

ABSTRACT

LEE, TERRI SUZANNE HOLSTON. Right Here, Right Now: Career Advancement of Generation X Female Mid-Level Administrators in Community Colleges in the Southeast. (Under the direction of Dr. Leila González Sullivan and Dr. Alyssa Bryant Rockenbach).

Community colleges in the United States are facing what some researchers are calling a “crisis” (Piland & Wolf, 2003; Shults, 2001). The current generation of community college leaders, those born to the birth cohort known as the Baby Boomers, are eligible to retire early in the 21st century. These retirements will leave a significant gap in the leadership of community colleges. The women in this generation of community college leaders have made great progress in reaching parity with men in leadership positions. The next generation of female senior administrators in community colleges will come from members of Generation X; however, the literature has yet to describe the experiences of this group of female leaders. This research was undertaken to explore the influences, both internal and external, that shape the career advancement decisions and goals of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. Interpretivism, life course theory, and feminist standpoint theory served as the framework of the study. Two research questions guided this study: 1) How do current Generation X female mid-level administrators in selected community colleges in the Southeast perceive leadership, and what are their career advancement goals? 2) What personal and professional factors do they take into consideration along their career paths and how do they experience this process? This qualitative interpretive study utilized semi-structured interviews of 10 Generation X female mid-level administrators in selected community colleges in the Southeast. The findings of this study suggest that Generation X female mid-level administrators find themselves experiencing paradoxes in both their personal and professional lives. They are communal

team leaders, but they feel they must possess certain agentic traits in order to be effective leaders. They are sandwiched between the Baby Boomers and Generation Y at their institutions, working to find a balance between the two. They are well aware of what is needed to develop professionally, but their career goals are relatively undefined other than a general tendency toward leadership and they often seem to move into higher level positions by happenstance. Finally, they praise their spouses for being supportive, yet they have to participate in a “delicate dance” to garner that support. The organizational and relational structures in which these women must maneuver also contribute to these paradoxes. To support the career advancement of these women, several implications for practice are offered. Senior administrators are encouraged to develop formal mentoring programs, foster stretch assignments for employees, seek input before making sweeping structural changes, and allow time for employees to participate in civic activities. Generation X female mid-level administrators are encouraged to participate in stretch assignments to build job knowledge and confidence. They are also encouraged to obtain the doctorate as one means to stand out among colleagues.

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Right Here, Right Now: Career Advancement of Generation X Female Mid-Level
Administrators in Community Colleges in the Southeast

by
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DEDICATION

To my mother, Rosa Lee Holston. You have always been the “Wind Beneath My Wings.”

BIOGRAPHY

Terri Suzanne Holston Lee was born on December 27, 1972 at RAF Lakenheath in England. An Air Force brat, she lived one other place before her family settled in North Carolina. After graduating from North Johnston High School in 1991, she attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She graduated in May of 1995 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education. She taught high school English for two years prior to continuing her studies. She earned a Master of Library and Information Studies degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 1999. She held several librarian positions before obtaining her current position. She is currently the Director of Instructional Technology and Distance Education at Johnston Community College in Smithfield, NC. She is wife to John and mother to Tony, and she looks forward to being able to spend much more time with them soon.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
Overview of Methods.....	8
Significance of the Study.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	10
Summary.....	10
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
Introduction.....	12
Researcher Epistemology.....	13
Life Course Theory.....	15
The Concept of Transitions and Trajectories.....	17
The Concept of Generations.....	20
A portrait of Generation X.....	21
Generations and the community college.....	26
Feminist Standpoint Theory.....	30
Challenges to Leadership Positions for Women.....	33
Male norms and gender stereotypes.....	35
Work-family balance.....	37

Women in the Community College.....	39
Historical overview of women in academia.....	39
Professional development and community college women administrators....	42
Summary.....	45
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	48
Introduction.....	48
Research Design.....	48
Sample and Site Selection.....	49
Data Collection.....	50
Data Analysis.....	54
Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness.....	57
Researcher’s Position/ Reflexivity.....	58
Limitations.....	59
Summary.....	60
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	62
Introduction.....	62
Profile of Research Sample.....	63
Leadership.....	64
What Leadership Is.....	65
Focusing on employees.....	65
Getting the job done.....	69
What Leadership Is Not.....	72

Micro-managing.....	73
Dictating.....	74
What Leadership Requires.....	75
Intrapersonal skills.....	76
Interpersonal skills.....	78
The Next Leadership Steps.....	81
General intention toward leadership.....	81
Developing professionally.....	84
Identifying a mentor.....	88
Addressing advancement fears.....	91
Factors Experienced Along the Career Path.....	93
Challenging factors within the organization.....	94
Structural issues.....	94
Gendered issues.....	97
Generational issues.....	100
Challenging factors outside the organization.....	102
Work/life balance.....	102
Civic and social activities.....	109
Support Systems Mitigate Some Challenges.....	110
Encouragement from family and friends.....	110
Institutional Support (both official and collegial).....	113
Critical role of spouses.....	116

Summary.....	118
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS...	121
Introduction.....	121
Study Overview.....	122
Summary of Findings.....	124
Moving between Communal and Agentic Leadership Attributes.....	124
Working across Generations.....	130
Planning for Happenstance Opportunities.....	133
Seeking Balance through a “Delicate Dance”.....	137
Implications for Research.....	145
Implications for Practice.....	148
Recommendations for Further Research.....	151
Summary.....	154
REFERENCES.....	157
APPENDICES.....	173
APPENDIX A: LETTER TO PRESIDENTS.....	174
APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS.....	175
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	176
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT.....	178

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Profile of Research Participants

63

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Women in the United States made significant progress closing the gap in leadership positions in the latter half of the 20th century. In the early 1970s, women accounted for less than 20% of managers and administrators, but by the beginning of the 21st century the number of women in administrative and managerial positions in all fields climbed to approximately 45% (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Oakley, 2000). However, women hold less than 1% of CEO positions in Fortune 500 companies (Carli & Eagly, 2001; O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008).

The situation for women in community colleges in the United States is somewhat different. Mirroring other occupational fields, women working in community colleges account for a majority of mid-level manager positions, around 63% (Drake, 2008). However, women hold 29% of presidency positions (Eddy & Cox, 2008). At the four-year college level, women account for only 18% of presidents (Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

For community colleges in the Southeast, the numbers reflect a similar picture. For example, in one Southeast community college system in 2008, there were 4514 (37%) men and 7,551 (63%) women listed as faculty, senior administrators, staff, or technical/paraprofessional staff. Women accounted for 47% of all senior level administrative positions. At the level of president, women account for 31% of these positions (North Carolina Community College System, 2008). While the percentage of women presidents in community colleges in the Southeast is substantially higher than that of corporate CEOs in general, parity between women and men presidents has yet to be achieved. Some researchers

even argue that the rise of women to presidential positions is beginning to slow down and level off (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

Not only are community colleges still facing a disparate representation of women in senior level leadership positions, but they are also facing what researchers are calling a crisis due to mass retirements of Baby Boomers from leadership positions. Piland and Wolf (2003, p. 1) state, “even as the community college has exhibited its importance as never before, we must also observe that the current state of community college leadership is not good. Indeed, we would join with those who have labeled the current situation a ‘crisis.’” This exodus is going to leave many high-level administrative positions open; indeed, in some colleges and systems, the crisis has already begun. Further, this generational turnover includes a significant number of women who have held executive positions.

In a Research Brief released by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2001, Shults warned of what the crisis means for community colleges in the United States. He combined the results of several different surveys on community college leadership to paint a picture of what the next few years of community college retirements would look like. According to Shults, as of 2001 seventy-nine percent of current community college presidents planned to retire by 2011. At the time, half of the current community college faculty also planned to retire within the next decade.

Since Shults’ research, others have echoed the need to prepare for the impending retirements (Drake, 2008; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008). According to the American Council on Education (2007), over 45% of currently sitting community college presidents are age 61 and older. Weisman and Vaughan (2007) note that close to 60% of

community college presidents plan to retire by 2012. Community colleges will also see a loss of senior administrators such as chief academic officers, chief financial officers, and student affairs administrators (Shults, 2001). Shults pointed out that “inestimable experience and history, as well as an intimate understanding of the community college mission, values, and culture, will disappear, leaving an enormous gap in the collective memory and the leadership of community colleges” (p. 2).

With the impending retirements of so many community college senior administrators and faculty, prime opportunities exist for women to advance into leadership positions and close the leadership gap. At this point in history, women hold the majority of mid-level administrator positions -- the positions that are in the direct pipeline to senior administrative positions and presidencies. One could argue that the ‘stars are aligned’ for female administrators in the community college system.

The challenge for current leaders in the community college sector is to ensure that the next generation of leaders, the age group sometimes known as Gen X, is ready for leadership positions as the Baby Boomer generation enters retirement. Generation X is the popular culture term used to describe the socio-historical birth cohort born between 1968 and 1979 (Crowley, 2003). In an American Association of Community College issue paper, Hockaday and Puryear (2000) offered a set of desired traits for future community college leaders. While they acknowledged that not every leader is or should be the same, they hoped to point out the traits that effective leaders should possess. Their intent was to give community colleges a place to start when thinking of professional development activities for the next generation of leaders. They suggested that the next generation of effective leaders would need to have

vision, integrity, confidence, courage, technical knowledge, collaboration skills, persistence, good judgment, and a desire to lead.

Statement of the Problem

One must ask if the concepts that current community college administrators hold of an “effective leader” as defined by Hockaday and Puryear (2000) are in line with the leadership beliefs and styles of Generation X. Literature on Generation X community college administrators is almost non-existent. For instance, conducting an ERIC search of peer-reviewed articles containing the phrase Generation X leads to very few articles, most of which focus on Generation X as a student population. A search of Dissertation Abstracts produces similar results. Goben (2003) found in his doctoral research that “Xers are not likely to lead the same as previous generations,” (p. 128), but does this concept hold true for community colleges in the Southeast?

The concept of generation is not the only sociological lens through which to view this problem. The social construct of gender also colors the analysis this problem. Generation X women have experienced a slightly different history than that of the preceding generations in that they were all born after the start of what is known as the Second Wave of Feminism. Although many had stay-at-home mothers, others became “latch-key” children while both their mothers and fathers participated in full-time careers. At their age, they are represented by greater numbers in the workforce, higher levels of education attainment, and higher earnings than women at their age in previous generations (DiNatale & Boraas, 2002). They are also marrying and having children later (Riche, 2003).

Another question is whether Generation X women are prepared for and willing to take advantage of the available leadership opportunities. The broad intent of this study is to explore the career intentions and preparations of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. In particular, how are their intentions and preparations influenced by various professional and personal aspects of their lives?

For the purposes of this research, professional aspects refer to any formal or informal practices in place at the administrator's institution that may impact her career advancement decisions. For instance, are professional development opportunities present? Is mentoring encouraged? Is there a 'good ol' boys network' she must learn to navigate?

Conversely, personal aspects, for the purposes of this research, refer to any factors outside of the workplace that may impact career decisions. For example, does childcare or eldercare play a part in her decision? Does her self-image as a leader shape her career decisions? Do social and civic activities influence career decisions?

In order to prepare this next generation of leaders, decision-makers need information that will help them ensure a smooth transition of leadership within the community college. Without an understanding of the next group in the leadership pipeline, succession planning efforts may fail to adequately prepare for the impending 'crisis' (Piland & Wolf, 2003; Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007).

Research Questions

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study was to explore the influences, both internal and external, that shape the career advancement decisions and goals of Generation X

female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. The questions that will guide this research are:

1. How do current Generation X female mid-level administrators in selected community colleges in the Southeast perceive leadership, and what are their career advancement goals?
2. What personal and professional factors do they take into consideration along their career paths and how do they experience this process?

Interpretivism, life course theory, and feminist standpoint theory are the foundations on which I conceptualized this study. Life course theory (Alwin & McCammon, 2003; Elder, 1999; Elder, Johnson, & Cronsoe, 2003) and interpretivism (Crotty, 2003) both rely on interpreting events from a socio-historical standpoint. Two aspects of life course theory in particular guided my thoughts on the current events in the community college system: the concepts of transitions and generations. Transitions involve changes in roles or identities. For instance, having a child is a transition in role from non-mother to mother. Career changes are transitions as well. The concept of generation situates people in a historical time and place. Part of this study's intent was to determine how the transitions and pathways of a particular generation of female community college administrators influence their leadership advancement decisions.

This study also focused solely on women of this generation. Feminist standpoint theory (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Hartsock, 1983b) guided this aspect of my research. According to Bechtold (2008), "to theorize gender from a feminist perspective involves using the gender principle as a lens to evaluate all of society's

institutions and power hierarchies” (p. 750). Several researchers have used gender as a lens to evaluate leadership within the community college (Bailey, 2008; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1998; Townsend & Twombly, 2007), and leadership in general (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ridgeway, 2001). An additional intent of this study was to determine what, if any, are the gendered aspects of Generation X mid-level administrators’ career advancement decisions.

Literature from several disciplines speaks to various aspects of this topic, yet none addresses this topic in particular. The literature of higher education shows how past and present community college administrators lead, as well as the skills necessary for future leaders. The literature also warns of the impending crisis due to the mass retirements of current administrators, yet offers little about how to prepare for the situation. The literature also does not address whether the future leaders of community colleges are ready to take on the challenge of leadership. In particular, existing studies do not address whether Generation X female mid-level administrators possess the necessary skills and even the desire to take on senior administrative positions in the community college system. With the proportion of female mid-level administrators and the tradition of hiring administrators from within the community college sector, the need to study and describe this group was compelling.

Literature from many other fields addresses issues such as stereotypes and prejudice in the workplace (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Oakley, 2000; Ridgeway, 2001) and work-family conflict (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Still, 2006).

Nonetheless, none of the literature bases deals directly with the unique aspect of Generation X female mid-level administrators, and their views on leadership. Chapter Two provides an

in-depth discussion of both the theoretical perspectives and the related research that guided this study.

Overview of Methods

This research project adopted qualitative methods to collect and analyze the data. Qualitative methods were deemed most appropriate because the nature of qualitative research coincides with my epistemology and theoretical perspective. Merriam (2002) notes: “the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world.” Additionally, in qualitative research, the “researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5).

Specifically, this research was an interpretive qualitative study. The aim of an interpretive qualitative study is to understand “how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon,” and its “strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Interview participants were chosen based on a criterion sampling procedure. Data collection consisted of an initial interview and follow-up telephone conversation. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method moving from open coding to generating categories through axial coding to focused coding and finally to the creation of data displays (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Chapter Three provides a thorough description of data collection methods and analysis.

Significance of the Study

With the growing numbers of retirements in community colleges in the Southeast, research is needed to understand those who are going to take the place of the retirees. In

particular, we need to understand the career advancement process of Generation X female mid-level administrators. This study has several implications for practice. First, the findings from this study provide current leaders with an awareness of the feelings and experiences of current Generation X female mid-level administrators. This awareness may help senior administrators in community colleges in the Southeast conduct better succession planning and professional development activities. Second, the findings may help those women who aspire to higher administrative positions by providing them with opportunities for reflection as well as descriptions of other women similar to them. Finally, this study fills a gap that exists in the research literature of various fields: sociology, psychology, leadership, and higher education. It provides data to increase understanding of the how certain concepts from these various fields impact the decision making process of a particular group of community college administrators. This research serves as a springboard for other research aimed at a better understanding of Generation X community college administrators.

Right here – in community colleges in the Southeast – right now – at this point in history – opportunities abound for Generation X female mid-level administrators. At this time, women are underrepresented in presidential positions and are just barely at parity in senior level administrative positions in the community colleges. However, women account for the majority (60%) of mid-level administrators and faculty. The potential exists to further close the leadership gap between males and females at senior level positions in community colleges. By exploring the careers goals of this particular generation of female mid-level administrators, we better understand how to prepare them for future community college leadership.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions explain various terms used throughout the study:

1. Generation – “groups of people who share a distinctive culture and/or a self-conscious identity by virtue of their having experienced the same historical events at roughly the same time in their life” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 27).
2. Baby Boomers – a popular culture term used to describe those born between the mid-1940s and mid-1960s; a period of high birth rates in America following the Second World War (Crowley, 2003).
3. Generation X – a popular culture term used to describe those born between the years of 1968-1979 (Crowley, 2003).
4. Mid-level administrator – in the community college, a supervisor that does not report directly to the college president; usually this person will report to a vice-president or dean.
5. Senior administrator – in the community college, the president or those who report directly to the president.

Summary

This qualitative interpretive study aimed to explore the personal and professional influences on career decision-making of Generation X female mid-level administrators. The time was right ... right here, right now. With the increasing retirements of large numbers of Baby Boomers from senior administrative positions, career opportunities abound for the women in this group. However, research was needed to determine whether these women want such positions, and if they do, whether they are ready for them. In Chapter Two, I

discuss the theoretical traditions that form my lens for exploring the problem: interpretivism, life course theory and feminist standpoint theory. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of how I gathered and analyzed the data for this study. Chapter Four presents the findings of the research. Chapter Five discusses the conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The intention of this chapter is twofold. One purpose is to provide the reader with an explanation of my view of knowledge creation. The other purpose is to provide a foundation from the literature that proves the necessity to study the career advancement intentions of Generation X female mid-level administrators.

The chapter begins with my epistemology and theoretical perspective: constructionism and interpretivism. Life course theory, or 'perspective' as it is also termed, also forms the basis of how I understand the world and knowledge creation within it. A synopsis of life course theory is included, with particular emphasis on the concepts of transitions and generations. From the lens of life course theory, the concept of generation is used to frame this research. Accordingly, an overview of Generation X as a whole is provided to give the reader a better understanding of this generation and the research conducted thus far about this population. Also included is an account of how the concept of generations in the community college has previously been studied.

Next, feminist standpoint theory is discussed to explain my view of the gendered nature of society. A discussion of research on challenges to women in leadership positions follows. The chapter concludes with a view of the community college and women in academia from a historical perspective, as well as a discussion of the professional development of women in the community college.

Researcher Epistemology

The epistemology and theoretical perspective of the researcher form the backbone of any research project. The researcher's epistemology informs his or her theoretical perspective, which in turn guides the methodology. The methodology governs what methods are used. Crotty (2003) defines each of these concepts as follows:

- Epistemology – the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology
- Theoretical perspective – the philosophical stance informing the methodology and also the context for the process and grounding of its logic and criteria
- Methodology – the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes
- Methods – the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze the data related to some research question or hypothesis (p. 3).

The epistemology I subscribe to is constructionism. Constructionism is the view that knowledge and meaning are “contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 2003, p. 42). Constructionism, according to Crotty (2003), is quite different from constructivism: “It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term *constructivism* [emphasis in original] for epistemological considerations focusing solely on ‘the meaning-making of the individual mind’ and to use *constructionism* where the focus includes ‘the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning’” (p. 58).

Constructionism is in direct opposition to objectivism. According to Crotty (2003), “objectivism is the epistemological view that things exist as meaningful entities independently of consciousness and experience, that they have truth and meaning residing in them as objects” (p. 5). The two primary theoretical perspectives that flow from an objectivist epistemology are positivism and post-positivism. Positivists believe in universal truths that are generalizable and applicable to all. Positivist epistemologies inform most research in the natural sciences.

I, on the other hand, believe that much of what we believe to be true is based on our own understanding of the world we live in. The particular constructionist theoretical perspective that describes my beliefs is interpretivism. Interpretivist approaches derived in reaction to positivist ideas of knowledge creation. Interpretivism “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-word” (Crotty, 2003, p. 67).

Interpretivism is often linked to the work of Max Weber (Crotty, 2003). In contrast to the positivist attempts to explain human and social reality, Weber believed that the social sciences needed to focus more on what he termed *Verstehen*, or understanding; however, he did not advocate different methods from those used in the natural sciences. Interpretivism became linked to qualitative methodologies through the works of sociologists and philosophers such as Wilhem Dilthey and Heinrich Rickert. Dilthey argued that “natural reality and social reality are in themselves different kinds of reality and their investigation therefore requires different methods” (Crotty, 2003, p. 67). Rickert, while not agreeing with Dilthey’s views of reality, did debate the need for different methods for the natural and social sciences.

Life Course Theory

Life course theory (or perspective), in alignment with the concepts of interpretivism, also plays a part in how I understand knowledge creation. As a theoretical orientation, life course theory “is grounded in a contextualist perspective and emphasizes the implications of social pathways in historical time and place” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 4). Three conceptual traditions fueled the emergence of life course theory: social relations, life-span concepts of development, and age and temporality (Elder, 1999, p. 318). The first sociological tradition, social relations, includes the ideas of social roles, role transitions, and socialization as espoused in the works of researchers such as W. I. Thomas and Urie Bronfenbrenner. The next tradition, life-span concepts, draws from the works of researchers such as Erik Erikson, Paul Baltes, and Richard Lerner and includes ideas such as psychosocial stage and life structure. The final tradition, age and temporality, was inspired by the works of researchers such as Bernice Neugarten and Matilda Riley and brings in the ideas of cohorts, transitions and trajectories, and age (Alwin & McCammon, 2003; Elder, 1999).

In the 1960s, these three traditions began to converge into life course theory. Each one on its own could not fully explain the historical, social, and psychological forces that shape a person’s life. In *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills (1959) called for a move to study human life in the context of and in relation to society. However, at the time, Mills did not have the empirical evidence needed to prove his ideas. As data from longitudinal studies such as the Oakland Growth Study and the Berkeley Guidance Study became more readily available (Elder et al., 2003), pioneers in the field of life course

research, such as Glen Elder, were able to develop a framework that meshed all three of the traditions.

Life course theory has evolved to include five main principles. In his seminal work, *Children of the Great Depression*, Elder (1999) refined the principles of life course theory. The principle of life-span development states that “human development and aging are lifelong processes” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 11). The principle of human agency asserts that “individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances” (p. 11). The principle of historical time and place posits that “the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime” (p. 12). The principle of timing maintains that “the developmental antecedents and consequences of life transitions, events, and behavioral patterns vary according to their timing in a person’s life” (p. 12). The principle of linked lives states that “lives are lived interdependently and social-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships” (p. 13).

Life course theory has not been widely used to frame research in the field of higher education. Two particular concepts of life course theory, transitions/trajectories and generations, served as part of the frame for this study. By understanding how people move through the life course and by understanding the socio-historical parameters of a life course, one can better understand how people make decisions (career, social, personal).

The Concept of Transitions and Trajectories

The principle of human agency and the principle of timing shape the concepts of trajectories and transitions. A trajectory provides a longitudinal way to look at the life course. A person can occupy multiple role trajectories at the same time. For example, one person can have a work trajectory, a family trajectory, and a social trajectory. Often these role trajectories are intertwined. Trajectories are made up of role transitions and the duration of those role transitions (Alwin & McCammon, 2003).

Transition is a concept that speaks to the changes in a person's life. Role theory and social stress theory predate interest in studying transitions (George, 1993): "The link between role theory and life transitions is straightforward: role entry and exit are, by definition, transitions" (p. 355). However, role theory failed to incorporate issues of timing and social context.

According to George (1993), "transitions refer to changes in status that are discrete and bounded in duration" (p. 358), while "trajectories are long-term patterns of stability and change, often including multiple transitions" (p. 358). Therefore, a transition is always embedded in a trajectory. A trajectory may also include multiple transitions. For example, a career path may be considered a trajectory. However, one's career trajectory may include multiple transitions: first job, change of job, promotion, job loss, and so forth.

The status/role and personal experience that one leaves behind can affect her or his transition to a new status/role. For instance, a woman who leaves an abusive marriage may view her new status/role of divorced as positive. On the other hand, a woman who believes that she is in a good marriage and then her husband leaves her may view the new status/role

of divorce as negative. In either situation, both women may view their old role of marriage in a negative light.

Barrett (2000) affirmed that prior statuses/roles can have an effect on new statuses/roles. She examined how different marital trajectories and transitions can influence mental health. She found that those who remained in the same role, continuously married, had better mental health later in life than those who changed marriage roles, yet, while the participants who switched marital roles (married, divorced, widowed, etc.) experienced higher levels of depression and anxiety later in life.

