooks (1996) questioned whether or not an integrated, comprehensive career development theory is possible. They described two distinct philosophical categories of career choice and development theories: positivism and constructivism. They concluded that "all theories, including

those that focus on career choice and development, spring from two philosophical positions for which there is no rapprochement” (pp. 8-9).

Brown and Brooks found that most theories of career choice and development “are rooted in positivism, a philosophical position that supports logical proofs and empirical bases [and that] has dominated the philosophy of science for centuries” (p.

9). Brown and Brooks summarized the assumptions of logical positivism:

(1) People can be studied separately from their environments. Also, people can be subdivided into categories for study.

(2) Human behavior can be objectively observed and measured. Moreover, behavior operates in a lawful, linear fashion: cause and effect can be inferred.

(3) The tradition of the scientific method is the accepted paradigm for identifying facts about human behavior.

(4) The contexts (environments) in which people operate are considered neutral or relatively unimportant; thus, the focus of inquiry should be observable actions of human beings. (p. 9)

Constructivism, on the other hand, is a philosophy that assumes that people are active participants in constructing their own realities rather than passively accepting a given reality. Constructivism also assumes that much of the knowledge people possess cannot be verified through logical positivism and that purpose, values, and meaning cannot be empirically determined. Brown and Brooks summarized the assumptions of constructivism as follows:

- (1) All aspects of the universe are interconnected; it is impossible to separate figure from ground, subject from object, people from their environments.
- (2) There are no absolutes; thus human functioning cannot be reduced to laws or principles, and cause and effect cannot be inferred.
- (3) Human behavior can only be understood in the context in which it occurs.
- (4) The subjective frame of reference of human beings is the only legitimate source of knowledge. Events occur outside human beings. As individuals understand their environments and participate in these events, they define themselves and their environments. (p.10)

Brown and Brooks concluded that positivism and constructivism are two disparate philosophical positions that preclude the integration of career development theory into a single, comprehensive theory.

Social learning theories of career development fall into both the positivist and constructivist camps. Both Krumboltz (1996) and Lent et al. (1996) sought to measure variables and predict outcomes. While acknowledging that external and internal factors affect career choice decisions, these researchers attempted to isolate and identify the causal relationships that shape people's career choice behavior for the purposes of predicting career behavior. Farmer's (1997) longitudinal study of women's career development used survey data to generate constructs to describe women's career behavior. However, Farmer found that quantitative data failed to fully identify the context of internal and external influences on career behavior. To gain a fuller understanding of the context and of the meanings that women attached to

their career development experiences, Farmer employed qualitative interviews designed to “clarify the complexity of the career development and choice process for the women in our study” (p. 28).

Social learning theory, which is based on the assumptions that people cannot be separated from their environments or their behaviors, is a constructivist approach based on the definition described by Brown and Brooks (1996). Social learning theory precludes arguments of cause and effect by assuming a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences. Social learning theory also assumes that human behavior cannot be separated from influences of cognition and environment. The application of social learning theory to career development supports the idea of the career development process as a complex and nonlinear process that takes into account the reciprocal and interactive influences of behavior, environment, and cognition to explain career choice behaviors. By applying social learning theory to the study of female community college presidents’ career development processes, this study utilized a constructivist approach.

### Career Pathways and Career Barriers of Female Community College Presidents

Career pathways studies provide descriptive demographic data about community college presidents’ socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, marital status, age, mentors and role models, and career progression (Buddemeier, 1998; Touchton et al., 1991; Vaughan, 1989). The literature also indicates a history of

barriers to women's career progression to the community college presidency. As recently as 1997, the state of Iowa appointed its first woman president (Ebbers, Gallisath, Rockel, & Coyan, 2000). That same year, only 26 women served as chief business officer, associate dean, assistant dean, or executive director in the state's community colleges. Ebbers et al. reported that nationwide, women represented 58% of students enrolled in community colleges in 1996, yet only 17% of the colleges' presidents were women in 1995 (p. 376).

By 1995, women's progress in achieving community college presidencies remained slow. Deborah DiCroce (1995), a Virginia community college president, wrote that while community colleges were at the forefront in placing women into presidencies, most institutions still had a "good old boy" network that tended to exhibit predominately "masculine" behaviors. During the decade of the 1990s, most women who became community college presidents broke what DiCroce called the "gender barrier" at their institutions by becoming the first women named to the college's presidency.

The number of female community college presidents has increased significantly during the last decade. Weisman and Vaughan (2002) reported that in 2001, 27.8% of the nation's 1,200 community college presidents were women. This number represents an increase from 11% in 1991 (Weisman and Vaughan, 2002) and 6% in 1986 (Corrigan, 2002). The proportion of women leading public community colleges in 2001 was the highest of any sector of higher education (Corrigan, 2002).

Several studies have been conducted to examine community college presidents' career pathways and the barriers that women face in progressing to the presidency. This section will review the literature on community college presidents' career pathways, especially those studies that examine women's career paths. This review will reveal patterns in how presidents prepare for the presidency, what career positions they are most likely to hold before becoming president, and what background characteristics they have in common. This section will also examine the literature on the barriers female presidents have faced in the process of ascending to the presidency and their use of mentoring relationships to overcome those barriers.

#### *Community College Presidents' Career Pathways*

When Cohen and March (1974) conducted a study of the college and university presidency in 1970, they found that the career path to the presidency was promotion through the hierarchy of academic administration. Their study of presidents of four-year colleges and universities, the majority of whom were men, revealed that the standard pathway to the presidency was professor, department chair, dean, academic vice president, and president.

George Vaughan's (1986) landmark study of community college presidents more than a decade later indicated the same pathway pattern: The most common route to the community college presidency was "through the academic pipeline" (p. 27). More than half of the presidents who responded to Vaughan's 1984 survey indicated

that they had served as chief academic officers or vice presidents prior to assuming their first presidency.

Vaughan identified other positions on the path to the presidency, including dean of student services, dean of community services (continuing education), public school administrator, chief business officer, and university administrator or faculty member. In total, nearly 90% of the presidents in Vaughan's study came to the presidency from a position within the community college hierarchy, and of these, the majority achieved the presidency through the academic route (p. 30).

In 2001, Weisman and Vaughan (2002) again surveyed community college presidents and found that the academic pathway to the presidency continued to be the dominant pathway. More than 39% of the presidents surveyed had been chief academic officers and 7% had been vice presidents with academic oversight; another 6% had held administrative positions overseeing both academics and student services, and 3% had held other academic administrative positions. In total, nearly 55% of the presidents had held academic administrative positions prior to attaining their first presidency (p. 6). Weisman and Vaughan concluded that "since 1984, the most common pathway to the presidency has been through academic administrative positions" (p. 6).

Two nationwide studies of college and university presidents conducted in 1979 and 2001 show that women follow the academic pathway to the presidency. A study of college and university presidents in 1979 revealed that the most frequent position held by female community college presidents prior to the presidency was chief

academic officer (Taylor, 1981). Most had also held positions as academic deans or department chairpersons, and most started their community college careers as instructors or as student services personnel. A 2001 nation-wide study of all higher education institutions conducted by the American Council on Education Center for Policy Analysis revealed that “women were more likely [than men] to have served as provost/chief academic officer or another senior executive in higher education prior to assuming the presidency” (Corrigan, 2002, p. 16).

In 1997, Sharon Buddemeier (1998) conducted a survey of 145 female community college presidents. Buddemeier found that 66.4% of the female presidents had entered higher education as faculty members (p. 78). Although the majority held a teaching position when they first entered the community college, only one in four of the female presidents followed the pathway from faculty to division chair to chief academic officer and then to president. Nearly half had held the position of division chairperson or dean, and the majority were chief academic officers before attaining the presidency (pp. 78-79). Other positions leading to the presidency included other vice presidencies, dean, chief student services officer, campus president, and provost (p. 79).

Researchers have also examined the extent to which presidents planned their career pathways. Based on their 1970 study, Cohen and March (1974) described the presidential career as “an after-the-fact invention” (p. 25). Most presidents in their study had not planned a career that would lead to their position. Instead, they moved from one position to another with little or no organizational career planning.

Vaughan (1986) identified three major approaches to describe why the individuals who became presidents assumed those positions. “Serendipity,” or being in the right place at the right time, described individuals such as those in Cohen and March’s study who found themselves moving into the presidency without planning. This trend was apparent during the formative years of community colleges when experienced administrators were few and leadership programs to train future presidents had not yet developed. The second approach Vaughan identified was the “planned approach,” which described presidents who actively sought the presidency and planned how to attain the office through education, experience, and networking. The third approach was the “dissatisfied or opportunistic approach” (p. 35), which included public school and university administrators who sought a new opportunity in community colleges as well as disgruntled community college employees who were unhappy with campus leadership and who sought to make a difference by becoming the president. Vaughan found that the planned approach was the most common path to the presidency for the individuals in his study.

Taylor (1981) and Buddemeier (1998) reported similar findings in their studies of female community college presidents’ career pathways. Taylor (1981) reported that the women in the 1979 study indicated that they had planned for two to five years before they gained the presidency. Only a few women reported that they had not planned to become a president. Most had completed a doctoral degree, had attended one or more management training programs, and had published articles or papers prior to the presidency. Buddemeier (1998) found that the majority of female presidents in

1997 said the presidency became their career goal as they moved up the career ladder. For some, being a community college president had been their goal since entering the field of higher education.

Both Vaughan (1986) and Buddemeier (1998) included questions in their studies related to presidents' family and educational backgrounds. In his 1984 study, Vaughan (1986) found that slightly more than half of the presidents' fathers had not finished high school. Almost one-third of the fathers had finished high school, but less than 8% had earned a bachelor's degree and less than 8% had earned a master's or doctoral degree (p. 10). The majority of fathers were employed in positions that "are traditionally associated with the working class" (pp. 11-12). The mother's educational background was similar to the father's, and almost 60% of the mothers were homemakers (p. 11). Based on the parents' educational and employment backgrounds, Vaughan concluded that "the great majority of today's [1984] presidents grew up in working-class homes" (p. 10).

Vaughan also found that over 75% of the presidents in the 1984 study held doctoral degrees, with the majority holding the doctorate of education (Ed.D.) (p. 19). While some consider the Ed.D. to be less prestigious than a Ph.D. in an academic discipline, Vaughan observed that "there is nothing wrong—and much right with—college presidents getting their degree in education, especially from programs in higher education that emphasize management, finance, and human relations" (p. 19). In the 2001 study, Weisman and Vaughan (2002) found that 46% of the presidents held the Ph.D. and 42% held the Ed.D., for a total of 88% of the presidents holding a

doctoral degree. Approximately 72% of the degrees were in an education field (pp. 4-5).

The demographics for the female presidents in Buddemeier's (1998) study differed slightly from those in Vaughan's study a decade earlier. Unlike the presidents' mothers in the 1984 study, almost 66% of the female presidents' mothers in 1997 worked outside the home in full- or part-time positions (p. 56). The percentage of fathers in working class jobs had not changed much since the earlier study; 32.5% of the fathers worked in blue-collar jobs, which included farming. More than 90% of the female presidents in Buddemeier's study held a doctoral degree, with 54% holding a Ph.D. and 36.5% holding an Ed.D. (p. 58). Approximately 77% of the doctoral degrees were in an education field, with the highest percentage in the field of higher education-community college administration (p. 58).

Vaughan (1986) found that presidents who had planned their organizational career pathway to the presidency had often participated in leadership programs specifically designed for community college leaders. Buddemeier (1998) asked the female presidents in her 1997 study if they had participated in professional education programs that assisted them in attaining their current position as president. Approximately 68% of the presidents responded that they had participated in programs that assisted in attaining the presidency (p. 71). The programs most often cited were the National Institute for Leadership Development, the League for Innovation's Executive Leadership Institute, the American Council on Education National Identification Project, and programs sponsored by the American Association

of Community Colleges (p. 71). Taylor (1981) credited these leadership programs for including women in national forums, which allowed them to form networks with other female community college administrators and presidents.

Clearly, the most common pathway to the presidency, for both men and women, is through the academic hierarchy of a community college. The most common position held before attaining the presidency is chief academic officer, although some presidents have held other college positions such as chief student services officer, chief continuing education officer, chief business officer, or dean. In all studies, the majority of presidents rose from within the ranks of the college; only a small percentage came to the presidency from other educational institutions, businesses, or public agencies.

Holding a doctoral degree is also important for obtaining the presidency. The increase in the number of presidents holding doctorates between 1984 and 2001 indicates that the degree has become a standard for the position. Buddemeier's 1997 study of female presidents showed that slightly more of them held doctoral degrees than the population of all presidents studied in 2001. One explanation may be that while all presidents hired to lead community colleges today are expected to hold a doctorate, a higher number of the presidents with longer tenures are men who obtained their positions without the higher degree.

*Barriers to Women's Career Progression and the Community College Presidency*

In her qualitative study of female executives in the early 1990s, Laura Bierema (1994) found that women made up nearly 50% of the workforce, yet they were still under-represented in executive positions. Bierema identified several barriers for women seeking executive positions, including society's views of working women as "immoral, unfeminine, negligent mothers" (p. 29). Another barrier was women's exclusion from the social networks of the male-dominated executive culture, meaning that women had to learn the subtleties of the organization's culture and climate without formal assistance. A third barrier was the gender-role behaviors expected of women by their male colleagues and supervisors. Women were expected to be passive and non-assertive and not to exhibit the strong, aggressive behavior that corporations equate with good managers. The women in Bierema's study also identified the "old boys' network," the glass ceiling, and sexual harassment as barriers to career advancement.

Organizational culture is another barrier to women seeking access to higher education leadership positions. Like the corporate women described by Bierema (1999) who had "ventured into a culture they did not create" (p. 108), female community college presidents have found themselves in an academic administrative culture that has been dominated by men for many decades. In her review of the literature on female faculty in community colleges, Clark (1998) concluded, "Like the highly prestigious fields of law and medicine, the world of academe is, in many respects, a man's world controlled by the traditions, language, and social mores of

men who have grown up together as both competitors and teammates” (p. 84). Before 1970, few community college leaders were women, and male domination of administrative positions was taken for granted (Frye, 1995).

The American Council on Education study of female community college presidents in 1979 revealed several barriers that women had experienced as they moved up the career ladder to the presidency (Taylor, 1981). The women identified marital responsibilities, maternal responsibilities, lack of access to informal networks, men’s tendency to give preference to other men for appointments to top positions, and women’s perceptions of themselves as assistants rather than managers as barriers to their career advancement.

A decade later, Vaughan (1989, 1989a) conducted a study of barriers experienced by community college female presidents. Vaughan reported that the women identified a wide range of barriers they had encountered on the pathway to the presidency. Some felt that society’s stereotypes about women meant that women had to be over-prepared for their positions. Women also expressed frustration because of the difficulty of becoming accepted in the “old boys’ network,” and they perceived discrimination in their advancement up the career ladder. Many of the women indicated that trustees exhibited gender bias during their interviews by asking questions that indicated their beliefs that the women were not strong enough to control the faculty, were not able to manage a budget, did not understand construction, and were not tough enough to handle problems. In addition to these external barriers, Vaughan reported that some of the women felt that taking time off to have children

and to perform child-rearing responsibilities inhibited their career development. Some also indicated a lack of spousal support in moving to a new location or changing their own careers to support the wife's career. Vaughan concluded that "a 'double standard' is applied to some women presidents, whereby they are expected to accomplish more than their male colleagues" (1989a, p. 25).

In her 1997 study of female community college presidents, Buddemeier (1998) found similar barriers. One-third of the female presidents who responded to her survey indicated that events in their personal lives, usually maternal or marital responsibilities, hindered their career development. The women with children and the women who were divorced were most likely to perceive personal hindrances. More than 80% of the female presidents reported having experienced sex discrimination on their pathway to the presidency (p. 80). Examples of sex discrimination included exclusion from the "old boys" network, prejudice in hiring, being ignored in meetings, being discouraged from applying for administrative positions, and being assigned duties considered "women's work," such as planning luncheons. More than one-third reported that they were asked an inappropriate question during an interview for the presidency.

