

DISSERTATION

WHY WOMEN MAKE THE DECISION TO BECOME PRESIDENTS AT RURAL
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Submitted by

Dana M. Young

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Doctoral Committee:

Advisor: Linda Kuk

Louise Jennings
Sharon Anderson
Susan Tungate

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ABSTRACT

WHY WOMEN MAKE THE DECISION TO BECOME PRESIDENTS AT RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES

This interpretative phenomenological analysis examined what influenced 10 women's decisions to become rural community college presidents in the western region of the US. The themes which emerged were how career history shaped decisions; the role groups played in women's decision to become presidents; the importance of rural roots and the "right fit"; the influence of gender on women's decisions to become presidents; and advice for women seeking rural community college presidential positions.

Ten women shared their experiences. Women shared why they decided to become rural community college presidents. Women discovered their self-efficacy and internal strengths through pure determination, grit, and verve in becoming rural community college presidents. These women credited their successes to their education, pursuit of advanced administrative positions, personal experiences, professional development opportunities, mentors who helped them build their confidence, and the support of their families.

The majority of women arriving at the rural community college presidency in this study had rural roots and a desire to live rurally. All women in the study discussed the significance of engaging in local community activities and events, civic clubs, and the importance of understanding the local culture. Relationships in the community meant everything and strong interpersonal skills were critical for being successful. Women were passionate about serving at rural community colleges and the primary role of connecting with the community.

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DEDICATION

To my amazing husband Jeff, you are the wind beneath my wings! To my strong sons Ethan and Andrew, thank you for letting me pursue my dreams throughout my life. Thanks for giving me time to study and for supporting me when I felt challenged. It is because of all of you that I was able to reach my goals. I love you all more than words can express!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Research Purpose	3
Research Questions	4
Definition of Terms.....	4
Delimitations	5
Potential Limitations	5
Significance of the Study	5
Researcher’s Perspective.....	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Brief History of Community Colleges	9
Leadership and Gender.....	11
Rural Story Framework.....	15
Isolation, rural politics, and visibility challenges	18
Importance of strong relationships	19
Poverty, funding gap, and employment challenges.....	20
Fit and making a difference	22
Career Pathways to the Presidency	23
Intentional vs. non-intentional pathways.....	26
Degrees	29
Succession planning	30
Mentors.....	31
Summary	33
CHAPTER 3: METHOD.....	36
Research Design and Rationale.....	39
Participants and Site	40
Data Collection	42
Data Analysis.....	43
Summary/Discussion.....	47
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	48
Demographic Information.....	48

Themes	53
How Career History Shaped Decisions	56
Importance of Degrees for Advancement to the Presidency	56
Significance of Previous Positions in Deciding to Become President	58
Personal Experience and Professional Development Helped Prepare Women	61
Decision to Become President Intentional or Unintentional	65
Decision to Become President Influenced by Bad Leadership.....	66
Role Support Groups Played in Women’s Decision to Become President	67
Importance of Mentors to Women Becoming Presidents.....	68
Importance of Family Support to Women Becoming Presidents	70
Importance of Rural Roots and the “Right Fit” to Becoming Successful Presidents	72
Rural Roots Led Women to Rural Presidencies	72
Influence of Gender on Women’s Decisions to Become Presidents.....	78
Gender Impact on Women’s Experiences	81
Importance of Women Making a Difference in People’s Lives	84
Gender Discrimination Realized by Women Presidents	85
Advice for Women Seeking Rural Community College Presidential Positions	88
Be Prepared to Live in a Fishbowl	88
Align Yourself with the Rural Job.....	89
Find Successful College Presidents to Mentor You	93
Try to Balance Work and Personal Life	94
Do Not Let Challenges Scare You Off	94
Women’s Thoughts on Whether a Different Career Path Would Have Been Better	95
Answers to Research Questions.....	96
Essence Statement.....	110
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	111
Discussion of Findings.....	111
Relationship of Findings to the Literature	112
How Career History Shaped Decisions.....	112
Importance of Degrees for Advancement to the Presidency	112
Significance of Previous Positions in Deciding to Become President	113
Personal Experience and Professional Development Helped Prepare Women.....	114

Decision to Become President Intentional or Unintentional	117
Decision to Become President Influenced by Incompetent Leadership	118
Role Support Groups Played in Women's Decision to Become President.....	118
Importance of Mentors to Women Becoming Presidents.....	118
Importance of Family Support to Women Becoming Presidents	120
Importance of Rural Roots and the "Right Fit" to Becoming Successful Presidents.....	121
Rural Roots Led Women to Rural Presidencies	122
Influence of Gender on Women's Decisions to Become Presidents	124
Gender Impact on Women's Experiences	124
Importance of Women Making a Difference in People's Lives	124
Gender Discrimination Realized by Women Presidents	125
Advice for Women Seeking Rural Community College Presidential Positions	126
Be Prepared to Live in a Fishbowl	126
Align Yourself with the Rural Job.....	128
Find Successful College Presidents to Mentor You	129
Try to Balance Work and Personal Life	129
Do Not Let Challenges Scare You Off.....	130
Women's Thoughts on Whether a Different Career Path Would Have Been Better	131
Implications for Practice	132
Implications for Future Research.....	136
REFERENCES	140
APPENDIX A: COLLEGES QUALIFYING RURAL-SMALL, RURAL MEDIUM	151
APPENDIX B – INVITATION LETTER/E-MAIL TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.....	154
APPENDIX C – DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION.....	156
APPENDIX D – FOLLOW-UP LETTER	157
APPENDIX E – THANK YOU LETTER.....	158
APPENDIX F – RESEARCH QUESTIONS	159
APPENDIX G – INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE	160
APPENDIX H - THEMES TABLE.....	161
APPENDIX I – IRB.....	164

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The 2012 American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) “CEO Characteristics” report stated that within the next 10 years, nearly 75% of community college presidents plan to retire and an additional 15% are considering retirement in 11-15 years (Phillipe, 2013; Tekle, 2012). The AACC (2012) indicated that the number of potential applicants to replace retiring community college presidents has been diminishing. Using data from the 2012 AACC report, Hammond (2013) affirmed that the average age of a president in 2011 was 61 years old. Seltzer (2017) indicated that the average age of college presidents is advancing as the portion of presidents over 70 increased to 11% in 2016 versus 5% in 2011. More than half of presidents stated retirement plans within five years. If these numbers are correct, community colleges will experience a large turnover in leadership, and new presidents will lead most of these (Nibbelink Struck, 2013; Rice & O’Keefe, 2014). The sheer number of presidents planning to retire in this short time frame will create a significant challenge for community colleges to replace those leaders. These retirements will potentially open opportunities for more women to enter leadership positions due to the huge turnover (American Council on Education [ACE], 2007; Nealy, 2008). This wave of presidential retirements can set up opportunities for some additional diversity, albeit slow growth (Seltzer, 2017).

According to the AACC (2012), 72% of presidents are male, 28% of presidents are female. Since more women lead at community colleges than ever before (Moore-Brown, 2006; Liu, 2007), it will be informative to learn directly from them what influenced their decisions to become rural community college presidents. About half of all community colleges are in rural

areas, and more than half of the senior leaders at all community colleges are near retirement (Phillipe, 2013; Tekle, 2012).

In 2005, the Rural Policy Research Institute utilized a map (Hardy, 2005) indicating that over 50% of all community colleges are rural. Carnegie Classifications (2010) defined rural community colleges: Basic are small colleges with less than 2,500 full-year unduplicated headcounts; medium with 2,500 through 7,500; and large as those institutions with greater than 7,500. Carnegie Classifications used Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data for 2013-2014 as a source of enrollment numbers for the most recent categorization.

Because rural communities have small isolated populations with unique characteristics, many are struggling economically in locales with high rates of poverty and aging populations. Residents of these rural communities consider their local community colleges as the cultural centers of their communities (Cejda, 2012; Eddy, 2007). Community residents look to local community colleges as their economic engines (Bigelow, 2011; Leist, 2005). Two of the many challenges for attracting senior leaders to rural community colleges are that these colleges tend to pay lower salaries and are geographically isolated (Cejda, 2012; Eddy, 2013). Retaining presidents at rural community colleges can be even more challenging because smaller rural colleges can sometimes become “stepping stones” to other more desirable presidencies (Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2005).

There is a sense of urgency to get leaders prepared to take these leadership roles (Eddy, 2013). A distinctive set of traits and characteristics is necessary for presidents to lead at rural community colleges. They not only must have technical leadership skills but also engage, respect, and embrace local citizens and culture (Leist, 2005; Wallin, 2003). In short, rural

community colleges need to find ways to attract qualified applicants to avoid a leadership vacuum (Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2005; Pennington, Williams & Karvonen, 2006).

Although limited in scope, the results from AACC's 2005 research supported that leaders of rural community colleges will need strong aptitude and expertise to satisfy the regional educational requirements in the 21st century. The results included the competencies identified as necessary to ready leaders for rural community colleges (Cejda, 2012). AACC's 2005 list of six competencies for community college leaders included organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism. Furthermore, Cejda stated that due to static economies, reduction in available resources, and geographic location, rural community colleges' challenges are unique. External candidates could be more difficult to secure because many people are unwilling to relocate to rural communities where their values and beliefs may be different from the local population (Luzbetak, 2010). Rural community colleges need access to a larger labor pool to find qualified candidates for presidential leadership positions (Eddy, 2013; Luzbetak, 2010; Leist, 2005). While these challenges apply to either gender, the aims of this study focused on women applicants.

Statement of the Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to understand the key influences on women's decisions to become presidents of rural community colleges. Given that so many community college presidents are retiring soon and that there is a concern around shrinking numbers of applicants to replace them, it was valuable to learn why women decided to become rural community college presidents. Since more than half of all community colleges in the US are rural community colleges, these retirements are potential opportunities for women to consider becoming presidents.

Research Questions

The central research question for the study was: What influenced women's decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges? The associated sub-questions were as follows:

1. How did women presidents realize becoming a community college president was a goal they want to pursue?
2. What previous experiences led women presidents who participated in this study to make their decisions to become rural community college presidents?
3. What role did gender play in the women president participant's decision-making process related to deciding to become a community college president?
4. What role did gender play in the rural community college experience for women president participants?
5. What role did other individuals play in women president participant's decision-making process related to becoming a community college president?

Definition of Terms

Community college refers to public two-year community colleges.

President is the chief executive officer of a public two-year community college.

Public community colleges are defined in this study using the Carnegie Classifications. The basic definition includes those institutions serving "...a full-year unduplicated credit headcount, where small is defined as less than 2,500; medium is defined as 2,500 through 7,500; and large as greater than 7,500." These basic institutions applied IPEDS data from 2013-14_(Basic Classification, 2010). Also, the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education [NCES], 2005) defined three levels of rural based on the 2005 census-bureau identified as a rural territory:

Rural, fringe is rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster. Rural, distant as rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster. Rural, remote is rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster.

For purposes of this study, the Carnegie Classifications of rural basic: small and medium was used to identify community colleges with less than 7,500 full-year unduplicated headcounts (Basic Classification, 2010). Also, the researcher used the NCES (2005) definition of a rural territory to include community colleges categorized into the Carnegie Classifications of rural distant and rural remote.

Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative study involved interviewing current women community college presidents who had served at least two years as a president at a rural community college in the western US. For convenience, the researcher used purposeful homogeneous criterion sampling by choosing 10 to 15 participants.

Potential Limitations

The researcher limited the geographic area to rural community colleges in the western US. The study design included only rural community colleges. Findings are not generalizable on a national level but will be informative and add to existing literature on rural women community college presidents.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the key factors which women perceived as influencing their decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges. The focus was on women's reflections on their decisions and their cultural and historical experiences that

influenced those decisions. These focused perspectives will help identify and inform others about what influenced women's decisions to lead in presidential positions at rural community colleges. Using a social constructivist worldview, the aims of the study concentrated on participants' subjective meaning of their situations and the factors that helped lead them there.

Examining why women made the decision to serve as presidents of rural community colleges, and the complexities they faced, may aid in informing other women, rural community college boards, and rural communities who are looking to attract qualified presidential candidates. Through the lenses of these women's experiences, future women leaders may gain a better understanding of why some women decided to pursue presidential positions at rural community colleges. Exploring the drivers behind these women's decisions led to an understanding of gender issues for these women. The development of the phenomenon emerged through differing views from different lenses.

The researcher anticipated that the results might provide information to rural community colleges as to how to attract a broader diversity of applicants internally and externally. Rural community colleges are likely to have difficulty attracting applicants due to their isolation, lower salaries, and lack of resources (Leist, 2005; Eddy, 2007). The results of this study may add to existing literature related to female community college presidents, rural female community college presidents, and rural female community college presidents in the western US.

Researcher's Perspective

During my 30-year career at rural community colleges, I served in several administrative positions. I worked at two rural community colleges in vice presidential positions and am now serving as a president at a third rural community college. I was interested in learning more about what led other women to decide to lead rural community colleges. I was interested in learning

whether the decision was intentional or unintentional and why women decided to lead a rural community college in the western region of the US. I selected rural community colleges because I have been an administrator at rural community colleges and am comfortable in rural communities. I realized I wanted to become a community college president after I became a vice president of student services and three presidents, along with several peers, suggested to me that I pursue a presidency. Previous experiences as a vice president at two different institutions and the pursuit of a doctoral degree in higher education leadership led me to this decision. Gender played a role in my decision-making process because being a mother was my number one priority. I waited until my children were in high school to pursue my doctoral degree and a presidency.

Most of my upbringing was in rural communities except when I was very young. I have a passion for people residing in rural areas and the sense of belonging with what is found there. I have found challenges as a female leader in rural communities where leaders have usually been men. In the beginning, I also found it difficult to break the glass ceiling, but as the first woman president at my current community college, people have become more accepting and supportive. Because of the support of my family and friends and some outstanding mentors, I have had strong support in each leadership decision along my path. I consistently took on new responsibilities and challenging assignments to learn more about serving students. I still have a passion for learning and a commitment to serve students. It is essential each day to know I have made a difference.