The transitions as described in the previous examples can occur simultaneously with transitions in other trajectories. While someone may be experiencing a transition in a marital trajectory, he or she may also be experiencing a transition in a career trajectory. The effects of one transition, anxiety from a divorce for example, may have an effect on another transition, career choice.

Generation X female mid-level administrators in the community college may experience several transitions at the same time. Generation X women have waited later than other generations to marry and have their first child. Many of them are looking at the possibility of senior administrative positions at a younger age than their predecessors. These factors combined could result in Generation X female mid-level administrators experiencing marital, family, and career transitions within the same time span.

The timing of transitions can also matter in terms of personal impact. When a transition occurs can have an impact on other life choices and outcomes. For instance, using life course data from the Survey of Doctorate Recipients (SDR), Mason and Goulden (2003)

found that the timing of birth can have an impact on earning tenure. Women who have early babies (within five years of receiving the doctorate) are 29% less likely than women without children to receive tenure. Conversely, men with early babies earn tenure at higher rates than all women and single men (Mason & Goulden, 2003).

Throughout a particular trajectory, a person may also experience multiple turning points. Clausen (1998) defined a turning point as a “time or event when one took a different direction from that in which one had been traveling” (p.202). Generally, a person cannot determine whether or not they are experiencing a turning point at the time it occurs. To the individual, the turning point will seem like just another role transition. Through retrospection and an analysis of the cumulative events that have occurred over the life course, a person can determine whether or not she or he experienced a turning point.

One example of a turning point comes from my own life experiences. In 1999, I was working as a Director of a public library in the northeast region of North Carolina. Dissatisfaction in my personal life (not being as close to friends and family as I wanted) led me to look for library jobs closer to home. A position at my current college opened in the library. I applied and was hired. At the time, the career change and move seemed like just any other transition. However, in retrospect, I can now say that the transition of moving to my current institution was a turning point in my career trajectory. That change has led to a new career in distance education as well as a desire to pursue senior level administrative positions in the community college.

The Concept of Generations

The life course principle of historical time and place and the principle of linked lives shape the concept of generations. The idea of viewing societal change through the lens of generations is not a new concept. Philosophers such as August Comte and David Hume “considered the fundamental linkage between the biological succession of generations and change in the nature of society” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 23). In the 1920s, German sociologist Karl Mannheim wrote “The Problem of Generations.” In this treatise, he argues that

belonging to the same generation or age group, endow[s] the individuals [in that generation]... with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action (Wolff, 1993).

The term generation has multiple meanings. Generation is most often used as a kinship term “referring to relationships between individuals who have a common ancestor” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 25). However, it is also frequently used to signify “people born at about the same time and who therefore experience historical events at the same times in their lives” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 25).

The term “cohort” shares a similar meaning with the term generation, “referring to proposed groups of individuals who are born during the same time period and who experienced similar external events during their formative or coming-of-age years (i.e., late adolescent and early adulthood years)” (Noble & Schewe, 2003, p. 979). Some sociologists

(Kertzer, 1983; Ryder, 1965) argue against using the term generation unless referring to kinship relationships. Instead, they support using the term cohort. Other sociologists (Alwin & McCammon, 2003) advocate the use of both meanings of the term generation in scholarly writing. For the purposes of this study, the term generation will refer to those born around the same time span and who share a similar historic background.

A portrait of Generation X. The term Generation X exploded into national consciousness in the early 1990s through its use in the popular media. Douglas Coupland first coined the term in his 1991 novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. His book described a generation much different than that of the preceding Baby Boomer generation (Kunreuther, 2003). Since the publication of Coupland's novel, other titles have appeared to try to explain the phenomenon of Generation X: i.e., *After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X* (Craig & Bennett, 1997), *Welcome to the Jungle: The Why Behind "Generation X"* (Holtz, 1995), and *13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Fail?* (Howe & Strauss, 1993).

According to U.S. Census reports, there were approximately 77 million people born to the Baby Boomer generation. In contrast, there are only 45 million people born to the generation labeled Generation X (Dunphy, 1999). A report from the U.S. Census Bureau defines Generation X as those born between the years of 1968-1979 (Crowley, 2003). Various authors use differing year ranges for Generation X, but Generation X are essentially those persons who, at the time of this study, were between the ages of 30-41 years.

While the Baby Boomer generation was affected by such social issues as the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, Generation X has no such societal rallying point; instead, they have had multiple influences: "Generation Xers have been impacted by the

pessimism of the 1970s, the cynicism of the 1980s, and the skepticism of the 1990s” (Dunphy, 1999, p. 200). In addition, Generation Xers are less civically engaged than prior generations. In a longitudinal study of three generations, Jennings and Stoker (2004) found that civic engagement and trust decreased dramatically with Generation X. The Baby Boomers resembled their parents, the “Long Civic Generation,” in terms of their volunteer activities and social trust. Generation X, without a defining social or political movement, seems to lack the impetus to engage in social and civic events.

Stephen Dunphy (1999) referred to Generation X as “infopreneurs,” who are “[people] who [have] the knowledge and ability to use technology for improved decision making and overall productivity enhancement” (p. 202). Generation X, as well as the following generation, Generation Y or the Net Generation, has been influenced by the advancements in technology like no other generation. Increased globalization and demands for telecommunication have made technology an integral part of many American Generation Xers’ lives.

Myths abound about Generation X. They are viewed as job-hoppers who lack job dedication. They are also referred to as the “Slacker” generation. The myth also exists that Generation X demands flashy amenities from their employers, such as gym memberships and fancy employee lounges (Catalyst, 2001, 2005). Catalyst, an independent nonprofit organization and member of the National Council for Research on Women, dispelled some of these myths. Their study “The Next Generation: Today's Professionals, Tomorrow's Leaders” focuses on some of the assumptions of both male and female Generation Xers and sheds light on the nature of Generation X in the workforce. The Catalyst researchers

surveyed 3,000 women and 1,500 men in industries in the United States and Canada, with a 30 percent response rate. They also conducted telephone interviews with 39 respondents (Catalyst, 2001).

The study found that most Generation Xers do have a high level of commitment to their employers. In fact, 85% stated that they cared about the fate of their organization and 83% said that they would put in extra effort to ensure the success of their organization. About half of the respondents indicated that they desired to stay with their current employer for the rest of their careers, and around two-thirds indicated that they were attracted to their current employer because of the potential job security. Eighty-eight percent of the Generation Xers surveyed were looking for potential advancement opportunities. Over 90% of the survey respondents indicated that feedback on their performance and support from supervisors were essential to their professional development. The reasons a Generation Xer would seek other employment included increased intellectual stimulation and better advancement opportunities (Catalyst, 2001).

The Generation Xers also indicated that their personal lives were very important to them. They were trying, more so than their Baby Boomer counterparts, to effectively balance their personal and professional lives. About three quarters of the respondents believed that flexible scheduling was important to their job satisfaction: “Two-thirds—67%—of employees would like to work a compressed workweek, though only 6% actually did, and 36% would like to work part-time, while only 4% did. There was also great interest in working from home: 59% wanted this option, while only 17% had the opportunity” (Catalyst, 2005, p. 39). The main reasons that the survey participants cited for

wanting flexible work policies were child care concerns, the ability to attend school, and personal health.

The survey also looked at differences between males and females of Generation X in the workforce. Overall, there were not any startling differences in the two groups. However, there were varying perceptions of the workplace environment between the males and females. For instance, the women, much like their Baby Boomer predecessors, felt that they needed to work twice as hard to get the same rewards as their male counterparts. Also, the majority of the men in the survey (62%) felt that the two sexes were compensated comparably while only 30% of the women believed that compensation was comparable. Women also lacked the same mentorship opportunities as men. The researchers found “many organizations either are not doing as good a job managing diversity as they need to be or are not communicating their efforts and successes well enough” (Catalyst, 2005).

Research conducted by Frances Kunreuther (2003), a research fellow at the Hauser - Center for Non-Profit Organization at Harvard University, explained the generational differences between Baby Boomers and their Generation X successors. Kunreuther interviewed two cohorts of executive directors of non-profit organizations; one older than 45 years and one younger than 40. She also interviewed staff members that were younger than 40. She found, as the Catalyst group did, that the popular slacker myths associated with Generation X are unfounded. She did discover, though, that there are significant workplace differences between the Baby Boomers and Generation X.

The Baby Boomers and Generations Xers were likely to enter work in non-profit, social-change organizations in different ways. When asked what motivated them to enter

employment in the non-profit arena, one Generation Xer stated that he had himself been a victim of domestic violence. One other Generation Xer indicated that she had nursed her dying mother. The interviewees of the Baby Boomer era more often than not mentioned some sort of political awakening experience (Kunreuther, 2003).

Although both groups were highly committed to their jobs, the Generation Xers were more concerned about conflicts between work and family life (as also indicated in the Catalyst study). The younger interviewees, both men and women, were concerned with spending time with their families. None of the older respondents mentioned this concern, and they were unaware that the concern existed for the younger employees (Kunreuther, 2003).

Kunreuther (2003) also found that the younger generation in her study was more willing to experiment with different leadership styles. The Generation Xers utilized more team leadership approaches than the older generation. For example, “younger directors either talked about or were trying to run organizations in different ways – with leadership circles, leadership teams, codirectors, staff collectives, and significantly flattened hierarchies” (p. 454).

Through a survey of 241 employees in Midwestern municipalities, Jurkiewicz (2000) analyzed the differences between Baby Boomer and Generation X employees. Each respondent ranked “fifteen work-related factors in terms of what they wanted from their jobs” (p. 62). While she found more similarities than differences between Boomers and Xers, she did find a few statistically significant differences between the two. For instance, she found that Xers ranked “freedom from supervision significantly higher” (p. 63) which

coincides with other research findings of Xers' views of hierarchies (Goben, 2003; Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Kunreuther, 2003).

Goben (2003) explored the leadership approaches with which Generation Xers in community colleges most identified. Five leadership themes emerged from his GenX participants:

1. Embracing diverse Xers with customized leadership
 2. Avoiding micromanagement by empowering and supporting Xers with freedom, responsibility, and inclusion
 3. Taking the time to support continuous improvement in an immersive learning environment with good mentoring
 4. Respecting Xers' need to communicate efficiently and solve challenges quickly with tangible, self-sustaining solutions
 5. Showing respect for ability, encouraging fun and creativity, and praising sincerely
- (p. 80).

Goben also found that the Gen Xers in his study preferred flatter, bottom-up hierarchies as opposed to the traditional top-down hierarchies seen in most community colleges.

Generations and the community college. Goben's (2003) research is an example of the few cohort studies conducted on Generation X employees or administrators in the community college. Most research to date on generations in the community college describes the past generations of leaders and the current generation (the Baby Boomers). This view of generation resembles the kinship/succession notion of generation as opposed to

the cohort view of generation. Existing research conducted from a generational perspective focuses on the evolution of leadership in the community college.

Understanding the history and formation of the community college system in the United States explains the growth and change of leadership since its inception. The concept of the community (or junior) college began in the late nineteenth century. Higher education leaders such as William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago envisioned the concept of a junior college to bridge the gap between elementary school and the university. However, until the early 1900s, the two key elements for the rise of postsecondary education were not yet in place: a growing population of high school graduates and a system of public education that afforded two additional years of education past secondary school (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). After the formation of the first junior college, Joliet Junior College, in 1901, the movement began to flourish. By 1930, there were approximately 175 community or junior colleges in America; by 1960, there were approximately 400; and by 2004, there were 1,158 (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005).

The 1947 President's Commission on Higher Education, also known as the Truman Commission, popularized the term community college. Gleazer (1994) noted that "the commission's recommendations for the community college were part of a broader call that public education be made available...to all Americans able and willing to receive it, regardless of race, creed, color, sex, or economic and social status" (p. xi). The 1970 Carnegie Commission on Higher Education report "The Open-Door Colleges: Policies for Community Colleges" reiterated this idea of open access. The Commission recommended that "all states enact legislation providing admission to public community colleges of all

applicants who are high school graduates or are persons over 18 years of age who are capable of benefiting from continuing education” (p. 15) .

Cohen and Brawer (2003) argued that one of the best answers for the formation of community colleges is that “the United States has been more dedicated to the belief that all individuals should have the opportunity to rise to their greatest potential” (p. 10). In the United States the belief exists that every individual should be afforded the second chance to correct the mistakes of his/her youth and have the ability to grow. The people of this nation see opportunity as a means of justice, and education affords opportunity.

In the early days of the community college, staff and leadership emerged out of the local school systems. In fact, as the community colleges formed, “schoolteachers became college professors and school superintendents became college presidents” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 11). Planning for leadership positions in community colleges did not exist; it just happened. This adaptation of leadership from the outside marked the early stages of community college leaders.

The leadership style of community college administrators has evolved over the last century. Susan Twombly (1995) presented four different stages in the life cycle of community colleges. She identified the first stage as “The Early Years: 1900-1930s.” She wrote, “The ‘great man’ theory of leadership dominated this early period in the development of community colleges” (p. 68). The next stage, Independence: 1940-1950s, also saw images of the great man style of leadership with community college presidents being described as the star athlete or the battleship commander. Well into the 1960s-1970s, the Maturation stage, “images of leaders as commander and great man continued to dominate as strong leadership

was thought necessary to build and develop community colleges out of relatively small junior colleges” (p. 70). Not until the 1980s did the autocratic view of community colleges presidents begin to subside.

Sullivan (2001) also provided an overview of the past generations of community college leadership. She described the generations of community college leaders as follows:

- (a) the first generation of founding fathers, who pioneered a new and democratic form of higher education;
- (b) the second generation of good managers, who led the colleges through a period of rapid growth and abundant resources;
- and (c) the third generation of collaborators, who have drawn disparate groups together to leverage scarce resources and make access to higher education truly universal (p. 560).

Community colleges are now on their third generation of leaders, the collaborators. In a subsequent article, Sullivan (2004) noted that the emerging fourth generation of leaders “are already skilled collaborators because as rising administrators they have played major roles in negotiating partnerships with government agencies, business and industry and the K-12 schools” (p. 37). The personality of the fourth generation has yet to fully emerge, however.

The current generation of community college leaders took many different paths to achieve their leadership positions. Using the responses from a random sample of 1,700 community college administrators, Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) explained how most of the current administrators obtained their positions. The majority of presidents held positions as chief academic officer, president at another community college, provost, or senior student affairs officer prior to their current position as president. A small percentage came straight

from the faculty ranks (2%) or from the public school system (2%). No one in their sample came from the private sector. In addition, “as their careers progressed, most survey respondents seemed to spend no more than five years in each position on the path to the presidency” (p. 3). Most chief academic officers, student affairs officers, and other leaders within the community college obtained their positions by moving up within their academic unit.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

To fully understand the influences on career decisions of Generation X female mid-level administrators, multiple lenses are necessary. The concepts of interpretivism and life course theory situate the problem in a socio-historical perspective. Feminist standpoint theory situates the problem in a gendered perspective. Bechtold (2008) explained that “to theorize gender from a feminist perspective involves using the gender principle as a lens to evaluate all of society’s institutions and power hierarchies, and to allow for the possibility of multidimensional social stratification” (p. 750).

Feminist standpoint theory grew out of the work of sociology and psychology researchers of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1982, Carol Gilligan published *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. In her seminal work, Gilligan challenged previous research on moral development. Researchers such as Piaget and Kohlberg based their concepts of moral development on research conducted mainly on men and boys. These concepts argued that people (as a whole) subscribed to a rights morality – based in ideas of justice, fairness, and impartiality. Gilligan listened to the voices of women and girls and developed a theory of moral development that centered on an ethical

system of care and nurturing.

Other researchers began to listen to the voice of women. In *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1997) identified five different ways that women construct knowledge and interpret themselves and their world: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge. Others (Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1983a) argued for a feminist research framework. According to Hartsock (1983a), the feminist standpoint “expresses female experience at a particular time and place, located within a particular set of social relations” (p. 303). Drawing from the work of Marx, the central themes of feminist standpoint theory are:

1. How societies are structured has epistemological consequences.
2. When material life is hierarchically organized...the understandings of such hierarchical relations that are available to ‘rulers’ and ‘ruled’ will tend to be opposed in certain respects.
3. The oppressors’ false [referred to as ‘partial’ by Hartsock] and perverse perceptions are nevertheless made ‘real’ and operative.
4. It takes both science and politics to see the world ‘behind,’ ‘beneath,’ or ‘from outside’ the oppressors’ institutionalized vision.
5. The achievement of a standpoint brings the possibility of liberation (Harding, 2007, p. 50-51).

Hesse-Biber (2007) provided an overview of the history and beliefs of feminist research. Feminist scholars in the 1960s started calling attention to the androcentric bias

prevalent in much science and social science research of the time. They also began questioning the nature of positivistic research and the idea that social reality is objectively constructed. Hesse-Biber notes, however, that “positivism per se is not the enemy of all feminist inquiry; rather, the problem is with certain practices arising from how the method is carried out by some mainstream social researchers” (p. 8). She goes on to explain exactly what feminist research praxis involves. “Feminist praxis refers to the varied ways feminist research proceeds. Feminist perspectives challenge the traditional research paradigm of positivism, which assumes a unified truth with the idea of testing out hypotheses” (p. 14).

By framing a research problem from a feminist standpoint, researchers are able to detect gender oppression within institutions and society. However, Patricia Hill Collins (1989) argued that a feminist only standpoint is not enough to frame the concepts of oppression in society. According to Collins (1989), feminist scholars

assert that women share a history of patriarchal oppression through the political economy of the material conditions of sexuality and reproduction.

These shared material conditions are thought to transcend divisions among women created by race, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity and to form the basis of a women's standpoint with its corresponding feminist consciousness and epistemology (p. 756).

In the 1990s, Collins (1998) refined the concept of intersectionality to describe the various socially and culturally constructed categories (race, social class, gender, etc.) at play in perpetuating social inequalities. According to the theory of intersectionality, no single social or cultural category can describe socially and culturally derived hierarchical oppressions.

Also inherent in the theory of intersectionality is the idea that these categories influence each other. For instance, it would be inaccurate to state that all women experience the same forms of oppression. Black women, homosexual women, and women from lower socio-economic classes will experience oppression much differently than white, affluent heterosexual women. In her study of Hispanic women professionals and managers, Hite (2007) stated “gender is lived in the context of culture. Considering issues of gender outside a cultural context yields an incomplete picture of reality” (p. 21).

I believe a feminist standpoint lens is necessary to fully understand the career advancement influences of Generation X female mid-level administrators. As the following section will show, oppression grounded in gender is still prevalent in the organizations in the 21st century. However, a feminist standpoint perspective must be coupled with the theory of intersectionality, in order to truly describe the experiences of these women.

Challenges to Leadership Positions for Women

The most popular metaphor used to explain the imbalance of women and men in leadership positions is the “glass ceiling.” The term “glass ceiling” was first used in *The Wall Street Journal* in 1986 to describe the invisible barriers women face on the corporate ladder to leadership positions (Carli & Eagly, 2001). Prior to the metaphor of the glass ceiling, the situation for women in leadership positions resembled more of a “concrete wall” (Eagly & Carli, 2007). A telling illustration of this metaphor is exemplified by Richard Nixon in a statement concerning women as Supreme Court Justices: “I don’t think a woman should be in any government job whatsoever...The reason why I do is mainly because they

are erratic. And emotional. Men are erratic and emotional, too, but the point is a women is more likely to be” (as quoted in Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 3).

In *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders*, Eagly and Carli (2007) proposed a different metaphor to describe women’s paths to leadership positions. They argue that the glass ceiling metaphor is no longer appropriate. They cite CEOs such as Meg Whitman of eBay and Anne Mulcahy of Xerox as illustrations of women who have broken through the “glass ceiling” and achieved success as leaders in their fields. However, they do stress that a problem still exists in the United States for equal attainment of leadership positions by women. They list seven reasons why the glass ceiling metaphor is no longer appropriate:

1. It erroneously implies that women have equal access to entry-level positions.
2. It erroneously assumes the presence of an absolute barrier at a specific high level in organizations.
3. It erroneously suggests that all barriers to women are difficult to detect and therefore unforeseen.
4. It erroneously assumes that there exists a single, homogenous barrier and thereby ignores the complexity and variety of obstacles that women leaders can face.
5. It fails to recognize the diverse strategies that women devise to become leaders.

6. It precludes the possibility that women can overcome barriers and become leaders.
7. It fails to suggest that thoughtful problem solving can facilitate women's paths to leadership.

For Eagly and Carli (2007), the concept of a labyrinth best describes the issues women are facing today in regard to leadership: "The labyrinth contains numerous barriers, some subtle and others quite obvious, such as the expectation that mothers will provide the lion's share of childcare" (p. 6). So what are some of the barriers that women face in the labyrinth to leadership positions? Issues of male norms in the workplace, gender stereotypes, and work-family balance can all act as deterrents for women seeking leadership positions.

Male norms and gender stereotypes. The idea of 'think manager—think male' has persisted in the workforce for decades (Schein, 2001). In the early 1970s, Virginia Schein studied the gendered nature of leadership. Her findings showed that both men and women believed that "the characteristics associated with managerial success were more likely to be held by men than women" (p. 676). Three decades later, Schein analyzed recent replications of her study in five industrial countries and found that the male gendered view of leadership had not changed much among men.

Eagly and Karau (2002) asserted, using role congruity theory, that the gendered view of leadership roles creates "prejudice toward female leaders ... from the incongruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leader roles" (p. 574). Eagly and Carli (2007) argued that leadership is still defined with gendered terms: "Two connotations predominate in people's associations about women and men: the

communal and agentic. Communal associations convey a concern with the compassionate treatment of others...In contrast, agentic associations convey assertion and control” (p. 86). In polls and surveys, people still ascribed communal connotations to women and agentic connotations to men. Additionally, the predominant connotation of leadership is still agentic (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Stereotypes that create gendered views of leadership positions and individuals can hinder women’s progress (Lips, 2001; Oakley, 2000; Ridgeway, 2001). These stereotypes can also alter a woman’s own perception of her abilities as a leader (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Gendered identities and terms for leadership can be found in the community college setting. Eddy (April 2003) found while studying the role gender plays in presidential leadership that “gender-loaded terms were used to reinforce the ideal gender of the leader” (p. 11). Tedrow and Rhoads (1998) “found that senior women administrators largely constructed their leadership identity as a response to organization expectations and norms grounded in the experiences of men” (p. 9).

Structural issues within an organization can also be barriers to women’s attainment of leadership positions. Most modern organizations still have hierarchical structures, and 40 hour work weeks first developed in the early- to mid-twentieth century. These structures typically assumed a traditional family with a bread-winning father and stay-at-home mother (O’Neil et al., 2008). While some companies and organizations are embracing alternative human resource policies (such as telecommuting, flex-scheduling, job sharing), the United States lags behind other industrialized nations in family-friendly work policies (Gornick & Meyers, 2008).

Work-family balance. In 2003, *The New York Times* published an article titled “The Opt-Out Revolution” (Belkin, 2003). The article claimed that young, educated mothers were opting out of the workforce to stay home and care for their children. It became the most emailed *New York Times* article of that year. According to the U. S. Census Bureau, the number of new mothers not returning to the workforce increased from 41% in 1998 to 46% in 2002 (Still, 2006).

Since the appearance of the *New York Times* article, and many others like it in the popular media, researchers have tried to establish the validity of these claims. For example, in her analysis of working women born between 1906 and 1975, Percheski (2008) found “little evidence that recent cohorts of professional women are opting out of paid work to raise children at higher rates than did preceding” generations (p. 513). Conversely, Still (2006) argued that the “opt-out revolution in the United States is a predictable response to the unique features of the US workplace which lead women to stay at home with children” (p. 168). Other researchers have tried to understand why the women who do “opt-out” choose to do so.

Stone and Lovejoy (2004) interviewed 43 women about their choice to stay home with their children and not return to full time employment. Each woman in their study was previously employed in a professional or managerial position. The women in their study cited various reasons for not returning to work. Structural issues in the workplace, such as inflexibility in scheduling, were one of the primary factors in their decisions. They also cited concerns about adequate day care for their children and the increased demands on their time to balance both work and family responsibilities. Several of the women commented that

while their spouses were supportive of their choice, the women did not feel that they had much of a choice. Some also cited lack of support from their spouses/partners as a primary reason for opting out of the workforce.