In a survey of women in Iowa community college administrative positions, Ebbers et al. (2000) found that "the majority of women surveyed believed their biggest hurdle to advancement was the mind-set of community college boards of trustees" (p. 380). The authors concluded that barriers to women's advancement are created by "stereotypical male images that persist about leaders and effective

leadership” and by the tendency of governing boards “to favor candidates by their fit in a male-dominated environment . . . [and] to favor candidates most like themselves” (p. 380).

Vaughan and Weisman (1997) developed a profile of community college trustees based on results of a national survey conducted in the mid-1990s. The authors reported that “a trustee is twice as likely to be male than to be female” (p. 16). At the time of their survey, 67% of the trustees were men and 33% were women (p. 16). Noting that 89% of the presidents in 1991 were men, the authors concluded that “the perception might be that governing boards select presidents who, up to a point, reflect the makeup of the governing board” (p. 114). Vaughan and Weisman (1997) encouraged boards to increase diversity among their members to ensure that the governing board represents the college’s service area. Such diversity would reduce barriers for women seeking to attain the presidency.

Women are likely to continue to encounter barriers to the presidency until society’s attitudes about women in the workplace have changed. The studies reviewed in this section spanned nearly three decades from 1979 to 1997, and all were consistent in their findings about barriers to women’s career progression to the community college presidency. Women perceived both personal and external barriers, with personal barriers primarily being related to child-rearing responsibilities and lack of spousal support and external barriers primarily being related to society’s attitudes about the role of women, their exclusion from the “old boys’ network,” and the higher standards to which they are held. Another significant external barrier is trustees’

attitudes about women as leaders. Vaughan (1989) wrote, “It is incumbent upon those doing the selecting to be able to demonstrate that the decision to select or not to select an individual was based on considerations other than the gender or race of the applicant” (p. 77).

### *Mentoring Relationships*

One of the ways that academic administrators gain experience, learn new skills, and overcome organizational and societal barriers is through the guidance, advice, and assistance provided by experienced mentors. For men, this mentoring process often includes access to the “good old boys network” where most of the mentoring occurs (Moore & Salimbene, 1981). Historically, women have not had access to the “network,” yet their mentoring experiences are equally important for their career advancement.

Moore and Salimbene (1981) examined the dynamics of mentoring in helping women advance to academic administrative positions. They defined mentoring as “an intense, lasting, and professionally-centered relationship between two individuals in which the more experienced and powerful individual, the mentor, guides, advises, and assists in any number of ways the career of the less experienced, often younger, upwardly mobile protégé” (p. 52). Moore and Salimbene found that the female administrators in their study tended to have both male and female mentors while men reported having only male mentors. Cross-gender mentoring relationships created problems for women because of fear that others would infer a sexual relationship.

However, Moore and Salimbene found that women who had male mentors were “enthusiastic in their sense of the investment made in their careers by their male superiors” (p. 63).

The benefits of a mentoring relationship are well documented. Hansman (1998) reported that having a mentor increases self-esteem and enhances the quality of organizational life for women by enabling them to gain entry into social networks that lead to promotions. Mentoring also enhances an individual’s potential for achievement and influence in the organization and leads to higher salaries.

In spite of the benefits of having a mentor, women have to face barriers related to organizational culture in establishing a mentor relationship. In her study of women in executive corporate positions, Bierema (1994) observed that organizational culture is “created, maintained, and taught through organizational members affirming and communicating values, norms, and rules of conduct to its members” (p. 6). One of the ways that organizational culture is maintained is through older, experienced administrators passing on their “accumulated wisdom to younger men who are identified as possessing qualities valued by the organization” (Moore & Salimbene, 1981, p. 51). Moore and Salimbene defined this mentoring process as the “good old boys network,” which they viewed as an informal process for sustaining the patriarchal hierarchy of the organization.

Hansman (1998) summarized four issues related to mentoring that women must deal with in seeking mentor relationships for career advancement. First, because most executives and administrators in business and in education are men, Hansman

found that women are likely to have more difficulty initiating and maintaining mentor relationships in male-dominated institutions. The second concern is that conflicts between work and family responsibilities often cause women to experience more difficulty in meeting their career goals, leading to male mentors' perceptions that they are less committed to their careers. The third issue is the perception of inappropriate relationships created when a woman seeks a male mentor. The final concern is that the concept of mentoring perpetuates existing cultural structures within organizations, a problem that was also identified by Moore and Salimbene (1981) and Bierema (1994).

Several mentoring studies have focused on community college presidents. A study conducted in the mid-1990s on the role of mentoring in the career paths of community college presidents revealed that all of the presidents who participated in the study had at least one primary mentor who assisted in his or her career advancement to the presidency (Barhorst, 1997). The mentor relationships were hierarchical and involved being selected by a superior, usually a president, and being given opportunities for advancement and for learning about the presidency. The majority of the female presidents studied had male mentors and none of them reported having difficulty finding a mentor or experiencing sexual tension with the male mentor.

Vaughan (1989) found that the majority of female community college presidents reported having mentors. More than half had a male mentor, a small number had a female mentor, and the remaining women had both male and female

mentors. The mentors mentioned most often were presidents, deans, and vice presidents (p. 80). Vaughan (1989a) observed, “Male dominance in the world of community college administration tends to force women to turn to male mentors” (p. 22).

In addition to mentors, women often identify role models who influenced their careers. While role models are usually considered to have a positive influence on one’s career development, Vaughan (1989) found that the female presidents in his study were often motivated by a “negative role model.” Over 51% of the respondents in his study “stated that they had a negative role model who caused them to want to move up the administrative ladder to become president” (p. 81). Negative role models were described as presidents and deans who hated change, were afraid to make decisions, delegated too much work to others, lacked vision and leadership abilities, or were autocratic leaders.

Buddemeier (1998) found that 81% of the female presidents in her study had a mentor who assisted in their professional development and played a role, either directly or indirectly, in assisting their promotions up the career ladder (p. 62). Mentors were most often men. Buddemeier found that female presidents who had mentors were more likely to participate in continuing professional education programs that assisted in their career development and in the attainment of their current position. More presidents said that their mentor played the most influential role in their career development than any other individual. Buddemeier concluded that mentoring was an

important factor in helping women gain the experience and support necessary to “successfully climb the administrative ladder within the community college (p. 38).

In 1981, Moore and Salimbene found that the women in their study were not serving as mentors to younger women, either because they perceived the process as being too time consuming or because they were too involved in their own advancement to assist other women’s career development. Based on the low number of women in his study who reported having a female role model, Vaughan (1989) noted that “women presidents would seem to have a special obligation to serve as role models and mentors for other women’ (p. 80). Ebbers et al. (2000) also contended that “current community college presidents should assume responsibility for the development of future leaders” (p. 380). The literature shows that mentoring relationships do make a difference in career progression for both men and women. One way to increase the number of women and minority community college presidents is for the current female presidents to “make this a high priority and be directly involved in identifying, training, and nurturing high-quality future community college leaders” (Ebbers et al., p. 381).

Recent studies indicate that women are mentoring other women. In a study of male and female North Carolina community college administrators, 90% of the female respondents reported having a woman as a mentor (Gillett-Karam, Smith, & Simpson, 1997). In Buddemeier’s (1998) nationwide study of female presidents, 82.8% reported that they were serving as a mentor (p. 66). Nearly all of the female presidents were mentoring women, and many were mentoring both women and men.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the literature related to the conceptual framework for this study. The three major areas of research identified for the literature review were (1) career development theory and its applications to women's career development experiences, (2) social learning theory and women's career development, and (3) career pathways of female community college presidents and the barriers they have faced in ascending to the presidency. The research questions for this study are based in career development theory and in previous research on community college presidents' career pathways.

The literature review shows that that women's career development is uniquely different from men's because of gender-role socialization, the influence of work and family in their lives, and other socially constructed inhibiting and facilitating influences. Researchers have found social learning theory, which identifies the personal and environmental influences on behavior, to be a useful model for explaining women's career development experiences. In her longitudinal study of women's career development, Farmer (1997) found social learning theory to be useful in examining personal influences, such as gender role socialization, academic self-esteem, self-efficacy, and home-career conflict, on career-choice behavior. She also examined the influence of environmental factors, such as family support, socialization experiences, and discrimination in the community and at work, on career-choice behavior.

Studies of community college presidents' career pathways reveal that men and women are following the same pathway to the presidency. The "academic pipeline" identified by Vaughan (1986) and others continues to be the most common route to the presidency (Buddemeier, 1998; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). In addition, most successful presidential candidates have planned their career pathways with the ultimate goal of achieving the presidency, and most have earned the doctorate in preparation for the presidency (Vaughan, 1986; Buddemeier, 1998; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). In 2000, women represented slightly more than 40% of the total population of chief academic officers in the nation's community colleges, a statistic that indicates that women are in the pipeline to the presidency (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). However, the percentage of female presidents still is not proportionate to their representation on the faculty or in senior administrative positions.

Several career pathways' studies have also examined barriers that women experience in their progression to the community college presidency (Buddemeier, 1998; Taylor, 1981; Vaughan, 1989 & 1989a). These studies have focused primarily on the external, or environmental, influences that inhibit or facilitate women's career progression in the community college. Home-career conflict, spousal support, discrimination, lack of access to male-dominated networks, and trustees' attitudes about women in the workplace are barriers identified in all of the studies.

Chapter Three describes the research design and methodology used for this study, which examined female community college presidents' career pathways through a conceptual framework informed by career development theory.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Women have made astonishing progress in achieving community college leadership positions during the past three decades, and they now hold approximately 28% of all presidencies (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). As more women are gaining higher education and corporate leadership positions, researchers are looking more closely at women's career development processes. Traditional career development theory, which is based on the assumption that career choice is a process of matching a person's interests and abilities with a compatible work experience, appears to be limited in explaining women's developmental processes (Bierema, 1999; Farmer & Associates, 1997; Schreiber, 1998). Researchers have begun to explore women's multiple role issues and how they affect their career aspirations and achievements. Recognizing the need for a theory about women's career development that would accommodate these multiple role issues, researchers have begun to apply social learning theory to the study of women's career development processes (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). This study of female community college presidents' career development experiences was framed by the tenets of social learning theory as they apply to career development studies. The objective of this study was to explore the formative experiences, developmental factors, and personal factors that influence female community college presidents' career development.

The purposes of this study were (1) to provide a broader understanding of the factors that influenced selected female community college presidents' career development; (2) to provide a description of how the women have made meaning of their career development experiences; and (3) to develop, through inductive analysis, findings that may contribute to a better understanding of female community college presidents' career development. These purposes were accomplished through the use of a qualitative multiple-case study approach. This chapter describes the research design, selection of participants, interview protocol, and inductive analysis methods that were used to develop descriptions of the women's lived experiences and key understandings that may lead to further study on the topic of female community college presidents' career development experiences.

## Research Design

### *Research Genre*

This study was designed using a qualitative multiple-case study approach to examine the personal and environmental factors that influenced female community college presidents' career development processes. Denzin & Lincoln (2000) defined qualitative research as

a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible . . . . This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to

make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Qualitative inquiry was appropriate for this study because it allowed for in-depth exploration of the meanings that female community college presidents ascribed to their career development experiences.

The research approach selected to examine the overall research questions for this study was the case-study approach. Yin (1994) identified the case study as an appropriate research strategy to employ when a “how” or “why” question is being asked, and Merriam (2001) identified case study as a suitable research design for studies that focus on process, such as the career development process.

The selection of the case study research approach must be determined by the research problem (Merriam, 2001). For this study, the overall research questions focused on formative, developmental, and personal influences on female community college presidents’ career development processes. The case study approach was the appropriate methodology for answering the research questions because it provided a way to investigate the complex relationships among the potential influences in order to achieve a better understanding of the women’s career development processes (Merriam, 2001). Merriam observed that because the case study describes lived experiences, it “results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences” (p. 41). These insights and illuminated meanings may lead to increased understanding of the

formative, developmental, and personal factors that influenced the participants' career development experiences.

Merriam also described three features that characterize case studies: (1) case studies are "particularistic," or focused on specific situations, events, or phenomena; (2) case studies are "descriptive," with the end product being "a rich, 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study"; and (3) case studies are "heuristic" because they "illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (pp. 29-30). According to Merriam, these aspects of case study research provide illustrations, illumination, influences, and explanations that can reveal significant characteristics of the phenomenon being studied. In particular, the heuristic aspect of a case study "can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (Merriam, 2001, p. 30).

Because this study examined the experiences of five female community college presidents, the multiple-case approach was employed. The multiple-case approach involves collecting data from several cases and analyzing the data across the cases to make generalizations about the phenomenon (Merriam, 2001). In a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of multiple-case studies, Yin (1994) observed that multiple-case studies provide more robust and compelling information than do single-case studies, except in situations where a single case represents a unique event or a critical test of theory. Since the purpose of this study was to increase understanding rather than to present a unique case or test an existing theory, a multiple-case design better served this purpose.

### *Selection of Participants*

The study was bounded to include only female community college presidents in a single state system. Five female community college presidents in the state were interviewed in order to discover how their formative experiences, developmental experiences, and personal beliefs and attitudes influenced their career development processes. The study was purposefully limited to a single state in order to keep the case manageable and to provide the researcher with convenience and ease of access (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The decision to use presidents from one state was justified because there was nothing in the existing literature on to suggest that women's career pathway experiences or their career development processes differ from state to state.

At the time of this study's data collection (2002), the selected state had eight female community college presidents, who represented 14% of the total population of community college presidents in that state. Each of the eight female presidents was sent a letter explaining the study and inviting her to volunteer to participate in the study. Each woman was also asked to submit her work history for analysis (see Appendix A). The work history was analyzed to determine which women met the selection criteria and to provide a career pathway summary for each woman.

The selection of individual participants was a purposeful selection made based on the individual's employment history in community colleges. The selection of the interviewees was based on the following criteria: (1) employment as a community college president in the selected state at the time of the study, (2) gender, (3) previous

community college administrative or teaching position immediately prior to assuming the presidency, and (4) employment in the field of community college education for at least five years immediately prior to gaining the presidency. Because this study focused on the factors that influence women’s career advancement within the community college hierarchy, women who came into their presidencies from business and industry or from other sectors of educational administration were excluded from the study.

Of the eight women who were invited to participate, six women responded and submitted work history summaries for analysis. Five of the women met all of the selection criteria. One was excluded from the study because her employment history prior to the presidency was outside of community college education. While her story would be an interesting case study, her experiences may differ significantly from those who ascended through the ranks of the community college hierarchy. Table 3.1 summarizes how each of the six respondents met the selection criteria.

Table 3.1  
Analysis of Participant Selection for Multiple-Case Study

|   | A   | B   | C   | D   | E   | F   |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Currently employed as president               | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Female  | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Held CC Position Prior to Presidency          | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No  |
| Employed in CC Five Years Prior to Presidency | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No  |

### *Data Collection Procedures*

Data for this study were collected using individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The in-depth interview allowed the researcher to fully understand the meanings that the women ascribed to their lived experiences. Kvale (1983) defined the qualitative research interview as a “semi-structured” process that “seeks to describe and understand the meaning of central themes in the life-world of the interviewee” through a process aimed at obtaining “nuanced” descriptions of the participant’s experiences (pp. 174-175). Marshall and Rossman (1999) identified the in-depth interview as a way to capture the deep meaning of individual, lived experiences through a process that allows “the participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest [to] unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it” (p. 108). Patton (1990) explained the value of the in-depth interview for gathering information that cannot otherwise be gained. “We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things” (p. 196).

Merriam (2001) identified three methods for structuring the qualitative interview: highly-structured, with predetermined wording and order of questions; semi-structured, with a mix of structured and unstructured questions; and unstructured or informal, with open-ended questions delivered in a conversational manner. The highly structured approach is used when the researcher needs to ensure consistency of data collection. The unstructured or informal interview is more unplanned, exploratory, and conversational and is most often used in ethnographies and for

single-case studies. For this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. Because the research design for this study involved interviews with several individuals, a certain level of systematization in the interview protocol was needed to ensure that all participants responded to the same prompts. The researcher used an Interview Guide as a prompt to begin the interviews and as a checklist to make sure that each participant responded to all questions.

The Interview Guide for this study (see Appendix B) was constructed to address the following influences on female president's career development processes: (1) the formative experiences, such as family background, gender-role socialization, and early work roles, that influence a female community college president's career development; (2) the key developmental factors, such as mentors and role models, barriers, and developmental learning experiences, that influence a female community college president's career development; and (3) the personal factors, such as skills and abilities, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and career-family conflicts, that influence a female community college president's career development. The Interview Guide also included questions about advice to other women aspiring to the presidency.