According to a peer-reviewed research paper regarding rural community college leadership development and the AACC competencies, there is a pending leadership gap caused by retiring community college presidents and a seeming lack of individuals interested in

pursuing presidencies, particularly at rural community colleges (AACC, 2005; Eddy & Drake, 2008). Reflecting on my background and career, which has culminated in becoming a rural community college president in the western US, I wondered how other women made this similar decision. I wanted to understand more about why women decided to pursue rural community college presidencies and what influenced that decision. When interviewing for my current presidential position, I was the only female semi-finalist out of eight semi-finalist candidates. I am the first female president in the 56-year history of the rural community college in which I serve. I am a first-generation college student in my family. I grew up in rural Oregon. I have enjoyed, valued living, and raising my children in rural communities. My goal is to be a positive role model for other women seeking leadership positions at rural community colleges.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains a review of literature relevant to the proposed research. Several key themes emerged from the review: a brief history of community colleges, leadership and gender, rural perspectives, and career pathways. A summary of the themes is provided at the end of this chapter.

Brief History of Community Colleges

Because of changing American culture, motivated by the populations' increasing attendance of high school, community colleges sprang up all over the US (Stich, 2008; Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, & Suppiger, 1994). In the 1800s, rural communities in America became less remote than they once were because railroads created greater access for people getting to key locations. The 1862 Morrill Act increased public access to higher education and funded the establishment of land-grant universities. In 1890, the Act required state institutions to accept minorities or provide separate colleges to avoid loss of federal funding (Witt et al., 1994).

By the mid to late 1800s, young women started to attend college to become teachers and educated ladies or wives (Stich, 2008). Through legislation such as the Morrill Act (1862), Congress and the states established community colleges to serve more people. In 1901, Joliet Junior College was the first in the US (Witt et al., 1994; Coley, 2000). In the early 1900s, the culture reflected the "great man" theory, and it was customary that white men of privilege led and attended these colleges (Eddy, 2007; Winship & Amey, 1992).

In the 1920s, junior colleges experienced increased enrollment growth, and this growth continued through the depression. Under Roosevelt's New Deal, many community colleges began and operated from high schools. These institutions typically constructed the coursework to

match university offerings so that students could transfer after completing. In 1944, Congress enacted the G.I. Bill and funding started to help veterans, mostly men, in attending colleges. In 1947, the Truman commission shaped the idea that community colleges were to provide a college education for local populations. Truman did this by devising a comprehensive curriculum, focusing on civic duties that included these colleges as a center for cultural activities in the community, and by offering courses at a minimal cost (Stich, 2008; Witt et al., 1994).

Through technical assistance provided by the U. S. Office of Education, community college numbers grew in the 1960s (Witt et al., 1994). Female students accounted for around half of US student enrollment; however, faculty and leadership positions remained male-dominated (Witt et al., 1994). Junior colleges had touted that they were the democratic colleges that served all people, but in the 1960s, the women's movement challenged that claim (Rossi, 1976). In 1972, Title IX of the Federal Education Act added rules that prohibited sex discrimination based on education and activities (Rossi, 1976, p. 41). During this same period, minority and veterans' groups became active and were advocating for inclusion. Congress amended the federal Civil Rights of 1964 Act to disallow discrimination based on race or gender at educational institutions; based on a presidential executive order to promote equal opportunity, colleges and universities adopted affirmative action to encourage enrollment and the advancement and hiring of minorities and women (Bonpua, 1973). Witt et al. (1994) acknowledged that the women's movement contributed during this same period and that feminists targeted higher education. Feminists noted that white males still predominantly operated the people's colleges. At the same time, colleges created campus women's centers to support women's needs throughout the US.

In 1973, the Eileen Rossi founded the American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges (AAWCJC) as a council under the American Association of Community and

Junior Colleges (AACJC). Within two years, the AAWCJC grew to be the biggest AACJC council with 700 members (Witt et al., 1994). Rossi (1976) pointed out that at the peak of public community college enrollments in 1975, only eight women led public community colleges in the US.

The baby boomers passed through the college pipeline in the mid-1970s causing a decrease in student enrollments; thereafter, community colleges focused on increasing enrollment by bolstering academic, student, transfer, and community services (Witt et al., 1994). Because the US still had many service personnel overseas, in 1971, the AAJC developed a program called the service-members opportunity colleges (SOC) to help service men and women earn degrees. By 1985, community college enrollments had grown substantially (Witt et al., 1994).

In the fall of 1980, during a recession, enrollments at two-year colleges once again increased as students chose lower tuition over the higher costs at four-year colleges and universities. However, by 1983, enrollments dipped to 1978 levels and did not recover until the late 1980s. Community colleges reached out to increase their part-time enrollments through public media, local high schools, correctional institutions, and senior citizen centers (Witt et al., 1994). In 1990, enrollments once again surged, providing more evidence that college enrollments are cyclical and tied tightly and inversely with economic conditions. When the economy is strong, enrollments are lower. When the economy is struggling, enrollments typically increase (Chen, 2016).

Leadership and Gender

In the 1970s and 1980s, the AAWCC and the National Institute for Leadership Development (NILD) focused on the equity in the employment of women in community colleges

and assisted in increasing the number of female administrators (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). In a descriptive study, Buddemeier (1998) used secondary data from a nationwide survey to demonstrate that the number of women leading community colleges had increased to nearly one in five. According to NCES (Snyder & Tan, 2004), women filled 29% of presidencies at community colleges. Furthermore, the NCES indicated that over the period between 1997 and 2004, the number of women attaining community college presidencies grew but remained far below the number of men.

According to AACC's (2012) nation-wide survey, women led 28% of community colleges; however, there was a slower rate of growth for women at the presidential level since 2004. In their research regarding gendered leadership, Eddy and Cox (2008) purported that those holding leadership positions at the "people's colleges" did not reflect the demographics of the critical mass enrolled at community colleges. The smaller percentage of women versus men has remained steady over time with women hovering at about 28 to 29% of community college presidents (AACC, 2012; Snyder & Tan, 2004; ACE, 2007). Kellerman and Rhode (2007) confirmed that women continued to face gender stereotypes, bias, and inequality as well as other challenges such as inflexible workplace structures and inadequate public policies. Furthermore, even after "almost half of a century of equal opportunity legislation, women's opportunities for leadership are anything but equal." (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p.1).

Eddy and Cox's (2008) studied six female presidents' life experiences in leading community colleges and found that organizational construction still reflected male norms of hierarchical structure. They affirmed that these institutions rewarded women for masculine types of behaviors and structures as they rose to presidential positions. Despite community colleges claims of being democratic institutions, these colleges were still gendered institutions. Acker

(1990) created the term gendered organization(s) to include the disembodied worker who reflects a man's focus on a career while a woman looks out for him (p. 149). Masculine-associated leadership characteristics such as dominance, authority, hierarchy, and assertiveness left women in a double bind of having to exhibit masculine traits to be seen as capable leaders (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Eddy, 2010). Eddy and Cox found "Frame-breaking changes to these norms are required to create a gender-neutral institution." (p.77).

Community colleges were a fitting place for women to establish a career because of the flexibility of family obligations and work. Townsend and Twombly (2007) discovered mixed information about the behavior of men and women on campus. They found that women more than men were more prone to proactively prompt gendered practices at community colleges. Townsend and Twombly go further to state that the public and researchers have viewed community colleges as gendered institutions but could stand to serve women better. These authors purported that the apparent equity at community colleges appears as more accidental rather intentionally influenced by community college leaders.

In contrast to theories related to male domination, Rosener (1990) studied the ways women influence and emphasized that a second generation of women can advance into leadership positions by adopting relationship building and socialization skills. These authors argued that creating positive working environments are at the heart of women's leadership styles. Like Rosener, Helgeson (1995) conceptualized "a web of inclusion" which leaders can create if they structure organizations in ways that mirror how individuals do their work. Helgeson's web of inclusion organization has an advantage in responding to complex changes. Helgeson described how women developed structures that were open and inclusive, integrated, organic, and circular. These structures form webs of inclusion because the women focused on integrating

good relationships rather than hierarchical positioning. Bornstein (2007) stated that in today's quick-moving, competitive worldwide economy, institutions must be able to move fast and flexibly while also being innovative and entrepreneurial. She claimed these characteristics depend on a collaborative and inclusive leadership style that she believed were qualities that women bring to the table.

Bornstein (2007) also found that “women were judged by the actions of women leaders who came before them and against male norms of the organization making it challenging to be authentic in their leadership.” (Eddy & Cox, 2008, p. 75). Bornstein (2007) pointed out “the first female president at any institution has been critically examined by both internal and external audiences, particularly early in her presidency.” (p. 21). Eddy and Cox (2008) and Krull (2011) documented that organizational tensions made women feel compelled to lead in traditional top-down ways; these tensions were barriers for women who sought successful leadership careers. In addition, there were pressures for women to balance work and life; for example, women had fears of failing as mothers and wives while attempting to succeed in their careers.

In a qualitative study, Krull (2011) uncovered some impacts on 14 female community college presidents as they rose to a position as president. The themes from this study included the “influences to the presidency, determination, and perseverance, and a sense of progress and success, and advice for future women leaders.” (p. ii). Krull found three main factors influencing female presidents as they rose to leadership positions: the presence of a colleague or mentor who encouraged or supported their advancement into leadership; a willingness to take on additional responsibilities and roles; and an understanding of their potential and motivation to lead an institution.

Cox (2008) studied influences on women's decisions to seek upper-level leadership positions at four-year educational organizations. Cox found that "self-efficacy influenced their effort, persistence, and choices of responsibility." (p.10) and women believed they had the skills to do the job. Similar to Krull (2011), Cox found women's willingness to take on additional responsibilities as a key.

Powers (2005) used mixed-methods to study women's leadership styles. Powers maintained that women motivated to become presidential leaders at community colleges should be multitasking visionaries and motivators who inspire others to achieve institutional goals. Powers also found that colleges promoted the majority of women from inside of education, including 64% from other institutions, and 11% from inside the current institution. In a national study, Amey, VanDerLinden, and Brown (2002) reported similar patterns of promotion for women that led to higher numbers of women versus men who move into leadership positions from inside their institutions. Amey et al. (2002) identified women's leadership styles, effectiveness, career paths, and length of time to degree, but did not specifically explore why women decided to become presidents.

Rural Story Framework

Eddy (2007) pointed out rural community colleges, as defined by AACC, comprise nearly 60% of all community colleges in the nation. In a qualitative study, Leist (2005) compared the "professional qualities of 15 exemplary rural community college presidents" to the advertisements for their jobs. (p. 18). Leist pointed out rural community college presidents had unique characteristics when compared to urban and suburban counterparts. Leist identified the "themes of mission, location, culture, and constituencies" as having influence on rural community colleges. (p. 200). Leist (2005) also indicated that although there existed a common

set of qualities of expertise that a community college president needed to have, rural community college presidents were unique. He stated that individuals who decided to become college president at a rural community college should understand the unique challenges they will face when leading in a rural area. Leist identified "...geography, politics, and culture as unique demands placed on rural community college presidents." (p. 168). He described the unique demands as the reality and sense of geographic isolation, understanding rural politics, visibility, and embracing the culture in a rural setting. Another challenge identified in his study was the funding-staff gap that led to less capacity and more generalists.

Wallin's (2003) report from an AACC session on "Rural Roundtable Report of Community College Leadership" indicated that presidents' comprehension of the mission of the community college and capacity to implement it, was one of the top five leadership characteristics. Also, it is imperative that strong advocate across federal, state, and local governmental levels, and with college charitable foundations. Overall, a good leader should possess planning and budgeting, managerial, and leadership skills. Moreover, presidents who are an active partner with K-12 schools, four-year universities, businesses, industries, and community organizations made a difference. Finally, participants also mentioned that strong interpersonal skills were essential as well as being nimble and making quick changes in response to local community needs.

Wallin (2003) agreed with Leist (2005) that a special set of traits and characteristics were necessary for presidents to lead a rural community college; leadership in these colleges requires them to engage, respect, and embrace local citizens and culture. Because these colleges are rural and often isolated, colleges had a different history and culture than urban and metropolitan colleges offering the same education (Leist, 2005; Wallin, 2003). Similar to Leist and Wallin,

Gillett-Karam (1995) developed descriptors for rural communities that included low income-high levels of poverty, low total populations, low educational levels of residents, sluggish job growth and high percentages of unemployment and illiteracy (p. 43). Also, Gillett-Karam agreed with these other authors that rural community college leaders often encounter different challenges than do urban and suburban leaders.

Eddy and Drake's (2008) work was part of a larger study with other researchers who were studying the roles of community college presidents. The research question was "how rural community college presidents construct their leadership given their rural locals." (p. 272). The authors found that rural presidents were highly visible with little anonymity; their cooperation and relationships within the community were important, and their networking opportunities were minimal. Eddy & Drake (2008) concluded that rural community college leaders must find a fit between themselves and the institutions in which they work and it is difficult to locate individuals to lead in rural and isolated settings. Eddy (2007) coined the idea of "grocery store politics" which is consistent with research findings that rural community college presidents are always in the spotlight in their community and many exchanges with local constituents happen in the grocery store and other casual, incidental contacts.

Bigelow (2011) used a grounded theory approach centered on developing a theory for "how presidents at the intersection of tribal and community colleges and their rural areas come to understand economic development and how they act on that understanding." (p. 8). Bigelow interviewed eight presidents of rural and tribal community colleges, and found that economic development is interdependent with the responsibilities of rural community college presidents. Like Leist (2005), Bigelow's findings supported the importance of fit between the president and the rural community college (p. 157).

Isolation, rural politics, and visibility challenges. Leist (2005) contended that rural community colleges are isolated from major population bases. This can be challenging for new presidents who are unfamiliar with the lack of shopping, and cultural and religious diversity found in more populated areas. Leist (2005) and Bigelow (2011) declared that rural communities many times see their community college as the lifeblood of the community as well as the cultural center because of the isolated locations.

Leist (2005) and Bigelow (2011) also claimed that living in rural areas can be challenging for community college presidents due to increased time demands on them as compared to those in urban or even suburban areas. Leist pointed out that these time demands on rural community college presidents occur because they may need to travel some distance to airports, legislative sessions, state meetings, and professional development opportunities. Travel in remote geographic locations may occur across expansive service district areas and take a large amount of time.

Morelli (2002) studied promotion in rural regions of academic, business, and community, and found that rural Colorado community colleges faced challenges that were deeper than urban community colleges. Similar to Leist (2005) and Wallin (2003), Morelli's findings supported how issues were "exacerbated by limited resources, geographic isolation, and a static economy." (p. 1). Morelli went on to mention the importance of solid relationships with local, regional, state, and federal agencies, businesses, educational institutions, and local constituents. In 1993, Colorado formed the Colorado Rural Development Council (CRDC) board that meets quarterly to address rural development issues. In 2001, the Colorado Community College System formed the Rural New Economy Initiative (RNEI) to assist with rural community college professional development and training initiatives.