While the research on the opt-out revolution is mixed, issues of work-family balance do exist for women today (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008; DeGroot & Fine, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007). Although the number of hours that men are contributing to domestic duties has increased, women still spend more time than their partners completing domestic duties (Bianchi et al., 2000; DeGroot & Fine, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007). With the birth of children, women continue to invest more time in raising children compared with their partners (Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004). Many women are concerned about the quality of day care, and this concern can affect their employment decisions (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

In a survey of 255 higher education institutions, Hollenshead (2005) discovered that community colleges were the least likely of any institution type to offer family-friendly policies. This discovery is interesting considering that many women choose the community college with the perception that work-family conflicts will be lessened (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007). The lack of family-friendly policies in community colleges leads to problems such as one described by a participant in a study by Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly (2007). While trying to find people to cover classes for maternity leave, the participant stated that she “felt like [she] was in negotiation to be a mom” (p. 232).

Women in the Community College

Historical overview of women in academia. Higher education for women began in female seminaries such as those founded at Troy in 1821, Hartford in 1828, and South Hadley in 1836 (Lucas, 2006; Rudolph, 1990). Coeducation did not appear in the United States until 1837 when “Oberlin College in Ohio enrolled four female freshmen” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 311). Although women’s colleges and coeducation slowly emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century, not much progress was made for women’s education prior to the onset of the Civil War.

The rise of coeducation began in the West and Midwest during the middle part of the nineteenth century (Thelin, 2004). The first coeducational institutions were founded upon evangelical principles. At Oberlin, “men and women, white and black, were educated together to carry out God’s cause on earth” (Solomon, 1985, p. 21). When land-grant colleges and state universities began to appear in these regions, founders of these institutions were amenable to admitting women (Lucas, 2006). Women in the Midwest and West also “helped to save many one-time men’s colleges of the small denominational type from being put out of business by the state institutions” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 323).

After the Civil War, coeducation began to spread throughout the United States. By 1872, there were ninety-seven coeducational colleges and universities in the United States. By the turn of the 20th century, nearly 71 percent of the colleges and universities were coeducational (Rudolph, 1990, p. 322). The coeducational movement that began in the Midwest and West had spread throughout the nation by the end of the century. Women were in college to stay.

Although women had gained admittance to institutions of higher education, the environment was unfriendly and the social cost was immense. Olive San Louis Anderson in her book *An American Girl and Her Four Years in a Boy's College* (1878) related her experiences at the fictional University of Ortonville (in truth she is writing about her experiences at the University of Michigan). In describing the climate of a coeducational institution in the 1800s, Anderson stated, "The girls are not expected to have much class spirit yet, but are supposed to sit meekly by and say 'Thank you' for the crumbs that fall from the boys' table" (as quoted in Nidiffer, 2001b, p. 13).

Many arguments were used by higher education administrators as well as society at large to discount the education of women. One of the most interesting arguments against the education of women came from Dr. Edward H. Clarke, Harvard Medical School faculty member. Science, biology in particular, was used by many in the nineteenth century to explain the differences in gender (Solomon, 1985). In his 1873 book *Sex in Education; or, a Fair Chance for the Girls*, Clarke argued "that women's brains were less developed and could not tolerate the same level of mental stimulation as men's" (Bashaw, 2001, p. 17) and believed that intense brain activity was linked "with the potential malfunction of the reproductive 'apparatus,' especially if women were overtaxed during [menstruation]" (Bashaw, 2001, p. 17). Many throughout the country read Clarke's work and feared for the safety of future mothers.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, another argument emerged. Critics argued that women's education would lead to race suicide (Bashaw, 2001). Women who attended college were less likely to marry and have children than non-college educated women.

However, women continued to attend college in droves. By 1920, almost half of all higher education students in the United States were women.

Gradually, as women obtained degrees, they aspired to govern institutions of higher education themselves. At first, even the earliest women-only institutions were headed by men. Eventually, women began to assume leadership positions in higher education such as president or chief executive officer. Some of the earliest examples of female leadership are seen in female seminaries and colleges: Alice Freeman at Wellesley College, M. Carey Thomas at Bryn Mawr College, Sister Mary Euphrasia at Trinity College, and Mother Irene Gill at the College of New Rochelle (Brown, 2001).

Women also entered into leadership positions as deans of women. According to Nidiffer (2001), “The position of dean of women was born in the antebellum liberal arts colleges of the Midwest” (p. 136). The first deans of women were charged with maintaining decorum among women in coeducational institutions. At the onset of coeducation, many colleges and universities did not offer housing for women, but toward the end of the century many parents began to demand housing for their daughters. Deans of women took on the task of monitoring dormitories for women as well (Nidiffer, 2001a).

The position of dean of women soon moved from a position to a profession. Through the efforts of women such as Marion Talbot of the University of Chicago, Mary Bidwell Breed of Indiana University, Ada Comstock of the University of Minnesota, and Lois Mathews of the University of Wisconsin, one of the first professional women’s higher education organizations was formed, the National Association of Deans of Women (NADW) (Bashaw, 2001, p. 139). The first conference for deans of women was held in Chicago in

1903. From these biennial conferences, the NADW was formed in 1916. The NADW, after several name changes, would eventually become the National Association for Women in Education (NAWE), which was active until 2000 (Bashaw, 2001).

With the emergence of junior and community colleges at the beginning of the twentieth century, many women found a more encouraging environment for higher education: “Coeducation, strong in the high schools, came naturally into the junior college” (Frye, 1995, p. 6). Parents also applauded the close proximity of regional junior colleges to home. Many parents were more willing to send their daughters to the local junior college than to a distant university. The new, emerging junior colleges also needed students to fill the classrooms, thus enhancing the idea of coeducation (Frye, 1995).

The social circumstances of the early twentieth century led more women to attend college, especially community colleges. World Wars I and II showed America that women were valuable to the American workforce. Many women came to the community college to enhance occupational skills. However, while women students were increasing in numbers at junior and community colleges, women administrators were not: “Before 1970, female leaders in the community college were few and far between” (Frye, 1995, p. 10). In 1986, the percentage of female community college presidents was roughly eight percent (Shults, 2001). By the beginning of the 21st century, that percentage had grown to close to 30% (Drake, 2008). While females are making great strides in obtaining presidencies in community colleges, there is still room for improvement.

Professional development and community college women administrators. Higher education researchers have long suggested that participation in professional development

activities can impact career advancement (Anderson, 1997; Warner & DeFleur, 1993). As growing numbers of senior level administrative positions become available in community colleges, professional development activities will become increasingly necessary.

VanDerLinden (2005) stated that “some [professional development] activities are formal experiences such as workshops, retreats, or specific professional development activities that have outlined goals and objectives. Other less formal activities include networking at a conference or informal mentoring programs between junior and senior colleagues” (p. 729) .

VanDerLinden (2005) surveyed community college administrators in community colleges in Michigan to ascertain what professional development activities were most important to their careers as well as what challenges they may face in their career advancement. Examples of important activities included presentations at conferences, serving on state and regional organization boards, specialized workshops and seminars, opportunities to take on additional responsibilities, and mentors.

Challenges to career advancement consisted of limited time for professional development, limited organizational support, lack of mentoring opportunities, and lack of the appropriate degree (VanDerLinden, 2005). Those seeking senior-level positions in higher education are encouraged to obtain the terminal degree. Although the doctorate may not be a necessity for some senior level positions in higher education, “an advanced degree may [serve as a] screening type of variable for top administrative positions” (VanDerLinden, 2004, p. 4).

In her study of women administrators in Texas public community and junior colleges, Durnovo (1990) found that women who had mentors were in significantly higher

administrative positions than women who had not experienced mentoring. She found that “the mentor was helpful with career advancement: providing opportunity, visibility, sharing information, [and] providing encouragement and confidence” (Durnovo, 1990, p. 153). Even those in Durnovo’s study who did not experience a mentor encouraged women to seek out a mentor relationship. Without mentoring, “women frequently remain unaware of specific steps important to their career advancement” (VanDerLinden, 2004, p. 5).

Several additional studies (Faulconer, 1995; Gerdes, 2003; VanDerLinden, 2004) revealed that many women in administrative positions in higher education attribute their success in leadership positions to mentors. A mentor can serve as an educator, a sponsor, a coach, a counselor, and a confronter (Anderson & Ramey, 1990). The mentor as an educator informs the protégé of organizational culture, advancement prospects, and professional development opportunities. The mentor as a sponsor offers the protégé positive and enthusiastic reinforcement as well as guiding the protégé ‘in the right direction.’ The mentor as coach provides the protégé with constructive criticism and will serve as devil’s advocate to challenge and improve the protégé. The mentor as counselor “advises, listens actively, provides empathetic support, and encourages problem solving” (Anderson & Ramey, 1990, p. 186). The mentor as confronter is most apparent when a behavioral change in the protégé is needed. The confronter exposes options and consequences to the protégé.

Through her survey of 98 women in leadership positions, Gerdes (2003) found that about one-fifth of the respondents encouraged mentoring for women entering leadership positions in higher education institutions. Vaughan (1989) also found that many female

presidents ascribed their successes to mentors, both positive and negative, maintaining that “a negative situation can also create a desire to move ahead in one’s profession” (p. 23) .

In addition to obtaining the terminal degree and seeking out a supportive mentor, state and regional leadership programs also provide valuable professional development opportunities. In a 2002 study of female chief academic officers (CAOs) in community colleges, Brent Cejda (Cook, 2005) found that the CAOs listed opportunities for additional responsibility, special committee and task force assignments, and state/regional leadership programs as the top three most important professional development activities.

Local, regional, and national leadership programs can help keep employees’ skills up-to-date and provide strategies for career advancement. Programs specifically for women include the ACE (OWHE) National and Regional Leadership Forums, the Bryn Mawr College/HERS Mid-America Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education Administration, and the National Institute for Leadership Development (NILD), the premier program for community college women. These programs also provide a source for networking, which Gerdes (2003) stated is one of the keys for nurturing successful leaders. One respondent to her survey advised future leaders to “network like crazy with both men and women” (Gerdes, 2003, p. 270). People who network successfully find mutually beneficial relationships that often pave the way for future success.

Summary

The overarching concept that situated the research problem and the research questions for this study was interpretivism. Interpretivism “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 2003, p. 67). However,

interpretivism is too broad to fully explain the particular aspects that frame this study.

Life course theory served as one perspective with which to frame this study. Life course theory “emphasizes the implications of social pathways in historical time and place” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 4). Life course theory has been used to frame many topics within the social sciences: juvenile delinquency (Sampson & Laub, 1993), the Great Depression (Elder, 1999), generations and family (Bengtson, Biblarz, & Roberts, 2002) and, to some small extent, higher education (Mason & Goulden, 2003). The particular life course concept of generations has been used to frame studies on leadership in community colleges in several different ways (Phelan, 2005; Sullivan, 2004; Watts & Hammons, 2002), but only a few studies have addressed the particular aspects of Generation X administrators in community colleges (Goben, 2003).

Feminist standpoint theory, in combination with the theory of intersectionality, also served as a perspective with which this study was framed. It “involves using the gender principle as a lens” in research (Bechtold, 2008, p. 750). Many leadership studies have been conducted using gender as a lens both within organizations in general (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2003, 2007; Oakley, 2000; Ridgeway, 2001; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004) and within higher education specifically (Lester, 2008; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1998; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Twombly, 1998; Twombly, 1995). However, few studies exist that address the particular situations of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges.

The bodies of literature that informed this research project were those on Generation X, challenges to women in leadership, work-family balance, and women in community

colleges. Literature from these areas, mixed with a hint of history on women in academia, formed the foundation for understanding the purpose of this project: to explore the influences, both internal and external, that shape the career advancement decisions and goals of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. These bodies of literature viewed individually have their own separate meanings, but intertwined they form the basis for understanding the personal and professional forces at work right here, right now in the career advancement decisions of Generation X female mid-level administrators. In the next chapter, I explain how qualitative interpretive inquiry guided the methods of this research project.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the qualitative research methods that I used in this study to explore the influences, both internal and external, that shape the career advancement decisions and goals of Generation X female mid-level administrators in selected community colleges in the Southeast. This study utilized a qualitative interpretive design. The specific questions addressed were:

1. How do current Generation X female mid-level administrators in selected community colleges in the Southeast perceive leadership, and what are their career advancement goals?
2. What personal and professional factors do they take into consideration along their career paths and how do they experience this process?

Research Design

In order to better understand the personal, social, and professional experiences that affect the career decisions of female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast, a qualitative design was employed. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p.3). They go on to state “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).

This study followed the procedures of a qualitative interpretive study. Constructionism, which is aligned with my epistemology, forms the foundation for an

interpretive study (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2002) stated that the overall purpose of an interpretive study “is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 38). She further explained that while all qualitative research reflects some aspects of this purpose, other forms have additional purposes. In a qualitative interpretive study the researcher is “interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 38).

A qualitative interpretive study, in addition to being a good fit with my view of knowledge construction, was a good place for a new researcher to start. Other qualitative research methodologies, such as phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory to name a few, have additional dimensions (Merriam, 2009) to consider when designing methods and analysis procedures. A qualitative interpretive study gives the novice researcher the opportunity to use qualitative methods without stumbling with additional dimensions.

Sample and Site Selection

In light of the selected qualitative methods, the sample size was small (Marshall & Rossman, 2006): ten women. Criterion sampling methods were employed to ensure that the participants exhibited the qualities of interest in this study. In the interest of time and financial resources, I recruited Generation X female mid-level administrators who work in select community colleges in southeastern United States. My institution was not included, as the relationships that I already have with other female mid-level administrators could have made it uncomfortable for them to participate in the interviews candidly. The selected institutions were not disclosed in this study to ensure participant and institution confidentiality.

I sent a letter to the president of each institution soliciting his or her support for this research project (See Appendix A). I asked the president to obtain a list of employees that met the study criteria and then provide the list to me. I sent an email to each potential participant describing the study and its purposes and asking for her participation in the study (Appendix B). If the president of the institution was not comfortable with providing such a list, he or she was asked to forward the introductory email to those employees at the institution that met the criteria. A selection of those that responded and fit the criteria were included in the study. The three criteria included:

- being female,
- having a birth date between the years of 1968 and 1979, and
- holding a mid-level administrator position in the community college.

Once again, a mid-level administrator is one who supervises others but does not report directly to the college president.

Data Collection

Data for this research project were collected using a semi-structured interview process (Merriam, 2001). Regarding interviews, Marshall and Rossman (2006) explain that “the participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it... not as the researcher views it” (p. 101). Warren further explains that “the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to derive interpretations, not facts or laws, from respondent talk” (Warren, 2002, p. 83).

I used an interview guide (See Appendix C) to allow each participant the opportunity to respond to the same questions. This helped maintain rigor in the qualitative study.

However, the semi-structured nature of the interviews gave us the freedom to elaborate beyond just the questions on the interview guide. The interview guide was piloted informally with two women from my institution and was adjusted as needed. According to Merriam (2009), “pilot interviews are crucial for trying out your questions. Not only do you get some practice interviewing, but you also quickly learn which questions are confusing and need rewording” (p. 95).

I established an interview time with each woman who chose to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted at a location of the participant’s choosing in order to increase the level of comfort. To ensure comfort with the process, the interviews began with a briefing “in which the interviewer define[d] the situation” and “briefly [told] about the purpose of the interview, the use of a tape recorder, and so on” and asked the participant if she had any questions (Kvale, 2007, p. 55). Next, the participant read and signed an informed consent form (See Appendix D) per Institutional Review Board guidelines. The participant was then asked to choose a pseudonym. The rest of the interview consisted of questions from the interview guide, beginning with a few opening demographic questions to ease the participant into the interview and then moving to more focused questions about career decisions (i.e. What is your conception of leadership? How does gender play a role in your view of leadership or your leadership career decisions? How do you foresee your work life and your personal life interacting when taking the next step in leadership?)

The initial audiotaped interviews lasted approximately one hour, and follow-up phone interviews lasted about 10-15 minutes. I hired a transcriptionist to transcribe each interview. Upon receipt of the transcripts, I read each one while listening to the audio to correct any

mistakes in the transcripts. The process of correcting the transcripts allowed me to become immersed in the data as soon as possible. Merriam (2009) suggested “that new and experienced researchers transcribe at the least the first few interviews of any study” (p. 110). The process of reviewing the transcriptions for accuracy allowed me to begin analyzing the data while also continuing simultaneous data collection and data analysis. After the interviews were transcribed, a copy of the transcript was hand delivered the participant to check for accuracy.

The follow-up interview encouraged the participants to review the transcripts and make any comments or clarifications. As with the initial interview, a set of questions was developed to allow for a semi-structured interview process. The participants were asked if there were any changes in their professional, personal and/or civic lives since the initial interview. They were also given the opportunity to add any additional thoughts they may have had concerning work/life balance, leadership, gender, and/or Generation X identity. This process, known as member checks, allows researchers to take their “preliminary analysis back to some of the participants and ask whether [her] interpretation ‘rings true’” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Follow-up interviews used the same data collection and analysis process as the initial interviews with the exception that I transcribed the follow-up interviews in their entirety.

All interviews were recorded using both an internal laptop microphone and an external voice recorder. Using both ensured a successful recording in case of any equipment failure. Each woman was informed that the information they provided would be published using pseudonyms both for the individuals and their place of employment.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) stated that “knowledge of the history and context surrounding a specific setting comes, in part, from reviewing documents” (p. 107). In addition to interviews, I had planned to review the policies and procedures manuals from each institution, as well as any professional development plans that the participant wished to share. However, only one policy and procedure manual was obtained. The other colleges did not wish to share their manuals. For this reason, I chose not to include document review in my study. While engaging in data collection and analysis, I also used a researcher journal to organize my observations and thoughts (Merriam, 2002).

This research proposal was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board for North Carolina State University. Each participant received information on the risk of being involved with the study as well as the associated benefits. They also signed an informed consent form. Participants were notified in the informed consent (See Appendix D) that there was no compensation for their participation in this research project. They were also given the contact information for the university’s IRB office and the faculty sponsors for any questions or concerns they may have had. If at any time during the process the participant felt that they could not continue, the data collection would have ceased and any data gathered up to that point would not have been used in analysis.

The parameters of this study did not lend themselves to many potential risks. However, the integrity of the interview data was a consideration. The interview data were stored on my laptop and an external hard drive. A separate key designating the true identities of the participants with their pseudonyms was stored on a separate removable storage device,

and locked in a fire proof box at my home. The data will be kept for at least ten years from the conclusion of the study to allow for the possibility of additional articles.

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) cautioned that there are no set guidelines for qualitative analysis: “Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But no recipe...” (p. 432). As a beginning researcher, however, I felt that some structure would help me through this process. Marshall and Rossman (2006) offered seven typical analytic phases to help guide novice researchers:

1. Organizing the data
2. Immersion in the data
3. Generating categories and themes
4. Coding the data
5. Offering interpretations through analytic memos
6. Searching for alternative understandings
7. Writing the report (p. 156).

The data and codes were organized using QSR International’s NVivo 9 software. NVivo allowed me to import and code text and audio files, as well as keep a researcher journal. Much debate exists about the use of qualitative computing packages (Creswell, 2007; Grbich, 2007); however, I believe that the benefits outweigh any concerns. Creswell listed some of the advantages to using computer software in qualitative data analysis: “the researcher can quickly and easily locate material and store it in one place,... a computer program encourages a researcher to look closely at the data,.. [and] a computer program

allows the researcher to easily retrieve memos associated with codes, themes, or documents” (p. 165).

For the first step in the data analysis process, I immersed myself in the data collected. “Reading, rereading, and reading through the data once more forces the researcher to become intimately familiar with those data” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 158). It is important for the researcher to become familiar with the data as a whole before dissecting them into their parts.

After immersion, I constructed categories and themes from the data using the constant comparative method. Although the constant comparative method grew out of grounded theory methodologies, it “need not result in substantive theory,” but serves to provide “a systematic strategy for analyzing any data set” (Merriam, 2009, p. 31). The process begins with the open coding method as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). With open coding, the researcher “work[s] intensively with [the] data, line by line, identifying themes and categories that seem of interest” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 158). In an interpretive inquiry “the analysis of the data involves identifying recurrent patterns (presented as categories, factors, variables, themes) that cut through the data” (Merriam, 2002, p. 38).

I chose to start data analysis for this research project with open coding before introducing literature-based codes. Little research has been conducted on the career advancement decisions of this particular group of female mid-level administrators, and I believed that starting with a predefined set of literature-based codes could have had an effect on any emergent themes. I wanted to enter the process with as open a mind as possible. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued

Merely selecting data for a category that has been established by another theory tends to hinder the generation of new categories, because the major effort is not generation, but data selection. Also, emergent categories usually prove to be the most relevant and the best fitted to the data. Working with borrowed categories is more difficult since they are harder to find, fewer in number, and not as rich; since in the long run they may not be relevant, and are not exactly designed for the purpose, they must be respecified (as quoted in Merriam, 2009, p. 185).

The open codes were grouped together and merged into categories through the process of axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). After identifying categories from the data, I then coded the transcripts using focused coding: “Like open coding, focused coding entails going through your data line by line, but this time you focus on those key themes you identified during open [and axial] coding” (Esterberg, 2002. p. 161). The process was iterative and inductive, moving from coding to category creation back to coding, until categories become more solidified. The categories were then arranged using the data display process outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). They define a data display as “a visual format that presents information systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions and take needed action” (p. 91). A grid of codes to research questions was created to better visualize the data. The grid was refined several times before eventually forming an outline of the findings.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Merriam (2002) stated that “all researchers aspire to produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. And both producers and consumers of research want to be assured that the findings of an investigation are to be believed and trusted” (p. 22) . Several methods were used in this research process to ensure validity, reliability, and trustworthiness.

Multiple data sources were used to triangulate the data. Triangulation involves “using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings” (Merriam, 2001, p. 31). Sources of data for this research project included the researcher journal, the initial interview, and the follow-up interview. Member checks were used as part of the research process; they “provide an opportunity for the researcher to examine summaries of interpretations, open them to lay scrutiny, and reexamine their analytic process as one of the many steps in the research process” (Meadows & Morse, 2001, p. 196). Once the data were transcribed, the participants were asked to review the transcriptions to ensure that they accurately reflected their statements.

Peer review serves as another way to ensure validity (Merriam, 2009). Peer review involves “discussions with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). Throughout the research process, I consulted colleagues and other doctoral students about the methods used and the analysis of data (making sure to protect participant identity).

As part of a dissertation process, this research was reviewed by members of my committee. This research was conducted under the guidance of experts in the fields of higher education, women’s studies, and qualitative research. The committee “read and

comment[ed] on the findings” and “assess[ed] whether the findings [were] plausible based on the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220).

Merriam (2002) noted that researchers should spend adequate time in data collection. She also advised that “the best rule of thumb is that the data and emerging findings must feel saturated; that is, you begin to see or hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as you collect more data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). The findings of this research project also include rich, thick descriptions that provide “enough descriptions to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context, and hence whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 2001, p. 31).

Researcher’s Position/ Reflexivity

Alan Peshkin (1988) encouraged researchers to be cognizant of their own subjectivities before and while conducting research. He argued that being aware of one’s own subjectivities allows the researcher to realize how these are shaping the research. I am a Generation X female mid-level administrator in the North Carolina Community College System. This topic developed out of my own concerns as a member of this group. I am 39 years old, recently married with one child at this time. At this point in my life, I have begun to question what my career priorities are and whether I am personally and professionally ready for these opportunities. In discussion with other colleagues at my institution, I have found that there are others with similar backgrounds to my own that share these same concerns.

There are many Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast for which the next step on the career ladder is a Vice Presidency or Presidency. I was interested in describing the experiences of these individuals professionally and personally to understand how these worlds intersect and inform their career decisions. I hope that this information will prove useful to the senior administrators in the community college sector.