Because of the presidents' busy schedules, finding time to conduct the interviews was challenging. Due to the difficulty of scheduling the first interviews, the researcher realized that follow-up interviews also would be difficult to schedule. Therefore she requested a minimum of two to three hours for each interview. Two of the five interviews were conducted near the end of fall semester 2002, and three were conducted after semester classes had ended. Each interview was conducted in the

president's office, and each lasted between two and three hours. The researcher also spent time either before or after each interview engaged in informal conversations with the presidents, touring their campuses, talking with them about their colleges' programs and new initiatives, or having lunch with them. The presidents were open and candid during the interviews. They appeared eager to participate in the study and were willing to share details about their personal and professional lives, their educational backgrounds, and their career experiences.

Interviews were conducted during November and December 2002. Prior to each interview, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the research study and requested that the participants sign a consent form (see Appendix C). Each interview was audio tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure that the transcripts were accurate, the researcher listened to each interview tape while reading the word-processed transcript. After verifying that the transcripts were verbatim narratives of the audiotapes, the researcher mailed each participant a copy of her transcript to review for accuracy of meaning. Transcripts were edited based on the responses received from the participants.

In addition to taped interviews, the researcher wrote field notes while conducting the interviews and completed a contact summary sheet within 24 hours of each interview. Maintaining the field notes allowed the researcher to capture nuances of meaning conveyed through the participants' body language, vocal inflections, and facial expressions. The field contact summary sheet enabled the researcher to identify the main concepts, themes, issues, and questions that were raised in each interview.

The contact summary sheet also allowed the researcher to document information gained from the informal conversations held with the presidents before and after the interviews.

### *Data Analysis Process*

In qualitative research, data analysis involves a deliberate process of coding, pattern-matching, and explanation-building. Yin (1994) stated that the objective of a multiple-case study is to “build a general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary in their details” (p. 112). In this study, the researcher employed Merriam’s (2001) two-step process for data analysis of multiple-case studies. First, each case was analyzed independently (within-case analysis), and then the results of those analyses were compared and analyzed on the macro-level (cross-case analysis).

The data analysis for this study followed Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method of data analysis for generating propositions and theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) described the constant comparative method of data analysis as a method for generating theory. The process involves (1) coding categories of analysis in the margins of transcripts and (2) constantly comparing the category codes “with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category” (p. 106). The coding categories are descriptive codes, or “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). For multiple-case study analysis, Merriam (2001)

recommended performing data analysis concurrently with data collection by creating an initial descriptive category list after analysis of the first interview and comparing it to the category list that emerges after analysis of the second interview, and so on.

The next stage in constant comparative analysis is integrating categories and their properties and identifying emerging patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Miles and Huberman (1994) described the process of grouping related categories as “pattern coding” (p. 69). For multiple-case analysis, the process of pattern coding “lays the groundwork for cross-case analysis by surfacing common themes and directional processes” (Miles & Huberman, p. 69). Cross-case analysis begins after the analysis of each individual case is completed and involves identifying and analyzing the patterns of variables that cross all cases (Merriam, 2001). In cross-case analysis, the researcher “seeks to build abstractions across cases” (Merriam, 2001, p. 195).

The final stage in constant comparative analysis is “delimiting the theory.” Glaser and Strauss (1967) described this as a process of integrating and reducing categories that leads to theoretical delimiting. By delimiting the terminology, the researcher can “formulate the theory with a smaller set of higher level concepts” (p. 110). Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to this phase of analysis as developing propositions, or “connected sets of statements, reflecting the findings and conclusions of the study” (p. 75). The propositions must be coherent and must be valid across all of the cases. Merriam (2001) reported that this level of analysis “can lead to categories, themes, or typologies that conceptualize the data from all the cases; or it

can result in building substantive theory offering an integrated framework covering multiple cases” (p. 195).

The data analysis methods used in this study included (1) descriptive coding concurrently and iteratively with data collection by writing field notes and contact summary sheets for each interview before conducting the following interview; (2) constantly comparing emerging coding categories and re-coding on an ongoing basis; (3) reducing data within each case into smaller units by identifying pattern codes; (4) analyzing pattern codes and developing explanations for the phenomena in each case; (5) identifying and analyzing patterns that occurred across cases; and (6) generating propositions or explanations to explain phenomena across all cases.

#### Validity, Integrity, and Trustworthiness

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described the need to employ multiple strategies to add “rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth” to the qualitative inquiry (p. 5). Such strategies are necessary because “objective reality can never be captured. We can know a thing only through its representations” (p. 5). Several strategies for ensuring the validity, integrity, and trustworthiness of this study are built into the design. First, the multiple-case design strengthens the validity of this case. Yin (1994) stated that “the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust” than evidence from a single-case study (p. 45). The design for this study utilized multiple cases to strengthen the validity of the results.

The Interview Guide used by the researcher in this study ensured that all participants had an opportunity to respond to all of the prompts. Field notes and field summary sheets were written up following each interview, and verbatim transcriptions of the audiotapes were completed within one week following the interview. Each transcript was reviewed while listening to the audiotape to ensure accuracy, and the transcripts were sent to the participants to verify accuracy of intended meaning (Glesne, 1999). These processes contribute to the trustworthiness of this study by ensuring that data are accurate and complete.

Data were collected, codified, and filed using paper and electronic filing systems designed to maintain a careful audit trail (Merriam, 2001). The design and methods of the study were explicitly detailed, and rigorous data analysis techniques, as outlined earlier in this Chapter, were utilized. These careful organizational and data collection and storage measures, along with the use of field notes and field summary sheets, contribute to the credibility of this study.

A thorough review of the literature, as summarized in Chapter Two, led to the development of the conceptual framework that guided the data collection and analysis for this study. The literature review situates the study within the scholarly context of career development theory and contributes to the generalizability of the study for other researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Merriam (2001) described the multiple-case study as a way to strengthen the validity of a study because “the more cases included in a study, and the greater the

variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be” (p. 40). The multiple-case approach enhances the generalizability of the findings.

### Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered to be the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described qualitative research as an interactive process, shaped by the researcher’s “personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting” (p. 6). They described the qualitative researcher as a quilt-maker who gathers, interprets, and pieces together multiple sources of information to construct new insights or interpretations. Using a similar metaphor, Janesick (2000) described the qualitative researcher as a choreographer who “situate[es] and recontextualiz[es] the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants in the study” (p. 210). Implicit in these metaphors of researcher-as-quilt-maker and researcher-as-choreographer is the notion of the researcher as an active interpreter and creator in the research process.

Kvale (1983) acknowledged the active role of the researcher in describing the qualitative interview as “an interaction between two people. Interviewer and interviewee react in relation to each other, and reciprocally influence each other” (p. 178). As the instrument for the research study, the researcher’s integrity can be a strength or a limiting factor in determining the trustworthiness of the study’s outcomes. Kvale also said, “Precision in description and stringency in meaning

interpretation in qualitative interviews corresponds to exactness in quantitative measurements” (p. 175). Merriam (2001) described the qualitative researcher’s challenge:

Because the primary instrument in qualitative research is human, all observations and analyses are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values, and perspective. . . . One of the philosophical assumptions underlying this type of research is that reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality. The researcher thus brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others’ views filtered through his or her own. (pp. 22-23)

The researcher’s awareness of his or her subjectivities can help guide him or her in selecting strategies, analyzing data, and making sense of the information. Glesne (1999) explained that monitoring subjectivity means learning more about “your own values, attitudes, beliefs, interests, and needs. You learn that your subjectivity is the basis for the story that you are able to tell. It is the strength on which you build” (p. 109). The qualitative researcher may delimit the influence of his or her personal biases in a research study by acknowledging initial assumptions, perspectives, and personal interests that could influence the research design.

To ensure the integrity of this research study and to increase awareness of her own subjectivities, this researcher analyzed her own career development experiences

and her feelings about women's career development and opportunities prior to conducting the interviews. The researcher is a female community college administrator who began her career as a public school teacher and then became a community college faculty member. She is married and has a child.

During her career history, the researcher welcomed new challenges. After teaching for several years, she became the director of a statewide curriculum project that required a great deal of traveling. When her daughter was two years old, she accepted a position at the state-level education oversight agency for community colleges. Her husband could not move because of his job, so for five and one-half years she commuted forty-five miles one way to work every day. She and her husband juggled child care arrangements, household chores, and two careers. The researcher then received a vice-presidency at a community college in another nearby city. Again, the family could not move because of her husband's career, and she continued to commute to work for three years. After acknowledging that the family unit was suffering because of the researcher's work and that opportunities for her husband were scarce in the city where she was working, she applied for and received a job in another city. Her husband supported the decision to move. He resigned from his position and is now working part-time.

The researcher pursued her doctorate in higher education administration as a part-time student while working as vice-president. She has recently discovered an ambition to be a community college president, and she continues to juggle parental, marital, and professional responsibilities. The researcher is interested in studying the

factors that influence women's career development processes and their decisions to pursue the community college presidency so that she can better understand her own experiences.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter described the research design and genre, participant selection procedures, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and actions for validity, integrity, and trustworthiness. The research design described in this chapter is appropriate for a qualitative, multiple-case study of the personal, background, and environmental influences on female community college presidents' career development processes.

Chapter Four presents an in-depth analysis of the research findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of a selected group of female community college presidents' career development processes and of the experiences that influenced their decisions to become community college presidents. Becoming a community college president was a complex developmental process for the women who participated in this study. These women did not begin their careers with the intention of becoming the chief executive officers in community colleges. Instead, their identification of the presidency as a career goal was a gradual realization that resulted from events and influences that occurred throughout the course of their career development. This study was designed to gain a fuller understanding of the contexts and meanings that the women attached to their career development experiences.

This chapter presents the findings from in-depth interviews with five female community college presidents about the factors that influenced their careers, ultimately resulting in their decisions to become community college presidents. The women's stories about their career development experiences indicate that their career development was not a planned, linear process. Instead, their stories suggest that their career pathways developed as a result of multiple influences in their personal and professional lives.

While the literature review has shown that there is no model of female community college presidents' career development to draw upon, there are implications in this study for a preliminary model. The Preliminary Conceptual Model of Selected Female Community College Presidents' Career Development illustrates the career development of the women who participated in this study as a process that takes into account multiple influences to explain their career choice behaviors (See Figure 4.1). The model relates the diversity and complexity of the influences that affected the women's career development, and it depicts the process as relational and multi-faceted. The model was developed to help organize the information collected from the in-depth interviews and to present graphically the key understandings that emerged from this study.

The Preliminary Conceptual Model of Selected Female Community College Presidents' Career Development consists of four components that describe the women's career development experiences. The first three components of the model describe the categories of influences that shaped the women's career development. The first component, Formative Experiences, describes the background experiences, early educational experiences, and early career moves that influenced the women's career choice decisions. This component is the foundation for the other components of the Preliminary Conceptual Model. The second component, Key Developmental Experiences, describes the people, educational experiences, and work roles that helped the women gain technical and professional competence in community college administration. The third component, Multiple Role Challenges, describes the

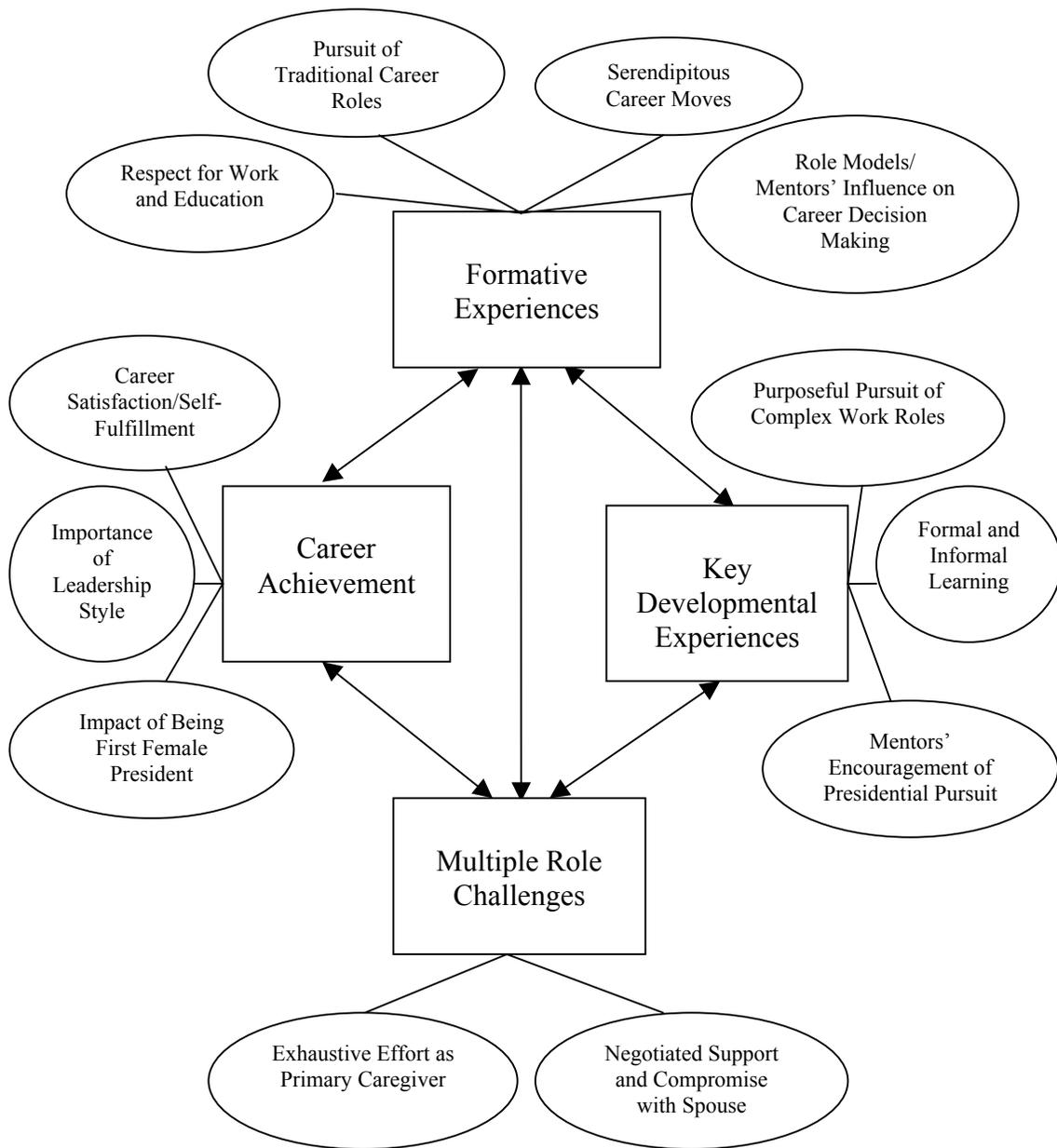


Figure 4.1. A Preliminary Conceptual Model of Selected Female Community College President's Career Development

increasing tension between family and career responsibilities that the women experienced as they moved into progressively higher-level administrative positions.

The fourth component of the Preliminary Conceptual Model is called Career Achievement. This component, which represents the culmination of the women's career development processes, describes the importance of work in the women's lives and their satisfaction with their roles as presidents, as well as the impact of their leadership style.

The Preliminary Conceptual Model of Selected Female Community College Presidents' Career Development suggests that becoming a community college president is a complex developmental process of assimilating multiple experiences and influences. In this chapter, the model will be used to describe the themes that emerged from the stories of the women who were selected to participate in this study.

#### Description of Participants

The five women who participated in this study were selected based on their community college career pathway experiences and their achievement of the community college presidency. At the time of the interviews in 2002, the women's ages ranged from the 50s to the mid-60s. One woman had never married, one was a widow, two were in their second marriages, and one had never been divorced. Two had grown children, one had teenaged children, and one had adult stepchildren.

The women shared many common characteristics: each woman was serving in her first presidency; each woman obtained her doctoral degree while working in a community college; each woman served as the dean of instruction or vice-president over academic affairs before becoming president; each woman had teaching

experience; and each woman was the first female to be appointed to the presidency at her college. Their years of community college experience prior to attaining the presidency ranged from 15 to 32 years. One president was appointed to her presidency in 1994, one in 1999, two in 2000, and one in 2001.