In comparison to urban or suburban institutions that have many activities and outlets in their communities, rural communities have limited activities and events available to their constituents. Leist (2005) stated that community involvement is an essential condition of employment for rural community college presidents. A president must embrace and respect the local values and immerse oneself in it to be successful. Leist emphasized the result of not attending local events and engaging in the community could be an unsuccessful presidency.

Key themes that emerged in Eddy's (2007) study concerned the visibility of rural presidents when out in the community; that is, there should be no running to the grocery store in sweats and tennis shoes because everyone in the community knows the president and expects them to represent the college at all times. Other results suggested that presidents are on the job all the time representing their colleges and communities and that leading at a rural community college is different than in more populous areas (Bigelow, 2011; Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2005). Eddy (2007) described "leading in a rural community truly lives out the cliché of being a big fish in a small pond." (p. 288), and that several presidents interviewed mentioned trips to the grocery store as providing opportunities to interact with community constituents. In rural communities, where fewer people live, a president is recognizable at all times. Leist (2005) argued most people living in rural communities know the president of their local community college, and in this way, rural community colleges may be different from urban or metropolitan presidencies where the president can many times blend in with the crowd.

Importance of strong relationships. Switzer (2006) stated community college presidents require a solid connection and engagement with the public in rural communities where relationships are critical. Eddy (2007) emphasized that building formal and informal relationships was a key element and that communication methods were particularly important

and needed to be effective for presidents to succeed. Given the necessity of cooperation, these presidents had to spend substantial time forming relationships and fostering associations in the community (Bigelow, 2011; Eddy, 2007; Wallin, 2003). As consistent with these studies, Kools (2010) found that for rural presidents “the most common theme was that leaders are required to have greater interpersonal skills to support a more hands-on leadership role.” (p. 119). In contrast to the notion that a need to form local relationships is a negative for attracting new presidents to rural community colleges, Bigelow (2011) purported that colleges may use this need for build relationships as a positive marketing strategy.

Bigelow (2011) and Eddy (2007) stated that connectivity and relationships in rural communities may drive how much support there is for a local community college. This support included funding for capital campaigns and scholarships, ability to pass bonds, and business and industry support in the form of equipment, supplies, and services. Leaders of rural community colleges need to be highly informed and actively engaged in the distinct brand of politics in the local, state, and regional economic agencies to move their institutions forward (Eddy, 2007; Bigelow, 2011; Leist, 2005; Wallin, 2003). Furthermore, Eddy found rural community college leaders need to be highly visible on campus and with students and have the skills to communicate.

Poverty, funding gap, and employment challenges. There are resource issues that continue to plague rural community colleges and require them to act. Rural regions are often areas of high poverty and high unemployment (Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2005). In response, leaders must “lead more complex 21st Century, changing, community colleges while meeting educational, community, and economic demands.” (Eddy, 2007, p. 288). Morelli (2002)

purported that leadership at rural community colleges is challenging because of the scarce resources, geographic isolation, and flattened economies.

Leist (2005) indicated many counties that have an outmigration of population within rural areas had experienced significant demographic changes; in most of these, there has been an increase in the number of people over the age of 65. Furthermore, the demographic shifts created recruiting challenges for rural colleges when trying to maintain their annual student enrollments. Leist mentioned these issues make it difficult to attract faculty and staff outside of the local area to positions and can lead to an unsophisticated board of trustees.

Leist (2005) performed a case study concerning how closely the “professional qualities of exemplary rural community college presidents mirrored the job advertisements” used to hire them (p. 18). Examination of these advertisements indicated that rural community colleges differed from urban community colleges as to the leadership skills that they required for candidates. Leist proposed that the job descriptions for presidents of rural colleges should reflect their rural way of life. Luzbetak (2010) agreed with Leist that external candidates would be more difficult to secure as many people are unwilling to relocate to rural communities where their values and beliefs may be different. Similarly, Eddy (2007) posited the high rate of senior-level leadership turnover creates a challenge for rural community colleges. Internal succession planning will become more critical, and the boards and top administrators must support the succession plan so that institutions can withstand their internal political climates (Luzbetak, 2010; Sherbini, 2012). Pennington et al. (2006) studied community colleges in rural Kansas, and they found that hiring qualified people was a common challenge for rural community colleges.

Kools (2010) focused on comparing the opinions of small, single-campus presidents from rural community colleges to those from large, multi-campus urban colleges (p. 124). The study

included the president's perceptions of competencies, characteristics, and professional skills. Similar to other studies described above, Kools found that presidents viewed "community college advocacy and resource management skills to be of greater importance" for rural leaders than for urban leaders (p. 115). The focus of much of this engagement involved securing funding. Bigelow (2011) and Leist (2005) concluded that rural communities look to their local community colleges for answers for economic development and prosperity because community revitalization depends on a trained workforce.

Luzbetak (2010) used mixed-methods to study community college succession planning with a focus on the next generation of women leaders. She found that women were less likely to agree that their community colleges viewed women as future leaders and that there was "a system in place to identify internal candidates for moving into more senior level administrative roles." (p. 87). Luzbetak viewed this as a critical issue to address. Similar to Luzbetak, Sherbini (2012) used mixed-methods "to examine institution-based leadership development programs in rural community colleges in Illinois..." (p. 54). The results indicated that there is no clear support to suggest that rural colleges are making progress in institutionalizing formalized leadership development programs. (p. vi).

Fit and making a difference. The role of rural community college presidents is different from urban and metropolitan presidents (Bigelow, 2011; Leist, 2005). Leist purported that rural community college presidents' leadership styles must be compatible with their local boards and colleges. Furthermore, some leadership styles may fit better with rural presidencies. In rural community college environments, the community may expect to visit with their president and get to know them. Bigelow (2011) agreed that a leadership style that includes relationship building

to garner economic development and support might be imperative for rural community college leaders.

Leist (2005) found that sometimes leaders use rural community colleges as a stepping-stone to a more prestigious presidency. This stepping stone mindset can be a challenge for the president to be successful. Presidents regularly stated that having rural roots was a big plus to appreciate the local citizen's allegiance and high regard for their community college and its culture (Leist, 2005).

Career Pathways to the Presidency

A great deal of attention has focused on career pathways to the presidency. Previous studies indicated that it was standard for aspiring presidents to matriculate through the chief academic administrator pathway (Amey et al., 2002; Eddy, 2004). Amey et al. (2002) examined the career pathways for upper-level administrators in community colleges. They reported more diversity in the career pathways than found in previous studies. Previously, rising to the presidency occurred through the chief academic officer post. However, the pathway has shifted to include chief student services officers and other executive level positions as well as other rapidly growing academic areas and administrative structures (Amey et al., 2002).

The pathway has changed and arriving at the presidency has become a serpentine, non-traditional pathway for many women, especially those who are not consciously choosing to rise to presidential level positions (Cox, 2008; Jaschik, 2007; Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Switzer, 2006; Thompson-Adams, 2012). Consequently, women arriving at presidencies through non-traditional career pathways came at a fruitful time because demand is outpacing the supply of potential presidents (Eddy, 2004; Eddy, 2012). Consistent with findings from Amey et al. (2002), Kuharski (2009) studied "career pathways and experiences of community college presidents" (p.

2) and found that a broader diversity of individuals from different backgrounds, knowledge, and leadership capabilities are pursuing college presidencies. Kuharski found that a wide array of previous experiences as well as an understanding of the complex role of the presidency was critical.

Cox (2008) investigated factors that influenced women's motivations to advance into upper-level administrative positions. Cox found that many senior administrative women were content in their current positions and did not desire to rise to the presidency. Many women stated it was fortuitous that they entered higher education and they did not plot their course to the presidency (Cox, 2008, p. 123). Cox's findings regarding career pathways were similar to those from other research (Jaschik, 2007; Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Switzer, 2006; Thompson-Adams, 2012).

Krull's (2011) study focused on the experiences of 14 Midwestern women in community college presidencies in leading their campuses. Krull examined participant's pathways to the presidency. Krull established that community college women leader's pathways to the presidency were unintentional. Some participants initially were not familiar with community colleges, but once they arrived, they never left. The results were consistent with other studies (Amey et al., 2002; Cox, 2008; Jaschik, 2007; Kuharski, 2009; Switzer, 2006; Thompson-Adams, 2012).

Similar to other studies, Thompson-Adams (2012) indicated that the pipeline to the presidency for the female Texas university presidents was not necessarily traditional through the faculty, department chair, and dean to provost pathway. The three university women in Thompson-Adam's study all followed different career pathways, and all stated that they did not have the aim of becoming a president. Vanhook-Morrissey (2003) studied five women's career

development as community college presidents and focused on understanding what influenced women's decisions to rise to the presidency. (p. 3). In this multiple-case study, the author found that socialization, informal female role models and mentors, self-efficacy, and succeeding at challenging new roles influenced the career development process. She also found that women's interests in becoming a president evolved as they moved up to more challenging positions.

Jaschik (2007) reported findings from a 2007 ACE report showing that provosts and chief academic officers like their jobs and do not necessarily aspire to become presidents; the report indicated that only 30% of academic officers were seeking promotion. Other results suggested that institutional board search committees may expect that top academic administrators do not possess the primary fundraising and decision-making skills necessary to develop into successful presidents (Hartley & Godin, 2009). Using the 2001 American College President Study (ACPS), Hartley & Godin (2009) described that trends in the pathway to the presidency were fluctuating. From the 2001 study, non-academic administrators who have risen to the presidency outpaced the promotion of chief academic administrator-provosts by 37% to 33%, respectively. In a subsequent 2006 ACPS study, the pattern of promotions appeared to reverse with 35% of chief academic administrator-provosts promoted at a pace exceeding non-academic administrators at 33%.

According to previous studies, moving to the presidency from positions other than academic affairs had not been a common or traditional pathway, but there had been a growing number of presidents rising up from student affairs and other non-traditional paths. Student affairs typically had a higher percentage of female employees within its ranks (Amey et al., 2002; Eddy, 2004) which was a likely contributing factor. Presidential selections made from

those on a non-traditional career path can contribute to the supply of candidates needed to meet demand (Eddy, 2004).

Amey et al. (2002) found that migrating across institutions rather than staying with one institution was characteristic of the career pathways of presidents. Five years was the average time spent in each position on the presidential career path. Over a third of presidents were previously employed at four-year universities, and 17% reported having public school leadership experience. From the 2006 ACPS study, Hartley and Godin (2009) found that 38% of community colleges hired first-time presidents internally from their current community colleges and the majority of schools hired presidents externally.

Switzer (2006) studied 15 women college presidents' journeys through the ranks. The focus of the study concerned the adaptations that women make to avoid the double-bind created by society's expectations of a leader's skills and socialized gender roles (p. 1). The women in Switzer's studies were from different educational sectors, but their varied experiences held common threads including that being female gave them some skill advantages. These skills advantages included "enhanced fundraising, administrative effectiveness, and work with their boards." (p. 3). Similar to Cox (2008), most women interviewed by Switzer indicated the complexity of balancing work and family.

Intentional vs. non-intentional pathways. In several studies, non-intentional pathways to the presidency were the standard (Cox, 2008; Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Switzer, 2006). Switzer (2006) focused on why women became college and university presidents and how they make their journeys. Switzer interviewed women college presidents and found that being president is complex, requiring unique levels of knowledge, work-life balance, and leadership. Several of the women interviewed began as successful faculty members and described their

journey not as a direct pathway, but as a circuitous route. These women were hard working and happy in their current positions with no intentions of seeking a presidency, but somewhere along the way they became interested in the bigger picture and networking with other people.

Consistent with Switzer's findings regarding the complexity of the position, Kuharski found that the faculty women felt shocked at the intellectual energy needed to perform at the executive level.

Kuharski (2009) studied the career pathway experiences of 14 female community college presidents and their values, beliefs, barriers, challenges, identified influences, mentors, and support systems that were in place along the way. Participants were from across the US; although, some presidents were from rural community colleges, these schools were not a focus of the study. The aim was to help "future women leaders gain a better understanding of how to achieve senior-level positions at community colleges." (p.1). Kuharski's result was similar to Switzer (2006), most of the participants (11 of 14) originated from diverse backgrounds that did not reflect the traditional pathways. The identified non-traditional pathways included business and industry, student affairs, marketing, fundraising, human resources, K-12, two- and four-year higher education institutions. Only three participants followed the traditional pathway in academics from faculty to a senior administrator.

The findings of Kuharski (2009) revealed that career pathways for women to become president might be changing. Three themes emerged from this study: "perspectives and philosophies based on core personal and professional values and beliefs; career barriers and challenges that pushed them further along rather than hindered them; and factors influenced them." (p. 120). Kuharski found that women were influenced by who they were, their careers were on track, and they allowed mentors to support them. The women shared that making a

difference was important to them; these women formed relationships effortlessly and honored those around them. Women in this study perceived that women created hope in rural communities. They took care of themselves physically and emotionally and worked hard to have a balanced home life. Kuharski noted a shift in how women are becoming community college presidents. The findings of this study may help explain how women are arriving at presidencies including how traditional pathways are changing to allow for broader diversity.

In a study similar to Kuharski (2009) and Switzer (2006), Krull (2011) examined women's career pathways and experiences. None of the 14 presidents interviewed began their careers with the intention of becoming an administrator or seeking a presidency. Participants in Krull's study described their route as accidental or "unintentional" (p. 56). Krull asserted many of the women admitted not knowing about community colleges before working in one. Krull discovered tangible experiences and "gut feelings" quoted as reasons for making decisions to become community college presidents (p. 94). Krull found the ability to "impact student's lives through learning, making a difference in colleagues' lives, and being able to effect the campus culture change seemed to provide the impetus for women to remain in the community college setting and to eventually seek a presidency." (p. 94). Participants in Kuharski's study all "shared one thing in common – what motivated them to become a community college president was to be in a position that could have an impact on the lives of students and others around them." (p. 126).

When exploring what factors influenced "women's decisions to pursue upper-level administrative positions in higher education," Cox (2008) found that women "did not set career goals even after entering education." (p. 123). The result was consistent with those found by Krull (2011) and Kuharski (2009). Cox's (2008) participants used language like serendipitous for their career paths and indicated that they just fell into their positions (p. 123). The women in

Cox's (2008) study were comfortable with their current career goals and felt fulfilled in their current positions.