In order to best describe these experiences without interjecting my own subjectivities into the collection and analysis, I bracketed my own experiences. Although deriving from phenomenological methods, bracketing can be used by other methodologies as well (Merriam, 2009). Bracketing calls for “investigators [to] set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2007).

Ahern (1999) offered several tips for reflexive bracketing. These tips suggest that bracketing should occur at all stages of the research process. Prior to data collection and during the analysis process, I kept a researcher journal so that I could, as Ahern (1999) suggests, “write down the issues that will enhance your reflexivity and your ability to bracket” (p. 408) . After analysis, I reviewed my subjectivities and reviewed any areas where my researcher bias may have been inserted. Throughout the process, I worked with my committee and sought guidance as to my analytical conclusions.

Limitations

Due to the time constraints of a dissertation, this research study relied on a cross-sectional analysis of Generation X female mid-level administrators at a certain time and

place in history. In order to understand completely the issues facing this group of women, a longitudinal study was deemed most appropriate. With a longitudinal study, I could have traced the perceptions of leadership by these women through several points in time to gain a better perspective. However, this is a study that must wait for another time.

Another limitation of this study is that its findings were geographically bound. While the findings of the research may inform decision-making processes in community colleges in the Southeast, the results may not be transferrable beyond this geographic location.

In order to find women who met the criteria of this study, I contacted the presidents of community colleges in the Southeast. It is possible that these presidents may have served as gatekeepers to that information, thereby influencing the availability of participants.

In addition, the study was limited to female mid-level administrators in community colleges. This study did not address the career advancement process of females in the K-12 or university systems. While the experiences and feelings of those in other academic venues may mirror those of women in community colleges, this study only addressed community college women due to the time needed to conduct the qualitative study.

The generation and gender studied also limited this study. By studying only Generation X female mid-level administrators, the findings are only descriptive of this generation of women administrators. The experiences of male mid-level administrators of any generation in community colleges in the Southeast were excluded from this study.

Summary

The nature of this project lent itself to the principles of qualitative interpretive inquiry. Qualitative research “is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make

sense of their lives and world” (Merriam, 2002, p. 39). The primary goal of an interpretive inquiry is to understand those meanings. The goal of this project was congruent in its intention to understand how Generation X female mid-level managers make meaning of the different factors in their lives (personal, social, and professional) and how those meanings influence their career advancement decisions.

The participants were selected using criterion sampling methods. To recruit participants, I sent emails to the Presidents of selected community colleges in the Southeast asking for help identifying employees within their institutions who met the parameters of the study. The parameters of the study required that the participants were female, mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast who were born between 1968 and 1979.

Data for the study were gathered using a semi-structured process during initial and follow-up interviews. All data were stored electronically and backed up on external hard drives. Qualitative data analysis software assisted in organizing and coding the data. The data were coded using the constant comparative method, moving from open coding to axial coding to focused coding and finally to the creation of data displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, this chapter addressed the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the study, as well as the researcher’s position. The following chapter presents the findings from the data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Following the Baby Boomers of the 20th century, Generation X women are entering into mid-level administrator positions while also juggling the demands of their home, social and civic lives. This qualitative interpretive study explored the influences, both internal and external to the organization, that shape the career advancement decisions and goals of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. There were two guiding research questions for the study: 1) How do current Generation X female mid-level administrators in selected community colleges in the Southeast perceive leadership, and what are their career advancement goals? 2) What personal and professional factors do they take into consideration along their career paths and how do they experience this process?

In order to gain a better understanding of females who work in community colleges in the Southeast, hold a mid-level administrative position, and are members of Generation X, I used a criterion sampling method to identify women that met these pre-determined characteristics. For this study, Generation X was defined as those individuals born between 1968 and 1979 (Crowley, 2003). During semi-structured interviews, these women provided a deeper understanding of their views of leadership and the factors that guide their leadership paths.

This chapter will present the findings of the study. Part one will provide a brief description of the study participants. Part two will present the participants' views of leadership as well as how they perceive leadership preparation. Part three will present the

challenging factors, both internal and external to the organization, that the women experience during their career journey. Part three will also describe some of the factors that lessen those challenges.

Profile of Research Sample

Eleven women were interviewed for this research, with one woman's interview excluded from data analysis because she was born before the data parameters for this study (1968-1979). The criteria for this sample dictated that the women were Generation X female mid-level administrators who work for community colleges in the Southeast. At the time of the interviews, the women ranged in age from 30-41 years.

The women worked at colleges of varying size. For this study, colleges with 0-3000 FTE were considered small, 3001-6000 FTE were considered medium, and 6000+ FTE were considered large. Two of the women worked at small colleges, two of the women worked at medium colleges, and six of the women worked at large colleges. The women had varying occupational backgrounds before coming to work at the community college. Prior careers included such areas as allied health, cosmetology, criminal justice, agriculture, K-12 education, counseling, non-profit organizations and the military. At the time of the study, they held titles such as Department Chair, Director, Assistant Director, and Coordinator. Two women held a bachelor's degree, six women held a master's, and two women had a doctorate. In most cases, the women were more educated than their mothers, fathers and husbands. Each participant was married and had at least one child. Seven of the participants were White, two were Black, and one was Asian. Participant profiles are summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Profile of Research Participants						
Participant Pseudonym	Race	Level of Education	Mother's Education	Father's Education	Husband's Education	Institution Size
Chantelle	White	Doctorate	High School	High School	High School	Small
Connie	Black	Bachelors	High School	Less than High School	Associates	Large
Danielle	White	Masters	High School	High School	Bachelors	Large
Elizabeth	White	Doctorate	Bachelors	Masters	Bachelors	Small
Jazz	White	Masters	High School	Bachelors	High School	Medium
Lisa	White	Masters	Bachelors	Bachelors	Bachelors	Medium
Marie	Black	Masters	Masters	High School	Masters	Large
Ophelia	White	Bachelors	High School	Bachelors	Associates	Large
Taryn	White	Masters	High School	Unknown	Bachelors	Large
Tula	Asian	Masters	Less than High School	Less than High School	Doctorate	Large

Leadership

The participants were asked about how they conceptualized leadership, how they viewed themselves as leaders, and how prepared they felt as leaders. After discussing their experiences with leaders and as leaders, the women suggested four distinct areas of leadership understanding and development. The four main areas that make up their views of

leadership are What Leadership Is, What Leadership Is Not, What Leadership Requires, and The Next Leadership Steps.

What Leadership Is

For these participants, a leader has two main objectives: to focus on employees and to get the job done. Both objectives must be met for the leader to be effective. By focusing on employees, the leader ensures that her employees have the tools necessary to be successful. After the employees have what they need, then the leader can concentrate on getting the job done.

Focusing on employees. One way for a leader to focus on employees is by being a cultivator. According to the participants, one responsibility of a leader is to “cultivate” (Elizabeth) their employees. The process of cultivating employees involves helping them develop and improve their own professional skills. As part of the cultivation process, a leader should also empower her employees with the ability to become leaders themselves one day.

Ophelia describes a leader as someone who “can look at the employees that they have . . . [and] assist them in maximizing their positive attributes and maximizing their skills.” For Ophelia, the process of helping employees maximize their skills also includes lessening the barriers in their way. In some cases, that may involve reassigning their duties so that they may be successful.

The process of cultivating employees can also include letting them explore new ways of handling work related situations or tasks. This may involve allowing the employees to make mistakes and to experience the process of recovering from such mistakes. Prior to

coming to the community college, Danielle had several years of experience as an associate professor in a large university in the west. She operates her department now much as she experienced the university system, but she is also open to new ideas from her employees. In describing a recent conversation with her employees, she states:

One of the things I told them the other day, I said there's [sic] times that I've let them make mistakes for something that I would have thought would have been a mistake. But in the way I learned . . . try it. If it works, great, if it doesn't work then regear [sic] and see what else is going to work. But let them try it because they'll never know.

Cultivating employees includes encouraging them to accomplish more than they think they are capable of accomplishing. Jazz explains, "I'll push, and I always tend to push my people a little bit further than what they think they can do. Our main motto for our area is 'you cannot say no.'" The previous supervisor would not challenge the employees and would let them say "no" to things they did not want to do or did not feel comfortable doing. Jazz came in with a different philosophy and urges her employees to take on new tasks and roles, even if they seem a bit risky.

While letting their employees try new things and make their own mistakes, a leader also cultivates employees by encouraging them to be creative. Lisa states that she allows "them the freedom to come up with ideas and, given the opportunity, to just to run with that idea." That creativity gives the employee a feeling of ownership.

In addition to cultivating the talents of employees, focusing on employees involves motivating them to accomplish the unit and college goals. Ophelia takes the concept of

motivating employees a step further by describing a leader as one who “can inspire people.” Motivating employees can involve urging them to complete tasks or encouraging them to better themselves.

According to Lisa, a key component of leadership involves “motivation, as far as your subordinates. Getting them motivated to do something and doing it in such a way where . . . you get the best out of someone.” Lisa goes on to explain that sometimes the best way to do this is to get their buy-in on the task that needs to be completed, at times letting them “feel like it’s their idea” to complete it.

For Marie, motivating employees includes fostering their sense of job satisfaction. She states, “I try to encourage my staff to—if they are happy in their positions, fine—but to also seek other opportunities.” She is aware that her department may be a stepping stone for some of her employees, especially for the employees who do not hold degrees and are working as paraprofessionals. She urges them to continue their education and explore other opportunities if that will contribute to their overall satisfaction. Jazz echoes this sentiment, explaining, “[S]ome of my views of leadership is, is [sic] more towards the satisfaction of your employees or your people.”

Focusing on employees also includes serving as a model for employees to follow. Several participants depicted a leader as one who sets the bar for which employees aim. Connie explains, “I try not to implement something that I wouldn’t do myself. A leader has to be an example.”

In addition to her direct supervisees, a leader can also be an example to other members of the organization. Tula describes a situation where she sets an example for her employees and peers:

I lead by example. With my co-workers, I feel I can lead sideways, too. Where maybe there is a new policy or new situations that are not great but we just have to do it because, you know, it's part of the job. So instead of being that group where you complain about it and just talk bad about the supervisor, I would just do the opposite . . . that's how I operate . . . I can sit here and complain all day about it, but I still need to do it. So might as well just be happy doing it. So then I, I will lead by example that way.

For these participants, focusing on employees involves providing them with support to the best of their ability in a variety of circumstances. Chantelle asserts, "I think effective leadership, is, it's a presence, as guidance, as direction, as assistance." As a leader, these participants find themselves supporting their employees in both their professional and personal lives.

As a mid-level administrator, these participants find themselves sandwiched between the upper administration and the employees they supervise. Connie's employees often describe her as "their buffer." She tries to look out for their best interests when given directives from senior administration.

Sometimes stress external to the workplace can alter the work environment. Marie believes in keeping personal problems at home and not letting personal issues interfere with the work place. In contrast, with some of her younger employees she notices a different

demeanor at work when they are dealing with personal issues. When noticing an employee on a cell phone crying about a personal issue, she wants to say, “[H]ang up the damn phone and get back to work. Suck it up.” She realizes, however, that she needs to be supportive of the different facets of their lives and help them find composure in the workplace. She states, “I do need to show empathy and still, you know, be a good supervisor as well, and acknowledge that I understand you are having some personal issues at home.”

Getting the job done. The participants characterize a leader as someone who must ensure that the goals of the organization are met. Connie characterizes a leader as “someone who can successfully implement the things that the company wants to see done.” A leader, at times, must serve as a project manager.

Elizabeth describes such a scenario. She mentions that she must “bring down the direction of the senior administration.” When her supervisors decide that all academic departments must collect data on education outcomes, then she must “be the one within my department to lead that and to say, okay, how are we going to get this done? When are we going to get it done?”

A leader must also make sure that project completion is not hindered by stumbling blocks. For Lisa, a leader must safeguard project completion and not let the project “get bogged down in the, how would I phrase it, in the mire that can happen. . . . If you have a task to do, let’s get it done, let’s do it.” A leader is responsible for setting up the guidelines for project completion and anticipating the hurdles that may prevent completion.

While ensuring that the goals of the department are implemented, the participants affirm that a leader should also focus on the details surrounding the implementation. Jazz takes on the role of researcher and editor as part of her leadership duties. She states:

I have no problems communicating or correcting or doing stuff like that and, you know, if there is any task or project that I am directed to, I do my homework and I make sure my head is completely around until I understand it, you know, before I move forward with it.

A leader also confirms that her employees are following the guidelines set forth by the organization. Connie verifies that her employees are doing just that:

I like to do things right and I think every company needs a leader that wants things done right and make sure you are following procedures and taking precautions and what we need to do as we carry out those procedures.

Leaders who do not pay attention to details can gain a bad reputation as a leader with their employees and other coworkers. Some of Marie's supervisors and colleagues send out memos with spelling and grammar mistakes and are not aware of all that is going on in their departments. To her, these acts reflect poorly on their leadership abilities and professionalism.

For these participants, one skill needed to get the job done is the ability to collaborate. The best outcomes are obtained when employees work with each other to achieve those outcomes. One job of a leader is to foster that collaboration among her employees. Taryn explains:

A leader is one who can look around them and see who is with them . . . not necessarily below them. And say, you know, what are your strengths and what are the strengths you bring to the table and how can we work together as a team to make something else happen, to make something else, you know, work, work well together.

Part of creating a collaborative environment is valuing the input of your employees. According to Connie, leaders bring “all their employees up to a point where they have input as long as it’s in reason.” Having that input makes it easier for employees to accept the task to be completed.

Danielle learned early in her career that gaining acceptance from her employees was key to successfully accomplishing her department’s goals and objectives. Danielle was in her early 20’s when she first became a department head in an academic environment. She never really had a hard time commanding respect from her employees, and she believes she earned their respect by using a team-oriented approach to decision making: “I usually try to do it as a team and have everybody play into it and buy into it. Because if I don’t have their buy-in, I’m not getting anything done anyway.”

The collaborative process also allows employees to learn from each other. The learning process is not only a top-down process. Employees can learn from their supervisor, employees can learn from each other, and the supervisor can learn from her employees. Tula tells her employees, “[W]e can work together because I have so much to learn from you.”

The participants believe that a leader must also have a vision in order to accomplish the goals and objectives of her department. Connie notes that leaders not only need to be able to implement the directives of those above them, but they must also be able to “come up

with ideas and creativity to further their area . . . or the college itself.” Ophelia adds that in addition to having a vision, a leader must also be able to “articulate that vision” to her employees.

Having a vision and achieving acceptance for that vision can sometimes prove problematic when the leader is supervising employees who have been with the organization for quite some time. Elizabeth faces that situation at her organization. Some of the people she supervises are 20 years or so older than her and have been with the college for a long time. She explains that she is “not tied to the way things have always been which . . . is sometimes a challenge with people who’ve been, ‘oh this is the way we’ve always done it.’”

Another element of having a vision is being willing to leave one’s comfort zone and venture into new territory. Jazz describes a leader as someone “being able to step up and take risks, or kind of stay ahead of the game and see what’s coming down the line.” A leader anticipates future events and proactively implements changes to accommodate those future events.

What Leadership Is Not

Two leadership archetypes emerged as negative symbols of leadership. The participants identified the “micro-manager” and the “delegator” as ineffective leaders. A micro-manager closely observes the activities of her employees and exerts excessive control over their daily activities. On the other hand, a delegator assigns tasks, but does not give clear direction or guidance for task completion. A delegator leaves employees struggling and without a clear understanding of the reasons behind the task.

Micro-managing. Several participants described a leader as someone who does not practice micro-management. Remembering the advice of a previous supervisor, Elizabeth recalls, “One my supervisors one time [made] the comment that you don’t, oh gosh, how is the way he said it, ‘You don’t micro-manage thoroughbreds. You just let them run.’ You micro-manage donkeys, to say it in a nicer way.”

Elizabeth has had a few experiences with being micro-managed which, in one instance, led her to seek alternate employment. In a previous position, Elizabeth worked for someone she considered the best supervisor she had ever had. When the head of the department retired, her supervisor was promoted. After that promotion, everything changed. Elizabeth’s supervisor became dictatorial and micro-managing. Elizabeth no longer felt like a professional and valued employee. Although she loved what she did, she chose to leave the organization because of the treatment from that supervisor.

Because of micro-managing and lack of trust, employees at Elizabeth’s current organization are experiencing morale issues as well; however, Elizabeth chooses to stay at her current organization this time as she is in a different place in her life. She is married and has children now. Her home, workplace, and daycare are all within eight miles of each other. She chooses to stay where she is for now, but she points out, “It has [never] been my job. It has been [the] people [at the job] who have made it to the point where [I was] ready to move on.”

Ophelia offers a similar opinion of micro-management: “I don’t like to be micromanaged. I don’t want, you know, you either trust me or you don’t. And if you don’t, I obviously don’t need to be here.” She considers herself lucky to have the supervisors she

has had in her career. She values the fact that they have allowed her to be creative and not watched over her every step of the way. She does not hesitate to mention, moreover, that if she does experience a micro-manager, she will seek other employment.

Lisa also dislikes a micro-managing leadership style. When talking about employee creativity, she advises, “If you keep your thumb on them more, you sort of squelch that. They get discouraged. They also get frustrated, and they don’t work as well for you.” However, she has to go against her own leadership style due to the nature of the employees she supervises:

So, every single assignment that I give is in great detail. . . . It’s opposite of my philosophy of leadership because my philosophy of leadership is to be wide open and let them run, but yet at the same time, because of the personalities and some of the things that have taken place, I have to be very specific and just say here are the parameters.

Some of her employees have been with the institution for quite some time. When Lisa gives an assignment, she is challenged by some of the employees every step of the way. In some cases, the employees have gone above her head. She has had to alter her own leadership style to address being challenged.

Dictating. Somewhat in contrast to a micro-manager, someone who dictates sends down mandates without guidance or explanation. According to several participants, a leader does not simply dictate tasks. When describing leadership, Chantelle attempts to explain, “[I]t’s not something that is . . . it’s not necessarily delegated, delegating stuff out.”

The label “dictator” elicits a negative connotation for these participants. In describing the actions of a dictator, some of the participants used words such as “demand” and “yell.” They also implied that a dictator can be “authoritative.”

For Danielle, simply having a title does not garner respect nor afford the ability to give directives without explanation. She explains that she does not like just being told what to do, and she tends to ask a lot of questions:

If I don't have good directions, I am just floundering, like “What is it you want me to do?” I don't want to spin my wheels and waste my time if I don't need to. So you know I ask a lot of ... Tell me exactly what you want me to do and why you need me to do it so I can focus in on what I need to do for sure.

In some cases, the simple comfort of understanding the “why” behind a directive allows the participants to complete the task.

What Leadership Requires

In order to be an effective leader, a person must have certain qualities. The participants in this study identified several qualities, either innate or learned over time, that are necessary for leadership. The skills are classified as intrapersonal and interpersonal. Intrapersonal skills refer to those skills internal to the individual self or mind, and interpersonal skills are the skills required for interaction with others. Although the skills are presented here as either intrapersonal or interpersonal, in many cases, particular skill could require aspects of skills from the other dimension. Although the two categories are not entirely discrete, I have distinguished the two here to highlight the multi-dimensional nature of leadership skills.

Intrapersonal skills. The participants identified a leader as someone who can lead even without a formal position. Leadership does not always require a particular supervisory position. The participants of this study define a leader as someone who has a particular personality, not just someone in a position of power over others. When asked if she considers herself a leader, Chantelle replies, “Even before this job, yes. I mean I think I have the personality, you know, to be more of a leader anyway, than a follower.” As a faculty member, Chantelle saw herself as a leader.

Ophelia reiterates the idea that leadership does not require a certain position. According to her, she often finds herself in informal leadership positions because she is “outspoken and I am very independent and I have a lot of ideas and I tend to articulate them.” She recalls that for most of her life she has found herself in leadership positions without realizing it. Her current supervisor is out of the office a lot of the time working with external constituents. Even though Ophelia is not officially in charge during his absence, many of the employees turn to her for guidance.

Just as leaders do not necessarily have to have titles, those with titles are sometimes not leaders. Tula explains, “I think a leader can lead anywhere. It’s not the title. Because sometimes there are people with big titles but they don’t have a lot of powers [sic]. Because not a lot of people consider them leaders.” She goes on to acknowledge that sometimes leaders emerge from anywhere because people trust them and look to them for guidance. Leadership does not have to come from the top.

According to the participants, being a leader requires a certain amount of confidence in one’s own abilities. Danielle gained confidence from her graduate program. She recalls:

I think a couple of things that they did, just was to instill that confidence in us that, yes, you know what you are doing. You've got the background. You know, you are aware of the system. You know how the game is played.

The confidence she has in her abilities and the awareness she has of her subject area earn her the respect of her employees.

Self-assurance is an integral part of Connie's personality. She is secure in her abilities and strives to be the best that she can be. She is also not threatened by the success of her employees. To illustrate the point, she provides an example of how she supports her employees. Her organization has an in-house leadership program which she was not told about by her supervisors. She happened to stumble upon information about it one day. When she became aware of it, she immediately asked to participate. Then she encouraged her employees to take part in the program:

I've already told my employees about it. Got one of them on board for them to do it because I am not intimidated by people and their skills because I feel like the better staff I have, the better I am.

Because of her own security, she is able to promote the abilities of her staff.

In addition to having confidence in one's abilities, the participants classified a leader as someone who must also have thorough knowledge of her organizational areas. Taryn has difficulty viewing her supervisor as an effective leader because her supervisor is not as familiar with the department as she should be. Taryn explains, "I don't think she has... She's not as involved in the day-to-day operations as I feel someone leading should be involved."

Marie points out that a leader who is not aware of the daily operations of her department can be a detriment to the department. When describing an ineffective leader at her organization, Marie states:

In my opinion [he] is not involved in what his staff is doing. Has no clue and just seems to me does not want to know . . . [I]f you are not aware of the types of things your staff is going through or their responsibilities, then you cannot be an advocate for your staff.

All of the participants strive to have a full understanding of the service areas that they supervise as well as an understanding of the needs of their employees.

Interpersonal skills. A key interpersonal skill for leadership cited by the participants is the ability of the leader to develop a trusting relationship with employees and other co-workers. The majority of participants mentioned trustworthiness as a necessary aspect of a leader. In reference to her employees, Jazz relates:

They come to me for problems or issues, whether it's personal or work . . . I'm usually the one who has to take care of it or iron things out or whatever but I mean, they trust me and they come to me and I do know that.

Danielle earned the trust of her employees by keeping the lines of communication open with her employees. A few of her employees are currently enrolled in graduate programs. Through their programs, they are finding out that classmates with other supervisors are not as well-informed about certain aspects of the discipline. They attribute their knowledge to Danielle's open and trusting management style. According to Danielle, her employees' classmates find out the department heads aren't filling them in on a lot of

things along the way. In contrast, Danielle has worked hard to achieve transparency in her department, and that transparency has paid off as she now has the trust of her employees.

Chantelle has earned the trust of her employees by being fair. When Chantelle became the head of her department, she was significantly younger than many of the employees in her area. Many of those employees had developed social relationships and cliques over the years of working together. Chantelle chose not to engage in social activities with her employees. This distance allowed her to remain objective when having to make decisions for the department. She tells her employees, "I'll support you if your facts are strong, or I'll support you if your facts are stronger."

Political savvy is another interpersonal characteristic of leadership the participants identified. Truty (2006) states that political savvy in the workplace "represents the totality of skills for successfully navigating the political dynamics of an organization to accomplish one's goals" (p. 1). Playing organizational politics usually leads to individual or collective gain. Danielle explains that "there's days [sic] here that you might just have to bite your tongue and make sure you don't say something because you know in that leadership role you really shouldn't say something that you really, really want to say."

While they mention that political savvy as a part of leadership, few of the participants actually feel comfortable playing the political game. When asked about her fears as a leader Connie shares:

I am very leery about politics, too. Because I know the higher you get up, the more political, and I'm not very political. . . . I'm not interested in playing games . . . That's just the kind of person I am. I know sometimes . . . the higher up you get . . . you do

this to get this done and you do that to get that [done]. . . . I don't know if I think I am very good at that so that is definitely an area in myself that I think will be very hard for me to do. Not that I couldn't do the job. I think I could do the job. I think I can lead people. But I don't know if I am very good stroking and milking and that's a personality trait I think I just didn't get.