Two of the women attended a community college to begin their higher education studies. Three completed their baccalaureate degrees in the 1960s and two in the 1970s. Four of the women held doctorates of education and one held a doctorate of philosophy. All of the women were employed in community colleges while going to graduate school.

Each woman held four or five increasingly responsible administrative positions before moving into the presidency. Two women served as interim presidents prior to attaining a presidency, and all had served as vice-presidents or deans of instruction immediately prior to obtaining the presidency. Two women had held executive vice-presidencies, the “second in command” position at their colleges. Table 4.1 summarizes the work histories of the women selected to participate in this study.

Because this study collected personal information, the participants were assured that their identities would be protected in all oral and written reports of the study. Therefore, pseudonyms are used in Table 4.1 and throughout Chapter Four.

Table 4.1

## Work Histories of Female Community College Presidents Selected for Participation

| <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Position Prior to Presidency</b>               | <b>Prior Administrative Positions</b>   | <b>Teaching Experience</b>   | <b>Years of CC Experience</b> | <b>Highest Degree Earned</b> |
|------------------|---|---|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Gwen             | Vice-President/Provost (senior administrator)     | Provost, Assoc. Dean of Development, Exec. Director of Foundation, Director of Guidance, Guidance Counselor, <i>Director of Admissions, Assoc. Director of Admissions, Admissions Counselor</i> | <i>High school</i>   | 17                            | Ed.D., Ed. Leadership        |
| Judith           | Vice-President/Dean of Academic & Student Affairs | Vice-President/Dean of Academic Affairs, Program Director-State Oversight Agency, Acting Director, Continuing Education   | <i>Graduate Research Assistant, Assoc. Professor, Adjunct Instructor</i> | 24                            | Ph.D. Higher Ed. Admin.      |
| Rebecca          | Interim President                                 | Executive Vice-President, Executive VP for Administration, VP for Student Development, Counselor, Financial Aid Officer, Registrar, Learning Lab Coordinator                                    | Adjunct Instructor   | 32                            | Ed.D., Higher Ed. Admin.     |
| Abigail          | Vice-President for Instruction                    | Asst. Dean for Transfer Studies, Director of Off-Campus Instruction, <i>Director of Home-Based Early Childhood Program</i>  | <i>Public school teacher</i><br>Professor                                | 23                            | Ed.D., Ed. Administration    |
| Molly            | Interim President                                 | Dean of Instruction, Asst. to Pres. For Personnel and Development, Admin. Asst. to the President, <i>Office Manager, Exec. Secretary</i>  | Adjunct Instructor   | 15                            | Ed.D., Higher Ed. Admin.     |

*Note: Work experience outside of the community college is indicated by italics.*

The women's career paths prior to obtaining the presidency differed in interesting ways. Abigail rose up in the hierarchy through the traditional pathway of instructor, dean, and vice-president for instruction. Judith also began her career as an instructor and came through the traditional pathway from vice-president of instruction to president, but she served as a program director for a state higher education oversight agency before becoming a vice-president. Gwen began her career in student services,

moved into the college's development office, and then moved to provost of a satellite campus before becoming the vice-president for the college. Rebecca, who also began her career in student services, moved up to vice-president for student development, then to vice-president for administration, and finally to the executive vice-president for the college. Molly, who began her community college career as assistant to the president with responsibilities over personnel and college development, later became dean of instruction. Although their career pathways to the presidency differed, the women's stories illustrate the similarities in the influences and experiences that led them to their roles as community college presidents.

### Formative Experiences

The first component of the Preliminary Conceptual Model is Formative Experiences. The women shared many stories about their family backgrounds and their early work experiences. Their experiences illustrate their naiveté about career opportunities when they were young adults and their willingness to acquiesce to society's prevailing ideas about women's roles. This section presents the themes that emerged from their stories about their family backgrounds, their early work roles, and their mentors and role models.

#### *Respect for Work and Education*

The five women who participated in this study came from working-class families. Their fathers were employed as a mill worker, a railroad worker, the owner

of a construction business, and a businessman. One woman's father was deceased, and her mother did not remarry. Their mothers were homemakers, except for one mother who had to work outside the home after her husband died. None of the parents had completed a college education, and one woman's parents had never completed high school.

In their interviews, the women spoke of their parents' influence on their education and development. Although their family background experiences had minimal influence on the women's decisions to become community college presidents, two common themes related to their success as community college presidents emerged from their family background experiences.

One theme that was common in all of the women's backgrounds was respect for hard work. All of the women recalled images of their parents' hard work and of their struggles to make ends meet. Molly, for example, described her family:

Dad worked for a mill. Although I thought it was the best family in the whole world, we apparently didn't have a lot of money. It never dawned on me that Mom made all my clothes, never dawned on me that I had one pair of shoes to wear to church and another pair to wear to school and that was it.

All of the women described similar childhood memories of parents who worked hard to make ends meet. From their parents' examples, the women learned the value of hard work. For example, Gwen said, "Growing up in a poor southern family, the expectation was that if you wanted to succeed you'd have to do it yourself."

The women all started working while in high school, and they described the value of their early work experience. Rebecca, for example, said, “I was brought up that you worked. My father had a business, and at age fourteen I started working there and would work after school and on Saturdays.... I think it was a good thing to teach a child.” The women also believed that their early work experiences helped them develop a strong work ethic. For example, Judith said, “It’s my own make-up and nature that I always expected more of myself, challenged myself to do more, and worked really hard.” She credited her parents with helping her develop a strong work ethic. “They both worked hard,” she said. “I got my basic values and work ethic from them.”

A second theme that emerged from the women’s family background experiences was an appreciation for the value of a college education. Going to college after high school was a goal that the women set for themselves and was also a goal their parents had set for them. Judith, for example, described her parents as immigrants to America who never completed high school but who regarded a college education for their children as part of “their American dream.” Judith said, “Education was a real goal that [my mom] had for her children.” Rebecca’s parents had similar ambitions for their daughter. “I knew I was going to go to college because my parents told me from the time I was a baby,” she said. “In fact, when my [natural] father died, my mother took his insurance and put it into a trust fund. So my college education was guaranteed. . . . I knew I was going to college.”

Two of the women completed associate in arts degrees at community colleges, and they expressed first-hand knowledge of what a community college can mean to individuals from working class families. Gwen, for example, described the importance of being able to attend a community college:

I will be honest with you. I wouldn't be sitting here if I hadn't had the opportunity to go to a community college. My parents were very poor. If I wanted to go to college it was on my own, which I did. I worked full time and went to college and paid my way all through college. I know exactly what the role of community college is to individuals.

Judith, who also attended a community college, found that experience to be important to her success as a president. "I can really relate to the community college student because I came from that background," she said.

Although their family background experiences had minimal influence on the women's decisions to become community college presidents, these experiences did help to shape the values that helped the women to be successful as community college presidents. Among those values are a strong work ethic and a deep appreciation of the value of a college education.

### *Pursuit of Traditional Career Roles*

The women began their careers working in jobs that were considered to be traditional career roles for women. Their stories indicate that they perceived their gender, family backgrounds, and generation to be factors that influenced their early

work experiences. As teenagers, the women had few professional female role models other than their high school teachers. With few exceptions, their parents were not able to provide experiences and opportunities to broaden their awareness of career possibilities. Molly, for example, said, “I didn’t really have anybody that would say you can be anything you want to be,” she said. “The roles that mom had picked out for me were traditionally female, like nursing, or playing the organ at the church.”

The women attended high school during the 1950s and 1960s. When asked what their career goals were when they were in high school and planning for college, four of the women said “teacher” and one said “secretary.” Abigail, Judith, and Rebecca, who graduated from college in the 1960s, reflected on having limited career options. Rebecca, for example, described the three options available to her. “You had three choices graduating from high school. You could be a nurse, you could be a secretary, or you could be a teacher. I chose to be a teacher.” For Abigail, who planned to get married and start a family as soon as she graduated from college, a career in teaching meant that she would be able to have a job and also have time for her children. “Really, it was a narrow tunnel in which I walked,” she said. “There just were no other possibilities that occurred to me.”

The young women who did explore other possibilities besides teaching were usually redirected toward one of the three traditional careers. Rebecca, for example, recalled a visit to her high school guidance counselor:

I will never forget the day I went to the guidance counselor in high school and I told him that I had really been thinking about it and I wanted to be a

pharmacist. He told me, ‘No. You couldn’t do that. You just don’t do that.’

We were limited by those three choices in those days, and really the only role models you had with good educations were teachers. So that was pretty much it.

Abigail, too, spoke of being guided in the direction of teaching. “There was no such thing as career choice software in those days,” she said. “Teaching, teaching was all I ever thought of. It just never occurred to me to do anything else. . . . We were pretty much guided in that direction as I was graduating from college.”

Gwen and Molly, who graduated from college in the 1970s, also chose careers that were traditionally acceptable for women. Gwen chose teaching because she wanted a career that would provide a good income, and teaching was the only thing that occurred to her. “I looked around, saw my life, and said I don’t want it to be this way. What can I do to position myself where I won’t be this way?” she said. Like Gwen, Molly also chose her career based on the financial stability it represented. She said that she knew that as a secretary, she could always find work no matter what. “I thought I was going to get married and become a secretary and my husband would look after me,” she said.

The women’s experiences indicate that their career options were limited. They grew up in working-class families and did not have the kinds of opportunities and experiences that would broaden the scope of their career options. They had few professional female role models other than their high school teachers, and they chose careers that represented traditional career roles for women.

### *Serendipitous Career Moves*

Another influence on the women's career development was their early work roles. They chose teaching and secretarial work as their career goals, and they did not consider working in a community college in the early stages of their career development. Their career plans were altered, however, by serendipitous events or circumstances in their lives that led them to community college jobs. Once they began to work in community colleges, they developed an appreciation for the mission and work of their institutions. Their individual stories about how they ended up in community colleges illustrate how career plans can be altered dramatically by a single event.

Judith's career goal was to be a high school teacher. After graduation from college, she had already signed a contract to teach at a rural high school when she received an invitation to apply for a graduate fellowship. She said, "You know, that was probably one of those critical moments in your career. If I had not done that I probably would have a whole different life. That was an opportunity." After completing her master's degree in business, Judith applied for and received a teaching job in the community college she had attended before transferring to a university to complete her baccalaureate degree. Once on the college campus, she never considered high school teaching again. She said, "I loved being a faculty member, and I was always on committees and I was very involved."

Abigail began her career as an elementary school teacher, but she resigned her position when she became pregnant with her first child. After spending a few years at

home with her children, Abigail became the director of a church kindergarten program. Soon, she started taking courses for a master's degree in early childhood education. She returned to public school education as a teacher and then became the director of an early childhood education program. While on a trip abroad to visit early childhood education centers, Abigail met a community college dean who was planning to start an early childhood education program at the college. The dean encouraged Abigail to apply for a position at the college to oversee development of a new early childhood education program. Abigail did so and became a community college faculty member. She loved her job. "As soon as I got into the community college setting and did some teaching and some administrative work, I decided I wanted to be able to advance and so I took every opportunity that I could to find out about all areas of the college," she said.

When Rebecca started college, her career goal was to be a teacher. In the course of her studies, she changed her major to history and political science and her career goal to attorney. The summer before her graduation from college, Rebecca worked in the student development center of the community college in her hometown. "Before that time, I didn't even know what a community college was. I was here for the summer and literally loved what I was doing." During her senior year, the dean of instruction called and offered her a position. Rebecca had been accepted to law school and decided to work at the community college for one year before matriculating in law school. She began working at the community college as a learning lab and

government instructor. Rebecca loved her job at the community college so much that she never returned to law school.

After graduating from college with a degree in business administration, Molly taught high school briefly and discovered that she did not like teaching high school students. She then held a series of administrative support positions in business and banking. “Out of the blue” she saw an ad for the position of administrative assistant to a community college president. Molly said that she had no idea at the time what community colleges were all about, but she thought it would be good experience to work for a college president. She applied and was hired for the position, which included oversight of personnel and the public information office. Molly loved the college environment, and she soon became an evening adjunct instructor in addition to her duties as the president’s administrative assistant.

Gwen had attended a community college before transferring to a university for her teaching degree. She taught for six years in public schools and worked for a short time as a bank teller before getting her first job in higher education as director of admissions at a private college. When she saw that the college’s finances were not stable, she applied for a position as a guidance counselor at a community college. Although it was a step down to move from a director of admissions position to a counseling position, that move was pivotal for her career. She said, “As I began to work with advising in the community college arena, I saw decisions being made around me that profoundly affected not only the students but the community and the institution.”

Although working in a community college was not the first choice of any of these women, their career pathways were set once they started working on college campuses. Each woman described a serendipitous event that led her to the community college. For Judith, it was the decision to pursue a graduate fellowship rather than teach in a high school. For Abigail, it was a chance meeting with a community college dean, and for Rebecca, it was a summer job at the community college in her hometown. For Molly, it was an “out of the blue” job ad, and for Gwen it was the financial condition of the private college where she worked. All of the women described their community college jobs as very satisfying, and they saw opportunities for advancement within the community college hierarchy.

#### *Role Models/Mentors' Influence on Career Decision-Making*

Mentors and role models influenced the women's early career development. The women's stories indicate that their role models influenced their career decision-making, and their mentors influenced their pursuit of advanced degrees as well as their advancement to administrative positions in community colleges.

The women who chose teaching as a profession did so because they regarded their female public school teachers as role models. Gwen, for example, said, “I idolized my sixth grade teacher and from then on I just said that was for me.” Their teachers also provided opportunities for the young women to experience cultural events that they would not otherwise have experienced. Abigail described the influence of her high school teachers:

All my teachers were females who really encouraged me and provided many opportunities for growth outside the classroom. I got to usher at the opera so I could see the opera, and things like that. I was valedictorian and my senior English teacher invited me to her home and we worked together, talked over the development of the speech. . . . She was very supportive and helped me make sure that I had what it took to go on to college.

Their public school teachers were role models in another way, as well. Abigail planned to get married as soon as she finished college, and she knew that as a teacher she could have a profession and also have time to raise children.

Not only did the women describe their mothers as homemakers who were models of nurturing and care giving, but they also described their mothers as role models in their career decision-making processes. Some of the mothers had worked outside the home before having children, and other mothers worked in the family business or took jobs outside the home after their children were older. For example, Molly's mother went to work as a receptionist in a dentist's office when Molly was in the ninth grade. Molly chose to be a secretary, she said, because "the female role models that I was aware of, that was pretty much what they were doing." Both Judith and Abigail also recalled their mothers as role models of women in "non-traditional roles," meaning that they had occupations other than work as homemakers. Judith's mother was the bookkeeper for her father's construction business, and Abigail's mother worked as a bookkeeper to support her family after her husband died. Abigail

described her mother as a role model who “was able to take care of herself at a time when a lot of women would not be able to do that.”

While their role models influenced their early career decisions, the women’s mentors played important roles in influencing the women’s educational and career goals during this phase of their career development. In most cases, the women described their early mentors as professors or administrators who saw “some potential” in their abilities and who “encouraged” them to enroll in advanced degree programs or pursue certain jobs. For Judith, an important mentor was a dean who encouraged her to go back to college for a master’s degree:

He said to me, ‘you ought to become an administrator.’ He said, ‘you really need to go back to school because if you’re ever going to move up, you’re going to have to have a degree.’

Abigail’s mentor was the dean at the community college who encouraged her to apply for an instructor’s position at the college, and Molly’s was the president who encouraged her to get a master’s degree. “He really encouraged me to continue going to school,” she said. Rebecca’s mentor was the dean who persuaded her to take a position at a community college instead of going to law school, and Gwen’s was the dean who hired her as a guidance counselor and promoted her to director of counseling. “All along, he knew what my goals were,” she said.

These and other mentors played important roles in guiding the women into their careers as community college administrators. During the early years of their career development, the women lacked the knowledge and confidence to pursue

administrative careers. Their mentors, who recognized their potential, influenced the women to obtain higher degrees and pursue administrative careers. For example, Judith described the dean who mentored her when she became an instructor at a community college:

He encouraged me and pushed me to go back to school to get another degree and move into administration. . . . He inspired me to move on. He was the one who encouraged me to do all those things, to get more involved and to move into administration.