In contrast to the qualitative studies described above, Powers (2005) performed a quantitative study concerning women community college presidents' paths to promotion and found that women serving in administration at community colleges tended to "strategically plan their career trajectory." (p. 48): Eighty-one percent of the participants had an intentional goal of becoming community college presidents. Seventy-five percent of female community college presidents in Power's (2005) study were "insiders" who had previously worked at another institution (64%) or in their current institution (11%) before their presidency. One hundred percent had worked as administrators before becoming community college presidents. In direct contrast to Powers (2005), in a qualitative study of senior-level administrators, Cox's (2008) found that even after participants entered higher education, they did not set career goals to become community college presidents. The focus for these women was on making an impactful difference, and many of these women discovered they could make a difference in their current positions; therefore, they did not actively seek promotion.

Degrees. Krull (2011) and Kuharski (2009) stated that many of the women in their studies believed achieving a doctorate provided more opportunities for advancement into a presidency. Krull (2011) mentioned the need for women leaders to have doctoral degrees and participate in internal and external leadership-development programs. Leadership programs helped these women to build their knowledge and awareness of the campus culture. From 1985 to 2000, the total percentage of female administrators who completed doctoral degrees remained at about 87% (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002). For public two-year colleges, Hartley & Godin (2009) found that 75% of first-time presidents' degrees are predominantly in the field of

education or higher education, remarkably higher than other disciplines. Kuharski (2009) discovered that of the 14 participants interviewed, some began their professional career in education while others started in business and industry after they obtained their bachelor's degree. The master's degree was the entry point for many participants. Many of the women went on to complete their doctoral degrees. Two women did not pursue a doctoral degree, but someone recognized their leadership skills and experiences had groomed them for the leadership position.

Succession planning. Some community colleges are investing in succession planning and professional development programs. Violino (2012) emphasized that community colleges “face the prospect of a leadership gap as baby boomers retire.” (p. 1). Eddy (2004) suggested the importance of training of new leaders to work in the administrative environment of community colleges. Administrators sometimes encounter external pressures for which they must be prepared; the author asserted that new leaders would need specialized training to be successful. Amey et al. (2002) mentioned that college leaders had not given much thought as to how administrative roles may evolve and what kinds of professional development are appropriate for supporting alternative pathways for career development. They suggested that with the support of the institution, more women would have opportunities to grow into senior-level positions.

Whether or not women decided to become community college presidents was somewhat related to whether they had internal and external leadership development opportunities (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; Krull, 2011; Powers, 2005). Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) encouraged institutions to review their policies and procedures as related to professional development. Determining ways to engage more individuals in professional development and training opportunities could enlarge the pool of applicants for high-level administrative jobs (Luzbetak,

2010; Violino, 2012; Wallin, Cameron, & Sharples, 2005). Wallin et al. (2005) emphasized that progressive colleges invest in succession planning for institutional sustainability (p. 1).

Luzbetak (2010) used mixed-methods to study community college succession planning and discover ways to prepare the next wave of women rural community college leaders. The author focused on practices consistent with transformational leadership theory. She indicated that over time succession planning might have a positive impact and create larger and richer applicant pools. According to Luzbetak (2010), succession plans “must have support from senior administration, the president, and the board to be effective.” (p. 108). Effective and successful succession occurs by cultivating future leaders over time (p. 41). Violino (2012) and Eddy (2010) reinforced Luzbetak’s findings on succession planning.

Mentors. Coughlin, Wingard, and Hollihan (2005) examined in their book *Enlightened Power*, how it is that “women are transforming the practice of leadership” and that “mentoring is one of the oldest forms for transferring knowledge.” (p. 250). Researchers have stressed that mentoring is one of the most important influences on women’s career development and help-seeking leadership positions (Ballentine, 2000; Coughlin et al., 2005; Cox, 2008; Getskow, 1996; Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Luzbetak, 2010; Moore-Brown, 2006; Powers, 2005; Rabey, 2011; Thompson-Adams, 2012). In many of the articles and dissertations, researchers suggested that key people who provided mentoring were impactful for women who moved into leadership roles.

Throughout the studies, there were several definitions of a mentor. These researchers most frequently described a mentor as an individual who cares, encourages, and influences or supports another individual. In contrast, a few presidents spoke of negative mentors from whom they learned how not to lead (Krull, 2011; Powers, 2005). Many presidents claimed mentors became important early in their careers and believed that mentors encouraged and supported

them by providing personal and professional development opportunities, groomed them for the position, and put them on the path to their presidency (Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Moore-Brown, 2006). In multiple studies, presidents discussed colleagues and mentors who encouraged them to seek an additional degree and apply for a position with increased responsibilities. Some had a mentor who created a leadership opportunity for them and who modeled leadership behaviors (Brown, 2005; Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Shults, 2001).

Through interviews of college presidents, Kuharski (2009) discovered that some participants recounted their experiences of having support or mentoring from people who guided them along their career path and provided them with opportunities to learn. Kuharski's participants discovered that through mentoring support, they enhanced their leadership abilities by receiving feedback and guidance from mentors. Some of the ways mentors helped were that the mentors encouraged them to grow into the next position (p. 90). Benefits of mentoring programs included increased confidence; opportunities to advance careers and learn new skills; availability of personal support and trusted assistance; and regular feedback (Cox, 2008; Kuharski, 2009). Kuharski (2009) found that many times these individuals were not formal mentors but instead people with whom participants had formed a bond; some women mentioned parents or doctoral advisors as informal mentors, and others mentioned college presidents who told them they could do the job. Similar to Kuharski (2009), Luzbetak (2010) found that mentoring was critical in training women as future campus leaders and for supporting those who sought to move into new or higher-level positions.

For women, it was very critical to develop a set of contacts, to have the opportunity to learn new skills, and to have formal mentoring programs (Eddy, 2004; Powers, 2005). Kuharski (2009) found that women without formal networks were sometimes unable to reach the upper-

level positions because promotions at that level are often based on trust. Similar to Kuharski, Cox (2008) found that encouragement and emotional support from superiors were necessary. Some women stated that the most important factor in obtaining a presidency position was the presence of mentors. The participants described the mentors as someone who found women with talent and capability and encouraged these women to make a difference (Kuharski, 2009; Luzbetak, 2010). The women in Kuharski's study stated that they were not always aware of their abilities and talents until someone recognized and encouraged them.

Luzbetak (2010) found that there is a "powerful connection between mentoring and career mobility." (p. 115). Moreover, a formal mentoring program can contribute to individual's motivation to seek senior leadership positions. In a qualitative study exploring the experiences of three female university presidents in Texas, Thompson-Adams (2012) found that mentors played a key role for each of these women. Altogether, the results were similar to those of Kuharski (2009) and Luzbetak (2010).

Summary

The literature reviewed for this study provided a context for the study research. Previous researchers focused their efforts on college presidents' leadership styles, career pathways, and gendered leadership. Some researchers studied women community college presidents from the eastern and mid-western regions of the US and in Texas, but there were no results specific to women community college presidents in the western regions of the US. More studies existed concerning women presidents from four-year universities, but the researcher found no results specifically focused only on rural community college women presidents.

Among the results reviewed, it was clear there was a greater diversity of pathways on which women could ascend to a presidency. Most the presidents interviewed by researchers were

not intentionally on a path to obtain a president's position; although, Powers (2005) indicated some community college women presidents intentionally chose their paths. The researcher examined whether rural women presidents were intentional or unintentional making their decision to lead. Why women decided to move into a presidential position is an issue that is mostly absent from the literature, except for some results from Switzer (2006) research.

The research results in this literature review suggested that mentors served a significant role in the success of many women who became presidents at universities and community colleges. Mentors encouraged them, opened doors for them, guided and directed their careers, and gave them opportunities that contributed to their success. The importance of having a mentor in reaching the presidency was present in most of the journals and studies reviewed for this research. Asking women community college presidents to talk about the influence of others on their decision to become rural community college presidents was important to this study because there was minimal research in this area.

In reviewing studies of rural community colleges, researchers claimed that additional research to augment the understanding of overcoming the challenges that are unique to rural community colleges is needed (Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2005). Eddy (2007) found little research aimed to examine issues related to rural community college presidents; the author reported that most findings concerned presidents at four-year institutions. There was a scarcity of research concerning women presidents in the western region of the US, particularly concerning why women decided to become presidents of rural community colleges. The researcher found no specific studies that focused on what influenced women's decisions to become rural community college presidents in the western region of the US.

It was important to understand the meaning of the themes that emerged from the participants' perspectives. It was also important to add to the current findings on women community college presidents and particularly those regarding women presidents serving in rural community colleges. The results could be valuable to rural community college boards as they select new presidents. In addition, this research study could be important for succession planning for rural community colleges.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This chapter contains the description of the qualitative research design for this study. The researcher described the rationale and choice of method, explained the selection of the site and participants, and described how data were collected and analyzed. The researcher also included information about trustworthiness and reliability.

“Qualitative research has roots in anthropology, education, sociology, and clinical psychology and has a focus on a unique phenomenon.” (Merriam, 2002, p.3). The process for conducting qualitative research is inductive. It utilizes the researcher to gather data from participants in their life surroundings and explains the meaning of the data from the participant’s point of view (Cresswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This phenomenological study was about participant’s subjective perceptions and essences of shared experiences as expressed by participants (Glesne, 1999; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Moustakas (1994) described the researcher as the main mechanism for collecting and interpreting the data. It is central for qualitative researchers to be knowledgeable about their personal biases, through bracketing, before entering the phenomenological research (Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2009).

The central research question for this study was as follows:

What influenced women’s decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges?

The associated sub-questions are as follows:

1. How did women presidents realize becoming a community college president was a goal they wanted to pursue?

2. What previous experiences led women presidents who participated in this study make their decisions to become rural community college presidents?
3. What role did gender play in the women president participant's decision-making process related to deciding to become a community college president?
4. What role did gender play in the rural community college experience for women president participants?
5. What role did other individuals play in women president participant's decision-making process related to becoming a community college president?

Guiding interview questions were developed and asked of each participant in order to develop answers to the sub-questions. Each guiding question in Table 1 was mapped back to at least one sub-question to ensure all sub-questions were answered.

Table 1: *Research Question, Sub-questions and Guiding Questions*

<p>Research Questions: The central research question for the study was: What influenced women's decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges? The associated sub-questions were as follows:</p>	<p>Guiding Questions</p>
<p>1) How did women presidents realize becoming a community college president was a goal they want to pursue?</p>	<p>Please tell me about your academic background and your career path to the rural community college presidency. How do you believe your career history shaped your decision to become a rural community college president?</p> <p>When did you know you wanted to become a rural community college president? Describe how you knew.</p> <p>What were the most influential factors that led you to become a rural community college president?</p>
<p>2) What previous experiences led women presidents who participated in this study to make their decisions to become rural community college presidents?</p>	<p>How did gender play a role in your decision to become a rural community college president?</p> <p>If you had it to do over again, what would you do differently in making your decision to become a community college president?</p> <p>What do you think best prepared you to become a president at a rural community college?</p>
<p>3) What role did gender play in the women president participant's decision-making process related to deciding to become a community college president?</p>	<p>What role did gender play in your preparation to become a rural community college president?</p> <p>What advice would you give to a woman who desires to become a rural community college leader about their decision-making process?</p>
<p>4) What role did gender play in the rural community college experience for women president participants?</p>	<p>How did your pre-presidency experience prepare you most for deciding to become a rural community college president and why?</p> <p>What advice would you give to a woman who desires to become a rural community college leader about their decision-making process?</p>
<p>5) What role did other individuals play in women president participant's decision-making process related to becoming a community college president?</p>	<p>Please describe to what extent or how other individuals played into your decision-making process to become a rural community college president.</p>
<p>Open Question:</p>	<p>Is there anything else about your decision to become, or your decision-making experience in becoming, a rural community college female president that would be helpful for me to know in order to understand your perspective?</p>

Research Design and Rationale

The researcher proposed a richly descriptive IPA basic ideographic method for this study. In choosing IPA, the researcher learned how participants socially related with their world and what significance it had for them (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher approached the study through a lens of social constructivism. “Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things.” (Cresswell, 2009, p. 8). Social constructivism is a worldview theory of knowledge that pertains to social settings where people learn about each other by asking each other questions and interacting, thereby collaboratively creating a small culture (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Cresswell, 2007).

Conducting IPA research entails a comprehensive examination of the lived experiences of humans. “The founding of phenomenological inquiry is that experience should be examined in the way that it occurs, and in its own terms.” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). The goal of this study was to learn from participant’s point-of-view and language what influenced women to become presidents at rural community colleges by entering their world and standing in their shoes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). An IPA study was a good fit for this type of research.

The researcher believed that IPA was the appropriate approach so that data were gathered on the cultural, historical, and personal views of these women’s experiences. The researcher chose a basic IPA method of inquiry to concentrate on the essence and reality of women’s experiences. The participants’ interview responses concerning their perspectives brought the phenomenon to life. The researcher looked beyond the narrow view of only a few classifications to discover a diversity of views among participants. The researcher observed participant’s body language and earnestly listened to what participants had to say. This lens is a new perspective

that will add to the body of knowledge in the field; the researcher found no existing qualitative phenomenological research on what influenced women's decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges.

Utilizing the IPA basic ideographic approach, the researcher organized, analyzed, and synthesized the data drawing upon phenomenology and hermeneutics. This approach involved asking participants to return to their experiences. The purpose of returning to the experiences was to gain a structural description that reflects the essence of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher asked participants to use their words to share their views from their own perspectives (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher performed face-to-face video conference, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with an intentionally selected small sample size. From the participants' data, the researcher identified themes, patterns, and variances to make meaning of the women's experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The purpose of IPA was to obtain an exclusive perspective on the participant's experiences (Fade, 2004; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). IPA asserts that to make sense of the participant's personal beliefs, it involves careful interpretation by the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). Other researchers can easily replicate the study, and the methodology fits well with this type of research.

Participants and Site

This study involved 10 rural women community college presidents from the western region of the US. This homogeneous, small sample size was an encouraged practice in basic IPA ideographic research as it creates the opportunity "to examine convergence and divergence in some detail." (Fade, 2004; Smith et al., 2009, p.3). The researcher used the Carnegie Classification/IPEDS definitions of rural-small and-medium and NCES rural territory definition to obtain a list of rural colleges and then looked at the college website to determine the gender of

the president. The researcher initially selected 15 potential participants to e-mail letters to in case some could not participate. The face-to-face video conference interviews occurred in their presidential offices or a location of the participant's choice where they were comfortable.