Playing politics was also cited as a fear by Tula. She mentions that she feels understanding politics should be part of leadership training or part of a mentoring relationship. She wonders how a leader learns things "like how do you strategically position yourself in a corporate world or in an organization where, you know, you don't step on any toes or you don't become too forceful at things." For one participant, even though she believes she can maneuver politically, she does not enjoy it. Taryn explains, "I am very good at smoothing things out and making everything work for everyone, but I don't always find that it is rewarding."

The final interpersonal skill identified by the participants is the ability to be humble. To them, a leader must not be boastful or conceited. In describing her supervisors from an older generation, Elizabeth says:

It always seemed like they had to remind you that they are the boss. I don't remind anybody that I'm the boss . . . [In] fact, I refer to people I supervise as my co-workers. Because they are. I am not on this boss kind of trip. I'm just the person with the title and I'm the person that has to make sure it gets done.

Jazz reiterates the idea of humility in leadership. Jazz considers her departmental organization flat. In describing the composition of her department, she explains:

We have [some people] with master's degrees and some people with ... two year degrees, some people without two year degrees. I mean, I've got a variety, you know, and ... we are all even, even keel as far as, I guess layers or structures.

These participants do not find it necessary to flaunt their titles or enforce their positions in order to be effective leaders.

The Next Leadership Steps

According to the participants of this study, the path to leadership consists of four main steps: general intention toward leadership, develop professionally, identify a mentor, and address career advancement fears. All of the participants mentioned some aspect of each of these steps in their interviews. While in many instances their paths may not be clearly defined, each woman is aware of what she needs to do to become a leader.

General intention toward leadership. All of the participants indicated that they do not have a definitive career goal planned. In fact, for some of them, they were led to their current positions by happenstance. Jazz started her career in the community college as an instructor. After teaching for a short time, she was asked to lead a curriculum improvement project. Being involved in that project steered Jazz to obtain her master's degree in a field unrelated to her teaching responsibilities. She then received a position in that area and decided to move out of instruction. Concerning her current position Jazz recalls, "I kind of moved up. Bosses leave and stuff like that." Now she is a director.

Elizabeth attributes the paths she has taken in her career to spirituality. When asked about her career goals, she notes, "I don't know. I really don't. And ... I don't have a plan. I don't have my goals written out. God has always put me in jobs that I would never have

done.” In thinking back on her various positions, Elizabeth realizes that she never set out to do some of the jobs she did. She was not willing to limit herself, and she eventually stumbled into the career she has now.

While reflecting on her ultimate career goal, Tula observes, “I change over time. I think for different stages for my life, it changed.” Before Tula had a child, she had set her sights on a senior level administrative position within the community college. She had flirted with the notion of being a college president. Now, she chooses to focus more on her baby and her family, and she is not looking to advance to senior level positions at this time.

Although none of the participants have a definitive career goal, about half of them expressed a desire to stay in the community college field. Ophelia admits that one day she would like to be the executive director of her department. At the time of the initial interview for this study, Ophelia had worked out a succession plan with her supervisor. Her supervisor was set to retire within the next few years, and he indicated that he wanted Ophelia to take his position. She did discuss with him, however, that she cannot guarantee in advance that she will be ready and willing to take on such a leadership role:

It’s really going to depend on when that day comes, where my family is at that time because I have another responsibility. Not to just educate all the kids here. But to educate my own children and to be there so I may, I may end up staying in this role longer than maybe I had initially anticipated just because my values and my perspective has changed.

During the follow-up telephone interview, Ophelia indicated that the succession plans had definitely changed. She already had a two year old and was pregnant with twins. Another

person was recently hired in the department, and the expected succession shifted to this person.

Lisa also indicated that she would be content staying in the community college. In fact, she explains, “I can see division head in my future but ... if I stay a department head, I would be happy at this point.” She is also exploring additional teaching opportunities within the school.

Connie wants to remain at the community college as well, but she wants more than what she has now. She reveals, “I want to be in an area where I am doing a little bit more than what I am doing now and that’s helping students get what they need.” Connie was recently a student in the community college in which she works. After years of owning her own business, she decided that she needed to return to school for the betterment of her family. While in school, she became involved in student government and a few other student activities. This involvement as a student leader fostered her desire to give back to students. She gets to help students in her current position, but longs to do more.

Many of the participants indicated that they are not willing to limit themselves to one decisive career goal. In fact, for some of the participants, their career goals are not necessarily within academia. Chantelle indicates, “I have professional ambitions, maybe not just at the college but at my professional levels, you know, within our organizations and structures.”

Danielle has spent her entire career in academia. At times she considers a career change. She relates, “I’ve thought before about getting out of education for a while and

taking a breather. I've done it for 20 years almost already." She contemplates going to work for a corporation as an educational representative.

Developing professionally. One of the first steps to growing in a profession is realizing the need for development. The majority of the participants expressed that they did not feel fully prepared to undertake their current positions. They used phrases such as "very much over my head," "not prepared at all," "not on par with ... really good leaders," and "leader in training" to describe their current preparedness for leadership.

When Elizabeth began her current position, she did not have any experience as an administrator in the community college. She recalls that when she first began she relied heavily on others to help her. She also supervised someone who was formerly in her position but had been demoted. This situation increased her feeling of awkwardness in the position. Elizabeth is leery taking on any other higher level positions before she gains more experience as a community college administrator. She contends, "You know, I feel like I need to see a few more things, do a few more things, go around the block a few more times before I am at another level."

Lisa felt unprepared for her role as an administrator as well. Prior to her current position, Lisa was an instructor at another community college. She was quite familiar with the curriculum, but she was not made aware of certain college policies and procedures. When she would make a decision, she would be overridden because her decision was not congruent with the philosophy of the organization. Lisa has decided not to take on a higher position until she feels that she has learned all she can about her current position and organization. She acknowledges:

For a division head, I don't feel like I am ready yet but I—because I'm still learning a lot and when, when I stop learning or, well, you don't stop learning but when the learning comes less often—then I'll probably be more prepared to be in that position.

A few of the women mentioned that their education did not prepare them to take on an administrative role. Tula mentions that her classes focused more on theory than the technical aspects of leadership. She explains, "Everything's all theory ... So never, [a] technical piece ... I felt that, there is not a good training out there to deal with performance appraisal, deal with, you know, more technical versus more theory." Tula's position was a newly created position. She was asked by the administration if she would be a coordinator for her area, so she went from being a coworker to a supervisor. She had to conduct performance appraisals for people she had worked with for years. One of her employees had been at the organization for over 15 years. The performance appraisal meetings were tense and awkward. She felt that she had not been fully prepared to take on that supervisory activity. She goes on to note, "Yeah ... none of my books address that."

The majority of the participants are self-directed in their professional development pursuits and do not have to be told to participate in training opportunities. They actively seek ways to increase their job knowledge and skills. Ophelia describes her process:

Doing the ... self-reflection and identifying for myself where I feel my strengths and weaknesses are and trying to take it upon myself on a day to day basis to fix the areas that I think need work or to seek out advice on what to do about those situations.

Once she has identified areas for improvement, she seeks out workshops and literature to help her in those areas.

Similarly, Connie actively searches for ways to develop. As was previously related, when Connie learned of an in-house leadership program, she had no reservations about asking to be a part of the next cohort. Connie points out:

Any time the college [opens] leadership roles, I jump on [them] because I know that it will help me in the future and so, from classes to workshops, to any staff development that this college is offering, I try to take advantage of it.

In addition to searching for development activities, these participants are also self-directed in their development pursuits by volunteering to take on additional roles within the organization. Marie relates that she is “willing to take on other responsibilities. I think that it will speak for itself eventually.” Taryn reiterates the idea that good work will be noticed. She maintains that:

[T]alents are recognized. You don't necessarily have to go out and advertise, I mean, you advertise for it in terms of you do a job and you do it well and people will recognize it. And it may not be the president who sees you doing it but somebody above you sees you doing it and you gradually move up. And I think there have been more opportunities, especially for women, in that.

The participants do not indicate that they believe in touting their own strengths. They believe their accomplishments will be acknowledged on their own merit.

All of the women in this study are currently participating in some type of formal professional development program or event. These types of activities include, but are not limited to, enrolling in an education program; taking continuing education courses; serving on boards of local, state, and national organizations; going to conferences and workshops;

and participating in school sponsored programs. In most cases, the women are involved in a combination of activities. Elizabeth explains, “I’m kind of connected to everything. . . . [E]ven though it’s not on my radar, I like to keep my hands in whatever cookie jars I can keep them in.” Usually, the schools provide financial assistance and allow time to participate in these activities.

Several of the women have furthered their education while working for the community college. Both Chantelle and Elizabeth completed their doctorate. Jazz and Tula completed their master’s degrees, and Connie received her bachelor’s. As a matter of fact, the day of the follow-up interview for this study was Connie’s last day at work prior to taking a leave of absence to finish her degree.

Another part of professional development is learning the dynamics of the institution. Several of the participants identified the need to learn the ins and outs of the organization after recalling their experiences as new administrators. Most feel as though they have much more to learn about the system. Chantelle remarks, “I’ll be honest, again, jumping into this position and not being sure what all it entailed. Obviously, I am paying much more attention to [learning the] inner workings of the college system.”

The participants also want to ensure that they are qualified for a variety of positions that may open up. Taryn explains her philosophy:

I am doing more of the training on this end here to be more versed in the whole program and understanding the different aspects of the entire . . . program so then I’m kind of covering all my bases should those positions open up.

A better understanding of the inner workings of the organization will prepare the participants for positions both within their college and in other institutions as well.

A few of the participants noted that observing was one way they developed themselves professionally. Learning from observation usually entails learning what leadership qualities you like and which ones you do not. Taryn describes the process:

So I think just taking in how they deal with situations and watching how people interact and seeing what she did right and what she did wrong or just observing, you know, who I thought were strong female role models and then kind of watching how they responded to things.

For Tula, the observation process is even more meaningful if she can observe not only a strong female leader, but a strong Asian female leader. In questioning her own abilities, she asks, “Am I, you know, am I fit for this or not? But knowing another female that done it [sic], and especially if they are Asian, too, if it fits me, I’m like, you know, I can do it then.”

Several of the participants identified networking as a necessary professional development tool. Connie considers networking as a means to market herself. Through the school she is attending, she has been able to meet the assistant attorney general, the governor’s liaison, and several other political figures. She believes, “There is a lot of networking that I think will prepare me, you know, for growth. I just probably need to tap into it a little bit more.” Taryn reiterates the importance of networking by stating, “I think anybody can be whatever they want to be as long as they have the right connections.”

Identifying a mentor. In addition to developing professionally, the participants also acknowledge the importance of a mentor on the leadership path; however, none of the

participants in this study engage in a formal mentoring relationship. For the purposes of this study, a formal mentoring relationship is one that is established by the organization and is part of the employee's official development process. The participants explain that they "feel awkward" or "not comfortable" asking someone to be a mentor. They also relate that no one has directly asked them to be a mentee. Elizabeth describes her experience: "I've never had a formal kind of structured, you know, let's talk about what you did yesterday. And it's always really kind of been friendships ... that originated through work experience."

All of the participants do have at least one person with whom they can discuss career issues. In fact, most of the women have several people they go to for career advice. These informal mentors include their supervisors, other administrators at the school, former supervisors, colleagues, friends, and family members. Connie seeks advice often from her sister who is a K-12 educator. She also discusses issues with her husband, a business owner.

Identifying a leader to emulate is the first step for some of the participants in nurturing an informal mentoring relationship. Chantelle mentions that she admires the leadership style of her associate vice president, so she attempts to pattern her leadership style to his. She often seeks his advice on communicating with employees. For Jazz, a good leader must be respected and have an ethical code similar to hers. She finds these characteristics in her current supervisor, and she turns to him for guidance on handling various situations.

Ophelia recognized a potential mentor in a newly hired employee in her department. As was previously mentioned, with the impending arrival of her twins, Ophelia and her supervisor decided that now was not the time in her career to focus on succession plans for

an executive director position. The new hire is now being groomed to take on the executive director position. Instead of becoming resentful of the situation, Ophelia has decided to learn as much as she can from her new colleague:

You know, I will say that this additional staff member that we added is female and she is a real powerhouse, real dynamo . . . So, I'm excited to have a female mentor directly in my office to learn from and you know, with any luck if I do decide to stay here for another 10 years then whenever she decides to move on then maybe I will then be ready to move into that position. Failing that, I have a lot I can learn from her and I'm excited because she does represent, I think, a nice work/life balance because she did stay home with her kids for several years before she moved back into the working world. She still prioritizes her two kids and her husband and her relationship but is still very much out in the community and is successful in the community. So, it is exciting to have someone like that to work with and work alongside and learn from. I'm really looking forward to that. I am very happy that she is onboard.

Ophelia is willing to change from a possible mentor to a mentee herself, and she has decided to turn a potentially bad situation into a learning experience.

In addition to identifying individuals who can serve as informal mentors, the majority of participants also indicated that they identify individuals who serve as "anti-mentors." An anti-mentor is a person who exhibits particular qualities that one does not wish to emulate. An anti-mentor is usually someone who is an ineffective leader. When reflecting on past leaders, Tula recounts:

I think the most frustrating thing for me is to work under bad leader. However, I always try to ... look at it more optimistically and learning from the mistake.

Because there is so much you can learn by observing leaders that are not effective. Most of the women discussed learning by observing ineffective leaders. They attribute part of who they are as a leader now to watching and avoiding the mistakes of other leaders.

Connie credits some of the successes in her current position to learning from the person who had the position prior to her. She notes, "So when I got in this position . . . I knew what to do but I knew what *not* to do." She does not consider her previous supervisor bad, but she does acknowledge that the supervisor made mistakes, and she made sure to take note of those mistakes and learn from them.

Addressing advancement fears. As they prepare to advance as leaders, the participants are conscious of the fears they have about advancement. One of the fears the participants have of advancing to a senior level administrative position is that they will not be able to completely accomplish the duties of their job. A few factors feed into this fear. They fear that they will not have a full understanding of the job duties and that they will make the wrong decisions.

Some of the participants are apprehensive about moving to senior administration too soon because they feel that they do not currently have a full understanding of what is required. Elizabeth observes:

I always struggle with that self-esteem factor of "do I know what I am talking about" and "do I know what I am asking people to do" and "do I understand that." And so I

think that's another reason for me that advancement in the very near future is not really on my radar because I feel like I need more experience under my belt.

The apprehension also stems from the worry they have about making the right decision for their employees and the school as a whole. For Lisa, making the wrong decision can have cumulative consequences. She explains that her biggest fear is, "being in a position where your decisions affect so many people. You really have to know all the facts and get everything straight and weigh the pros and cons and know why you are making that decision." Another participant noted that there are days that her confidence in her own abilities is shaken after making a tough decision.

These women also fear that advancing to a higher leadership position will change the nature of some of their current relationships. Most of the participants previously held positions that worked directly with students. As mid-level administrators, many of them still have some interaction with students. Taryn fears that the higher she goes in the organization, the less involved she will be with students:

Part of what I get out of the position that I had before was the satisfaction and the reward of helping others and doing something that I felt was meaningful and a lot of times, for me in administrative positions, you don't always get that direct feedback and sometimes, I like direct interaction.

Not only do the participants worry about altered relationships with students, but they also worry about altered relationships with their colleagues. Marie worries that she may not be seen as a good supervisor by those who are currently her peers. She is also concerned that she may not be viewed as fair in the new role.

The majority of the participants indicated that they worried about being able to balance their work life and their personal lives if they moved to a senior level administrative position. For Jazz, the ability to balance home life and work life is her only concern. She states, “I think my only fear is that they would expect me to sacrifice a lot of my family time. I’m willing to balance it if possible and especially wherever I am in my life.”

In referring to home life and work life, Chantelle declares, “I don’t want to give up either one. Does that make sense? And I don’t want to fail at either one.” She is wary about taking on more than she can handle and not being as involved in her children’s lives while they are young. She goes on to mention that the fear may subside as her children get older:

Right now they still hang out with us in the living room. They still want to go to town with us when we are going into town. At some point, they want to be in [their] room, they want to talk to their friends, they want to hang out with their friends, so that’s when it would be a little different.

Chantelle wants to be available at a time when her children are still interested in having her around, and she fears that she will not have that opportunity if she takes on a senior administrative position. She realizes, though, that once her children are older, she may be more open to the idea of advancement.

Factors Experienced Along the Career Path

In addition to sharing how they view and prepare for leadership, the participants also shared the various factors that come into play along their career paths. The participants are faced with various hurdles along their career path, both internal and external to the

organizations in which they work. They also receive help along the way to overcome those hurdles.

Challenging factors within the organization

Factors within the organization that pose challenges to the participants' work environment and career path include structural issues, gendered issues, and generational issues. Structural issues are any impediments to career advancement or job satisfaction that arise from the structure and policies of the organization itself. The other factors are prevalent because of the participants' gender or age.

Structural issues. One type of issue facing the participants stems from unclear structures and policies within the organization. On paper, Taryn reports to one person. In reality, Taryn has to report to two different people. Due to a limited budget, Taryn's dean could only hire one new director instead of the two that she had originally wanted. Taryn was to be promoted from coordinator to director, reporting directly to the dean. The dean still wants to be apprised of everything in Taryn's area, but officially Taryn has to report to her new director. She recounts, "My biggest stumbling block was trying to figure out, okay, well, do I go to her (*the director*) on this or do I go straight to you (*the dean*) on this or do I go to... And there wasn't a lot of clear direction."

For some of the participants, there are the official policies, and then there is the way things are actually done. Jazz's supervisor is flexible when it comes to the hours she works. Others at her organization are much stricter, however, recording hours worked to the quarter hour. She is at a point where she does not feel comfortable with her flexibility. She admits, "I feel like I'm hiding my flexibility. I don't want to feel like I'm cheating them." Elizabeth

acknowledges a comparable feeling: “I don’t think I’m, you know, sneaking. I joke about sneaking away, but I get my job done and I do it efficiently. I certainly put in my work hours.”

The work schedule is another structural issue for some participants. Due to the nature of her husband’s job, Jazz is responsible for dropping off and picking up the children from daycare and school. Jazz has a thirty minute commute to work. When the college was on a traditional 8-5 schedule, Jazz found herself just barely able to get to work on time and leave in time to coincide with the children’s drop off and pick up times. Now that the college has instituted a four day, summer schedule she is finding it difficult to get to work on time: “It used to be 8-5 and over the summer we went 7:30 to 5:30 ... and now it’s actually 7:45 to 5:30 and I can’t do these hours.”

Likewise, Tula usually finds herself running a few minutes late to work. When dropping her son off at daycare, she states that she does not want to just drop her son off without interacting with his classmates and teachers. She does not want to feel as if she has to “go, go, go” when it comes to dropping off her son. She explains, “I felt that’s important, so if I am 15 minutes late, I’ll make that up. You know, I always stay 30 minutes, always late at work.” Unfortunately, these schedule conflicts can cause stresses with other co-workers and may be reflected in performance evaluations and promotion opportunities.

The participants also struggle with inefficiency in the workplace. Time is a valuable commodity to these women, and wasting time hinders their ability to be successful. When describing her supervisor, Chantelle notes that she “loves to socialize. Talks a long time. Loves a good meeting and makes it last a long, long time.” In reference to meetings and

committees, Elizabeth feels, “You know, we don’t have to committee everything to death. We don’t have to process everything to death. We don’t have to over-analyze everything to death. And there is a lot of that going on that I struggle with.”

Danielle struggles with redundancy in the workplace. Without clear directions from her supervisors, she sometimes has to complete tasks multiple times. This often leads to frustration. As Danielle explains, “I don’t want to spin my wheels and waste my time if I don’t need to.”

Many of the participants must also contend with pre-existing cliques in the workplace. These cliques often make it difficult for a new supervisor. When Chantelle was first hired for her position, she was in charge of a group of individuals who had worked together for almost 20 years. At meetings, she would focus solely on work related topics, but her employees would also group together and discuss personal issues and campus gossip. Also, she was much younger than her employees and did not have the same social context that they had. She reflects, “I had to win them over and I wasn’t friends and they were all friends. They were the ones that were the friends.”

Some of the participants indicated that they must also cope with the remnants of a “good ol’ boy system.” Taryn explains, “I think the good old boy system is probably still in play where it’s easier if you are a male to make friends on the higher end of things.” Jazz goes on to describe an analogous situation but with a slight twist.

For years, a male president led Jazz’s organization. During his tenure, he surrounded himself with male employees and community members. Now, a female is president, and she has surrounded herself with women. Jazz feels that her immediate supervisor, who is male,

“has pretty much been shut out because [the president] surrounded herself with females and there [are] . . . even VP meetings that he’s not even involved in. There’s decisions made . . . it’s just really weird right now.”

Another internal challenge to career advancement is the fact that supervisory opportunities are few. When supervisory positions do open, there are many people applying for one position. Chantelle describes the situation at her organization: “The pyramid gets very small and narrow. So to go from all this, you know, up that, I think on average it’s just very challenging to move up within an organization.” She goes on to explain that one reason for the clog in the pipeline is that people are working longer. Her immediate supervisor is currently eligible to retire, but he supposedly has no plans to retire any time in the near future.

Connie expresses a similar sentiment. She has been looking within her organization and the community college system as a whole for advancement opportunities. However, she has found that few supervisory positions come open. She concludes:

No offense to the community college system but I find that a lot of positions, people stay a long, long time, until they retire and I don’t know if the opportunity is really there and I don’t know if I am willing to wait until somebody retires or dies off or something.

Gendered issues. Some challenges along the career path of the participants arise due to gender. For example, a few of the participants revealed that sometimes they find it more difficult to work with other women. Tula remarks, “I think that females always [have] a

harder time, you know, working with other females in a way ... I don't know what it is, it's that competition or something."

Elizabeth adds to the idea of competition between women as she has experienced it within her organization. In certain instances, she has not felt welcomed by other women in positions higher than hers. Elizabeth's acquaintances outside of the organization observe that the other women are threatened by her advanced degree and accomplishments. While Danielle does not currently experience any difficulty working with other females, she does hear about it in other programs like hers. Danielle adds, "You'll hear of the cut-throat and stomping on each other trying to work their way up."

Several of the participants indicated that they have experienced role congruity issues both within their current organizations and in previous positions. Role congruity issues arise when the gendered association of a particular role does not align with society's preconceived gender association of that role. For instance, Connie's current position requires a lot of event planning, which at times includes organizing catering for events. Connie has the feeling that certain people within her organization believe a woman is better suited for the job because of the gender stereotypes associated with hospitality and entertaining. She explains, "It's just a feeling that you get. This is where you are supposed to be. Yeah. But, you know, no one would definitely come out and say, oh, you should do it."

Elizabeth describes a situation where a former female president was viewed unfavorably because of the masculine traits she exhibited:

When I first came, we had a female president that most everyone could not stand, including women. You know ... she was one of those women in a glass house. You

know, you don't cross the line. You don't talk to her. . . . She achieved it and she was going to let everybody know she was in charge and that kind of thing. She was very distant.

For Tula, it seems that the best leaders are male, specifically white male leaders. She explains that she believes because of stereotypes and biases, most people view white males as most capable to lead. She reveals, "I think there's like a structure that none of [us will] say . . . is true but I think that because all of us have stereotypes and biases [we believe] if it's a male that is white . . . that person can do a better job than perhaps a female or male of [another] race."

Several of the women indicated that a lack of female role models in high level administrative positions is a challenge to their own career advancement. Tula mentions that seeing women in senior administrative positions leads to an increased confidence level within herself that she can do it, too. However, as Taryn explains, there is a dearth of women in senior positions within community college leadership:

I think one of the things that first comes to mind is the majority of the leadership here, especially at the upper levels, is male. It's almost completely male and every once in a while we will luck up and like, okay, did they just set her up on the stage so there would be a female up there.

Taryn goes on to discuss the differences she has witnessed in the South versus other parts of the country. She has perceived more of a glass ceiling in the South than in other areas.