The women's mentors influenced them in their decisions to pursue pathways to community college administrative positions. At the encouragement of their mentors, the women enrolled in advanced degree programs and sought promotions on their campuses. Their mentors played important roles in their development by encouraging them to pursue advanced degrees and to consider administrative positions.

#### *Summary of Formative Experiences*

The first finding of the study was that the women's career development had a formative component that included four influences. First, their family background experiences were influential in the development of their work ethic and their appreciation for the value of a college education. These values remained with the women throughout their careers. Second, their early career decisions were influenced by their gender, family backgrounds, and generation. The women grew up in working class families at a time when most women in the workforce were teachers or nurses or

secretaries, and they chose careers considered appropriate for women. Third, each woman described an event or circumstance in her early career experience that influenced her decision to work in a community college. The women initially did not choose careers related to community colleges, nor did they have aspirations to become educational administrators. Their stories of their early career experiences suggest that they ended up in community college positions more by serendipity than by design. The final formative experience was the role of mentors and role models who influenced the women's pursuit of advanced degrees and their advancement to administrative positions in community colleges.

### Key Developmental Experiences

The second component of the women's career development is Key Developmental Experiences. This component describes how the women gained knowledge and skills through formal education, work experience, and professional development. This component also describes the mentoring relationships that were significant in shaping their career decisions. This section will present the themes related to the women's community college career experiences, their decisions to pursue the presidency, the influence of mentors, and the professional development experiences that guided them in narrowing their focus on the presidency as a career goal.

### *Purposeful Pursuit of Complex Work Roles*

Although all of the women came to their presidencies from within the ranks of the community college hierarchy, their pathway experiences differed. Two of the women began their careers in student services, two as faculty members, and one as administrative assistant to the president. All of the women ended up in vice-presidencies that included oversight of academic programs. Their increasingly complex administrative roles provided opportunities to develop skills, abilities, and knowledge and to learn about community college mission and governance. Along with their increased knowledge and self-confidence came the realization of the community college presidency as a career goal. The women's stories illustrate their varied career paths and their recognition of the presidency as a career goal. In this section, each woman's career pathway is presented and conclusions are drawn about their experiences.

*Judith.* Judith's community college career began as a faculty member. A dean who saw her potential as an administrator encouraged her to go back to college for her doctoral degree, and she began a higher education leadership program while she was teaching. After a family move, she resumed her doctoral studies at another university and taught part-time in a community college's prison education program. After completing the doctorate, Judith applied for and received a job in a state-level higher education oversight agency, where she was responsible for authorizing all academic degree programs. Judith described her experience there as a "defining moment" in her career. After three years in the state level position, Judith became the first female

vice-president for academic affairs at one of the state's community colleges. Four years later, administration of student services was added to her responsibilities.

Judith said that being a president “was never my goal. I really didn't know that I wanted to be a president until I was finishing my doctorate, but I think I really realized it when I got my job as a vice-president.” Her president supported her career goal, and after three years she became a community college president in a different state.

Abigail. Abigail left her job with a public school system to become a faculty member at a community college and to help develop the college's new early childhood education program. She sought the advice of a mentor before making this career change:

I consulted the professor who was my advisor about the advisability of leaving public education and going into the community college. He said, ‘I really feel like this will be the institution of the future, especially for a female. I think your opportunities will be greater there than in the public school system.’

During her fourteen years at the college, Abigail obtained her doctoral degree and received promotions to director of off-campus instruction and then to assistant dean for transfer studies. Abigail applied for an instructional vice-presidency at a community college in another state. She was hired and was the first woman to hold that position.

While she was a vice-president, Abigail's president encouraged her to “work towards becoming a president,” and she applied for several presidencies. She had

come to the realization that “looking at the roles and responsibilities, I liked what the president did better than what the vice-president did.”

*Rebecca.* Rebecca began her community college career as a learning lab coordinator and government instructor. After a year, she moved into the registrar’s position, and from there she became the director of counseling and financial aid. She soon completed her master’s degree and became the vice-president for student development. She was also the first female vice-president at the college. “I loved student development and I loved students, and that is still my main emphasis,” she said. “Therefore, I thought I would always be in this position.” She had served in this position for ten years when the president asked her to move into the position of executive vice-president for administration. This position gave her valuable experience in the oversight of finance, facilities, and maintenance. During this time, she also obtained her doctoral degree. After four years as executive vice-president for administration, her title was changed to executive vice-president and she became responsible for the day-to-day operations of the college.

Realizing that she had the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to run a campus, Rebecca applied and became a finalist for presidencies of two other colleges. However, she changed her plans and decided to remain as executive vice-president at her college:

I think it scared me, and I was so close to having 30 years that I didn’t want to disrupt my life to go somewhere else. . . . Being the executive VP under [this

president] is the best job anybody could ever have. Also, I would have had to take a sizeable pay cut to move away.

Four years later, Rebecca was making plans to retire when the president unexpectedly died. She filled the role of interim president for one year before accepting the presidency of the college.

Molly. Molly began her community college career as the administrative assistant to the president. She also became an evening adjunct instructor and enrolled in a master's degree program. After two years, the president promoted her to assistant to the president and gave her additional responsibilities, including oversight of the foundation and supervision of personnel and public information. "He really let me run with lots of new ideas," she said. "He was just a great mentor."

During her tenure as assistant to the president, Molly decided on the presidency as her career goal. She enrolled in a doctoral degree program and was promoted to dean of instruction for the college. She was the first woman to hold this position at her campus. Molly had served for two years as dean of instruction when the president retired. She then served as interim president for one year. During the year she served as interim, she applied for and received the presidency at another community college.

Gwen. Gwen began her community college career as a guidance counselor. She realized early in her community college career that she wanted to move up in the college's administration. She said, "I gradually started putting myself in positions and making my supervisors know that when the time came, I would like to be

considered for higher positions within the ranks.” Within a year, Gwen was promoted to director of counseling.

Gwen decided early that she wanted to be a community college president. She had already received her master’s degree, and she began a doctoral program in educational leadership. Over the next ten years, Gwen was promoted to associate dean of development and executive director of the foundation, then to provost of an off-campus center, and finally to vice-president and provost of the main campus. In this position, she supervised student development services as well as all off-campus academic programs, and she served as the senior executive in charge of the institution in the absence of the president. “I was lucky,” she said. “I was there seventeen years, and every four years I had a new opportunity.” After three years as vice-president, Gwen applied for and obtained a presidency.

The desire to move up within the community college hierarchy was common to all of the women who participated in this study. Although they entered the community college workforce as faculty members or support staff, they were not satisfied to remain in their entry-level positions for very long. Judith became very involved on faculty committees, Abigail chaired the faculty senate, Rebecca and Gwen sought higher-level staff positions in student services, and Molly sought special project assignments from the president. Abigail described the ambition to move ahead, an ambition shared by all of the women. She said, “As soon as I got into the community college setting and did some teaching and some administrative work, I

decided I wanted to be able to advance and so I took every opportunity that I could to find out about all areas of the college.”

The women purposefully pursued career experiences that would provide them with opportunities to develop technical and professional competencies across many areas of their institutions. They described how their increasingly complex administrative job assignments provided them with opportunities to learn about how community colleges are governed, managed, and funded. Judith, for example, saw the benefit of having administration of student services added to her responsibilities as vice-president of instruction. “One of my weaknesses was that I had not had a student affairs background,” she said, “so then I got to do both.” Gwen talked about being strategic in gaining appointments to positions that would broaden her knowledge and experience. She said, “I saw where my weaknesses were and positioned myself to be able to be in those areas. Fundraising, for example, and running a branch campus. These are things that I would not have had the opportunity to do had I stayed in the same position.”

From the time the women began their work in community colleges until they became presidents, their community college career pathway experiences spanned between 13 and 32 years, and they collectively held 25 positions that spanned all of the administrative areas of a college. During these years, they developed valuable knowledge about community college administration. Abigail described the benefits of her community college career pathway experiences:

I really did develop a good feel for all areas of the community college. When the opportunity came to take the position of dean of off-campus instruction, I took that and that gave me experience in student services, administration, personnel, a lot of continuing education as well as curriculum, and I felt that helped me to have a broader grasp on community colleges and what they were all about.

### *Mentors' Encouragement of Presidential Pursuit*

Mentors and role models were an important influence in this component of the women's career development. Although the women did not actively seek mentors who would help them with their career development, each woman named at least one person as her significant mentor. Their mentors were instrumental in supporting the women's professional development and in encouraging them to consider the presidency as a career goal. The women also identified people who served as inspirational role models during their career development.

All of the significant mentor relationships described by the women were supervisor – subordinate relationships. Each woman identified her president as her primary mentor and described the president's mentoring role as providing additional job assignments and professional development opportunities. Gwen, for example, described the support and opportunities she received from her president:

He hired me as a guidance counselor when he was a dean and he made his way all the way through with me. As he was promoted, he took me with him.

When he became president, I went to see him and said, “What’s next?” That is when he said, “You have no fund raising experience, so let’s put you over in the foundation.” I did that for four years and then went back to him and said, “What’s next?” He said, “You have no branch campus experience, so let’s put you out there.” So I went out to a branch campus and ran that.

Gwen’s description of her mentoring relationship illustrates that this relationship enhanced her influence in the community college and increased her potential for advancement. The other women experienced similar benefits from their mentoring relationships. Molly, for example, who began her career in the community college as an administrative assistant to the president, was assigned increasingly responsible job assignments and special projects that culminated in her appointment as dean of instruction. “I had never even considered doing that,” she said, “but the president said, ‘You need to do this. You need to go in this direction.’ And he was right.”

The mentors also helped the women gain confidence in their abilities. Most of the women identified a lack of self-confidence as the reason they did not pursue the presidency earlier in their careers, and they described the significant roles their mentors played in helping them to gain more confidence in themselves. Judith, for example, described the importance of her mentors in helping her gain enough confidence to pursue a presidency:

I never would have imagined, never in a million years, that this is something that I would have wanted to do or would have been good at. Part of that is self-confidence. I was fortunate that I had people who could see potential and

help me with my own self-confidence because I don't think I would have done it without that. I liked being a faculty member and I could have stayed there a long time and be retired right now and on to a second career somewhere else! Through their encouragement and support, the mentors helped the women become more knowledgeable, experienced, and self-assured.

During the time that these women were progressing in their careers, there were few women presidents available to serve as mentors. Judith described the absence of female mentors. "There weren't many women faculty in the doctoral programs," she said, "and there weren't women role models out there in the educational institutions." The mentors these women described were all men, and all of the presidents they had worked for were men. Their descriptions of their mentoring relationships indicate that their presidents recognized their potential and intentionally established mentoring relationships. Rebecca said, for example, "I really think a key was that [he] saw something in me that I did not see in myself."

While their significant mentors were their male supervisors, the women identified women as their role models. These role models were successful women in high-level leadership positions. Judith identified as her role model a woman who was the only female community college president in another state. Abigail recalled a female dean whom she described as "the epitome of the steel hand in the velvet glove." Rebecca's female role model was the first female chairperson of the local school board, and Molly's was one of the first female community college presidents in her state. These role models were important because they were women who were

successful in leadership positions. For the women in this study, these role models represented the potential of what they could be.

Mentors and role models provided inspiration, motivation, and guidance to these women. More important, their influence helped the women gain confidence in their own leadership abilities. Molly summarized the importance of the mentors and role models who had assisted and inspired her. “It’s important to have your contacts and your network. I don’t know where I would be without the people who helped me. I would still be administrative assistant to [the president] if they had not inspired me.”

### *Formal and Informal Learning*

The women’s educational achievement and professional development were also factors in building their self-confidence and developing the skills needed to pursue the presidency. All of the women recognized the importance of formal education in preparing for administrative positions, and all of them pursued advanced degrees after accepting their first community college positions. Abigail, for example, talked about going back to graduate school while she was teaching at the community college. “I just kept on taking courses,” she said. “Once I got my master’s degree, I just went back and back and back.” As the women completed the advanced degrees, they found more opportunities available to them. Molly, for example, said, “As I continued my education, there were more opportunities that opened up for me. The president gave me more and more responsibilities.”

The women in this study were highly motivated to complete their doctoral degrees, which they did while working full-time at community colleges. Their completion of the degrees corresponded with significant promotions. Judith received a position at the state higher education oversight agency soon after completing her doctorate. Abigail became the director of off-campus instruction, and Rebecca became the vice president for student development. Molly, who had completed all coursework but had not written her dissertation, became dean of instruction. Gwen became associate dean of development and executive director of the foundation. For these women, completion of the doctoral degree was a prerequisite to receiving higher-level administrative positions. When asked what advice they would give to other women who aspired to become community college presidents, all of the women said to earn the doctoral degree. They viewed obtaining the degree not only as part of the preparation for the presidency, but also as a necessary credential. Judith said, “You can’t get in the door if you don’t have the right credentials.”

Formal education alone was not sufficient to prepare the women for increasingly responsible jobs. The women described leadership institutes and training seminars for future presidents as valuable learning opportunities. At these seminars, the women established relationships with other women who held similar administrative positions or who had already become presidents. Rebecca, for example, described the female friends she made at a national leadership institute in 1985. “I have always had them to talk with and to be honest with me,” she said. This kind of networking also helped the women gain confidence in their leadership abilities

and in their own potential as future presidents. Abigail, for example, said, “I think until that point I really had not had a sufficient level of confidence in myself that I could [be a president].”

All of the women who participated in this study actively pursued self-development by earning advanced degrees and participating in professional development opportunities throughout their careers. Their learning and development experiences suggest that self-development and intellectual development were important components of their career development processes. Abigail summarized the importance of preparing academically and professionally for a career as a community college president:

If I had not been prepared when I got to this place, I could not have gotten the job [as president]. So you have got to prepare yourself, to do all the things that you need to do to advance yourself, and that is to do all the reading and take any coursework you need and make sure that you have a terminal degree. That’s critical. Make sure you know a lot of people. . . . Stay tuned in to what the possibilities are and make sure that you take advantage of every opportunity that you have so when that time comes, you are ready to take it.

### *Developing the Ambition to Become Presidents*

The women did not begin their careers in community colleges with the presidency as their career goal. Rebecca, for example, said, “I am not one of these people whose goal was to become a community college president.” The recognition

of the presidency as a career goal was more like an awakening for these women, although Gwen identified the presidency as her career goal much earlier than the other women. For the others, the realization came gradually, after years of education, administrative work, and professional development.

The women's decisions to seek the presidency were linked to their mastery of administrative and leadership competencies that resulted from their increasingly complex job assignments. For Rebecca, the realization came while she served as executive vice-president in charge of day-to-day operations of the college. For Judith, Molly, and Abigail, it was while they were serving as academic vice-presidents or deans. Gwen had identified the presidency as a career goal early in her career, but she did not feel ready for the position until she had served as vice-president and provost. In all cases, the women reached a time in their career progressions when they acknowledged their readiness to pursue the presidency as a career goal.

One of the motivators that led these women to seek the presidency was their increasing self-confidence as they realized that they could do as good a job, if not a better job, than the presidents they worked for. Molly's words describe the feeling that all of the women shared. "This is going to sound bad," she said, "but in working directly with the president and being his assistant and doing different projects, it occurred to me one day, you know you can do this, too." A related motivator described by the women was their frustration of being the "second-in-command" at a college. Gwen, for example, described this frustration as "a kind of an empty feeling

that you can't see something come through to fruition that affected the institution under your leadership.”

Another motivator for seeking the presidency was the women's desire to do more for a college community, to make a difference in the lives of students, and to be able to effect change on a larger scale. Abigail described how as a vice-president, she began to realize that as a president she could more effectively influence the lives of students:

I came to see the possibilities of affecting students through affecting faculty and staff. In other words, I could make things happen by smoothing their path and making it easier for them to do what they wanted to do and encouraging them to do what they needed to do, and I wanted to be in a position where I could do that more effectively. I felt like while I could do a lot of it as the vice-president, if I could be president then I would be able to touch not only the faculty, but all of the institution.

Abigail's words were echoed by the other women as they discussed the factors that motivated them to seek the presidency. They all reached a point in their careers when they discovered that they could more readily effect campus-wide change through the position of the presidency. The community college presidency had become their career ambition.