The researcher created an initial list of prospective participants. The researcher e-mailed them the initial Invitation Letter (Appendix B) asking them to participate in the study. After participants responded, the researcher sent a demographic information sheet (Appendix C) and the consent to participate in an interview form (Appendix E) to the participants. The researcher did this to make it convenient to fill it out and return the forms. The researcher informed the potential participants of the additional time it might take them to review their transcript and analysis. The e-mail letter explained the potential need for a follow-up phone conversation to clarify details or ask additional questions that should last no longer than 30 minutes. The letter informed the participant of the nature of the study and that their participation in the study was voluntary and participants could withdraw at any time. The researcher kept a list of participants to track demographic information, geographic information, and other pertinent information throughout the process.

If there was no response to the first email, the researcher sent a follow-up e-mail letter to participants, and then a telephone call to their offices at the community colleges. Once the researcher received a confirmation from the participants, the researcher contacted the participant's office, or preferred number, to set up the initial face-to-face video conference interview. After the interview was set up, the researcher sent an e-mail confirming the date, time, and the telephone number where the researcher reached them. All other non-interview correspondence with the participants was by e-mail unless the researcher made other arrangements with the participants ahead of time. As suggested for IPA methodology, the

researcher allowed for the time between the scheduled interviews for transcription and member checking before moving to subsequent interviews.

Data Collection

Prior to beginning the video conference interview, the researcher disclosed researcher biases with each participant and let the participant know researcher's background. It was critical to let the participants know about the researcher's bias ahead of time because if not disclosed it could create bias and nullify the findings of the researcher (Cresswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher also reiterated that the initial face-to-face video conference interview would take 60 – 75 minutes and would be audio recorded.

“Qualitative research uses the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes.” (Cresswell, 2009, p. 37). The researcher used the open-ended questions to guide the interviews (Appendix H). The researcher did this using intentional prompts as a part of the semi-structured interview. The researcher allowed the interviewees to lead the discussions (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). For example, the first question allowed the participant to expand on a descriptive experience to encourage them to talk and become comfortable. The aim of the first question was to encourage participants to provide a summary of what they wanted to discuss and helped the researcher create a list of priorities.

The researcher documented the process by noting researcher reflections, researcher's initial and most prominent observations, and researcher's summary at the end of each interview. The researcher kept each transcript in a notebook. The researcher documented the work along the way to retain all the important facts, processes, and thoughts.

As a part of IPA, the researcher was fully immersed with the participants. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The researcher kept all information confidential to protect participants. The researcher did this by assigning pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. Three years after completion of the study, the researcher will erase the audio tapes, and destroy transcripts at the 3-year mark. The researcher kept track of all contacts with participants, forms, and papers in an organized notebook.

Data Analysis

To give structure to the data analysis, the researcher used a basic IPA idiographic approach to the analysis that is appropriate for small samples. This approach allowed the researcher to examine and write up an explanation of themes shared between a small number of cases (Smith et al., 2009). This basic approach was helpful in successfully understanding, ordering, examining, and integrating the data.

Step One: Reading and Re-reading

The researcher produced a written transcript of the initial audiotaped interview. The researcher listened to the audio recording, at least once, while first reading the transcript. The researcher then re-read the transcript while keeping the voice of the participant in mind. The researcher read the transcript several times while keeping the participant as the focus. Once the researcher had a sense of the data, prominent issues began to emerge (Fade, 2004).

The researcher sent the verbatim transcripts and thematic analysis to participants for them to review, edit, and return by e-mail. This process completed the member checking of the data and results. The researcher accepted all edits which increased the comfort level of the participants and the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 1999). Other procedures that increased trustworthiness in this study were the length of time spent with each participant during the initial

in-depth interview, a keen sense of participant's reactions during the interview, and the researcher's consistent awareness of personal bias (Glesne, 1999).

Step Two: Initial Noting

This step involved exploratory commenting and required inordinate attention to detail. The researcher kept an open mind and took ample time here while growing familiar with the transcript. The goal was "to begin to identify specific ways by which the participant talked about, understood, and thought about an issue." (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). This step included interpretative noting to help understand the how and why the participant made these statements. Three areas of focus were the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments. De-contextualization was a strategy used to understand the meaning of the participant's words. The researcher created a document with wide margins on the right of the document to detail initial comments, and a small margin on the left to identify emerging themes.

Step Three: Developing Emergent Themes

Developing a set of themes that emerged from the exploratory comments involved time and required focus on the separate identifiable pieces of data (Smith et al., 2009). This process demonstrated one part of the hermeneutic circle where the initial interview became a collection of parts in the full analysis and then became a new part of a whole in a synergistic process to reach the final analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

This was an important part of the process to identify significant statements whether they are sentences, paragraphs, passages, or quotes. These chunks of data helped the researcher understand the experience of the participant's phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007). Again, the researcher read the transcript several times to get a feel for the participant's experience and looked for repeated words or phrases. The researcher used QSR International's NVivo to code,

store, and organize the data. The researcher clustered the meaning units and applied definitions to the major core themes.

The researcher performed phenomenological data reduction by evaluating each transcript many times for descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments and lining out accounts that fail to answer the research questions, or are unclear, repetitive or that overlap. Evaluating each transcript many times is a redundant procedure of coming back to the experience to determine its real meaning (Merriam, 2002). Remaining statements became the meaning units of the experience. “IPA is usually concerned with experience which is of particular moment or significance to the person.” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 33).

Step Four: Searching for Connections across Emerging Themes

This process looked at charting out interconnectedness and relationships between exploratory notes and focused on identified masses of data. This involved abstraction where one begins to identify potential super-ordinate themes by putting similar data together and developing new grouping names (Fade, 2004) as well as counting the frequency with which data appears. This step also identified data that are outlier information because it is different from anything else mentioned. The researcher kept a notebook regarding the strategies used during the analysis process. The researcher created an individual written representation of each participant’s emergent themes.

Reliability

The researcher checked the exploratory comments and the themes against the participant’s transcripts to ensure the participants articulated these clearly, and that the researcher’s interpretation was congruent with participant’s responses. Lastly, the researcher checked to be sure nothing of significance was omitted. The researcher also used check coding with the help of a peer examiner to reduce any bias potential and to increase reliability. This

increased the reliability because the peer examiner checked the researcher's codes for the same blocks of data and assisted in culling out any procedural researcher bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Step Five: Moving to the Next Participant

The researcher moved to the next participant and worked to bracket the previous analysis. The researcher systematically repeated steps one through four listed above for each interview and expected to see new themes arise with each analysis. When new themes emerged, it was important to look back at other transcripts to see if these themes were present (Fade, 2004).

Step Six: Looking for Patterns across Participants

In qualitative research, researchers refer to attempts to find for patterns and themes as horizontalization. Researchers perform this by laying out the data and treating all statements and words from the transcript as having equal value, then merging them together looking for linkages and emergent themes (Cresswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002). This process helps to reveal patterns and develop super-ordinate themes and to keep track of the differences between participants (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher then wrote each super-ordinate theme as a narrative description (Fade, 2004). The researcher used imaginative variation to perceive how the experience occurred by studying differing frames of reference and varying perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). In this step, the researcher again thought about the setting and environment in which the participants' experienced the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007) and discovered if a new matter became known (Fade, 2004). The researcher created a graphic representation of the emergent themes.

Step Seven: Construction of a Detailed Comprehensible Narrative Description

In this step, the researcher merged the textural and structural narratives or the “what” and “how” for each participant into a shared view and presented results in a full comprehensible narrative account. The researcher wrote the narrative systematically and persuasively so the reader could make sense of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). To make sense of a phenomenon, one must know the situation at hand for the phenomenon to occur (Moustakas, 1994). This identified what the underlying meanings of participants’ statements were and was critical to the process of IPA. This section included extractions from participants’ transcripts and a detailed analysis of the text (Smith et al., 2009).

Summary/Discussion

Using an IPA basic ideographic method provided information directly from 10 women community college presidents who have experienced this decision-making process. Using this study design, the researcher could express the participants’ views from their real-life lens. Exploring the drivers behind these women’s decisions to lead at rural community colleges assisted in better understanding the influence of gender on women deciding to lead.

Others may use the results from the study, both the descriptive and subjective data, to understand how to attract, encourage, prepare, and train future women leaders of community colleges. Through the lens of these women’s decisions, interested stakeholders may gain a better understanding as to why some women decide to lead at rural community colleges. Stakeholders may also gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of gender.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand what influenced women's decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges. The study involved an examination of how participants interacted with their social world and what importance it had for them (Smith et al., 2009). This chapter disclosed demographic information and the overarching themes that emerged in the analysis of the interviews.

Demographic Information

Each of the 10 presidents provided demographic information to the researcher. The ages of presidents who participated in the study ranged from 47 to 67 years of age. All 10 presidents were married. Nine out of 10 presidents grew up in rural communities across several states in the western and mid-western regions of the US. One factor not considered in this study was race, as there were not many rural community college women presidents of different racial backgrounds in these regions. There was only one non-Caucasian woman participant. The 10 participants were sitting women presidents in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

Seven of the 10 presidents were in their first presidency, two were in their second presidency, and one president was in her third presidency. One second-time president previously served as a rural community college president and another second-time president served as a campus president at a large community college. The president who is in her third presidency had served two small rural community colleges and one medium rural community college. The longevity of presidents at their current positions ranged from two to eight years. Seven

participants had served five years or less in their current presidency, and three had served between 6-10 years.

Prior to their presidency, nine participants had served as community college administrators, and five served in mostly in academic roles. One participant served mostly in student services roles, one served in academic and student services roles, another served as an administrator of planning and improvement in addition to instructional roles, and one participant served as a chief information officer in addition to student services roles. One participant previously served as the head of a state agency and had no direct leadership experience at a community college, but extensive experience working with community college presidents and boards.

All 10 presidents had earned doctoral degrees. Eight of 10 presidents were outside applicants to their institutions and the college promoted two of these from the inside. Two women had an intentional goal of becoming a president near the beginning of their careers. Eight participants arrived at the presidency unintentionally; at least initially, they did not intend to become presidents as their career goal.

Rachel is in her first presidency and has been in the position since 2009. Her academic background is in psychology, and she earned her doctoral degree in education and community college leadership. The board promoted Rachel internally, and she assumed the position of interim president by way of the having previously served as the vice president of student services.

Angel is in her first presidency and has been in the position since 2011. Her academic background is in policy and planning, and she earned a doctoral degree in education and community college leadership. She had retired and came out of retirement when the college

recruited her for the position. Her previous positions included deanships and she had previously served as a chief information officer.

Bella is in her first presidency and has been in the position since 2013. Her academic background is in business, and she earned her doctoral degree in education and community college leadership. Bella was an outside candidate who applied for the position, and the college selected her as the president. Her previous position was as a director of a state agency.

Margie has been in her second presidency since 2014; she previously served as an interim campus president. Her academic background is in business and psychology, and she earned a doctoral degree in organizational psychology. She was an outside candidate who applied for the position. The college selected her from the pool of applicants for the position. Her previous position was interim campus president, and she had previously served as a dean of instruction.

Sheila has been in her second presidency since 2013, having previously served as a rural community college president. Her academic background is in adult education and communication, and she earned a doctoral degree in education administration. She was an outside candidate who applied, and the college selected her from among the candidates to be their president. Her previous position was as president of a rural community college, and she had also previously served as a dean of instruction.

Cookie is in her first presidency and has been in the position since 2014. Her academic background is in business and education, and she earned a doctoral degree in education. The college promoted her from within the institution, and the board moved her into the presidency after she had previously served as the dean of extended learning.

Callie is in her first presidency and has been in the position since 2013. Her academic background is in teacher research, math and statistics and she earned a doctoral degree in

education. She was an outside applicant who applied, and the college selected her as the president. Her previous position was vice president of planning and improvement, and she also had a background in instruction.

Wilma is in her first presidency and has been in the position since 2008. Her academic background is in business and education, and she has a doctoral degree in education and community college leadership. She was an outside applicant who applied, and the college selected her from the applicants for the president's position. Her previous position was dean of student learning.

Trina is in her first presidency and has been in the position since 2013. Her academic background is in chemistry with a doctoral degree in chemistry. The college selected her after she applied from outside the college. Her previous position was provost and vice president of instruction.

Lacy is in her third presidency since 2015. She previously served in a small rural college and a rural-medium sized institution. Her academic background is in administration and communication, and she earned a doctoral degree in higher education leadership. She applied as an outside applicant, and the college selected her as president. Her previous position was as president of a community college. She had also previously served as a vice president of academic affairs. Profiles of these women are located in Table 2.

Table 2: *Demographics of Rural Community College Women Presidents*

Participant	Presidency #	Begin date of current presidency	Doctoral background	Discipline	Previous position held	Rural roots	President aspiration
Rachel	1st	2009	Education, CCL	Psychology & Community College Leadership	Vice President of Student Services	Yes	No
Angel	1st	2011	Education, CCL	Policy & Planning	Dean(s), Chief Information Officer	Yes	No
Bella	1st	2013	Education, CCL	Business Administration & Science	Director/State Agency	Yes	No
Margie	2nd	2014	Organizational Psychology	Business & Psychology	Interim Campus Community College President	Yes	No
Sheila	2nd	2013	Education Administration	Adult Education & Communication	President Community College	Yes	Yes
Cookie	1st	2014	Education	Business & Education	Extended Learning Dean	Yes	No
Callie	1st	2013	Education	Teacher Research/Statistics/Math	Vice President Planning & Improvement	Yes	No
Wilma	1st	2008	Education	Community College Leadership & MBA	Dean Student Learning	No	No
Trina	1st	2013	Chemistry	Chemistry	Provost & VP Instruction	Yes	No
Lacy	3rd	2015	Higher Ed	Administration & Communication/Leadership	President Community College	Yes	Yes

Themes

After a thorough review and coding of in-depth interview data, major themes and sub-themes emerged. The researcher identified major themes from the interview responses with 10 sitting women presidents. These themes were how career history shaped decisions, the role support groups played in women's decision to become president, the importance of rural roots and the "right fit" to becoming successful presidents, the influence of gender on women's decisions to become presidents, and advice for women seeking rural community college presidential positions. Threads that intersected many themes included the importance of relationships and the application of a morality compass. The morality compass included being intentional in choosing a rural community college presidency and accepting the presidency for the right reasons. What motivated women was the ability to make a difference in people's lives.