Most of the participants indicated that they felt that there were few inequities in pay or treatment between males and females in the community colleges. None of the women had

experienced any direct inequities themselves, but a couple of the women had heard recent anecdotal stories of pay inequities. Jazz relates a situation at her school:

One lady I know taught there for 30 years and five other men that taught in the same area made \$10 or \$15,000 more than her. There is no reason. She was even a department chair. You know, and there is no way really to explain that. At some point, they should [have] just matched it and made it right.

Marie has heard similar stories at her institution.

A few of the participants feel like they have to prove themselves as administrators because they are women. That feeling pushes them to work harder. Connie comments that female administrators must make “sure you cross your t’s and dot your i’s.” Tula feels pressure when she goes to meetings that are attended predominantly by males. She finds it difficult to voice her ideas and opinions in those meetings. She also feels as if she must conduct more research and be more prepared than her male counterparts in order to be taken seriously. She does not feel the same pressure in a meeting where most of those in attendance are women.

Generational issues. The participants also face challenges along their career paths due to their age. The presence of various generational differences or age stereotypes at times becomes a barrier to achieving workplace goals. The participants have certain notions of both older and younger employees that work with and for them. Some of the stereotypes are positive, and some are negative.

The employees from older generations are viewed as both reliable and conscientious. However, they are also viewed as having outdated skills and being comfortable with the

status quo. At Lisa's institution, the average age of employees is considerably older than at many of the other institutions in the state. One of the biggest challenges she faces with her older employees is that they have the concept that "we've always done it that way." Lisa explains that she, and most of the people she knows from her generation, do not think like that. The disconnect is starting to show at her college: "The college as a whole is trying to make its way through that because the two differences are starting to come together. Okay, we've always done it that way but why don't we change it. Having that conversation."

Surprisingly, only one participant revealed that she felt less confident in her leadership abilities due to her age. Elizabeth is younger than all of the employees she supervises, and all of her employees have been at the college for quite some time. Elizabeth admits, "That makes it very awkward for me because I feel like ... they think she's a kid and she doesn't know." She finds herself compensating for her lack of confidence by deferring to her older employees instead of going with her own gut instinct.

Earning the respect of older employees is another leadership challenge these participants face. Each woman supervises employees who are older than she. For some of the women, it took a while before the older employees respected them as leaders.

It took Chantelle years to earn a certain level of respect from her older employees. At times, she felt like her successes would be dumbed down or viewed as not important. It took the publication of hard statistics to win over some of her employees. Chantelle's program has a licensure exam. Prior to her taking the leadership role in the department, the student passing rate for the exam was around 60%. Now the passing rate is at 95%. After learning of those statistics, her employees began to offer compliments and praise.

The women not only have to earn the respect of the older employees they supervise, but they also have to earn the respect of their older supervisors. When Ophelia first started at her organization, she worked for someone about 35 years her senior. Her new supervisor was reluctant to trust Ophelia with certain projects. Ophelia had years of experience in the field and had just been an executive director. For Ophelia, it “was a little bit unnerving because I knew I was capable of a lot more.”

Not only do the participants face challenging issues from their older employees and supervisors, but they also face challenges with their younger employees. The employees from younger generations are not viewed in a flattering light by the participants of this study. The younger employees are viewed as needing extra oversight and bringing outside issues into the workplace. Connie also notes that she has to motivate her younger employees more than she does the older ones. She states, “I find that the younger generation, they are very, I don’t know, care free. It can wait, you know.”

Challenging factors outside the organization

In addition to facing challenges along the career path within their organizations, the participants also confront challenging factors outside of the organizations. The women must understand and learn to balance various work/life issues. They must also realize how their social and civic lives are affected by various work/life issues.

Work/life balance. For every woman in this study, their personal lives affect their career decisions in some way. Chantelle sees many women putting their professional ambitions on hold while they start their families. However, she does not observe the same delay for men: “Women put their lives on hold and their ambitions on hold when they start

their family and men don't have that same commitment to the family. You know, whether it's conscious or unconscious, I don't know."

Elizabeth has definitely decided to take a pause in her career path at this time. Currently, the excitement she gets from her children fulfills her more than her professional goals. She explains, "Now when I walk into the room and a little person runs across the room and says, 'Mommy,' you know, that's what my life is about." She does not sense the same desire to focus on family from the department chairs who are male. She believes that they would jump on the chance to take her boss' job should he retire.

Most of the women serve as primary caregivers to the children. Although they may be the higher earner, they still choose to take on more of the childcare duties. For instance, most of the women are responsible for dropping off and picking up their children from daycare. They also are the ones to stay home with the children if they get sick or if school is closed. Marie and her husband both work at the same institution; however, Marie is the one who will leave if the school calls because a child is sick. She also mentions that she cannot stay for an unplanned late meeting. She has to tell her coworkers, "Sorry, that was not in my schedule. I need to be able to leave."

Elizabeth is chair of a major committee at her school. One day last year, she had a meeting scheduled for this committee, but it snowed. Her son's school was closed that day, but the college was open. Her son, who was in kindergarten at the time, did not have anyone with whom he could stay, so Elizabeth cancelled the meeting and stayed home with him. She felt that there may have been people at the school who viewed her decision unfavorably.

The participants revealed how their work lives and personal lives intersect. Many of the women try to keep their personal and professional lives as separate as possible. For Chantelle, coworkers and employees are not friends outside of work. She has been invited to parties at her employees' homes, but she always declines. She declares, "I have family, I have work and these are two very separate things."

Connie does not share much about herself with her employees and coworkers. She will share general information about herself—she is married, has two kids, and is in school—but she will not talk in detail about her personal life. She finds that in order to be successful at work, she must avoid conversations about her personal life and focus on those conversations related to work.

In addition to keeping conversations about their personal lives out of the workplace, these women also strive to keep conversations about their work lives out of the home environment. Since Marie and her husband both work at the same institution, it is easy for them to drift into conversation about the school. Marie knows when to change the topic, though: "If we've had enough of [talking about the school], then we say, okay, it's dinner time. I don't need to talk about those fools anymore." She believes that in her current position she is better able to separate home life and work life.

Tula reiterates the idea of putting up boundaries between work life and home life. She tries to focus on each aspect separately and to be as successful and happy as she can in each area. She believes that if she has issues in her home life, then her work life will suffer. Conversely, if there are issues in her work life, her family life will suffer. She claims that "it just bleeds over."

Nevertheless, even though they try to keep work and home separate, sometimes the women cannot keep the two from colliding in some way. Taryn just had her second child a year ago. While at work, she sometimes cannot help but think about what needs to be done at home or what she is missing out with her child. Similarly, Ophelia cannot help but consider home priorities while at work. Even before she knew she was pregnant with twins, Ophelia was making preparations at work to have another child. She admits that she told her boss “no [major projects this year] because I’m having a baby.” She goes on to explain that her home life factors in when determining how much extra effort she will be able to give at work.

The women also cannot help but consider work priorities while at home. Many of the women feel compelled to work at home. Danielle describes the situation in her house: “Some nights I’ll be home and after the kids go to bed, and all of a sudden [at] 9 or 9:15, I’m popping the computer back on and finish an email, you know, grading some things and doing other things.” Lisa also works from home in the evening. She tells her children, “Mommy has to work on the computer now,” and that is all her children know of her work life colliding with her home life. However, she knows of others—who live closer to the school—who drive back in to work after their kids are in bed.

While many of the women do work at home, most of them do not get credit for that time. Chantelle explains, “I can get my hours in, just let me get them in a little different than 8 to 5. One day it would be nice to say, you know, count all the hours I do put in after the kids go to bed. But because it’s off campus, they don’t count that towards your 39 hours.”

Yet, as professionals, they still do work from home so that they can be successful in their careers.

In addition to working at home, the women are sacrificing for their current position in several other ways. Danielle must sacrifice time with her children to complete continuing education courses in her subject area. She also says there have been a few Saturdays that she has had to devote to work projects.

When Marie's son first started kindergarten she said there was no way that she would put him in before- or after-school care. In her view, dropping her son off at 7:00 am and picking him up at 5:30 pm was too long a day. So, she worked out an arrangement with her husband. He would go to work later and take their son to school, and she would leave work early to pick him up from school. They tried that arrangement for a semester, but they did not continue it. Her husband needed to get to work as early as possible for meetings, and she found that she could not get tasks completed in her position without staying the full day. Marie feels that having her son in before- and after-school care is the sacrifice she is making for the mid-level administrative position she has now.

Before Taryn moved into her current position, she was a faculty member with flexible hours. In her prior position, she could work from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm and then go home and have dinner with her family. She could then go back and teach evening classes if she needed to. Now, with an administrative position, she is required to be in the office much more. She misses the flexibility she had and the time she was able to spend with her family.

All of the women anticipate additional job related commitments with advancement to senior level positions. They are all also hesitant to take on those positions because of those

additional commitments, which might take even more time from family activities. For example, right now Connie has very little travel in her position. She sees the administrators above her traveling to conferences and out-of-town meetings. In her opinion, family is not first when the president of the college needs you to go somewhere; consequently, she is unwilling to assume those commitments herself at this point in her life.

Danielle had the opportunity to apply for her supervisor's position. She chose not to apply because she knew all of the extra time the position entailed. Her supervisor is required to go to every department's graduation ceremony and many other evening events. She concludes, "That takes a lot of commitment on her part. And that was one of the reasons I chose not to even think about applying for the position."

On top of perceiving additional commitments with advancement, the women also believe they will lose the flexibility associated with their current positions. Lisa illustrates this idea. Now, Lisa can leave around 2:00 pm if she chooses. On most days, she starts dividing up her work at that time, what to take home and what to save until the next day. She is afraid that in a higher position somebody may walk in at the last minute and say, "Hey, I need you. We have to deal with this right now." She enjoys the flexibility of leaving early in the afternoon.

In their current positions, these women already feel there are parts of their work and personal lives that intersect. In some cases, their career decisions are impacted by their personal lives, and they already sacrifice some aspects of their personal lives for their careers. Unequivocally, they are unwilling to sacrifice any more of their personal time for their careers.

Connie provides a prime example of this sentiment. Not even the additional income from advancement can sway Connie to give up significant time with her family. She has experienced a murder in her family. Because of that event, she prioritizes family above everything else: “[O]ne day they will be here and then they may not. I can get another job but I can’t get another child. So, that makes me emotional.”

While the women in this study will not sacrifice their personal time *now* for advancement, they are all willing to reconsider advancement when their children are older. When asked what her ultimate career goal is, Tula responds, “I change over time. I think for different stages for my life, it changed.” She goes on to explain that before children, her focus was “high up” the career ladder. Now that she has children, her primary goal is to be a great mom.

Several of the participants indicated that they would contemplate advancement once their children were a bit more self-sufficient. Danielle says she will wait until her children can “fend for themselves a little bit better” before she will even think about taking on more responsibilities at work. Both Lisa and Chantelle believe that they probably will be ready for advancement when their children are able to drive and no longer need transportation.

Even though the women in this study try to keep their work lives and personal lives separate, in the end, their personal and professional worlds intertwine. They sacrifice time with their families for their current positions. They perceive additional commitments with advancement, and they are unwilling to sacrifice any more personal time for advancement. They indicate that timing of advancement opportunities is important, and they acknowledge that their advancement decisions change with the age of their children.

Civic and social activities. Most of the women in this study are unable to participate in civic and social activities due to professional and household responsibilities. Before having children, Ophelia volunteered for several local non-profits, but she now finds herself too tired to actively contribute. She opts instead to give money: “[I]f it is not directly tied to my family or benefit my job, it’s not happening. I give money. I will give money.”

Jazz puts aside her own desires to participate in social and civic activities so that her husband and children can. In addition to working a full-time job which often takes him out of town, her husband also volunteers every other week for the local fire department. Jazz tried a couple of times to become involved in civic activities, but she just could not make it work: “You might have to pay somebody \$200.00 to watch the kids” for two or three nights.

For a few of the women, their social and civic activities are centered around their children. Usually, they put their own desires aside for the desires of their children. Marie explains, “So, once I get home, my kids are very involved. I mean, with piano lessons, basketball, tee-ball and things like that. I’m not too involved in other things for myself.”

Tula believes she will become more involved in civic activities once her son is old enough to participate. Right now, Tula’s son is still a toddler and not very involved in activities outside of the home and daycare. When he gets older, though, she believes she will be more involved in civic activities because “I think [they will be] geared more towards my son.”

When these women do participate in social or civic activities, their participation is usually part of their jobs. Even though she is an administrator, Taryn still has a lot of contact with students. Many of the students she works with are first generation college students from

disadvantaged backgrounds. Helping these students feels like volunteering to Taryn in some respects: “So I don’t feel like I do as much of the formal volunteering that I used to do—leading this group or volunteering on that committee—because I feel like I am doing that all day long.”

As part of their professional development activities, some of the women participate in local non-profit groups. Connie leads the initiative at her school for both Toys for Tots and Coats for Children. Other participants volunteer for school by staffing tables at recruitment events and festivals.

Support Systems Mitigate Some Challenges

While these women face numerous challenges along their career paths from both within and outside of their organizations, they also have a collection of tools to help combat these challenges. Throughout their careers, they have had individuals who have influenced their careers in some way. These women also are aware of what motivates them to succeed, and they choose jobs that fulfill those motivations. They also have a support system that they draw on to help meet the challenges.

Encouragement from family and friends. For a few of the women, their own ambition pushes them to succeed in their careers. Neither of Chantelle’s parents received anything higher than a high school diploma. She relates that there was not a lot of external influence from her parents to obtain her education or succeed in her career. When asked who the influences in her career development were, she responds, “It’s going to sound selfish but it’s more of an internal drive.” That drive led her to earn her doctorate and obtain an administrative position.

Most of the women were influenced in some way by their families. In contrast to Chantelle, Taryn received a lot of encouragement from her mother to go to college. Taryn's mother was a single mother and was not able to go to college herself. She was determined, however, that her daughter would do what she could not: "[I]t was ingrained that I would be going to college, it wasn't a choice. I get to pick where. That was the only choice I had." Even though her mother was not able to get a formal education, she was very successful in her career. Taryn believes that she gets her work ethic from observing her mother.

Tula credits her grandmother for inspiring her to explore many careers and to find a career that she loved. Her grandmother also encouraged her to not let the stereotypes of "female" or "Asian" define her career choice. Tula started her career as a counselor. In her culture there is not a word for counselor. That job does not exist in her native country. She remarks that she has a hard time explaining to her parents and other family members in her country what she does. Still, she followed the advice of her grandmother and chose a profession she loves.

For the majority of women in this study, extended family provides a strong support system during their careers. When they were younger, these participants always had the concept of "We Can Do It!" Even though their mothers stayed home with the children, they encouraged their daughters (and granddaughters, in Tula's case) to be anything they wanted to be.

Now that they are in professional positions, these women are still receiving help from their extended families. Both of Connie's parents are retired, and her mom picks her children up from school. This allows Connie and her husband to work traditional schedules. It also

saves them money because they do not have to pay for before- and after-school care.

Elizabeth's parents are also retired, but they live about three hours away. Still, they do come and stay with the children during teacher workdays.

Professors played a role in the career advancement of a few of the women. Danielle received a lot of encouragement from her professors to enter the field of education. She initially went to college to obtain a two year vocational degree. She eventually received her bachelor's and was asked by the professors in the program to come back and complete her master's. While enrolled in her master's program, the professors also encouraged her to go into education. They provided guidance on entering the education profession and connected her with her first position.

Many of the participants can trace their career development to either a current or former employer. Ophelia considers her first employer as one of her most influential supporters. When she was a teenager, she worked at her best friend's mom's pizza shop. Their family owned the pizza shop, and its success rested solely with them. Ophelia's boss would always have the employees doing something. The philosophy was that they were getting paid to work so, even if it was slow, they were expected to be doing something. Ophelia attributes her current work ethic to this experience: "I think that's the basis of any success that I've had because I was driven and didn't sit on 'my laurels' when I could have." That drive was obvious to her first employer out of college. Even though she was "green," Ophelia's director gave her opportunities for growth.

Marie receives the same encouragement from her current supervisors. She has instilled in them trust for her professional abilities. When committee assignments open or

new opportunities arise, they ask her to be involved. Her involvement leads to a broader understanding of college practices and policies, thereby preparing her for higher positions in that or another organization.

Institutional Support (both official and collegial). Understanding their internal motivators is another way the women of this study reduce some of the challenges faced during their careers. For some of the women, flexibility is a primary motivator. When she was younger, Chantelle envisioned herself with a Ph.D., conducting research in a laboratory. She has since earned her Ph.D., but she has decided to stay in education. She points out that flexibility is “what keeps me here.”

Jazz appreciates the flexibility she receives from her supervisor. With the time demands of her home life, she cannot work a rigid schedule. She tries to extend the same courtesy to her employees: “I am just as flexible with my employees as my boss is with me. As long as they do their job, I am okay with it . . . I think people can get a lot of stuff done at home.”

Another motivator for these women is job satisfaction. If they are satisfied and challenged by what they do on a daily basis, then they are more likely to stay with the organization and want to advance within the organization. Chantelle acknowledges the part the administration can play in job satisfaction: “I don’t know that having a title would necessarily be the benefit over what I know [about] this administration and how they supported the faculty.”

Two of the women commented that money was also a motivator for them; however, money was not the prime motivator. Connie’s primary motivator is helping others succeed in

their educational journey. Having completed her own associate's degree fairly recently, Connie understands the needs of the students she works with. Seeing those students succeed provides her with a sense of joy and accomplishment. Nevertheless, she also acknowledges the need to provide for her family: "At the same time, I want to make a decent salary." Likewise, Marie admits that money could play a factor in her choice to take a different position.

The institution itself provides support to the women. Almost all of the participants mentioned that the institution offers some scheduling flexibility. In most cases, that flexibility comes unofficially from their supervisor. For Chantelle, the flexibility comes in a more formal understanding with her supervisors. Chantelle explains that when she applied for her current position, she made the administration aware of her need for flexibility:

I mean, they knew I had a limited work schedule. I needed to be flexible with it but they still offered me the department chair, and were willing to make some of that work with me because I have young kids at home. I don't know that you would get that elsewhere.

She stays with her current organization because of the support they provide to a working mother.

Most of the participants receive some form of tuition assistance from their institutions to complete advanced degrees. Usually, the school does not pay the full amount, but they do offer something to offset the cost of school. Additionally, most of the participants have the opportunity to take an educational leave of absence. As a matter of fact, Connie was starting an educational leave of absence the day after the follow-up interview for this study.

Several of the participants also have access to daycare services at their institution. Elizabeth describes having a daycare on campus as “the most wonderful experience I can have as a working mother.” When her son was an infant, she would walk over to the daycare and breastfeed her son during her lunch hour. When he was not feeling well, she could walk a few buildings over and check on him.

The participants’ coworkers also provide a support system. While Ophelia is a generation behind her supervisor, they find ways to relate to each other. Ophelia’s daughter is two, and her supervisor’s grandchildren are around the same age. They share stories and tips with each other and “find other points of related interest.” When she found out she was pregnant with twins, her supervisor supported a flexible schedule and an extended maternity leave. He told Ophelia that he does not want her to leave, so he is working to make it possible for her to stay.

Danielle and her faculty have an informal agreement to support each other’s child care duties. For example, they will take child care duties into consideration when developing class schedules:

When we do our scheduling here that is one of the things we always look at is, you know well, [her] son needs to go to baseball and [her] son is not a morning person and you know, we try to work with our home schedules as much as we can to try to accommodate both so that we feel like neither one suffers.

They will also cover for each other when someone needs to miss work because of child care duties. They are all transplants to the area and do not have family members to help out. So, if someone needs to be out, the others pick up the slack and will cover classes if necessary.

Critical role of spouses. By far, the most valuable support system for these women is their husbands. Every woman mentioned in some way that their husband helps them overcome the obstacles they face in their careers. Chantelle affirms, “Having a supportive husband is probably more important as far as female advancement or even just professional ambition in any realm.”

The women reveal that sometimes the support of their husbands was not automatic. In referring to her husband, Connie explains, “At first, it was not pretty because my husband is from [the] country. The woman does this. The woman does that. So it took years.” Ophelia calls the consensus building with her husband “a delicate dance.”

Most of the women share household duties with their husbands, and in some cases, their children. They usually divide duties based on individual interest. Danielle comments that “There are certain things he likes to do. Certain things I’ll do.” A few of the women mentioned that having a schedule is crucial to sharing household duties. Marie notes, “It just makes it a little bit harder to continue to balance life activities and things like that with kids. So, you have to, I guess, be more organized and structured with your home life.”

The husbands also share childcare duties. They will adjust their schedules to pick up children, stay home with them, or take them to after school activities. Connie always took her daughter to dance, and her husband took their son to football. While working on her bachelor’s degree, she could not arrange to take her daughter to dance one semester. Her husband, the man who grew up in a rural, traditional neighborhood, was “the only dad most of the time at dance” that semester.

In one instance, the father is the primary child care provider and completes the majority of household chores. In describing the relationship with her husband, Lisa explains:

Our roles are different. What the perceived role in most of society is of what the man should do and what the woman should do are completely opposite. My husband cooks. He won't clean. That's the only thing he doesn't do. He does the laundry. He takes care of the kids. He's just all in that and then he allows me to go and do my thing.

While their children were younger, Lisa was a stay-at-home mother. When they moved to their current location, Lisa's husband took a position with non-traditional work hours. He supported her decision to go back to work full-time and takes care of most of the household duties so she does not have to worry about them.

Even though the men do share some of the household and childcare duties, the women feel there is a difference in how each is impacted by various work/life balance issues. Elizabeth relates how taking their kids to day care affected her and her husband differently:

I can tell the difference with my husband even, who is very much a hands-on father who is very much involved with our children, but it's never, I can see that it has never impacted him the way it does me. You know, you take them to day care or not, it's no big deal to him whereas it crushed me to take my children to day care. I sat here and cried. You know, even though I knew I had to come to work. Even though I enjoy my work.

For Marie, there is also a difference in work priorities between men and women. Marie, who works at the same institution as her husband, feels that she would leave a meeting if it ran

over in order to meet family obligations. She does not feel her husband would do the same. She states, “With men, it seems a little bit different, in my opinion, with him even saying [to the president] ‘My parent conference meeting has started. I’ve got to skedaddle and get there.’” Marie hints that men are less comfortable than women telling their supervisors or coworkers that they cannot work extra hours or stay longer at meetings to meet family commitments. Women, however, are more willing to voice the need to leave to attend to family duties.

Summary

This study provided insight into the career advancement decisions of Generation X female mid-level administrators in selected community colleges in the Southeast. Ten women from small, medium and large colleges in the region were interviewed. Through these conversations, the study participants revealed how they perceive themselves as leaders and what their career advancement goals might be. They also shared the factors they take into consideration as part of their career journey.

The participants identified leadership as the ability to get the job done while also focusing on employees. They suggested that a leader is someone who cultivates, motivates, sets an example, and provides support for her employees. At the same time, a leader must accomplish the objectives of the organization, which involves collaborating with others, implementing goals, paying attention to details, and having a vision. For these women, a poor or bad leader overly micro-manages employees or dictates without clear directions.

Being a leader requires strong intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Intrapersonal skills are those skills internal to the individual, and interpersonal skills are those required for

interaction with others. The participants indicated that to be a leader you must be able to lead with or without positional authority, have a certain amount of confidence, and have knowledge of the job. They also suggested that a leader must be able to develop trust, manage campus politics and show humility.

At this point, the participants are well aware of the next steps they must take to advance as leaders. While some of the women plan to stay within the community college sector, others are not limiting their career options. They are self-directed and realize the need to develop professionally. Most are participating in formal programs and events to accomplish this. They are also learning college dynamics, observing others in their institution, and networking. They acknowledge the importance of having a mentor, but at the moment, none are participating in a formal mentoring program. Some of the participants identified anti-mentors—leaders they try *not* to emulate. They are also well aware of their advancement fears: not accomplishing their duties; altered relationships; and not being able to balance work and life responsibilities.