### *Summary of Key Developmental Experiences*

The second component of the study is Key Developmental Experiences. This component describes three career development influences related to gaining the knowledge and skills needed to succeed as presidents. The first influence was the women's community college work roles. The women described the increasingly complex administrative job assignments that provided them with opportunities to learn about how community colleges are governed, managed, and funded. The second influence was the role of mentors who provided opportunities for career advancement and who encouraged the women to seek positions as presidents. The women also described inspirational female role models who were in successful leadership positions. The third key development influence was educational and professional development experiences. The women felt that the leadership institutes they had attended were especially important in helping them to develop self-confidence and to establish networks with other female community college administrators.

The women's decisions to seek the presidency were linked to their mastery of administrative and leadership competencies and to their growing self-confidence.

### Multiple Role Challenges

The third component of career development is Multiple Role Challenges. The women's stories indicate that balancing work and family was one of the biggest challenges they faced in their career progression. The women who had children described the struggle to balance the responsibility and time commitment of raising

children with the responsibility and time commitment of career advancement. The women with spouses described the struggle of negotiating a career move that would support one spouse's career advancement without hindering the other's career. Those without children struggled with the compromises they had made in order to advance in their careers. Key understandings in this section focus on the women's efforts to balance career advancements and family responsibilities.

#### *Exhaustive Effort as Primary Caregiver*

The stories shared by the three women who had children indicate that trying to balance career development and raising children was a "big challenge." The women's escalating careers, educational advancements, and professional development required a great deal of time and effort. At the same time, they were the primary caregivers of their children and were responsible for the housework, food, laundry, and other family responsibilities. Judith described the difficulty of being a married woman with children and a career who is responsible for raising the children and running the household. "Basically, the woman does that, and I wasn't any different, so that was a big challenge," she said. The stories told by these three women suggest that they expended a great deal of physical and emotional energy trying to maintain the balance between the demands of their careers and the responsibilities of child-raising.

The women had few professional female role models who had raised children while working. Judith described what it was like to work and raise children in the days before childcare centers:

My peer group stayed home. I was the only one on my block with small children that worked, so I guess one of the hard things was I was never really in sync with my peers. They were all getting married before I did and having children before I did and staying home with their children. I was out of sync, ahead of my time probably, and that made it more difficult. I had to be very creative in finding solutions.

Abigail did stay home with her children when they were young, but those years delayed her career development. “I think a lot of females face this because we start later if we choose to stay home with our children,” she said. “I started out way behind. Consequently, I was in my late fifties before it even occurred to me that I wanted to be a president.”

The women’s stories about the challenges of balancing children and career indicate that they had to make compromises in order to stay on their career tracks. Judith, for example, returned to her position at the state higher education oversight office while her second daughter was still an infant. “How do you have children and try to keep a career path going?” she asked. “I went back to [my position] five weeks after I had my daughter because that job was open, and I knew if I waited too long it wouldn’t be.” Abigail described the compromise she made when she accepted the position of vice-president and moved to a different state, leaving her teenage children with her first husband in their home state. “Those years were really very special years [for them], and I missed out on that, and I’m sorry for that,” she said.

Giving up time with their children was a “huge compromise” the women made in pursuing their careers. They worried that the time they spent away from their children would be detrimental to them. Molly expressed the guilt she felt about the demands of her job and graduate school. She said, “One of my biggest worries was that I would get even more tied up and be away from my girls and not be the mom that I needed to be. Sometimes I think I may have failed at that because I haven’t been there all the time. If I have a regret, that’s going to be it.” Abigail, too, admitted that the time she had dedicated time to the development of her career was detrimental to her family. She said, “In the early years I was so intent on building a good reputation in my work that I probably spent more of my effort on that than I did on my children.”

The women also described the challenge of balancing children and career as “exhausting.” Judith said, “I had no idea it would be such a challenge.” Molly described the time when she had two young children, a full-time job, primary responsibility for housework, and was pregnant with her third child. She also was enrolled in a doctoral program in a distant city and was commuting to classes one night a week. She became exhausted and experienced complications with her pregnancy, and her third child was stillborn near full-term. Molly was determined to continue on her career track, although in retrospect she realizes that she should have taken more time to grieve her loss:

I probably should have taken longer off now that I look back at that. I took a semester off and probably should have taken longer. If anybody was to ask me

what's the worst I'd been through, that would be it. It took me a long time to get over that. I look at that period as a really dark period of my life.

The struggle to balance career and family often seemed overwhelming for these women, but sometimes they found their careers to be more fulfilling than their families. Abigail, for example, said that work provided a challenge and a stimulus that she did not receive from her family. She said, "My work was more rewarding to me than my home life was. I'm sorry about that. I should have balanced that better, but I did not. The work and the opportunities I had [in my work] were what kept me alive and fueled me."

Gwen and Rebecca did not have children, so they were able to focus their time and energies on their career advancement without having to worry about child-raising responsibilities. Their stories, however, indicate that the decision not to have children was a compromise. When Gwen married her second husband, they discussed the possibility of having a family. Her husband said, "If you are going to have children, have them now." But Gwen had already identified the presidency as a career goal and was positioning herself for career advancement. She said, "I consciously chose not to have children." Although Rebecca described being involved with her sister's children and caring for her aging mother as fulfilling, she acknowledged that her focus on career development to the detriment of having a family was the biggest compromise in her life:

I have made some big choices. Choices that you don't look back on now that you have made them. One thing is that I think I have always been so tied into

my career that I have never married, so therefore I don't have any children. I think that is a big, big compromise I made. It was a big choice, and really I'm not sure even when I really made that choice. But now, looking back, I made the choice so I am not going to let it bother me. You just keep going with it. There are times, though, I think it would be nice to have some children or grandchildren.

### *Negotiated Support and Compromise with Spouse*

The stories of the participants in this study indicated that married women in high-level administrative positions needed their spouses' support, both in managing the household and in supporting their career advancement. The married women in this study found that having a two-career family meant making compromises.

The women described their spouses as supportive of their career advancement. Judith described her husband as a "forward thinking" person who said that "he wanted his wife to have a career, and if I wanted to work and have children, that would be fine with him. That was just unheard of [in the early seventies]." The other women also described their husbands as supportive of their career goals.

Although their husbands supported their career advancements, the women perceived their husbands to be less supportive in helping with household and child-raising responsibilities. Molly, for example, described the exhausting work of raising the children and running the household while holding a full-time job and going to graduate school. She said, "I would come home from work, cook supper, spend time

with them, and once I got them to bed, then I turned to my studies.” Judith, too, described the responsibility of running the household as a job that was “expected” of her. When her children were young, Judith “found someone that came to [her] house sixty hours a week and would do all the cooking and all the housework and take care of the kids” so that she could focus on her career advancement.

The married women in this study had spouses who had their own careers, so negotiating a career move required one spouse to make a compromise. Judith, for example, commuted fifty-eight miles one way to work every day for seven years because her husband could not move. Later when she received her presidency, her husband had to give up his career to move with her. “He wasn’t real crazy about moving here, but in the end we worked it out,” she said. “That’s the difficult part of it if you have a spouse who has a career.” Molly’s husband supported her goal of being a president, but he was unable to find a job after they moved. Abigail’s husband gave up his career to move for her presidency, but that move resulted in an early retirement for him. Gwen waited for her husband to retire before she applied for a presidency. Although her husband did not want to move out of state, Gwen said, “he knew that I was in the prime of my career and if I intended to ever be a president that I was going to have to leave the state.”

The challenge of balancing two careers was evident in the women’s stories. The women believed that their husbands were supportive of their career goals, but at the same time they realized that their own career progression negatively affected their spouses’ careers. Judith summarized this challenge. “I was fortunate that for the most

part my husband was supportive,” she said. “But you still have to juggle two careers that might be going in different directions.”

### *Summary of Multiple Role Challenges*

The third component of the women’s career development is Multiple Role Challenges. This component describes two influences related to the women’s personal lives that were significant in their career development. The first influence was related to their roles as primary caregivers. The women’s stories about the challenges of balancing career expectations and child-raising responsibilities indicate that they had to make compromises. The biggest compromise they described was giving up time with their children in order to keep their careers on track. The women who chose not to have children described that decision as a compromise, also.

The second influence was related to negotiated support and compromise with their spouses. The married women in this study had spouses who had their own careers, so negotiating a career move was a difficult family decision that required one spouse to make a compromise. The women’s stories revealed that maintaining the balance between career advancement and family responsibilities was not easy.

### Career Achievement

The final component of the Preliminary Conceptual Model of Selected Female Community College Presidents’ Career Development is Career Achievement. This component represents the culmination of the women’s career development process.

This section will examine the women's experiences as the first female presidents at their colleges, their leadership styles, and their satisfaction at having achieved their career goals.

### *Impact of Being the First Female President*

The five participants in this study were the first women to be named presidents of their institutions. They described their perceptions about how their gender influenced their hiring decisions, and they described their transitions into their institutions.

Four of the women described their achievement of the presidency by saying, "I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time." The women were also aware that gender was a factor in their selection as presidents. Judith, for example, described her selection as president:

I was very lucky in that I happened to be a female at the time when they were noticing that there weren't many female presidents. . . . When I applied for my first presidency, they happened to be looking for a woman, and all of the finalists were women.

The other women also described being "lucky" that they were seeking presidencies at a time when trustees were looking for women in leadership roles. Gwen, however, took a more pragmatic approach. In describing her interview for the presidency, Gwen said, "I wasn't going to be foolish enough to think that I could have an advantage because I was female or even be disadvantaged because I was female."

The women all faced reactions from people in their communities when they were named the first female presidents at their respective colleges. Gwen, for example, was interviewed by a reporter about how it felt to be the first female president. She said, “I hope I was selected because of my leadership skills and not necessarily because of my gender.” Molly described the newspaper headline announcing her presidency. “It didn’t say ‘President Selected.’ It didn’t say ‘Molly Jones Selected.’ It said ‘Woman Selected To Be President.’ I didn’t know what to think.”

The women described the challenges they faced in dealing with the “good old boy” political networks in their local communities. Rebecca, for example, described her work with male-dominated boards. “We have never had a woman to successfully be elected to the county commission or the city council,” she said. “It is pretty much still a male world.” Gwen also described the “good old boy” politics in her rural county:

I know I will never be in the back rooms where the “good old boys” make the decisions, but I expect to be in the hallways where they will turn and say, let’s find out what they are going to do at the college.

### *Importance of Leadership Style*

The women described their strategies for gaining acceptance on their campuses and in their communities. Their leadership strategies included being involved in the

community, identifying and nurturing the strengths of others, and using positive and open communication.

As presidents, the women had developed strategies for dealing with the “male world” of local politics, such as joining key civic clubs and serving on local chamber of commerce boards. These strategies helped them gain acceptance in their communities’ political circles. Gwen described a strategy that she used:

I went out and met with all of the politicians and personally went into their offices. I made appointments and sat down and introduced myself to the police chiefs, the fire chiefs, the mayors, and the county commissioners. I think that set a tone. . . . Because I reached out, I think that has made an impact that they didn’t expect. ‘Well, she’s not a prima donna. She’s approachable.’

Like Gwen, Rebecca found that being approachable was a strategy that helped her gain acceptance. She described her relationship with a county commissioner who had not worked cooperatively with the former president:

The commissioner just didn’t like [the president], it was that simple. We had a lot of trouble with the branch campus [in that county]. Well, that’s gone. For some reason, now all of a sudden he is a big supporter. Maybe my style is different. As a woman, I go in and I ask in a different way and my demeanor is different.

In describing their campus leadership styles, the women identified leadership characteristics that helped them gain acceptance. One leadership characteristic was identifying and nurturing the strengths in others and using positive rather than punitive

approaches to management. Judith, for example, talked about learning to handle tough situations in a positive way. “I learned that I could be tough in a soft kind of way. I could be tough and not be confrontational,” she said. Judith called listening to others and nurturing their development the “feminine” aspect of leadership. Abigail also described the nurturing role that women bring to leadership positions:

I think women bring a caring role to institutions that recognizes people as individuals and recognizes the strengths in people. Women also are cognizant of the pull from home, children, and everything else that so many of their employees have. They are more willing to work with them and to be accepting of those things. I think there is real strength in being able to do that, in supporting your people, knowing them by name, knowing their families, and letting them know that you are there for them.

A commitment to nurturing the people who work at their colleges was common to all of the women in their presidential roles.

Another leadership characteristic common to all of the women was using open communication. “If people know what’s happening and why it’s happening, they might not always agree but at least there is an understanding level there that helps them to understand,” Gwen explained. Abigail described the importance of open communication in her role as president:

I communicate completely and effectively with people and get input from a wide variety of people, especially those most directly affected, before any decision is made. I find that when I do that, there is less opportunity for hurt

feelings and for repercussions and all kinds of things. If people understand where you are coming from and the reasons for it, then they are much more accepting.

Their commitment to using open communication indicates that these women did not manage others by controlling the flow of information. Instead, they exhibited a high level of self-confidence and trust in others.

### *Career Satisfaction and Self-Fulfillment*

Work seemed to be important to the women in this study, and their work as presidents of community colleges seemed to be connected to self-fulfillment. Gwen, for example, said “I live to work, and that type of lifestyle enhances me outside of the work. I wouldn’t be content if I didn’t have this career. If I could not work, I just don’t know what I would do.” For these women, work provided a kind of fulfillment that a family could not provide. Abigail described the time when she stayed home to raise her children. “About the third year, I got terribly bored with that. Bored is not the right word—it was just not sufficient,” she said. “I just needed something else.”

Work and life had become inextricably intertwined for the women who participated in this study. The nature of their jobs required that they spend many hours outside of normal business hours attending meetings and serving on boards. Many of them also spent their free evening hours catching up on office work. Abigail called her work “the center of my life,” and Judith described her job as “more

consuming than it ought to be. I think I would describe this not as a job, but as a life style—that is, I really don't know that you can end one and start another.”

The community college presidency had become a “life's work” for these women. They described their work as satisfying, fulfilling, rewarding, and important. They talked about how well suited they are to their campuses and their communities. Gwen described her compatibility to the college by saying “the word fit is defined for me here.” The women also described their work in terms of their relationships with other people, such as faculty members, board members, and people in the community. Molly said, “It is important to feel needed, to feel like I am making a difference” to the people at the college.

The five women who participated in this study expressed a high level of satisfaction in their roles as community college presidents. The women were exuberant in saying “I love it” when asked about their jobs as presidents. Part of their career satisfaction related to the accomplishments they saw in their roles as presidents. Judith, for example, said, “It is very rewarding to be able to see the accomplishments. It's exciting and challenging. Every day is different and you never know what to expect, but after all is said and done, it's a very rewarding position.”

The women also described being part of the community as a factor in their career satisfaction. They described their involvement with local boards and community organizations as “enjoyable” and “fulfilling.” Abigail said, “I got immediately involved in everything in the county because that was the best way for

me to promote the college and myself. I had to really become involved in everything. It's been very rewarding.”

The women also related career satisfaction to the internal management of their institutions. They all felt that they were the right “fit” for their institutions, and they described managing their institutions as the most satisfying part of their jobs. Molly said, “I love making sure everything is going smoothly,” and Judith said, “I try to make the work environment the best it can be.” In summarizing her career achievement and her responsibility to the institution, Gwen described the importance of being a good leader:

I've taken the next step forward leadership-wise, and now all the pressure is on me as the leader to make sure this institution stays dynamic, stays moving, stays focused, and shame on me if it gets to the point where it doesn't excite me any more because I have done something to steer myself off course. . . . This part of the job excites me and that is why I love what I do.

#### *Summary of Career Achievement*

The fourth component of this study is Career Achievement. This component represents the culmination of the women's career development processes, and it describes the women's perceptions of their career goal achievement. The women's comments indicate that they defined themselves in terms of their work, which had become the center of their lives. They described their work as satisfying, fulfilling, rewarding, and important. The women also described their nurturing leadership styles

on their campuses, and they expressed a commitment to using open communication. They believed that their leadership styles allowed them to influence the work of their institutions in positive ways. Finally, the women expressed a high level of satisfaction in their roles as community college presidents. They all felt that they were the right “fit” for their institutions.

### Chapter Summary

The study provides insights into the multiple influences that shaped the career development processes of five female community college presidents. The women did not begin their careers with the intention of becoming the chief executive officers in community colleges. Instead, their identification of the presidency as a career goal developed gradually as their technical and professional competency and their self-confidence increased.