The first theme how career history shaped decisions included sub-themes of the importance of degrees for advancement to the presidency, the significance of previous positions in deciding to become president, how personal experience and professional development helped prepare women, the decision to become president intentional or unintentional, and the decision to become president influenced by bad leadership. The second theme the role support groups played in women's decision to become president, included subthemes of the importance of mentors to women becoming presidents and the importance of family support to women becoming presidents. The third theme the importance of rural roots and the "right fit" to becoming successful presidents emerged as a consistent theme among all participants and included the subtheme of rural roots led women to rural presidencies. The fourth theme that emerged was the influence of gender on women's decisions to become presidents and included subthemes of gender impact on women's experiences, the importance of women making a difference in

people's lives, and gender discrimination realized by women presidents. The fifth theme advice for women seeking rural community college presidential positions, included sub-themes. The sub-themes are one must be prepared to live in a fishbowl, align yourself with the rural job, find successful college presidents to mentor you, try to balance work and personal life, do not let challenges scare you off, and women's thoughts on whether a different career path would have been better (Table 3).

Table 3: *Factors Influencing Women's Decisions for Rural Community College Presidencies*

Emerging Themes and Sub-themes

Theme 1
How Career History Shaped Decisions

- Importance of degrees for advancement to the presidency
- Significance of previous positions in deciding to become president
- Personal experience and professional development helped prepare women
- Decision to become president intentional or unintentional
- Decision to become president influenced by bad leadership

Theme 2
Role Support Groups Played in Women's Decision to Become Presidents

- Importance of mentors to women becoming presidents
- Importance of family support to women becoming presidents

Theme 3
Importance of Rural Roots and the "Right Fit" to Becoming Successful Presidents

- Rural roots led women to rural presidencies

Theme 4
Influence of Gender on Women's Decisions to Become Presidents

- Gender impact on women's experiences
- Importance of women making a difference in people's lives
- Gender discrimination realized by women presidents

Theme 5
Advice for Women Seeking Rural Community College Presidential Positions

- Be prepared to live in a fishbowl
- Align yourself with the rural job
- Find successful college presidents to mentor you
- Try to balance work and personal life
- Do not let challenges scare you off
- Women's thoughts on whether a different career path would have been better

How Career History Shaped Decisions

All women spoke passionately about their careers and the way in which their experiences changed their lives. They shared how their degrees and previous positions affected their decisions to become presidents. All the women in this study had earned their doctoral degrees. The majority of the women participants stated they felt they needed these degrees to advance into their higher education leadership positions. They discussed what prepared them for the presidency including the importance of personal experience and professional development in their decision-making process. Many of the personal experiences and professional development opportunities afforded to these participants were based on relationships with mentors or supervisors.

Women clarified whether their decision to become a president was intentional or unintentional. For the majority of women in this study it was unintentional. They realized their potential when a mentor or supervisor encouraged them to take on additional responsibilities or move to the next level. Some women shared how bad or incompetent leaders influenced their decisions to step into the next position.

Importance of Degrees for Advancement to the Presidency

All 10 women earned doctoral degrees along their career pathways to the presidency. Each participant discussed the importance of earning their doctoral degree relative to being able to reach the presidency, regardless of whether their journey was intentional or unintentional. They spoke passionately about mentors and supervisors encouraging them to earn their doctorate degrees. Callie gave a lot of credit to her mentor. She stated, “There’s a lot of talk about people pulling themselves up by the bootstrap, but somebody has to give you a shoe, right?”

Some women talked about reaching their goal of completing their doctoral degrees purely using their grit and persistence. They stated that they pursued their doctoral degrees intentionally as a step toward becoming a president. Sheila, who is now in her second presidency, stated,

I went to college and earned my undergraduate degree in organizational communication. My first job out of college was in TRIO working for a student support services program. I then went into administration and after finishing my master's degree, my boss's boss, the vice president of academic affairs, encouraged me to go to the University of Texas doctoral program to prepare college presidents. It was kind of scary. I was 28 years old and starting a Ph.D. program with the intent of becoming a college president someday. I was a college president by the time I was 37.

Lacy, started a degree in pre-medicine, but then discovered psychology, and ended up with a med-psych discipline. Her mentor pointed out that all the things that she enjoyed were in this field called higher education. After talking with him, Lacy decided,

Yeah, I could be a dean. I could see myself being a dean. He said to me right then, "Why not a president? Why didn't I think of that?" Then he invited me to attend a couple of his classes to see if there was something I would be interested in. From that point on, my career path was, though not completely planned, very thoughtful. It was very linear. He helped me put together my plan and told me I needed my master's degree, to pursue jobs in these areas, and work my way up the ladder. He said, "Then you'll want to get your doctorate."

The other women shared that they earned their doctoral degrees so they could move into higher administrative level positions, but not with the initial intention of becoming presidents. Some did not intend to become a president.

Rachel never planned to be a president, but she did prepare because she believed in being prepared. Rachel said her favorite quote by Les Brown was, "Better to be prepared for an opportunity and not have one than to have one and not be prepared."

Bella decided, after earning a bachelor's degree in chemistry and while she was working at a corporation as a chemist, that she would rather be interacting with people. She shared,

I pursued a master's in business administration (MBA), finished it and then looked for a job that helped people find their next job. I then decided to get my doctorate in case I wanted to be a college president at some point in the future.

Margie was interested in the business field and came from a background of entrepreneurs.

She explained,

I am first generation. My family immigrated and started a small business, so business seemed like a logical choice. I ended up going to work for a very large corporate entity in marketing and software support. Then, I became a single parent and left the workforce. When I came back into the career world, I made a switch to psychology. I then thought about moving into education, higher education, and potentially teaching. I felt I was late in earning my Ph.D.

Cookie reflected on her journey in pursuit of a community college presidency. She explained,

I received my bachelor's degree and my master's degree and wanted to then go on for my doctorate degree because at that time I was already teaching at a community college. I knew if I wanted to become an administrator, I would need to go on for my terminal degree.

Callie stated, "I had found my calling in life at community college! I went to college to finish my doctorate in higher education and community college leadership with a specialization in educational research."

Trina shared that she went to a university right out of high school. She stated,

I was scared to death for that transition because I grew up in a town of 2,000 people in a very rural part of the state. It was a really big step for me because the university was in a big city of 45,000 people and a six-hour drive away from home. I didn't know what I wanted to study, but my dad was a teacher, so I went into teaching. I got my bachelor's degree in chemistry and then went on for my Ph.D. I never thought in the world about career path or what I would do with my degree. I just knew I wanted that degree and I wanted to be a teacher.

Significance of Previous Positions in Deciding to Become President

Eight out of 10 women discussed the significance of their previous administrative positions, background, and experience in rising to the presidency. Career pathways of the women

in this study included a chief academic officer, chief student services officer, chief information officer, chief planning and improvement officer, director of a state agency, and other academic areas. Many women stated that they did not enter their administrative positions with the goal of becoming a president, but rather just enjoyed a new challenge each step of the way. Others stated they took administrative positions because they believed they could do the job better than previous administrators had done. Trina stated, “I took an administrative job to block someone else and to protect myself.” Nine of 10 participants held administrative level leadership positions, one led a state agency and all women had extensive experience with community colleges and with supervising employees.

Rachel stated that there was a lot of talk while she was in a doctoral program about what her career goals were and pursuing a presidency. Rachel talked about her deep passion for community colleges and experience as a faculty member and in an administrative role in student services before becoming president. She shared,

I always was a big believer of starting at a community college. And I love the job and the college so much and fell in love with the community and got in a doctoral program in community college leadership that allowed me to pursue my doctorate while working. I came out of student services, but I was also faculty and had instructional experience. Getting that budgeting experience, running a program, administrative experience, and getting to know all the people at the college helped. I took on a lot of stuff myself just to learn how things worked in instruction and then I got this job and realized how much I didn't know about a lot of things [laughs].

Angel became a dean of student services, then a dean of student services and outreach, then a dean of regional partnerships and economic development. She was also a chief information officer and was on the executive committee of the college for 25 years. She shared,

I loved it because the college always gave me things I knew nothing about. If there was an area that was a sticky wicket, they would give it to me. I never wanted to be a president. My choice was to be a really good mom and a really good professional. My time working at the agency and working with all the colleges in the state helped me a lot. I worked with a lot of presidents and tried to figure out how to make things work. You

wind up talking about a lot of issues and how it affects all colleges. I think that prepared me to be better at how I both work with my peers but also how to better help me work with my colleagues.

Margie talked about how her career in business and education prepared her to be a president. She also talked about preparing herself for instruction, working closely with the dean of students, foundation work, and accreditation. She shared,

Going back to the start in business and working in the corporate world, and that business degree and the MBA, it gives me the ability, and the capacity. I think I can communicate and establish credibility with our industry partners. That business preparation, and then after the corporate work, when I took over the family business, I got to be an entrepreneur for five years, and ran the small business. Teaching has also helped me relate to the work of our faculty (full-time & part-time). I moved from teacher to administrator and had a division of 30 full-time faculty. It wasn't quite clear to me that I was headed all the way to a presidency, but it was clear to me that I wanted to get to that next level; the VP level. I moved into a Dean of Instruction position and had some opportunities to sit in for the president, and then became the Interim Campus President. It was then I realized, "Yep, this is the work and position for me."

Cookie shared,

I think with my career path, it's been more the academic route, the instructional route. I've been a part-time faculty member, a full-time faculty member, tenured and promoted throughout the ranks. I've been a Dean of Instruction, a Vice President and Executive Vice President for Instruction, and Vice President for Advancement.

Callie taught statistics and two graduate courses at a university. She described,

I really loved the teaching part of it. Then an adjunct teaching position opened at the college where I was a student. I got the adjunct teaching position, and quit my full-time job, and told my husband afterward. From then on, that was it. I knew I had found my niche at the community college, that the rural-based college provided access, and opportunity to those who might not be able to even know what's available in this world. I had been a department chair, really like a dean. There were no vice presidents at that time and I ran all institutional effectiveness, was a chair and a faculty member. In rural colleges you get a lot of experience doing a lot of things. Next I became a vice president and did policy work. Then I became a president.

Trina had a very traditional kind of pathway to the presidency; faculty to division chair to academic vice-president. She described,

There came a point at the college where I was teaching where they needed a new division chair, and one of the other people that wanted to become my boss as a division chair really wasn't a good fit for the role, so I threw my hat in the ring, too. It was kind of a self-defense move. The position was a half-time administrative and half-time teaching, so it still kind of fit. I guess I never looked back after that. I was also provost for a couple of years at a four-year institution, but I missed community colleges. The four-year institution was a great job, but it just didn't feel right to me. I love community colleges, and I love what we do.

Sheila did not have a traditional path to a presidency. She described,

My experience was hodgepoded together. When I finished my doctorate, my husband and I hadn't lived together for about two years, and so we decided to take this ranch manager job. It was a way for me to downshift after two years of working on a doctorate and reconnect with my husband again. So, I stepped out for two and a half years and had two babies during that time and lived on this ranch. But, I really missed my academic work. I missed being in college. I missed working with students. I loved living on the ranch and I loved the college atmosphere. I needed to be somewhere that I loved to live, and so that told me that I needed to be in a rural place.

Personal Experience and Professional Development Helped Prepare Women

In addition to their degrees and previous positions, the researcher asked the presidents what best prepared them for the position. They shared a range of answers as well as strongly indicating that their personal experiences and professional development (AACC, ACCT, and NILD) were key components. Women explained mentor and supervisor support as key influencers as well.

Rachel explained, "I can look at FFA [Future Farmers of America] leadership roles as something that helped me because of all the public speaking that we had to do. We also had to be very organized."

Cookie thought her background in both the academic, as well as continuing education, helped her as she moved through her career. She was very fortunate and had the opportunity to be an administrative intern to the chancellor. She believes the other thing that helped prepare her was her fundraising experience. Trina thought that all her experiences helped shape her

understanding of what a president does and what the role is. She shared that she had role models who taught her how to do and not do the job, and she could learn from all those experiences. She shared,

One of the most important things I learned along the way is the importance of communication and the importance of being transparent as you're making decisions and as you're leading the institution.

Angel perceived what best prepared her is the ability to not take things personally. And she offered,

When you feel yourself feeling personal, which I do at times, to stand back and say, okay, it feels personal, but most of the time, these things aren't personal. It's about what others are perceiving or feeling. I think that helps in a small community not to get hung up. The ability to rise above those things and not just be angry, I think, is – maybe for me in a small community prepared me the most. It's not personal.

Sheila explained,

I grew up on a farm in poverty. I never really thought about going to college. Once I got out of high school, I remember sitting on a tractor thinking about the poverty cycle my family had been in our entire life. Also, immediately prior to becoming a community college president, I was a ranch manager with my husband. I think all of this prepared me to become a community college president.

Margie stated,

I think seeing some really good role models, watching and observing really good presidents helped me too. Most of all grit, I think I have a lot of personal grit. I've encountered challenges in my life, and I've always had grit and been optimistic.

Most women mentioned professional development playing a key role in their rise to the presidency. Organizations including AACC, American Community College of Trustees (ACCT), NILD were some of the main professional development organizations mentioned. Most women mentioned they knew they wanted to become a president when they attended professional development conferences and workshops like AACC, ACCT, NILD, but a few women mentioned other things that helped them realize they wanted to become presidents.

Sheila stated,

One of the most influential factors was my president identifying me for NILD. I didn't know that NILD was to prepare you to be college president and to be community college president at that point. As I look back on it, that was a huge, influential factor.

Cookie stated,

A lot of professional development workshops and seminars they sent me to had to do with women in leadership. It was the 80s and at that time, they didn't have as many women. I think they looked, they saw that and they encouraged me to go to – and they paid for me to go to week-long leadership conferences and workshops including AACC. This helped me prepare to become a president.

Callie knew when she went through Future Leaders Institute with AACC. She shared,

I'd been pushed into doing some professional development earlier and I was trying to figure out which way I was going to go. I knew I had some skills. I knew that I wanted to be at a rural-based community college. It wasn't about being a president, or a title. I really knew that I wanted to be able to impact change in a rural economic base. Then I went to Future Leaders Institute, and my mentor and I sat down, and she just started talking to me, and she said, "Well, why is this so hard for you? It's so clear what you should be doing." I think I had, like many women—I didn't have every single thing. My mentor was like, "No, you just need to say it [ready to pursue a community college presidency]. You have your closing statement ready tomorrow morning." So, I did. I got up in front of everyone, and I said in the next three to five years, I will pursue a presidential position at a rural community college with a high minority population," and it was three years later. Here I am.