These women face challenges along their career paths both within and outside of the organization. Among the factors within the organization, they face structural issues, gendered issues, and generational issues. Outside the organization they must contend with balancing work and home life, as well as civic and social activities.

To counter the challenges, the women acknowledge those influential in their careers, recognize what motivates them toward higher positions, and rely on several support systems. By far, the greatest support comes from their husbands. All of the women identified a supportive husband as key to advancement and success in a career. Through consensus

building, the participants and their husbands participate in a “delicate dance” of shared duties. Their husbands do share household duties, childcare duties, and in one instance, serve as the primary child care giver.

The next chapter will provide conclusions, implications for practice, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative interpretive study was to explore the influences, both internal and external to the organization, that shape the career advancement decisions and goals of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. The goal of this exploration was to provide greater insight into the experiences of the next generation of female community college leaders. Through a deeper understanding of the experiences of this group of women, community college administrators may be better able to prepare for the next generation of leaders.

The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do current Generation X female mid-level administrators in selected community colleges in the Southeast perceive leadership, and what are their career advancement goals?
2. What personal and professional factors do they take into consideration along their career paths and how do they experience this process?

In this chapter, I will present the conclusions and implications of this study drawn from analysis of the research findings. This chapter contains five sections. The first section provides an overview of the study. The second section presents a summary of the findings with conclusions based upon analysis of the findings and related literature in the areas of Life Course Theory, Feminist Standpoint Theory, higher education leadership, and leadership in general. The third section presents the implications for research, and the fourth section

presents the implications for practice. The final section explains the limitations of the study and suggests recommendations for further research.

Study Overview

This research was designed as a qualitative interpretive study. As such, participants were chosen using criterion sampling methods, and the data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Participants in this study included ten female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. The participants were also members of the birth cohort known as Generation X. Members of Generation X were born between 1968 and 1979 (Crowley, 2003).

All of the participants were married and had a least one child at the time of the study, although marriage and motherhood were not conditions for participation in the study. They worked at small, medium, and large community colleges and had held a variety of occupations before coming to the community college. Their backgrounds included allied health, cosmetology, criminal justice, agriculture, K-12 education, counseling, non-profit organizations and the military. They held degrees ranging from bachelor's degrees to the doctorate and were, in most cases, more educated than their husbands, fathers, and mothers.

During the face-to-face semi-structured interview process, the women were asked about their views of leadership, their current and future career goals, and their professional development activities. In addition, they were asked how, if at all, their gender and generational identity play a role in their career trajectory. The women were also asked to comment on the interaction of their work lives and personal lives. Through a telephone follow-up interview, the participants were asked if the initial interviews accurately reflected

their thoughts. They were also asked to share any recent changes to their positions and add any further thoughts to the conversation. The initial face-to-face interview transcripts and the follow up telephone transcripts were the raw data used for analysis.

The theories that served as the conceptual framework for this study were interpretivism, Life Course Theory (Elder, 1999) and Feminist Standpoint Theory (Belenky et al., 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Hartsock, 1983a). Life Course Theory (also referred to as life course perspective or life course approach) contends that “the course of one’s life is not just determined by a natural process of aging but is mainly shaped by social institutions and sociocultural values as well as by decisions and unexpected events” (Zinn, 2007, pp. 2631-2632). The Life Course Theory concepts of transitions and trajectories and the concept of generations are particularly relevant to this study. While Feminist Standpoint Theory encompasses many diverse perspectives, all standpoint theorists argue that women’s unique experiences are important to knowledge production (Naples, 2007).

This conceptual framework of Life Course Theory and Feminist Standpoint Theory, in conjunction with literature on higher education leadership, served as guides throughout the study. The interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994), with theory-derived codes and open codes from the data. The codes were organized into two main themes: leadership and factors experienced along the career path. When expressing their views on leadership, the participants discussed what they believe leadership is, what it is not, what skills and qualities it requires, and what their next steps in leadership might be. When discussing the various factors they have experienced along their career paths, the participants mentioned challenging factors they face

within the organization, those they face outside of the organization, and the factors that reduce or mitigate those challenges.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the influences, both internal and external to the organization, that shape the career advancement decisions and goals of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. The conclusions were derived using a feminist standpoint lens coupled with the tenets of life course theory to examine the findings holistically in relation to the research questions. What emerged from the findings was the impression that these participants often find themselves experiencing paradoxes in both their personal and professional lives. They are communal team leaders, but they feel they must possess certain agentic traits in order to be effective leaders. They are sandwiched between the Baby Boomers and Generation Y at their institutions, working to find a balance between the two. They are well aware of what is needed to develop professionally, but their career goals are relatively undefined other than a general tendency toward leadership and they often seem to move into higher level positions by happenstance. Finally, they praise their spouses for being supportive, yet they have to participate in a “delicate dance” to garner that support. What follows is a discussion of each of these paradoxes as well as a critique of the organizational and relational structures that foster these paradoxes in the lives of women.

Moving between Communal and Agentic Leadership Attributes

In this study, participants described leadership as a collaborative, nurturing, and goal-oriented process. The idea of leadership as a collaborative process is exemplified in how the

participants accomplish tasks on a daily basis and the interpersonal skills they identify as necessary for leadership. The majority of the participants encourage employees to work with each other, provide input, and learn from each other. They also view a leader as someone who has the ability to develop trusting relationships, manage organizational politics and show humility. In addition, the majority of the participants explained their dislike for the anti-collaborative nature of micro-management and dictating without clear direction.

The idea of leadership as a nurturing process is exemplified in how the participants focus on their employees. The participants view a leader as someone who cultivates her employees to develop and improve their professional skills. They also believe a leader should set an example and motivate her employees to be the best they can. Finally, they believe that a leader should provide support to her employees on both a personal and professional level. Not only do these women nurture their employees, but they see themselves as nurturers to their coworkers as well.

At the same time the women see leadership as collaborative and nurturing, they also realize that they must accomplish the goals of the organization. The idea of leadership as a goal-oriented process is exemplified by the participants' need to have a vision, implement organizational goals, and attend to details. It is also exemplified in the participants' views of a leader as someone who may not have an official position but still exerts influence and is respected. Such a leader has self-confidence and in-depth knowledge of the job.

Although the participants seem to prefer a communal, collaborative leadership approach, they also seem to aspire to certain agentic leadership qualities. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), "Communal associations convey a concern with the compassionate

treatment of others...In contrast, agentic associations convey assertion and control” (p. 86). This view of leadership as agentic is more consistent with the trait approach to leadership. The trait approach was one of the first attempts to describe leadership, and it focuses solely on the leader instead of leader-employee interaction. Often referred to as the “great man” approach to leadership, the trait approach claims that there are key traits that all leaders possess (Northouse, 2004).

The two approaches to leadership are quite dissimilar. One approach focuses on development of employees while the other focuses on development of the leader. Many of these women first began their careers in higher education as the “first generation of founding fathers” was retiring and the “second generation of good managers” was moving into senior level administrative positions. They are now working for the “third generation of collaborators” (Sullivan, 2001). During their time in higher education, they have been exposed to very different approaches to leadership, which could explain some of the disparity in their views. They also may have experienced a childhood and adolescence in which the “great man” was still a somewhat dominant figure in the household, which could also have an effect on their views of leadership.

Interestingly, while the women view confidence as a necessary trait of leadership, they seem to lack a certain amount of confidence themselves. Not all of them feel prepared for their current positions, most feel uncomfortable and awkward seeking mentors, and most fear they will not have the knowledge to move into higher leadership roles. They also feel they need to prove themselves as female administrators. While the exact reason for the low confidence levels was not determined by this study, research has shown that women tend to

have lower levels of confidence in their careers. Citing a 2011 study by Europe's Institute of Leadership, a recent Harvard Business Review Blog post states that "half of women managers admitted to feelings of self-doubt about their performance and career, but only 31% of men reported the same" (Flynn, Heath, & Holt, 2011).

Flynn et al. (2011) also discuss four low-confidence behaviors women exhibit, as cited by managers they surveyed: being overly modest, not asking, blending in, and remaining silent. Taryn exemplifies the trait of being overly modest, or not speaking up, when she states that "talents are recognized. You don't necessarily have to go out and advertise." Tula best demonstrates the traits of blending in and remaining silent when she discusses attending meetings at her school. She finds it difficult to voice her ideas and opinions in meetings attended predominantly by males. She chooses to blend in and go unnoticed. None of the participants embody the trait of "not asking." The participants will readily volunteer for many big projects to develop professionally and gain experience. Eagly and Carli (2007) explain that "advancement in organizations requires that women stand out from the crowd by achieving success at challenging work" (p. 164).

If the lower level of confidence exhibited by these women does in fact stem from the gendered biases they encounter in the workplace and society at large, then their male colleagues will have an advantage in obtaining senior level administrative positions. In turn, equality in senior positions will be difficult to achieve. Women will continue to hold a majority of the positions that feed into senior level positions, but men will hold the majority of actual senior positions.

Additionally, the participants identified political savvy as necessary for an effective leader. As with self-confidence, even though they believe politics to be important to leadership, few felt they possessed the ability to be political or felt comfortable maneuvering politically. One participant stated that she did not find politics rewarding while another even listed politics as an advancement fear.

Although political savvy can be considered more of a skill than a trait, the participants still associated agentic notions of power and control in their discussion of being political. The participants seem to perceive politics as defined by Russ (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2003): “the ability to ‘make one’s will prevail and to attain one’s goal’” (p. 188). They are unable to see their communal qualities of collaboration and nurturing as political skills.

Bolman and Deal (2003) suggest that one source of political power is the ability to form alliances and networks: “A key difference between more and less successful senior managers was the attentiveness to building and cultivating links with friends and allies” (p. 195). The participants of this study are already skilled at cultivating their employees and establishing trusting relationships with their coworkers. Unfortunately, they have difficulty viewing these strengths as sources of political power perhaps because society encourages more masculine sources of political power: “authority,” “control of rewards,” and “coercive power” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, pp. 194-195.)

The participants experience their careers from a gendered perspective. Feminist Standpoint Theory asserts that a gendered lens is necessary to examine oppression and power hierarchies experienced by women within society (Bechtold, 2008; Belenky et al., 1997;

Gilligan, 1982; Hartsock, 1983b). By using gender as a lens in leadership and organizational studies, researchers have been able to identify certain challenges to leadership positions for women.

Previous research indicates that a ‘think manager—think male’ concept exists within organizations (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eddy, April 2003; Schein, 2001; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1998). Virginia Schein (2001) contends that not much has changed over the last four decades. In the early 1970s, she found that notions of male norms existed for views of effective leadership, and in the 2000’s she found those notions still existed. Female leaders of the Baby Boomer generation, as well as female leaders in following generations, have had to measure their success as a leader by leadership qualities defined by masculine, agentic notions. Chin (2007) notes that these associations can have consequences: “Women leaders are often bound by these perceptions that constrain them to their gender roles and influence their leadership styles and behaviors. At the same time, these same behaviors may be defined as signs of ineffective leadership” (p. 8). The findings of this study support the idea that male norms and gender stereotypes remain to this day. Some of the participants indicated that males exhibiting masculine traits are viewed more favorably as leaders. Some of the participants also indicated that there were few female role models in high-level administrative positions. This dearth of women in high-level positions makes some of the women feel they need to prove themselves as women administrators.

The lack of female role models also perpetuates the concept of male norms for leadership positions and as such could lead to the lack of self-confidence experienced by female leaders. If the qualities of a successful leader are those identified with males, then

female leaders may not see those qualities within themselves, thus leading to a lack of confidence as a leader. The paradox, then, for these women is how to reconcile their communal leadership preferences with the agentic leadership attributes commonly accepted in society.

Working across Generations

The collaborative leadership traits exhibited by the women in this study are consistent with the findings of Kunreuther in her 2003 study of Generation Xers. She found that Gen Xers were more willing to experiment with team leadership approaches than the older generations in her study. In her description of the generations of community college leaders, Sullivan (2004) noted that the emerging fourth generation of leaders “are already skilled collaborators” (p. 37). The findings of this study support the importance of collaboration for the women of this generation of leaders.

Furthermore, the findings of this study echo the leadership themes identified by Goben (2003) in his study of Generation X employees in community colleges. He found that Generation X employees prefer varied leadership styles and dislike hierarchies. The women of this study view their units as flat structures and their employees as equals. As with Goben’s subjects, the participants of this study view mentoring as important for development although none of them were participating in formal mentoring relationships. Goben’s employees valued an efficient workplace. The participants of this study reiterated the need for efficiency. For them, time is a valuable commodity, and poor time management within an organization leads to dissatisfaction.

Goben's participants also stated that they did not like to be micromanaged. Likewise, when discussing what leadership is not, the participants of this study cited micromanagement as an activity that is contrary to effective leadership. However, they also indicated that a leader should not dictate while failing to give clear directions. As leaders, the participants try not to micromanage or dictate without clear directions. However, sometimes they must go against their leadership styles in order to work with the younger and older generations in their employ. Lisa's situation exemplifies this concept. Her older employees are attached to how things were done in the past at the institution and will circumvent her directives. Thus, she must sometimes focus closely on details and seem to micromanage her employees in order to accomplish the goals of her department.

As employees, the participants seem to want a balance between too much oversight and too little oversight. When there is too much oversight, the participants stated they feel less like professionals. Lack of feeling like a professional can lead to feelings of self-doubt and decreased confidence. As was previously discussed, confidence is viewed as an important leadership skill. With too little oversight, they stated they feel like they waste time by having to redo tasks and projects due to the lack of clear initial directions. They view repeating tasks as inefficient and a waste of their valuable time. Redundancy of this sort is counter to achieving a successful work/life balance.

This generation of leaders also seems more accepting of the influence of personal issues in the workplace, while prior generations of employees were strongly encouraged to leave the personal out of the workplace. Nevertheless, although the participants of this study are more tolerant of personal issues in the workplace, they strive to distance themselves

personally from their employees. Chantelle explains that her employees who worked together prior to her arrival have formed cliques and spend time together outside of work. She endeavors to keep her personal life separate from her work life. Connie echoes a similar sentiment by saying that she will only share basic personal information with her employees. Paradoxically, this concept of maintaining distance as a leader is contrary to the open, collaborative leadership styles the participants seem to have. Distance as a leader is more akin to the masculine, agentic notions of leadership.

Research has also revealed that Gen Xers value their personal lives and are concerned with work-family balance more than their Baby Boomer predecessors (Catalyst, 2005; Kunreuther, 2003). While it was not the purpose of this study to compare the participants with Baby Boomers, the women in this study do show concern for separation and balance of their work and personal lives. As a matter of fact, they are so concerned with work-family balance issues, they list this as one of their career advancement fears.

In life course theory, the principle of historical time and place suggests that “the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 12). The members of Generation X have been labeled as slackers and job hoppers; however, research has shown Generation Xers to have a high level of commitment to their employers (Catalyst, 2001, 2005). The participants of this study also illustrate the concept of commitment to employers, as well as commitment to their employees.

The principle of linked lives states that “lives are lived interdependently and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships” (Alwin &

McCammom, 2003, p. 13). The findings of this study support the concept of linked lives. The participants are sandwiched between the Baby Boomers and Generation Y working within their organizations. Their career experiences are interdependent with those of the other generations, and those experiences are not always positive. For instance, Lisa is frequently faced with the statement “we’ve always done it that way” from her older employees. The participants also feel the need to earn the respect of both their older employees and supervisors. They sometimes do not relate to the personal problems of their younger employees either. In either case, their views of certain situations within their work environment are impacted by their generational standing.

As leaders, they try not to micromanage or dictate without clear directions; however, they are forced at times to lead contrary to their preferred style due to generational differences. An older employee who is resistant to change or a younger employee who seems to lack focus and direction can each be a challenge for these women leaders. They also espouse collaborative, nurturing leadership styles, but try to maintain a distance with their employees. Ultimately, while working in a multi-generational setting, they are caught in a paradox of how they want to be as leaders and who they actually *are* as leaders. That paradox extends to their views of themselves as employees. Similarly, as employees, they are searching for a balance between too much oversight and too little oversight from their leaders.

Planning for Happenstance Opportunities

None of the participants in this study have definitive career goals. As a matter of fact, many of the women entered into their current positions by happenstance. Jazz’s career

change exemplifies this phenomenon. While participating in a curriculum improvement project, Jazz was able to experience another aspect of the community college. Once the project was complete, a full-time administrative staff position opened in the new area. Jazz then made the decision to leave her instructor position and tackle the new administrative position.

Planned Happenstance Theory (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999) asserts that individuals are capable of “creating and transforming ... unplanned events into opportunities for learning” (p. 117). Planned Happenstance Theory offers five skills that assist in taking advantage of unplanned events to further career opportunities: 1) curiosity, exploring new learning opportunities; 2) persistence, exerting effort despite setbacks; 3) flexibility, changing attitudes and circumstances; 4) optimism, viewing new opportunities as possible and attainable; 5) risk taking, taking action in the face of uncertain outcomes (p. 118).

The women of this study exhibit the skills necessary to capitalize on unplanned events. Lisa exemplifies curiosity in her desire to learn all she can about her current position and the division head position. Connie illustrates persistence in her determination to participate in the in-house leadership program despite the fact that her supervisors did not make the program readily known to her. Ophelia displays flexibility and optimism when faced with a change in the successorship plans in her department due to the birth of her twins. Although a new hire to the department has been tagged as a possible successor to the executive director rather than herself, Ophelia chooses to look upon the change as an opportunity to gain a mentor and have more time to develop herself. And finally, Jazz’s career move from instructor to administrator demonstrates risk taking.

To be fully prepared to benefit from any unplanned events, the women in this study are participating in a variety of professional development activities. Several of the women did not feel fully prepared for their current positions; consequently, they are hesitant to move into any higher positions without the appropriate preparation. Further, a few of the participants indicated that lack of preparation was one of their career advancement fears. Higher education researchers have touted the importance of participating in a variety of professional development activities for career advancement (Anderson, 1997; Warner & DeFleur, 1993) and, clearly, these women are following this advice. The women of this study are participating in formal education programs, serving as leaders in professional organizations, attending conferences and workshops, and taking advantage of in-house programs. These activities are in alignment with those identified by several researchers as important to career development in community colleges (Cook, 2005; Gerdes, 2003; VanDerLinden, 2005). VanDerLinden (2004) also found that an advanced degree sometimes serves as a “screening type of variable for top administrative positions” (p. 4). Only two of the participants hold a doctorate, and few mentioned the desire to obtain it. Although the doctorate may not be a requirement for some positions, the lack of a doctorate may serve as an impediment to obtaining senior level positions.

The women of this study are also self-developing by seeking their own “stretch assignments.” A stretch assignment requires “a worker to take a leap beyond his comfort zone and, in the process, pick up new skills” (Ulfelder, 2004). Connie best illustrates this point when she says, “Any time the college [opens] leadership roles, I jump on [them] because I know that it will help me in the future.” Administrators should realize the

importance of incorporating on-the-job experiences for leadership development, especially “given the pending retirements of the baby boom generation and the large number of Generation X and Y employees who will need to be developed to assume those managerial positions” (University of Maryland, 2009).

While the women of this study are participating in a wide variety of professional development activities, they are not actively involved in formal mentoring relationships. Several of the women mentioned that they viewed mentoring as an extremely important professional development activity, but they still lack a mentor. The participants stated that they “feel awkward” asking someone to be a mentor, and none of the institutions had a formal mentoring program. Several studies (Durnovo, 1990; Faulconer, 1995; Gerdes, 2003; VanDerLinden, 2004) promote the importance of a mentor to the success of women in administrative positions in higher education. Without access to a formal mentoring program, these women may not receive the best possible preparation for future leadership roles. Further, their reluctance to take the initiative in finding their own mentors may hold them back in their careers.

Vaughan (1989) found that some female presidents attribute their success to learning from a negative situation or mentor. The findings of this study coincide with Vaughan’s observations. Many of the participants identified someone who they considered an anti-mentor, a person who exhibits qualities they do not wish to emulate. In a 2007 editorial, Keith McFarland offers the following reflection about anti-mentors: “Anti-mentors may represent the most important opportunity for learning we’re given in life. The key is being

willing to learn from them.” For the women of this study, learning from an anti-mentor is an important part of their development as a leader and the way they choose to lead.

Structures present within the institutions lead to the likelihood of happenstance opportunities. Because of the non-existence of formal mentoring programs within the colleges, there is a lack of support for the next steps in the leadership process. A mentor can help define a clear path to senior leadership and help set goals to achieve that position. In particular, a female mentor can open a dialogue with her mentee about how to successfully navigate within a bureaucratic system that was developed over a century ago and favors a traditional family with a stay-at-home mother, as well as traditional male-based views of leadership. The lack of flexibility (telecommuting, job sharing, part-time) within most senior leadership positions is a deterrent to advancement.

Spousal support may be another reason why these women depend on happenstance opportunities. As will be discussed in depth in the next section, these women must participate in consensus building with their husbands to obtain the current level of childcare and household support they receive from their husbands. In many cases, spousal support is not automatic. The women may be reluctant to discuss advancement opportunities at this time as they would have to participate in additional consensus building to receive buy in for the advancement plan. Nevertheless and just in case, the women of this study are preparing and planning for whatever happenstance opportunities may come their way.

Seeking Balance through a “Delicate Dance”

One of the most significant gendered issues facing working women today is that of work-family balance (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007). Prior

research in work-family balance has shown that women are concerned about the quality of day care, and that concern could affect their employment decisions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). While the participants did not indicate that they were concerned about the quality of their day care, some did indicate that they were concerned about the amount of time their children spent in day care. Marie felt extremely guilty putting her children in before- and after-school care so that she could work.

Another concern listed by previous researchers is that women still spend more time than their partners on domestic chores (Bianchi et al., 2000; DeGroot & Fine, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007) and that women still spend more time completing childcare duties (Sayer et al., 2004). The majority of the participants in this study state that they do not share these concerns. They praise their husbands for sharing in both household and childcare duties. If the women do serve as primary caregivers to the children, they indicate that it is most often by choice.

While the women of this study view their husbands as supportive of their leadership goals, they also report that they must participate in a “delicate dance” (Ophelia) with their spouses to garner that support. In most cases, the support is not automatic. Connie states that the conversation to obtain her husband’s support for her goals “was not pretty.” She goes on to applaud her husband as the only father at dance class one semester when she could not rearrange her schedule to take their daughter to dance. Why do these women have to initiate and participate in this dance? Why is support not automatic? Why is it an oddity for a father to take his daughter to dance?

In mid-1980s, Arlie Hochschild (2012) found that women whose husbands shared some of the household and childcare duties labeled themselves as “lucky.” She explained the situation by stating, “Women’s lower wages, the high rate of divorce, and the cultural legacy of female subordination together created a social climate that made most women feel lucky that their husbands shared ‘some’” (p. 200). Thirty years later, she found that women are still working more during the “second shift” (p. 4). The “second shift” describes the phenomenon in which “most women work one shift at the office or factory and a ‘second shift’ at home” (p. 4). In her study in the 1980s, she found that Baby Boomer women worked the second shift a total of four weeks more a year than their husbands. Today, the number is slightly lower, but Generation X women still work more than their spouses in the second shift, two weeks more a year.

Perhaps the women in this study consider themselves lucky in comparison to other women they may know whose husbands share domestic duties less than their own husbands. For many women, the situation may more likely resemble Jazz’s. Jazz changed her career to accommodate a family. Her husband works in the same job he did prior to their marriage, leaving the house before she and the children are awake and returning at dinner. Jazz gets the children ready for school, ensures that they have lunch, and takes them to school. She picks them up from school, prepares dinner, and makes sure they have completed their homework and have a bath. Often her husband’s job takes him out of town, so she must function almost as a single parent many days. Her husband also still volunteers at a local fire department, an activity he has participated in since he was a teenager. Jazz, on the other hand, has no time for civic activities. On the surface, many women have the support of their

husbands. Still, it appears that many husbands will support the career advancement activities of their wives only as long as those activities do not interfere with their own careers or with the completion of household and childcare activities by their wives. The women are left to make all of the domestic arrangements while trying to grow in their careers at the same time.