The women identified background experiences and social role expectations as factors that influenced their early career decisions to be teachers and secretaries. They described their early work roles and the mentors who influenced them as they serendipitously moved into their first jobs at community colleges. They also described their career development in the community colleges, including their purposeful pursuit of complex work roles, mentors and role models, and educational and professional development opportunities. As they became more competent and more self-confident, the women developed the ambition of becoming community college presidents. However, the challenge of maintaining a balance between their

career goals and their family responsibilities was difficult for these women. They expressed regret for the time that their careers had taken away from their children and for the impact of their career advancements on their spouses' careers.

The model of Selected Female Community College Presidents' Career Development was introduced to illustrate the multiple influences that affected the women's career development. The model graphically presents the key understandings that emerged from this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of female community college presidents' career development processes and of the experiences that influenced their decisions to become community college presidents. This chapter presents a summary of the study, along with conclusions and implications of this research for educators and for women who aspire to become community college presidents. The first section of this chapter briefly reviews the literature and research questions. Next, a summary of the methodology and conceptual framework is presented and the findings are delineated. Finally, the implications of the research are presented, along with a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for research and practice.

#### Summary of Literature Review

Two major areas of research were reviewed for this study. One area reviewed was career pathways of female community college presidents, including the barriers women have faced in pursuing the presidency and the mentoring relationships that supported them in meeting their goals. The other research area reviewed was career development theory and its applications to women's career development experiences. The research questions for this study were based in career development theory and in previous research on community college presidents' career pathways.

Studies of community college presidents' career pathways reveal that men and women have followed the same pathway to the presidency. Vaughan (1986) and others have identified the "academic pipeline" as the most common route to the presidency (Buddemeier, 1998; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). In addition, most successful presidential candidates have planned their career pathways with the ultimate goal of achieving the presidency, and most have earned the doctorate in preparation for the presidency (Buddemeier, 1998; Vaughan, 1986; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002).

Several career pathways' studies have also examined barriers that women experience in their progression to the community college presidency (Buddemeier, 1998; Taylor, 1981; Vaughan, 1989 & 1989a). These studies have focused primarily on environmental influences on women's career development, such as career-family conflict, spousal support, gender discrimination, and lack of access to male-dominated networks. Previous studies have also explored the influence of mentors and role models in career development (Barhorst, 1997; Buddemeier, 1998; Hansman, 1998; Moore & Salimbene, 1981; Vaughan, 1989). These studies indicate that mentors play influential roles in women's career development.

For this study, the researcher examined female community college presidents' career pathways within a conceptual framework informed by career development theory. In a review of dominant career development theories, Stitt-Gohdes (1997) concluded that traditional career development theories "reflect the dominant makeup of the professional work force of 20 or 30 years ago: white, middle-class males" (p.

13). Other researchers suggest that the application of current career development theory to explain women's career development is limited (Bierema, 1998; Brown & Brooks, 1996; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Schreiber, 1998). These researchers agree that a model of career development that adequately describes women's career development experiences does not currently exist, and they recognize the need for a comprehensive theory that acknowledges and integrates multiple role responsibilities, gender socialization, career experiences, and developmental learning to describe women's career choice behavior.

Researchers have found social learning theory, which is based on the interaction of personal and environmental influences on behavior, to be a useful model for explaining women's career development experiences (Farmer, 1997; Lent et al., 1996; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). In her longitudinal study of women's career development, Farmer (1997) found social learning theory to be useful in examining women's career choice behavior. Farmer's conceptual model for women's career motivation, which was based on Albert Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, included the personal and environmental factors that influence women's career choice behavior, either by inhibiting or facilitating career motivation. Farmer also included in her model a study of the background factors that influence career choice behavior, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and age.

Social learning theory is a constructivist theory that assumes that people's learning cannot be separated from their environments or experiences (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Social learning theory precludes arguments of cause and effect by

assuming a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavioral, personal, and environmental influences. The application of social learning theory to career development supports the idea of the career development process as a complex and nonlinear process. For this study, the researcher applied social learning theory to the study of female community college presidents' career development processes in order to gain a better understanding of the factors that influenced their career choice behavior in pursuing the community college presidency.

Three overall research questions were developed to support the research approach:

4. What are the formative experiences, such as family background, gender-role socialization, and early work roles, that influence a female community college president's career development?
5. What are the key developmental factors, such as mentors and role models, barriers, and developmental learning experiences, that influence a female community college president's career development?
6. What are the personal factors, such as skills and abilities, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and career-family conflicts, that influence a female community college president's career development?

### Review of Research Design and Methodology

The purposes of this dissertation study were to (1) provide a broader understanding of the background, environmental, and personal factors that influenced

selected female community college presidents' career development processes; (2) to provide a description of how the women have made meaning of their career development experiences; and (3) to develop, through inductive analysis, findings that may lead to further study on the topic of female community college presidents' career development. The qualitative multiple-case study approach was chosen to accomplish these purposes.

The researcher used a purposeful selection procedure to select five female community college presidents for participation in this study. The selection of individual participants was made based on the following criteria: (1) employment as a community college president in the selected state at the time of the study, (2) gender, (3) previous community college administrative or teaching position immediately prior to assuming the presidency, and (4) employment in the field of community college education for at least five years immediately prior to gaining the presidency.

The researcher individually interviewed each participant using the semi-structured, in-depth interview method. Data were collected through interview tapes, interview transcripts, field notes, and contact summary sheets. Interview transcripts were returned to the participants for member check reviews, and comments were added, deleted, or edited based on the responses. The researcher analyzed and applied descriptive codes to the data on a case-by-case basis. Using the constant comparative method for evaluating qualitative data, the researcher compared descriptive codes across cases and defined and re-defined category codes until data from all cases were coded. After organizing the data by their category codes, the researcher identified and

described emerging coding patterns. Through this process, the interviewer developed a preliminary conceptual model to organize and explain the career development experiences of the five women who participated in this study.

### Summary of Findings

The findings of the study were organized by the four components of the Preliminary Conceptual Model of Selected Female Community College Presidents' Career Development. The four components of the model were (1) Formative Experiences, which describe the early experiences that influenced the women's career development; (2) Key Developmental Experiences, which describe the work roles, formal and informal learning experiences, and the mentoring experiences that influenced their career development; (3) Multiple Role Challenges, which describe the challenges of balancing family responsibilities with the demands of a career and the influence of those challenges on the women's career development; and (4) Career Achievement, which describes the women's influence as well as their own personal satisfaction in their roles as community college presidents. This section will present a summary of the findings and conclusions.

#### *Formative Experiences*

The first finding of the study was that the women's career development was influenced by formative experiences relating to their backgrounds and early career experiences. The women grew up in working class families and although none of

their parents had completed a college degree, all of the women grew up with the intention of going to college. Their early work experiences were not related to careers in community colleges or educational administration. Because they grew up at a time when most women in the workforce were either teachers or secretaries or nurses, they chose traditional careers when they were young adults. They ended up in community college careers because of unplanned events or circumstances that occurred during their early career experiences. Mentors were influential in the women's decisions to pursue advanced degrees and administrative positions in community colleges.

The social learning framework of the study supports the idea that there is a connection between the women's career development and their formative experiences. Applied to career development, social learning theory is used to identify and understand the personal and environmental factors that shape a person's decisions about careers (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Farmer (1997) defined the personal factors that influence career development as related primarily to gender-role socialization. She believed that women experience more complexity than men in career development because of societal expectations about women's roles.

The women in this study were guided into the career fields of teaching and secretarial work, and those who aspired to non-traditional careers described being redirected toward the fields of teaching, nursing, or secretarial work. Schreiber (1998) described this kind of guidance as a socialization process that limits women's opportunities for developing interests and abilities. Schreiber wrote, "If females are offered only certain types of experiences or discouraged from pursuing certain other

types, the opportunity to identify freely and develop all potential interests is diminished” (pp. 6-7).

Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell (1998) concluded that socialization affects women’s career paths by limiting their exposure to potential careers. The women in this study identified their high school teachers as the female role models who had influenced them in making their early career choices. Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell (1998) found that for most women, models of women in professional roles tend to be teachers, nurses, or social workers. Reddin (1997) identified the lack of exposure to female role models in nontraditional careers as a factor in limiting women’s career development, while exposure to professional female role models was a factor in enhancing women’s career development. Reddin found that when women are exposed to females in professional careers, “they become aware of the meaning work can have in one’s life, the various professions one can have, the ways one can combine work and family, and the availability of success” (p. 120). The women in this study said that they chose teaching and secretarial work because they had no other professional female role models.

Other formative influences that affected the women’s career development were mentors and serendipitous career moves. In the framework of social learning theory, these influences are part of the environmental context that provides new experiences, ideas, and self-concepts (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Mentors provide guidance, advice, and assistance to the individuals they mentor, and the benefits of mentoring relationships to women are well documented (Hansman, 1998; Moore & Salimbene,

1981). In this study, mentors were often instrumental in guiding what the women described as “serendipitous” career moves that led them to community college careers.

Applied to the study of women’s career development, social learning theory suggests that a woman’s formative experiences may influence her career development. In this study, the women’s formative experiences influenced their career development in several ways. As young adults, they chose careers that were considered to be traditionally appropriate career roles for women (Schreiber, 1998). Having few professional female role models other than their high school teachers limited their exposure to potential careers (Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Reddin, 1997). Mentors and serendipitous career moves were influential in guiding the women to community college careers.

### *Key Developmental Experiences*

The second finding of the study was that career pathway experiences, mentoring relationships, and formal and informal learning experiences influenced the women’s career development. The women purposefully pursued increasingly complex and responsible administrative job assignments that provided them with opportunities to learn about community college governance, mission, and administration. Their mentors played significant roles in providing opportunities for career advancement and in encouraging their continued professional development. Formal and informal learning experiences provided opportunities for the women to

develop professional and technical competencies and to gain confidence in their skills and abilities.

For the women in this study, formal learning experiences included obtaining master's and doctoral degrees. All of the women completed their doctorates while working full-time in community colleges. Looking back on their educational achievements, the women believed that the doctorate was important in preparing them for the role of the community college president. In their study of the evolution of women's leadership in higher education, Astin and Leland (1991) reported that education was important in developing leadership skills, personal awareness, and self-confidence. This finding held true for the women in this study, who reported that they gained knowledge and self-confidence through their higher education experiences. The importance of higher education for women's career advancement in community college administration is documented in Buddemeier's (1998) study of female community college presidents, which found that more than 90% of the female presidents held a doctoral degree

Informal learning experiences allowed the women in this study to develop networks with other female community college administrators. Informal learning experiences appear to be important both in developing supporting relationships and in advancing career development. In their study of how women learn and develop, Belenky et al. (1986) stressed relationships and connectedness as highly important to women's career development. The women in this study reported that they valued the supporting relationships they formed through informal learning experiences.

Buddemeier's (1998) study of female community college presidents also supports the importance of leadership institutes and seminars as informal learning experiences. Approximately 68% of the women surveyed in her study indicated that they had participated in programs that assisted their attainment of the presidency (p. 71).

Mentoring relationships also provided an informal way for the women in this study to learn, develop self-confidence, and advance in their careers. Hansman (1998) reported that having a mentor increases self-esteem and enhances the quality of organizational life for women by enabling them to gain entry into social networks that lead to promotions. Buddemeier (1998) found that 81% of the female presidents surveyed had a mentor who assisted in their professional development and played a role, either directly or indirectly, in assisting their promotions up the career ladder. Buddemeier concluded that mentoring was an important factor in helping women gain the experience and support necessary to "successfully climb the administrative ladder within the community college" (p. 38).

The women in this study purposefully pursued increasingly responsible administrative positions to increase their knowledge and understanding of community colleges. Collectively, they held 25 community college positions that spanned all of the administrative areas of a college during their careers. Although they did not all begin their community college careers in the academic divisions of their colleges, all of the women moved into positions with oversight of academic programs prior to gaining the presidency. This finding is consistent with other research studies that

show that positions with academic oversight are the most common positions held prior to the presidency (Buddemeier, 1998; Vaughan, 1986; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002).

Another key developmental finding was that the recognition of the presidency as a career goal was like a gradual awakening for four of the women in this study. The realization that they wanted to be presidents was related to their success in carrying out their increasingly responsible job responsibilities and to their growing self-confidence. Their experiences support research into self-efficacy, which describes an individual's beliefs about his or her performance possibilities; a person with strong self-efficacy has high confidence in his or her ability to perform the task (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1996) identified self-efficacy and outcome expectations as factors that influence women's career choice behavior. In this study, the women's success in performing their administrative jobs led to increased confidence in their skills and abilities. As their confidence increased, the women identified higher-level career goals. They gradually realized that they could perform the duties of the president, and they began to consider the presidency as a career goal. The finding that the women gradually realized the presidency as a career goal is corroborated by other research studies. Buddemeier (1998) found that the majority of female presidents surveyed in her study said the presidency became their career goal as they moved up the career ladder. Brooker's (1998) study of five female executives in higher education also revealed that the women gradually developed aspirations for executive leadership positions in higher education.

### *Multiple Role Challenges*

The third finding was that maintaining the balance between family responsibilities and career advancement was a challenge for the women in this study. The women's escalating careers, educational advancements, and professional development required a great deal of time and effort. At the same time, they were the primary caregivers for their children and were responsible for managing their households. The women felt that they had made compromises in their family lives in order to keep their careers on track. These compromises related to their decisions to marry and have children, their child-raising responsibilities, and their spouses' careers.

Three of the women in this study chose to have children while they were pursuing their careers, and they experienced frustrations and conflicts in trying to balance work and family roles. They reported that they had to make family compromises in order to keep their careers on track. At the same time, they reported that their family responsibilities resulted in career interruptions that delayed their goal achievement. Schreiber (1998) described the traditional linear, planned, and predictable career pattern that is associated with developmental career theory. This career pattern suggests a consistent, uninterrupted movement from one career stage to the next. This description, however, is inconsistent with women's experiences. The career pattern for women is more interrupted, nonlinear, and unplanned. Schreiber concluded that because "traditional measures of career success include continuity and commitment to one's work, women are often viewed as less interested in their career

development” (p. 8). Wentling (1998) also found that the challenge of balancing family and work can hinder women’s career development and decrease their satisfaction with work, and Vaughan (1989a) found that female community college presidents who had put their careers on hold to have children identified the “interrupted career” as a hindrance to their career progression. Schreiber (1998) reported several studies that suggest that men have higher incomes and hold higher-level positions at mid-career than do women because of women’s career interruptions. Schreiber concluded, “The decision to interrupt employment for family clearly carries significant consequences” (p. 8).

The married women who participated in this study found that their career progression often conflicted with their spouses’ career progression. Donald Super’s life span theory of career development assumes that career planning must take into account other life roles, such as a spouse (Super et al., 1996). The married women in this study reported that they had to take their spouses’ careers into account in planning their own career progressions. They reported instances early in their careers when the husband’s unwillingness to change his own career in order to support the wife’s career advancement delayed their career progression. However, the women reported that their spouses gave up their careers to support the move into the presidency. Vaughan (1989a) found that some of the female community college presidents who participated in his study “noted the unwillingness of their spouses to change their own careers in order to ease the way to the presidency, a situation that flies in the face of what males have expected of females from time eternal” (p. 21). The women in this study

reported that both they and their spouses had made compromises for each others' careers.

The finding that the women in this study experienced multiple role challenges illustrates Schreiber's (1998) depiction of women's career development as a process of "managing multiple roles throughout their lifespan" (p. 5). Multiple-role issues have been the focus of research on women's career development for the past two decades. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the social assumption that women who worked outside the home remained primarily responsible for the maintenance of home and family created "serious career obstacles in the form of overload, stress, and role conflict" (Fitzgerald et al., 1995, p. 73). Researchers see the need for further research on women's multiple roles and how they affect career development (Bierema, 1998; Brown & Brooks, 1996; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Schreiber, 1998).

#### *Career Achievement*

The fourth finding of this study was that the women expressed a high level of satisfaction in their roles as community college presidencies. They described their work as the center of their lives, and they believed they were having a positive influence in their communities and on their campuses. They exhibited a high level of self-confidence, and they described their leadership styles as characterized by nurturing others and using open communication. They believed that they were the right "fit" for their institutions.