Trina realized while she was at the four-year university, she missed the connection with groups like AACC. She explained,

I had been pretty heavily involved in the National Council for Instructional Administrators (NCIA) group, which is an affiliate of AACC, so I had that nationwide network of colleagues in the community colleges. When I went to the four-year, that all disappeared for me. My boss didn't help me with that, and I needed those kinds of connections in that network.

Lacy discovered that she wanted to become a president during a week-long ACCT workshop at the NILD. She determined,

It was when ACCT and AACC had their own president's institute separately. This was back in the '90s. I attended one of those workshops for a whole week. It was interesting because some of the feedback I heard at that time was if you're a first time president,

regardless if you're a male or female, going to or applying to a smaller institution might be a good thing. Because you'll have a better chance of getting a presidency if it is rural. Because smaller and/or rural was not as desirable, if you will, as some others would be. If you wanted to get your foot in the door quickly, then smaller and/or rural might be the way to go. I kept that in my head and when it was time to begin applying, I remembered those comments.

Lacy continued,

NILD was a key factor in deciding whether I was going to even really jump into a presidency. It didn't matter what everyone else said. Even though everyone else was very encouraging, extremely encouraging, in fact, pushy, even. I didn't feel ready. Until I felt ready, I wasn't going to put myself out there for a presidency. I needed to hear what Narcisa Polonio, (ACCT) had to say. I needed to hear it her way. Then I also needed to understand things like: What does it look like to report to a Board? What are the real types of legal issues that CEOs have to deal with? What are the politics that CEOs have to deal with? I needed to get the real skinny from people, who are willing to say it. Then decide. This was really important because I wasn't going to do it until I felt ready.

Sheila also attended NILD for Women. Her college president at the time said, "I think you should go to this." She shared,

I went to NILD and set a goal and that was the beginning. Some of that was intentionality, some of it was goal setting, and some of it was this fate of how everything falls together. Mainly, it was just my personality – I am not going to set a goal and not meet it! I am not going interview for a job and not get it...and I know that I can affect student's lives at a bigger level, and that's really, really satisfying for me. Becoming a president was intentional for me.

Margie knew around 2009-10 that she wanted to advance beyond the VP level. She explained,

I started applying to move up in administration and ended up with the position of Dean of Instruction at a campus that was serving 8000 FTE. That's six years, I think doing that, and through that process, I also had some opportunities to sit in for the president, and then eventually I was interim campus president for about 18 months. I was like, "Yep, this is the work and position for me." My positive expectations of the presidency were confirmed. I decided to seek a permanent presidency. I didn't want an urban environment, and I was looking for a rural or semi-suburban.

In 2002, Cookie had two position offers, a position with her mentor and another one. She decided to take the position with her mentor. She shared,

My mentor told me, “I will make you a president.” So, I took that one. He’s so proud of me now. He had confidence in me. He really believed I could be a president. This is my destination career. I love it.

Wilma shared that she did not set a goal to become a president and the rural part was not intentional. She described,

This was not my goal. My goal was probably the vice-president but I have always enjoyed the opportunity, where there was a problem, to have someone to escalate it to. I’ve always been concerned about the ego and ethics of some of the leaders I’ve seen. I didn’t necessarily want to be that ego and ethic issue, and that’s probably come from people who were actively working against me moving forward. It really didn’t concern me, because I’ve seen some kind of rotten folks in presidency’s and chancellorships. I wanted to make sure I was true to myself. Sometimes you have to get uncomfortable enough in your situation, in order to venture out and figure out what a change is. It was not my goal and the rural part was not necessarily intentional.

Rachel did not pursue a presidency, but rather was appointed as an interim and then asked to remain in the permanent position. Rachel stated,

While I don’t recommend this for others, I believe I have learned the role and have been a successful leader. I didn’t have enough time in my administrative role to learn, like if I had done that for five or seven years I would have probably gotten more experience, but I only had two. I wish I had more administrative experience coming into the presidency. I moved into her presidency with just two years of vice presidential level experience, so I had a steep learning curve. I used to tell people there is no way I want to be a president.

Decision to Become President Intentional or Unintentional

The majority of women stated their career paths were unintentional. They did not set out to become presidents. For several women in this study, it was not completely obvious that they were heading all the way to a presidency, but it was clear that they wanted to get to a higher administrative role.

However, Sheila and Lacy explained their career paths as intentional. Sheila explained, “My path was hodgepodged to get to the presidency. It was very intentional and planned once I decided to pursue it.” Lacy shared, “My path was well planned out to the presidency, but not necessarily to a rural or community college.”

For Bella, Callie, Cookie, and Margie, it was not clear that they would move to a presidency, but it was clear that they wanted to get to a higher administrative role. Angel, Rachel, Trina, and Wilma stated, “Being president was not my goal.”

Rachel decided to remain in the presidency only after appointment as an interim president. She explained,

I had no intentions of ever being a president and I was at my institution where we had a bad president and the board finally got to the point where they got her to resign and they needed somebody to be an interim and I had the most experience of all of the people on the administrative team, and I had two years of administrative experience. I remember one board member saying, “Get the job description and do the job.” [laughs]

Trina shared,

I never thought about going into administration at all. I didn’t know it right away. It took a couple of years into my first vice-presidency for me to recognize that I wanted to take that next step. Every role that I took on my pathway was a role I truly embraced. I wanted to continue growing as a leader. I do think it’s important that people have those kinds of pathways.

Bella thought people came up through the ranks and that was how they made it to the president’s office. She was unsure that she wanted to be a president. She shared,

I knew I wanted the degree because I wanted the other presidents to respect the fact that I knew community colleges...because there were a lot of frowny faces because I came out of workforce. It was through getting to know new presidents as they came to the state that caused me to think that: “Well, I could be a president,” and a mentor’s words play in my head a lot, which is, “You have a good passion for something and you have a passion for people, you can use that set of skills and passions to do anything you want.”

Decision to Become President Influenced by Bad Leadership

Several women mentioned bad or incompetent leaders or presidents as influencing their eventual decision to pursue administrative positions or a presidency. After observing others in the position, some of the women pushed themselves to take on presidential roles realizing that they could do the job. Once they gained confidence and understood they could do the job, they began their journey to the presidency.

Rachel's experience with two different types of presidents helped her make the decision. These experiences were with one successful president and one unsuccessful president. Rachel explained,

There were two presidents that I worked with at my school, one that was successful and the one who wasn't...well often times I would look at the unsuccessful president and know if she could do this job that I could do this job.

Bella stated,

I didn't like the direction things were going where I was, so I decided well, if I want to be a president, this might be a really good time. I was looking down the list of presidents who might be leaving the state. A sitting president at one of the colleges was very persuasive that I'd be a great president at the college they were retiring from. I knew the board. I knew their budget. So, I decided to go for it.

Other women shared similar experiences with incompetent leaders that led them to a decision to take the next step. Trina shared her situation when she was working at a four-year university after working at a community college. Trina explained,

You can have positive and negative mentors. When I was working at the four-year university I realized that I didn't have the same kind of mentor support that I had at the community college previously. I recognized quickly that I was in the wrong place and needed to get back to my roots. It's amazing what a difference one person can make in your life.

Margie shared,

I've also had some people that I've reported to, that were perhaps not the most competent leaders, and were pretty comfortable relying on the work of others, and in a way, taking credit for your good work. I will say that this category has been men, but also some of the mentors, on the positive side, have also been males.

Role Support Groups Played in Women's Decision to Become President

The majority of women in this study discussed the role support groups played in their decision to become a president. These supportive relationships were key influencers in their progression to a presidency. Key influencers mentioned by the women were mentors, supervisors and family members. They also mentioned mentor's encouragement helped them realize they

could become a president. Lacy stated she knew when her mentor said to her, “Why not become a President?” These women mentioned colleagues, male and female, who helped them along the way.

Importance of Mentors to Women Becoming Presidents

A male mentor came to Bella and said,

“You ought to apply for a presidential position. You have a passion for people and you have a passion for people’s success.” That’s really what community colleges are. The rest is history. I applied and got the job. In addition, by and large, my presidential colleagues were very influential as I was wrestling with whether I could make the transition. I went from being a policymaker to being an implementer which is different as most people take the opposite tract; they go from implementers to policymakers. As presidents encouraged me, it became more real to me that I could do it.

When Margie started at her first community college, there were these two presidents who were both these incredibly dynamic women and in her opinion walked on water. She said,

I’ve worked with some great presidents and also boards. People in those situations gave me those opportunities to access some “road to the presidency” professional development, but also, gave me the opportunity to really take ownership of some things, and see where my leadership goes, and that’s really built my self-confidence.

The president and vice president, both men, played a role in Sheila’s decision making to become a president. She shared that there were also women in her life that really made a difference. When Sheila did her Ph.D. program, she did an internship with a female who influenced her. Sheila described,

She not only influenced me to become a president in the first place – she encouraged me and helped me. She also gave me the confidence to know that I could do the job by watching her and shadowing her. Then I also had an opportunity to do an externship with another female leader who was a huge influence because she kept telling me, “Well, you’ve got to do this. We need people like you in leadership. Once I retire, people like you need to do it.”

Sheila also spoke of a female leader who was more of a caretaker than a mentor. Sheila shared,

My “caretaker” mentor would say things like, “You need to take care of yourself. You need to take care of your marriage. If you’re going to have babies, you can’t wait until you’re too late into your 40s or it’s not going to happen.” She influenced me to help me balance those personal and professional goals to figure out how they could go together. That really made a difference because as women, we have to balance all of those different pieces in our lives to be able to be successful at life. She really influenced me in how to be a well-rounded president, and another woman helped me to know how I can do it and how to become it, and to give me the confidence that I can do it.

Cookie talked about how very fortunate she was to have had mentors. She also had leadership opportunities along the way. She shared,

Actually, there were two influential mentors, male mentors, the chancellor and the vice-chancellor that encouraged me to look at a career as a president, because they felt I had the skillset and the passion, but I needed my Ph.D. They encouraged me to finish the degree. I also had a female mentor years later who encouraged me along the way and told me I should be a president.

Callie shared that her mentor was a big influence on her. In Callie’s doctoral program, several of the faculty pushed her, along with a female mentor. Also, another female community college president in Callie’s state told her not to apply for any more vice president jobs, just go get a presidency.

Trina had a mentor who was very encouraging and supportive. She thought he gave her the confidence to know that she could do that job well. Trina stated,

Without that kind of mentor, I don’t know that I would’ve been able to take that step. I really do owe it to him, and I’ve told him that. He was pretty pivotal in my pathway. She also thinks the network that she grew along the way of colleagues that she can call and talk with was important and helped her be successful as she became a president.

Lacy shared, “I had quite a wonderful mentor during and right out of college. He was the president of the college I went to.” When it came time for her to go back for a master’s degree, this same president was an adjunct faculty member in a Higher Education program and invited her to attend a couple of his classes, just to see if Higher Education was a profession of interest to her. Lacy went on to share,

I was interested so he told me what jobs I needed to get and that I would eventually need to get my doctorate. So, my path was very thoughtful and intentional in that way. The rural part of that was not necessarily intentional. As far as when I decided I wanted to be a president was when my mentor asked me, "Okay, why not a presidency, and let's figure this out." Then when it came time to consider a presidency so many other people, colleagues, mentors, et cetera, all were saying to me, "You're ready to be a president. You need to go be a president," but I didn't feel ready until I went to a week-long future president's institute program to see if this was a pipedream or if this had some legs. Upon returning from that, I just kind of absorbed it and let it roll around in my head and six to eight months later I talked to my husband. I think I'm ready now. I'm ready to apply. Let's sit down and talk about where we want to look.

Bella shared that she was lucky enough to observe and work with women who were very successful college presidents. Bella said, "Having good role models and having good mentors made it easier to see myself in the role."

Importance of Family Support to Women Becoming Presidents

All 10 women in the study were married. Several women stated that their husbands were their champions and that they could not have done it without their support. Many women also stated that their parents pushed them to get degrees and one woman's grandmother instilled in her a desire to go to college. Several women spoke about family as the key to their career successes.

Trina shared,

My grandma went through the third grade, and my mother was fortunate that she was able to graduate from high school. Since my mom was the youngest in her family, (none of her sisters were able to graduate from high school) there was no one else left at home to take care of, so she was able to graduate. They both (mom and grandma) really instilled in me from early on that I would go to college. With that kind of backing, who's going turn away from that, right?

Rachel's parents did not help her decide to be a president, but they helped her to decide to pursue whatever goal in which she developed an interest. She shared,

They taught me that I could do anything I wanted to. The people that helped me, in my decision to pursue this position permanently versus being an interim, were some of the people that were at the college, some other people in the state, friends and my husband.

Cookie shared, “My parents taught me about education from their own backgrounds, values, and education and pushed me to be educated and to get my degrees. They were very, very proud of me.”

Margie and her husband had always been a dual-career family with both in specialized careers. She explained,

We knew that if I wanted to continue to rise and seek a presidency, it would mean living apart during the workweek. He was very supportive, and our relationship has not been negatively impacted. It fits for us. Then my children, when I first started I was still place bound because of the kids, but they are grown now.

Trina spoke of the support she received from her husband. She shared,

I also wouldn't be here today without my husband, who's a saint. He's an engineer and he has made a lot of sacrifices so that my career could blossom. We knew that that was the sacrifice that he was willing to make. He spent time as a stay-at-home dad helping to raise our son. I know that without his support, it wouldn't have happened. You do have to make some sacrifices to be in a rural area.

Lacy explained,

It was really a joint conversation with my husband when I decided to apply for a new position. Decision points ranged from what do I like? To finding some place where they could pursue their year-round love for outdoor activities. We had those conversations, and basically took out the map of the United States, circled those areas and watched for postings, both in the Chronicle and ACCT. The rest is history.

Wilma spoke of one thing that a woman's family must understand that she has the position. She describes,

It's been hard on my husband. His health has failed at the same time as I had this job and here I am, on the front page of the paper, and he can't work anymore, so there's pressures on families with that. I think maybe it's more true with women leaders, but in my opinion, sometimes it's like “Well, of course the wife is following and she's aware of all these things” but I don't know that my husband was prepared for me being this far out front. He's been a champion, but it's been hard on him. Just any kind of criticism or anything, that's hard for family members to read and to manage.