Several authors (Belkin, 2003; Still, 2006; Stone & Lovejoy, 2004) have argued that over the past few years women have increasingly chose to “opt-out” of the workforce to stay home with their children. Reasons for not returning to the workforce include structural issues in the workplace, concerns about adequate daycare, and increased demands on time. Previous research has indicated that some women opt out of the workforce or choose not to seek advancement opportunities because of lack of support from their spouses/partners (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004). In their 2004 study of 22 Australian couples, Singleton and Maher found that among Generation X couples (except in the area of childcare), “men’s comfort with prevailing patterns of domestic labor, where women continue to take greater responsibility, appears to be the major impediment to achieving equality” (p. 239). . By opting-out of the workforce, women do not have to “dance,” or participate in consensus building, with their husbands. While the women in this study have not decided to opt-out of the workforce, they do share some of these same issues and concerns. One of their career advancement fears is that they will not be able to balance work and family life, mainly due to structural issues and increased time demands. The women are admittedly hesitant to move into higher positions due to their desire to adequately balance work and family.

Instead of opting out, the women in this study have decided to opt “in between” (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). Opting “in between” requires a person to make a shift in

her career. The shift could result in a reduction in hours worked, a schedule adjustment, an organizational switch, or a complete change of careers. Opting “in between” also requires less “dancing” than full commitment to career advancement. A few of the participants, especially those in academic divisions, work somewhat flexible schedules. For example, as a Department Chair, Lisa is able to leave work each day at 2:00 pm if she chooses. Danielle and her faculty arrange their teaching duties around family and childcare duties. A few of the women changed careers to better balance work and family life. Prior to coming to the community college, Jazz worked in a dangerous field that required early morning (3:00 am) hours. Connie owned her own business but decided to give that up for a career with more stability. Interestingly, a few of the women in this study chose the community college to better balance work and family although prior research shows that community colleges offered the least family-friendly policies of any higher education institution (Hollenshead, 2005; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2007). While community colleges may not be as family-friendly as other higher education institutions, they may be more so than other non-academic organizations.

Although a few of the women in academic divisions practice flexible scheduling, most of the women must adhere to a traditional work schedule. These traditional work schedules, which were developed during an era in which the husband as primary breadwinner went to work each day while the woman stayed home with the children, are contrary to family-friendly work policies (Gornick & Meyers, 2008; O'Neil et al., 2008). Tula has a difficult time dropping her son off at daycare and making it to work on time. She is consistently 15 minutes or so late. Jazz shares a similar dilemma. Her institution decided to

alter the schedule to close earlier on Fridays. She must come in 30 minutes earlier and stay 30 minutes later every other day of the week. She finds it difficult to sustain this schedule as it conflicts with her children's school schedule. The change in the college's schedule was made without consulting working parents. The participants also stated that they are generally not given credit for the hours they work from home.

Most of the participants feel that moving to higher positions will bring even more confining work schedules. Danielle, for instance, passed on an opportunity to apply for her supervisor's position because she knew how much extra time was involved. She was not willing to sacrifice the extra time with her family for the job. While these women are not opting out of the workplace all together, they are opting out of senior level positions, at least for now.

While the women of this study are not interested in taking on senior level positions at this time, most indicated that they could be interested once their children are older. At that point, the women feel that there will be less "dancing" to be done with their spouse to complete all of the tasks in their multiple role trajectories. Previous research has shown that simultaneous transitions in multiple life course trajectories can impact each other (Alwin & McCammon, 2003; Barrett, 2000; George, 1993; Mason & Goulden, 2003). Most of the participants of this study have just experienced a major transition: motherhood. Experiencing another major transition, a career change for example, concurrently with the transition to new motherhood is viewed as a stressor. However, the women believe there will be less stress once their children are older. Hopefully, at that time more supervisory opportunities will be available. Several researchers have indicated that currently and for the

near future community colleges are experiencing mass retirements and many senior level positions are becoming available (Drake, 2008; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Shults, 2001). However, the participants of this study offer a different perspective. Several women mentioned that there are few advancement opportunities in the community college as people stay in positions long past retirement, and when positions become available, there are many applicants for each opening.

The traditional structures in place at community colleges make it challenging for the women to balance work/family issues. Arlie Hochschild (2012) noted in the 1980s, “Women have changed. But most workplaces have remained inflexible in the face of the family demands of their workers” (p. 12). The same is true today. Community colleges still operate using traditional organizational structures developed over a century ago. Telecommuting is not widely encouraged. Job sharing and part-time leadership opportunities are lacking. Hours worked at home are not usually credited. Employee input regarding structural changes is not always sought. The participants in this study have a perception that moving into senior positions at this time would bring *even more* challenges and stress. Even though they believe their spouses are supportive, they still feel they need to hold back their career advancement until their children are older. This interruption in their career advancement delays their readiness to move into senior level positions. Research (Mason & Goulden, 2003) has shown that faculty at universities who are also mothers achieve tenure at much lower rates than male faculty. The same phenomenon appears to be occurring with women in community colleges as well. Instead of delays in tenure, these women are facing delays in advancement to senior positions.

According to the interviews, balancing work and family concerns takes up the majority of the participants' time. The participants indicated that they do not have much time left for civic and social activities unless these are tied directly to work or their children. Research on Generation X has shown that they are less civically engaged than previous generations (Jennings & Stoker, 2004). The time demands of work and family could be one explanation for the lack of civic participation.

In *Public Work and the Academy: An Academic Administrators Guide to Civic Engagement and Service-Learning* (2004), Langseth and Plater argue that colleges and universities must increase their level of civic participation within their communities. The book's intended audience is "academic leaders – chief academic officers, provosts, deans, division and department chairs – who have significant responsibility for the campus's academic programs" (p. xvii). Increasingly, academic administrators in all higher education institutions are expected to engage in civic organizations and service projects. As leaders in their institutions, they are also expected to set an example for others to participate in such projects. Additionally, often participation in civic organizations leads to acceptance in local power circles that stem from these organizations. If men have more opportunity to participate in civic activities than women, then they will have greater access to local sources of power. The fact that Gen X workers/mothers are not able to actively participate in civic opportunities could impede their career progress.

To develop as leaders, though, the women of this study are seeking work/life balance by participating in a "delicate dance" of understanding and compromise with their spouses and the structures within which they work. For these women, their commitment to career

advancement depends on the amount of “dancing” they must do with their spouses to achieve domestic and childcare support. In this group, no one yet has decided to stop “dancing” altogether. Instead, they have decided to opt in-between, or participate in a slow waltz with their spouses until their children are older. The question remains as to whether their spouses consider the “dance” as they plan for their own career opportunities.

In summary, as these women move along their career paths, they experience several paradoxes along the way. While they define leadership using communal leadership traits, they strive for the agentic traits that society defines as necessary for effective leadership. As a result of a multi-generational work environment, they sometimes lead contrary to their preferred leadership styles. Even though they are participating in a variety of leadership development opportunities and they express a general intention towards leadership, they have no clearly defined career goals and often come into leadership positions by happenstance. And finally, despite the fact that their spouses say they are supportive of their career goals, the women in this study have to participate in a “delicate dance” to garner that support from their husbands.

Implications for Research

In summary, the conclusions of this study add to the existing body of higher education leadership literature. The characteristics and experiences of earlier generations of community college administrators have been examined in previous research (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Sullivan, 2001; Twombly, 1995). However, studies focusing on the emerging generation of leaders, particularly women, are scarce. Goben’s (2003) study of Generation X leadership is one of few that focuses on the next group of leaders in community

colleges. Prior studies have also examined the experiences of women in community colleges (Durnovo, 1990; VanDerLinden, 2005), though few examine the experiences of Generation X women in community colleges. This study extends the current body of literature by highlighting the unique experiences of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges today.

Further, this study adds insight into how the current generation of female leaders are preparing for career advancement. Prior research (Anderson, 1997; VanDerLinden, 2005; Warner & DeFleur, 1993) offers suggestions for activities one should participate in to prepare for leadership roles. This study adds to the body of research by showing that even though they are participating in professional development activities, Generation X female mid-level administrators are often coming to leadership positions through planned happenstance, lacking some confidence in their own skills and preparation, but still aspiring to leadership.

This study also extends the findings of previous research on Generation X leadership preferences (Goben, 2003; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Kunreuther, 2003). Generation X female mid-level administrators prefer flatter hierarchies. They espouse collaborative and nurturing transformational leadership styles, and they view top-down, traditional structures as ineffective and inefficient. However, there is a difference in what they believe and what they actually *do*. Consistent with previous research, this study shows that Generation X dislikes micromanagement as both leaders and employees. This study shows, though, that Generation X administrators may have to micromanage at times to accomplish goals in a

multi-generational setting. At the same time, their self-imposed distance and reserve from their co-workers is contrary to the collaborative leadership style they advocate.

Further, the conclusions of this study contribute additional support to the concepts of life course theory, in particular the principle of historical time and place and the principle of linked lives. Life course theory has been used as a lens in several studies to examine the experiences of college students (Hostetler, Sweet, & Moen, 2007; Taniguchi, 2005). Rarely, has it been used as a framework to study administrators in colleges. This is the first study, then, to use life course as a lens to research the experiences of Generation X female mid-level administrators in the Southeast. In particular, this study shows how the timing of their birth and their connections to others influence the experiences they have along their career paths.

Finally, the conclusions of this study reiterate the need to conduct research from a feminist standpoint perspective. This study shows that male norms still exist in community colleges today and that one of the primary challenges these women face in career advancement is work/family balance issues. The paradoxes these women experience reveal deterrents to career advancement grounded in gendered organizational and relational issues. These women view themselves as collaborative, nurturing leaders but they feel they need to develop certain agentic characteristics to be effective leaders. This is consistent with role congruity issues as described by Eagly and Karau (2002). The lack of female role models and mentors also adds to the prevalence of a 'think manager-think male' mindset within community colleges (Schein, 2001). Although they believe they have support from their spouses, they have to initiate consensus building to achieve that support, and many times that

support is not automatic. This activity is leading to a fairly new phenomenon of women choosing to just “opt in-between” (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011). Opting in-between involves making a career shift to balance work/life priorities.

Implications for Practice

The overarching goal of this study was to provide a better understanding of Generation X female mid-level administrators so that senior level administrators in community colleges could best prepare them for future leadership roles. From the conclusions of this study, several implications for practice emerge. These suggestions for practice are intended to guide the development of institutional policies, succession planning, and professional development initiatives.

This study shows that the female leaders in this group are collaborators and nurturers. Senior administrators should encourage the collaborative preferences of these female administrators, and they should try to be collaborators themselves. One way they could accomplish this is to ensure that the female leaders are given assignments where collaboration and teamwork are needed. For example, strategic planning requires collaboration from many different departments across campus. Hopefully, these female mid-level administrators are already involved in such activities, but if they are not, they should be included and their collaborative skills should be utilized.

They should also work to create an efficient environment with effective project management strategies. These women do not like to waste time--a very valuable commodity for them. Furthermore, senior administrators should avoid micro-managing these female administrators and provide them with the clear directives, independence and tools necessary

to accomplish the organization's goals. These women have indicated that they are willing to leave an organization if they feel overly micro-managed. Senior administrators should welcome feedback from their employees as to their own leadership abilities. One way to do this is to provide employees with the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey about the leadership ability of senior administration within the organization.

Additionally, Generation X female mid-level administrators need to gain self-confidence by learning to promote themselves, standing out, and speaking up. This study shows that these women exhibit some of the ways women tend to slow their career progression through lack of confidence. Senior administrators should provide opportunities for these women to gain higher confidence levels so that they may be better advocates for themselves. One possible way to help increase self-confidence would be to offer stretch assignments. A stretch assignment can be any assignment that is not part of the employee's regular duties and challenges her while introducing a new skill set. For instance, if budget development is not part of the employee's normal tasks, then the supervisor could give the employee part of the department or unit budget to generate. Successfully completing assignments that challenge can instill a sense of confidence, assist in acquiring political savvy and help develop a larger knowledge base about the organization. That increased knowledge could make it easier to speak up and offer suggestions in meetings. Further, senior administration is encouraged to provide leave time and tuition assistance so that the women can obtain the doctorate, a desired credential for executive level positions and a means to stand out among colleagues.

Also, the findings of this research reveal that none of the colleges have formal mentoring programs. Previous research has shown the important role mentors can serve in the career advancement of female administrators. Senior administrators should institute formal mentoring relationships within their community colleges and actively invite female mid-level administrators to participate. Also, mid-level women administrators should take the initiative to find their own mentors, particularly for areas where they seek learning and growth. The mentoring relationship should involve the development of a mentoring plan as well as frequent conversation about and evaluation of the plan. More importantly, college presidents should identify willing *female* mentors within the senior administration at their institutions. These women could serve as role models and participate in conversations with the mentees as to how to balance home and career, among other topics.

Along with creating a formal mentoring program, senior administrators should continue to provide professional development opportunities, including “stretch assignments,” even in times of financial restrictions. They should also provide leave time to employees for participation in civic activities. As civic engagement is increasingly expected of senior administrators, leave time to participate in such events should be viewed as professional development. It could also serve as an excellent public relations opportunity for the college.

The participants of this study indicated that they feel they lack political savvy and practical administrative skills. They mentioned that graduate courses and in-house leadership programs focus more on the theory of leading than the practical aspects of leadership. Graduate programs in higher education and senior administrators in community colleges are encouraged to create professional development opportunities such as shadowing and

internships that better prepare future leaders for the practical nature of administrative positions.

Finally, senior administrators need to ask for feedback from their employees before making sweeping structural policy changes, and they should consider flexible scheduling, telecommuting and job sharing policies. Senior administrators should also welcome a review of organizational policies and structures to detect any that adversely affect people with families. They should invite Generation X female mid-level administrators to assist with the review. This study shows that, for these women, organizational structures can have an impact on balancing work and family. Facing increased stress from the pull of work and family, these women will choose family over work. They will choose not to seek advancement opportunities within the organization. Moreover, they may choose to leave the organization altogether if they find themselves unable to spend enough time with their families. Such practices and policies could also benefit male employees as it appears from the participants' comments that males of this generation may be more involved in family care.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study explored the career advancement decisions of Generation X female mid-level administrators within community colleges in the Southeast. While this study offers a better understanding of the experiences of this group of women, it does not describe the experiences of all women with these characteristics. The sample size of this study, although of sufficient size to comprehend the experiences of this group of women, is certainly not representative of all Generation X female mid-level administrators. The women also self-

selected to be a part of the study. Generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research. If generalizable results are required, then quantitative methods should be employed. Additional study using both qualitative and quantitative methods with a larger representative sample and broader geographical range should be conducted to obtain generalizable and transferable findings.

The sample was also restricted to only women of Generation X. As such, the experiences of male mid-level administrators were not a subject of the study. A comparative study examining the similarities and differences among men and women of this cohort should be conducted. Through a comparison of the experiences of Gen X men and women in community colleges, senior administrators will have a more complete understanding of this cohort of future leaders. They will then best be able to develop succession planning and professional development offerings.

In addition, the spouses of Generation X female mid-level administrators could be interviewed since this might provide a more complete perception of work/family balance issues among Generation X members. Through interviews with the spouses, one can better discern whether and why these women are taking on a majority of the childcare duties. Do the women demand to have these duties? Are they unwilling to give up control over childcare activities and household responsibilities? Do the men feel they have a choice?

Further, the sample was limited to Generation X female mid-level administrators working in community colleges. Research should be conducted to determine whether the same or similar experiences hold true for women working at liberal arts colleges and large universities. Also, the sample was limited to women working in academia. Further research

examining the experiences of women working in other public and private sectors is warranted. By examining female administrators in other organizations, one could determine whether the experiences of these women are unique to those working in community colleges. Is there something about the structure and organization of community colleges that led to these findings?

This is a cross-sectional study providing insight into the experiences of these women at one specific point in time. It also required the participants to answer some of the questions retrospectively. To best understand their career advancement decisions, a longitudinal study examining the same facets over several years would be most beneficial.

In the 1990s, Patricia Hill Collins (1998) coined the term “intersectionality” to describe the various socially and culturally constructed categories (e.g., race, class, gender) that interact to influence a person’s experiences. The experiences these women have along their career trajectories are influenced by multiple social roles. In particular, age and gender both have an impact of how the women perceive their careers and experience the career process. The constructs of age and gender, in conjunction with the organizational structures within which they work, provide the women of this study a perspective that may differ from that of their colleagues. However, this study fails to address the intersection of race into the career experiences of these women. In addition, all of the participants were heterosexual women with children. The experiences of women without children, women of other ethnic and racial backgrounds, and lesbian and bisexual women are absent. Additional study into the unique experiences of the women not represented by this study is needed to fully explain the situation for Generation X women.

A noteworthy finding of the study is that the participants exhibit a low level of confidence in their abilities as a leader. The source of the lack of confidence was not determined by this study. Lack of confidence could be a result of several factors such as gender, age, or male norms. More research needs to be conducted to establish the nature of the low self-confidence and its impact on careers.

Another interesting finding of the study is that while the participants do not participate in formal mentoring relationships, they do attribute part of their leadership style to the lessons they have learned from an anti-mentor. The literature of higher education and leadership contains an abundance of references to the importance of mentoring and the positive aspects of a mentoring relationship, but scant research exists on the nature of anti-mentoring and its impact on leadership development. In addition, research should be conducted to determine if the lack of mentoring opportunities extends to men in community college as well. If not, then the lack of formal mentors for women in community colleges could be a gendered issue as reported by prior research (Catalyst, 2005).

Summary

This research has revealed the career advancement experiences of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. It was grounded in Life Course Theory (Elder, 1999) and Feminist Standpoint Theory (Belenky et al., 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Hartsock, 1983a), as well as general literature on leadership and higher education. The study examined how these women perceived leadership, how they were preparing for leadership opportunities, the factors that influenced their career decisions, and how they experienced the career process.

One outcome of the study is to provide senior level administrators insight into the next group of female leaders in the community college pipeline and how they can best be nurtured and trained. The findings and conclusions of this research will also help current senior administrators develop institutional policies, succession plans and professional development options. This group of women is secure in their understanding of leadership and its demands, committed to their careers, supportive of their employees and coworkers, dedicated to getting the job done, and actively pursuing professional development opportunities. However, they are experiencing several paradoxes as they move along their careers paths.

They are collaborators and nurturers but feel that they need more agentic qualities to be effective leaders, qualities often associated with society's views of male leadership. They espouse a leadership preference, but they are forced at times to lead contrary to their preference in order to work within a multi-generational setting. They are participating in a variety of leadership development activities, but they often obtain leadership positions by happenstance. Finally, they feel that they have support from their spouses for childcare and domestic duties, but they also must participate in a "delicate dance" to achieve that support. Various organizational and relational structures lead to the existence of the paradoxes.

In the end, they are not willing to sacrifice inordinate amounts of time with their families to focus on their career. Their careers are important, but not more important than their family. Thus, they have decided to opt "in between," delicately balancing the commitments of work and family. By choosing to opt in between, these women will play

positive roles in the lives of their families, their colleges, and society as a whole. We can be optimistic about the future of our colleges with these women in leadership positions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER TO PRESIDENTS

Terri Suzanne Holston Lee
(919) xxx-xxxx
tslee@johnstoncc.edu

Date

First name, Last Name
Community College
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear :

As a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration at North Carolina State University, I am beginning my dissertation research. My research purpose is to explore the influences, both internal and external, that shape the career advancement goals of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast.

I am writing to ask your help in identifying participants for this study. I am interested in interviewing women who hold mid-level administrative positions at your institution and were born between the years of 1968 and 1979. For the purposes of this study, a mid-level administrator is an employee who supervises others, but does not report directly to the president.

I would appreciate it if you could provide a list of employees in your institution that match these criteria. From the list, I will contact potential participants and invite them to take part in this study. The findings of this study will help administrators throughout the region understand the leadership intentions and goals of this group of women, who constitute part of the pipeline for future community college leaders. If you are not comfortable providing the list, I can provide the participant invitation email for you to forward to those on your campus that meet the criteria.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions you may have. You may reach me at 919-975-5408 or tslee@johnstoncc.edu.

Sincerely,

Terri Suzanne Holston Lee
Doctoral student
North Carolina State University

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Terri Suzanne Holston Lee
(919) xxx-xxxx
tslee@johnstoncc.edu

Date

First name, Last Name
Community College
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear .:

As a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration at North Carolina State University, I am beginning my dissertation research. My research purpose is to explore the influences, both internal and external, that shape the career advancement goals of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast.

I am writing to ask for your participation in this study. I am interested in interviewing women who hold mid-level administrative positions and were born between the years of 1968 and 1979. For the purposes of this study, a mid-level administrator is an employee who supervises others, but does not report directly to the president.

Your involvement would include a face-to-face interview lasting approximately one hour at a location, to be chosen by you, close to your place of employment or close to your home. After the interview has been transcribed, you will have the opportunity to review the transcription. You will then be asked to participate in a follow-up telephone interview.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with any questions you may have. You may reach me at 919-975-5408 or tslee@johnstoncc.edu.

Sincerely,

Terri Suzanne Holston Lee
Doctoral student
North Carolina State University

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Pseudonym:

Interviewer: Terri Lee

Date: TBA

Place: TBA

Scheduled Time: TBA

Start: _____ End: _____

Opening Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself:
 - a. Family background
 - b. Early and Adult Educational Experiences
 - c. Work History over the years
3. Describe the career paths of your family of origin (father, mother, siblings, spouse).

Questions about Career Development

4. Please describe your career path to this point.
5. Who were/are the important influences in your career development?
6. What is your ultimate career goal?
7. What is your conception of leadership?
8. Do you see yourself as a leader? In what way?
9. Would your employees describe you as a leader?
10. How well do you feel prepared as a leader? What professional development activities have you pursued?
11. Do you have a mentor(s)? Tell me about that relationship.
12. What steps, if any, are you undertaking to move up as a leader?
13. How does gender play a role in your view of leadership or your leadership career decisions?
14. How do your work life and your personal life interact?
15. How do you foresee your work life and your personal life interacting when taking the next step in leadership?
16. Are you willing to sacrifice aspects of your personal life to become a senior level administrator? If so, in what way?
17. How does your work life interact with your social and civic life?
18. How does your Generation X identity play a role in your view or leadership or your leadership career decisions?
19. What fears, if any, do you have about being a leader?

Closing the Interview

20. Is there anything else that we have not covered that you would like to add at this time?

Thank you for participating in this interview!
Be sure to give participant follow-up information.

The following are probes that will be employed as suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (2003):

What do you mean?
I'm not sure that I am following you.
Would you explain that?
What did you say then?

What were you thinking at the time?
Give me an example.
Tell me about it.
Take me through the experience.

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT

North Carolina State University INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Right Here, Right Now: Career Advancement of Generation X Female Mid-Level Administrators in the North Carolina Community College System

Principal Investigator Terri Lee

Faculty Sponsor Dr. Leila González Sullivan

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore the career advancement decision making process and career goals of Generation X female mid-level administrators in community colleges in the Southeast. Specifically, this research seeks to understand:

1. How do current Generation X female mid-level administrators in selected community colleges in the Southeast perceive leadership, and what are their career advancement goals?
2. What personal and professional factors do they take into consideration along their career paths and how do they experience this process?

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an 1 ½ -2 hour initial interview, review the transcript of the initial interview, and participate in a follow-up phone interview. You will also be asked to provide any professional development plans or summaries of professional development activities that you may feel comfortable sharing.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks to being a part of this study. If, however, at any time you feel uncomfortable at any stage of the research process and would like to discontinue your participation, please notify the researcher. Any data collected from you up to that point will be destroyed.

Benefits

Being a part of this study will give you the opportunity to think reflexively about your career path thus far and any other future career advancement decisions. It will also give you the opportunity to reflect on the various social forces in play as you think about your career. The results from this study will add to the body of knowledge in the field of higher education. Hopefully, the results will also benefit senior administrators in the North Carolina Community College System as they look to the next generation of leaders in the system.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely in a fire proof lock box at the researcher's home. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to create a pseudonym, and this is how you will be known throughout the study.

Compensation

You will not receive any compensation for participating.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Terri Lee, at 919-xxx-xxxx.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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 Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____