The female presidents who participated in this study identified fostering open communication, building relationships on campus and in their communities, and nurturing the development of others as important leadership strategies. They also exhibited a high level of confidence in their abilities and their leadership roles. This finding illuminates Bierema's (1994) finding that women who had achieved executive positions exhibited a high level of self-confidence and competence. Self-efficacy concepts, which grew out of social learning theory, describe an individual's beliefs about his or her performance possibilities (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996). A person with strong self-efficacy has high confidence in his or her ability to perform the task. The women in this study exhibited high self-efficacy in their presidential roles.

The women also described their leadership styles as inclusive and nurturing. This finding reflects the findings of other research studies that focused on women's leadership styles. Belenky et al. (1986) found that women's leadership styles and preferences are different from men's; while men prefer hierarchy, women's leadership is based on inclusiveness, intuition, and connectedness. Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) identified two fundamental approaches to organizational structure in community colleges. The instrumental approach is characterized by rationalism and strategic action, and it emphasizes organizational hierarchy. The relational approach is characterized by relationship-building, shared power, and coalition-building. Tedrow and Rhoads found that "women most often use relational ways of knowing to perceive the world, whereas men are more likely to embrace instrumental ways" (p. 2). Based

on their descriptions of their leadership on their campuses and in their communities, the women in this study prefer inclusiveness and relational leadership strategies.

### *Summary*

The findings of this study are related to the four components of the Preliminary Model of Female Community College Presidents' Career Development. The first finding was that the women's career development was influenced by formative experiences relating to their background and early career experiences. The formative experiences that affected the women's career development were their socialization into traditional women's career roles, their lack of exposure to female role models in nontraditional careers, their mentors who guided their early career decisions, and the serendipitous career moves that led them to community college positions.

The second finding of this study was that key developmental experiences helped the women gain professional and technical competencies and develop confidence in their skills and abilities. The women exhibited a high level of self-efficacy in the performance of their administrative job roles. The purposeful pursuit of increasingly complex and responsible job assignments, guidance and support from mentors, and formal and informal learning experiences provided opportunities for the women to learn, develop self-confidence, and advance in their careers.

The third finding was that the women's multiple role challenges influenced their career development. The women were primary caregivers for their children and were responsible for managing their households. At the same time, their escalating

careers and professional development required a great deal of time and effort. The women experienced frustration and conflicts in trying to balance the demands of work with their family roles as primary caregivers and as spouses.

The fourth finding of this study was that the women expressed a high level of satisfaction in their roles as community college presidents. Their satisfaction was related to the importance of work in their lives and to their perceptions of themselves as nurturing and open leaders on their campuses and in their communities.

#### Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to increase understanding rather than to test existing theory or create new theory. In discussing the generalizability of qualitative research, Merriam (2001) points out that in qualitative research a “small, nonrandom sample is selected precisely *because* the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (p. 208). The design of this study does have limitations for generalizability. Because this research focused on a small sample of women in a particular profession, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population of women. In addition, this research study is limited because the participants were purposefully selected to include only those women who had worked as community college administrators before moving into their presidencies. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to the larger population of female community college presidents.

Another limitation of this study is that second interviews with the participants were not conducted. Qualitative investigation requires that emergent themes and understandings be probed for clarification and illumination. In this study, each female community college president participated in an individual in-depth interview that lasted between two and three hours. While rich data were recorded from these interviews, the researcher was unable to schedule follow-up interviews with the participants because of their busy work schedules. The researcher did send each participant a copy of her interview transcript to review and respond to, and she communicated with some of the participants by email to clarify information. Nonetheless, the failure to fully clarify and probe key understandings is a limitation of this study.

This study is intended to “offer insights and illuminate meanings” (Merriam, 2001, p. 41). The women’s stories illustrate the formative experiences, key developmental experiences, multiple role challenges, and career achievement experiences that influenced their career development.

### Implications for Research

The findings of this study and the related literature review suggest further areas for study. This section will present ideas and suggestions for future research into the factors that influence female community college presidents’ career development.

1. The study may be replicated to examine the formative experiences, key developmental experiences, multiple role challenges, and career achievements of a larger sample of female community college presidents who rose through the ranks of the community college hierarchy to the presidency. Additional research may corroborate the findings of this study or reveal new factors that influence female community college presidents' career development.

2. Managing the multiple roles of raising children, managing the household, and developing a career was identified as an influence on the career development of the women in this study. Researchers have identified the need for more research in order to fully understand and describe the effect of women's multiple roles on their career development (Bierema, 1998; Brown & Brooks, 1996; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1996; Schreiber, 1998). Future research could explore, in detail, the influence of female community college presidents' multiple roles on their career development.

3. Mentors played important roles in the career development of the women in this study. The women reported that as they were progressing through their career pathways, their significant mentors were male. This finding is corroborated by other studies of female community college presidents (e.g., Buddemeier, 1998; Vaughan, 1989). During the time when the women in this study were being mentored, there were few female community college presidents available to mentor other women (Touchton et al., 1991). However, demographic studies indicate that the number of female community college presidents is increasing. In 2001, women held more than

one-fourth of all community college presidencies (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). As more women move into community college presidencies, there is an opportunity to study their mentoring roles. Future research could explore the mentoring roles of female community college presidents in influencing women's career development.

4. The participants in this study identified formal and informal learning experiences that provided opportunities for them to develop networks and to become more self-confident about pursuing the community college presidency. They mentioned national and state-level leadership institutes as key influences in their career development. In her study of female community college presidents, Buddemeier (1998) also found that a significant number of participants had attended leadership institutes or seminars. A future study might examine, in detail, the influence of national and state-level leadership institutes on female community college presidents' career development.

5. In describing their roles as community college presidents, the women in this study described their leadership styles as characterized by nurturing others and using open communication. A question that was not explored is how the women's formative experiences, key developmental experiences, multiple role challenges, and career achievement experiences influenced the development of their leadership styles. Future research could explore how, in the course of their career development, female community college presidents learn and develop a leadership style.

6. The identification of the community college presidency as a career goal was a gradual awakening for most of the women in this study, a finding that is

corroborated by other research studies (e.g., Brooker, 1998; Buddemeier, 1998). The findings of this study suggest that formal and informal learning experiences, mentoring, and self-efficacy were factors in the women's recognition of the presidency as a career goal. Further research is needed to identify and fully explore the factors that influence women's recognition of the community college presidency as a career goal.

### Implications for Practice

The findings of this study suggest ideas that have implications for educators, community college presidents, and women who aspire to be presidents. This section will present recommendations for practice.

1. One finding of this study was that all of the women completed their doctoral degrees while they were employed full-time in community colleges. Formal education was identified as a key developmental experience for these women. They recognized the importance of the doctoral degree not only for career promotion, but also for professional development and increased self-confidence. The women's experiences corroborate Astin and Leland's (1991) finding that education is important in women's development of leadership skills, personal awareness, and self-confidence. The importance of completing the doctorate for community college presidency positions is documented in Buddemeier's (1998) study, which found that more than 90% of the female community college presidents surveyed held a doctoral degree. This finding suggests that women who aspire to become community college presidents

should complete the doctoral degree. A related suggestion is that women need access to non-traditional doctoral programs that will accommodate their working schedules.

2. Another finding of this study was the importance of informal learning experiences, especially leadership institutes and seminars, on the women's career development. All of the women in this study had participated in leadership institutes or seminars from which they gained self-confidence and developed networks. The women named leadership institutes sponsored by a university, a state community college system, or a professional association as most helpful to them. Buddemeier (1998) found that slightly more than two-thirds of the female community college presidents who were surveyed for her study had participated in professional education programs that assisted them in attaining their positions as presidents. This finding suggests that educators should continue to sponsor community college leadership institutes and seminars, especially those that target women. A related suggestion is that women who aspire to become community college presidents should participate in leadership training institutes or seminars.

3. Each of the women in this study named her former president as one of her significant mentors. These presidents assisted the women in their career progression through work assignments, professional development opportunities, and other learning opportunities. Hansman (1998) found that having a mentor increases self-esteem and enhances the quality of organizational life for women by enabling them to gain entry into social networks that lead to promotions. Vaughan (1989), Buddemeier (1998) and others have also reported on the important role mentors play in helping women

gain the experience and support necessary for career progression. These findings suggest that community college presidents should continue to mentor women for leadership positions. These findings also suggest that women who aspire to become community college presidents should seek mentors who can guide and support their career progression.

4. Although the academic career pathway is not the only pathway to the presidency, the career pathway experiences of the five women in this study suggest that the academic pathway is an important pathway to the presidency. Collectively, the women in this study held 25 community college positions that spanned all of the administrative areas of a college. Not all of the women rose up through the “academic pipeline,” but all of them held positions with oversight of academic programs prior to gaining the presidency. This finding suggests that women who aspire to become community college presidents should seek job opportunities that will provide them with academic oversight experience.

### Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the career development processes of female community college presidents. The questions which guided this research were: (1) What are the formative experiences that influence female community college presidents’ career development? (2) What are the key developmental factors that influence female community college presidents’ career development? (3) What are the personal factors that influence female community college presidents’ career

development? Chapter One introduced the study, provided a theoretical framework and rationale for the study, identified the research methodology, and outlined the significance of the study for research and practice. Chapter Two provided a review of relevant literature in three areas: (1) the literature on career development theory and its application to women's career development processes, (2) the literature on social learning theory as a means of understanding women's career development, and (3) the literature on the community college presidency as it relates to career pathways, barriers to career progression experienced by female community college presidents, and the role of mentors in career achievement. Chapter Three described the design for the study, the selection of participants, data collection methods, data analysis methods, and actions for validity, integrity, and trustworthiness. Chapter Four presented a preliminary conceptual model of female community college presidents' career development based on the findings gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Chapter Five presented a summary of the findings. This chapter also described limitations of the study and presented implications for educators, presidents, and women who aspire to be community college presidents, as well as suggestions for further research.

The preliminary conceptual model illustrates that the career choice behavior of the female community college presidents who participated in this study was affected by multiple and complex influences. The participants in this study described their formative experiences and the factors that influenced their early career decisions. They described their key developmental experiences and their serendipitous routes to

community colleges. Once in community colleges, their learning and development progressed as they moved into increasingly complex and demanding administrative positions. Their successful administrative experiences resulted in greater self-confidence and increased technical and professional competence. The women identified their presidents as the significant mentors who assisted them in their career advancement. The women also reported that they experienced multiple role conflicts in trying to maintain the balance between their escalating careers and their family responsibilities, and they expressed regrets about the toll their careers had taken on their families. At the same time, they were highly satisfied in their jobs, and they defined their work as the center of their lives.

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## Appendix A

October 12, 2002

Dear President:

In fulfillment of the requirements for completion of the doctoral degree in Adult and Community College Education at North Carolina State University, I am conducting a research study of female community college presidents' career development processes. My research is directed by Dr. George B. Vaughan, a distinguished professor at NCSU and a scholar of the community college presidency.

The purpose of this dissertation study is to describe the personal, social, and environmental influences that affect female community college presidents' career development. This research is important because little qualitative information is available that describes the lived experiences of women who rose through the ranks of the community college hierarchy and into the presidency. The descriptions of how female presidents have made meaning of their career development experiences may help to inform other women who aspire to become community college presidents about potential positive and negative influences on their career development. In addition, researchers who study career development see a need for a comprehensive theory of women's career development that takes into account gender, sex role socialization, career experiences, and learning. The findings of this study may result in propositions that will contribute to the development of such theory.

I will collect data for this study using a multiple-case study approach, and I invite you to be considered for participation. I plan to conduct in-depth interviews of selected female community college presidents during November and December, 2002. The selection of participants will be based on criteria related to employment history. If you would like to be a participant in this study, please complete and return to me by November 1 the enclosed questionnaire about your employment history (or if you prefer, send a copy of your employment history resume). I will review your employment history and notify you by November 15 if you have been selected for the case study.

If you are selected as a participant for the case study, I assure you that information collected in the interviews will be kept strictly confidential, and no reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

I hope that you will consider being a participant in this research study. If you have questions about the study, please do not hesitate to call me at (828) 254-1921, ext. 120 during the day or (828) 277-5825 in the evening. I look forward to receiving your resume.

Sincerely,

Sharon V. Morrissey

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide

1. How did you come to be a community college president?
2. What were the most important factors that led to your becoming a president?
3. When did you know that you wanted to be a college president?
4. What were your career goals when you were a teenager?
5. In high school and in college, how did being female influence your career choices?
6. How did your parents' socioeconomic status influence your career choices?
7. What role did your parents play in your developing into a community college president?  
Mother's work? Father's work?  
Mother's education level? Father's education level?
8. Describe other things about your life situation (e.g., people, experiences, socioeconomic status) that influenced your career development.
9. Did you attend any leadership training seminars or workshops to help prepare yourself for the presidency? If so, describe those.
10. Describe some of your personal characteristics (e.g., skills and abilities, beliefs, values) that influenced you in becoming a community college president.
11. Was there anything about yourself that caused you to have doubts about becoming a community college president?  
  
If so, how did you overcome these doubts/concerns?
12. Looking back over your career path to the presidency, what relationships have been most important to you and why?  
  
(If mentor relationship) Do you feel that the mentoring relationship was affected by your gender? If so, please explain.
13. Did you have any negative role models who influenced you to want to become a college president?

14. What barriers or obstacles in your life did you have to overcome as you progressed through your career from (\_\_\_\_) to the presidency?

How did you overcome these barriers?

15. Do you feel that you had to make any compromises in order to become a college president? If so, please describe them.

16. As you progressed up your career path, do you feel that you had to adapt your behavior in order to become a community college president? If so, please explain.

17. How do you like being a community college president?

18. Explain the value/meaning you place on work in your life.

19. What advice would you give to other women who aspire to become community college presidents?

20. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your journey to the community college presidency before we conclude?

## Appendix C

### North Carolina State University INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study *A Qualitative Analysis of Female Community College Presidents' Career Development Processes*

Principal Investigator  
*Sharon E. Morrissey*

Faculty Sponsor  
*George B. Vaughan*

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to describe the personal, social, and environmental influences that affect female community college presidents' career development processes. The research is important because little qualitative information is available that describes the lived experiences of women who rose through the ranks of community college faculty and administration and into the presidency.

#### INFORMATION

1. **Procedures.** I will ask you to provide me with a copy of your resume and/or vita, which I will analyze as part of the evaluation of career paths. I will also ask you to participate in an in-depth interview. I may ask you for a follow-up interview to completely document your career development experiences. Finally, I will ask you to review the transcript of our interview session to verify the accuracy of the transcription.
2. **Time Required.** I will conduct the interviews during the fall semester of 2002. I anticipate that your interview will last between one and two hours. The additional time required for you to send me your resume and review the transcript of our interview session will be minimal.

#### RISKS

I anticipate no potential risks for you as a participant in this study. Your name and the name of your college will be changed, and I will avoid using any descriptive identifiers in the dissertation. Although I anticipate no potential risks, I am aware that in an interview situation there is a possibility of sensitive information being revealed. To minimize risk, I will remind you that the beginning of the interview that you can stop the interview at any time. As a further safeguard, I will ask you to check her interview transcript for accuracy and to verify that the words express your intent.

#### BENEFITS

The study has several implications for practice. The study will describe how you have made meaning of your career development experiences, and these descriptions will provide a broader understanding of the significant personal and environmental factors that influenced your career development processes. The findings from this study may help to inform other women aspiring to become community college presidents about potential positive and negative influences on their career development. In addition, academic leaders in higher education institutions may use the study's findings to build awareness of the social and cultural factors that influence women's career development processes. The study's findings may also have implications for research. Researchers who study women's career

development see a need for the development of a comprehensive theory on women's career development that takes into account gender, sex role socialization, career experiences, and learning. The findings of this study may result in descriptions or propositions that will contribute to the development of such theory.

You may benefit indirectly by describing your own career development experiences in order to help other women who aspire to become community college presidents better understand the personal, social, and environmental influences that may affect their careers.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely, and I will be the only person with access to it. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. I request your permission in writing to use the data collected in this study in future articles or books.

#### COMPENSATION

For participating in this study, you will receive no compensation.

#### CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Sharon Morrissey, at 6 Elmwood Lane, Asheville, NC 28803 or (828) 277-5825. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-1834) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148)

#### PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

#### CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Subject's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_