Two women discussed taking care of themselves, their families, marriages, babies, and balancing professional and personal lives. Margie spoke of making sure that the family knew what the life of presidency is. She described,

You have diminished personal and family time. When your kids are younger they need you, that is part of the reason it took me so long to finish my Ph.D. I recognized I could work full time, and I could be a mom, and I could be a wife, but I couldn't also complete a Ph.D, and not go insane. That's why it took me a little longer to finish my Ph.D.

Importance of Rural Roots and the “Right Fit” to Becoming Successful Presidents

In this research, women who decided to become rural community college presidents recognized the challenges they faced in being a leader in a rural area as it related to location, culture and constituency influence. These women spoke vividly about the need to understand the culture of the local community and the importance of constituency relationships. Lacy stated that she never planned to be a president at a rural community college even though she grew up rural. Once she became a rural community college president, she fell in love with it. She stated, “In rural areas everyone supports everyone else, and I think this is positive. Everyone knows everyone else, which sometimes can be wonderful, but the politics of small towns is also crazy.” She expanded by saying,

Nothing really can prepare you for that until you live it and learn how to navigate it on your own. There is no college course or workshop that can prepare you for local politics. Some things are just particular to rural living, you just have to jump in and swim and figure it out. If you want to do anything, you have to go out of town or even out of state. I have a colleague friend that if she is going to play, she goes two states away. That's her boundary.

Rural Roots Led Women to Rural Presidencies

Nine of 10 presidents grew up in rural communities, and two of them took over or worked in rural family businesses. Bella stated, “Part of the rural attraction for me is growing up rural and how much I enjoyed being from a small town.” Even though Wilma did not grow up in a rural location, her parents grew up in a rural area, and her grandparents lived in rural

communities in which she spent substantial time. Wilma shared, “I have always loved the environment of the smaller town, and I think I just have an affinity for the smaller communities.”

Several women grew up in and lived in rural areas and farmlands most of their lives. Rachel shared, “I grew up in a very rural community, on a farm with population of 900 in the nearest town. I graduated from high school in a class of 31 students.”

Rachel talked about how her high school FFA experiences, which molded her for a role as president. She shared,

In FFA, I was about 12 years old when Title IX initially hit where you had to provide opportunities for women, so in FFA I was the second female Chapter President and the first District President who was female. And as I look back on what’s prepared me to be a good president, you know I can look at FFA as something that really did help me because of all the public speaking that we had to do. And I guess what the biggest thing is it made me feel comfortable with, these people who are now my citizens. These farmers, and these fishermen, and loggers are the people who are in my district and I totally feel comfortable with them because that’s how I grew up. And that’s why I feel comfortable being a female president in a community college because that’s how I grew up.

All women stated they were passionate about rural communities. Most talked about how they fell in love with community colleges, loved their jobs and their colleges. Sheila stated, “Rural communities are near and dear to my heart.”

Throughout the interviews, women emphasized the importance of knowing about the rural community and regional culture. Callie grew up in a rural Native American tribal community where everyone knew everyone. She shared, “There were good things and challenging things because of this. You have to know your rural.”

Margie stated that she had only 60 students in her graduating high school class. She also discussed the benefits of taking over the family business in a small rural community. She shared,

Along my career at one point, I was in Hawaii, and took over the family business when I was there for a while. That was also a very small rural community. I like those communities, and I like the people in those rural communities. It takes the mission of the community college and it makes it exponential in that these rural communities don’t have

a lot of other resources frequently in the community college to be that kind of convener that brings things together. Yeah, it was intentional. I only applied to rural colleges. Yeah, rural for me, that's a good fit.

Angel indicated that rural community colleges have a very central role in their communities and are usually the only education provider. She shared,

You are usually the only place students can get pre-collegiate courses or continuing education courses or CEUs. You are usually on economic development boards really, all committees, because you are it in the community. It really speaks to why community is our middle name. It's because you connect the dots. You leverage your small resources with the other resources to make a difference in that community.

Angel goes on to describe her passion,

I think rural colleges have, most likely, a greater return on investment if you just look at whether you place one person or two or three or ten in a program area, compared to hundreds or more in the urban area because if one or two stay in the community, and they become viable community members it is powerful. I think it is that vision, that reality that makes being a rural community college president one of the coolest things one could ever do. I mean, at graduation, I know every student's name. I know everybody here. That personally makes me more committed because I know how to make a decision. I can see the face. I know the story. It's not just a quantitative number. It's a qualitative value about life.

Bella shared that all of her jobs have been in small, rural communities. She reflected on what she has learned. She described,

There's a love-hate relationship between communities that are small. You don't do anything that doesn't get viewed. At the same time, you have such enormous opportunities to persuade or to help shape what a community thinks. Everyone wants to be a part of something that's a winner and I think that community colleges are that in that they are open institutions, and so when there was an opportunity I knew. I appreciate the – for the most part – the honesty of rural communities. There's not a lot of artifice. People are who they say, and they are not very apologetic about it, nor should they be. When you're a college president in a small rural community, you have to be open to all those perspectives. I think there's a challenge in that and that's part of the intrigue; that's part of what keeps me going, is trying to figure it out. Everybody deserves respect regardless of their opinion.

Sheila has served as a president in two places, both at rural colleges. She shared,

I like being accountable to the community, to the board, to the people I see in the grocery store...I like everybody to know who I am in the grocery store [laughter]. I like the

friendliness, the relationships that you have, the farming industry, the background that it takes to be able to live and thrive in a small community. Being in a rural area, I don't have to put on airs. I can just be 100 % authentically me, and they like me here because I'm a good fit. I like walking in the dirt, I like being able to ride my bike for miles and not see anybody but cows and those kind of things. I wanted to build a lifestyle. We currently live on 10 acres just outside of town. I have horses right outside my door, and I like that.

Callie also indicated that the number one thing that helped prepare her, aside from everything that she did to develop her professional acumen, was that she is from a rural area. She clarified,

I am from a rural area, a very small town in the southern region of the United States. I had to drive 30 miles to the closest college. I was still a minor, and was really advised, probably mostly to keep me out of trouble, to go to a dual enrollment course, which I did. I actually got my start at a rural community college, which is where my deep love for the rural-based college, and what it provides, in terms of access to rural America, particularly those from disproportionately impacted populations, and those from a very low socio-economic status area, which often is what occurs in our rural colleges, or you're very far away from a location. The amount of time it takes to get anywhere, and in a rural college, the visibility is really tough – particularly because of the amount of travel you have to do.

Callie continued,

I know influence in a rural area. I was a student at a rural community college. I get community dynamics, particularly in a rural area, where you have multi-generational families. You have complex family relationships, and particularly, if you're in, and many rural areas are, at high faith-based, where a whole lot of things occur around the community, and the church community. You have to be aware that you are part of a community, and you are a community member.

Trina explained that she grew up in a rural area and had such an appreciation of that, she could never really envision herself in a big city. She described, "I think growing up in a rural environment and serving in different capacities at rural institutions really laid the good ground work for me to be successful as a rural president."

Margie stated she did not want to be in an urban environment and was looking for a rural or semi-suburban location. She indicated she was looking for colleges that were below about

4,000 FTE and would not put aside a smaller one. Margie went on to share that part of the reason was due to her own background growing up in a very small rural area.

Margie indicated,

Rural was a good fit for me. Community colleges in a rural area have a broader impact. I like to be in that situation where I know all the players in the area, and the leaders of the various entities. They're really interested in partnering with you, as well, because in these rural areas – I don't mean you individually. I mean your college mission is not going to advance without partnering with other entities. I do have that part of me, the early career, the business and industry, and I like partnering with that to provide for students. We also have wonderful elected officials. A lot of times in these small communities, you get some pretty dynamic people there that aren't career politicians. They aren't looking to leverage some step along the way, but are really there because they love the place, and they want to make a future better. Being part of that is, yay, rural.

Sheila stated that she knew what she would be getting in a community college. She knew the people and the community that the college served. She knew she did not want to be in a big city and as she had experienced when working on a doctorate.

Sheila shared,

Those kind of experiences with my own brothers as truck drivers and construction workers, being around those kinds of people my whole life, prepared me really well for the talks I have with farmers and construction workers today. I can talk to any of them and be real comfortable. I had a student give me a piece of metal art that he donated to the college recently. I procured it for my office, and I said, "Look at the craftsmanship. You can't even see this welding seam." A faculty member turned to me and said, "You know what a clean weld seam looks like?" Well of course I do [laughter]. Those kinds of experiences have prepared me well for this job. It sounds funny that would prepare you to be a president, but in a rural area it does. When I am working with a farmer, I can talk farming with the best of them because of my background so I have an instant connection and gain their respect. It seems invaluable, these life experiences I have had to bring to this environment.

Rachel, Angel, and Bella specifically mentioned participating in FFA as making a huge difference in their decision. Rachel shared, "It really goes back to growing up in a rural area, living in a rural area and growing up on a farm...and being involved in FFA." Rachel continued,

I go back to that a lot. To say that becoming comfortable as a public speaker and dealing with community people really made a difference for me. Because I chose to get involved

in leadership positions. I got my first experience running meetings, making sure committees met and work got done. I learned that young, at a young age.

Some women shared that they grew up in rural poverty-cycle families. Margie mentioned her background, “Even though I didn’t attend a community college, I was from rural immigrant family, high poverty, and education made all the difference for me, so I wanted to carry that on.”

Sheila grew up rural, in poverty, on farms with her dad working as a farmhand. She explained,

I never thought I would go to college. My brothers were truck drivers and construction workers but, being around those kinds of people my whole life prepared me really well for the talks I have with farmers and construction workers today. I can talk to any of them and be real comfortable.

Callie shared, “I was on my own at the age of 16. Dual credit in community college kept me in high school. I am passionate about community college.”

Callie further explained,

I would call it a parental midlife crisis, and I was the last one of five children, so at first, I lived with a cousin for a while, and then—that was my junior year, and then my senior year, I lived with a friend. I did not want to go into foster care — because I was in a tribal area, but I was avoiding foster care. I did not have a legal guardian, interestingly enough, and I was able to get free lunches at school. I worked at Pizza Hut, and I was a lifeguard. I was just able to stay below the radar of the foster system. Dual enrollment through the local community college saved my life because it gave me a great start!

Women in this study stated it is important for a president to stay for the long term to learn the culture of the rural community college, the value of the local area, and the culture of the people they served before they could become effective in their roles as president. Therefore, it is essential not to consider a rural community college simply to advance a career to get to a more prestigious presidency. Several presidents also spoke about making decisions based on what was good for the college and the community. Several women indicated that coming to a rural college for a short time or using it as a career stepping-stone was poor judgment. Several women spoke

about how changes could not come about overnight and used that as a reason for staying in a job for the long run.

Rachel is passionate about people's decisions to go to work at a rural community college. Rachel stated,

A lot of people look at it as a way to start their career, they will be there for a few years and move on. They never really are committed to being at a rural place and those things can be difficult and hard on the colleges. I think people need to be cautious of that.

Sheila grew up rural and she implored, "I think just anybody coming into a rural area couldn't be successful. I mean, you can't do a job and do great things for the college, but not be able to stay for the long term."

Angel shared that when she was asked to consider a community college presidency, she and her husband went over to the local area. They walked through some stores and talked to folks. She described,

I asked somebody at the check-out stand, "So, you have a college here?" What was interesting to me everyone had an opinion, and it was all positive. They were all excited because a new building was going up. What I loved is everybody knew about it. They all had hope. They all had a hope story. Not about themselves but about somebody they knew. "You know what? This is a place where I think my belief in community colleges can resonate because it is about hope." It was really the community members, and we got home, and we agreed that I would apply.

Influence of Gender on Women's Decisions to Become Presidents

Most women in this study stated that they did not consider gender when preparing for the presidency and it did not play a role in their decision to become presidents. For women, this meant that they did not utilize professional development or training specialized for females. Some women mentioned that they were conscious of their gender and they believed being female gave them a different insight.

Presidents talked about their family and taking care of children. They were passionate about needing to take time out of their career to adopt or have babies, take care of children, or

reconnect with their spouses. Sheila shared, “I took about two and a half years off to reconnect with my husband and during that time I had two babies.” Women talked about trying to balance being a good mother and partner. Participants spoke of quality of life, and their diminished family and personal time because of their decision to become a president.

Angel says her life is serendipity. She explained,

With two little kids 18 months apart, I really thought I should take a leave. The president said “Well, why don’t you go ahead and take a sabbatical and go work on your doctorate?” Because I had just gotten accepted. I thought “Well, sure. I can do that and two little kids. One six months old, and one a year and a half. So, I did.

Margie shared,

I paused on my Ph.D. for five years, until my kids got through middle school and high school, and the teenage insanity years. Concerning the family piece, I got to a place where that all works, and my evenings are available, and I can plan time to meet all the extensive college and community obligations of a president.

Sheila and her husband discussed it and had a plan for childcare. She explained,

I made sure I brought my children and husband to events. They were at basketball games a lot and all those kinds of things. I just brought it all in. What I am learning is that that’s a real Generation X tendency, and many of us presidents, male and female, are doing these kinds of things with our children. I think it’s a lot healthier for our families to spend time together as we move forward.

Presidents indicated that they prepared differently because of gender. Interestingly, none of them said they thought about gender when considering whether to become a president. Rachel stated, “I never really thought about gender and not to do something because I was female.”

Women said they did not choose to apply because they were female. Sheila shared, “I was conscious of my femaleness and worked it to my advantage, but mostly didn’t consider it a disadvantage at all.” Several women stated that it was important to know who you are and have self-awareness.

Margie reflected, “I don’t know that I prepared for my career any differently related to my gender.” She went on to explain,

My professional development that I did, wasn't female specific. The trainings were all with AACC and League for Innovation. I've never done any specific women's programs around leadership. It wasn't so much about the gender getting into the role, but that over my life, I have, for the most part, appreciated the leadership style of women more than the leadership style of men – and I know that is a generalization, and it's not always true. There's more women that I've encountered that are communicative and collaborative in their leadership style. That's the kind of colleague I wanted, so I'll say that was attractive.

Sheila did not consider gender. She expressed,

I just had enough verve and confidence, I figured, Well, I can do this. What the heck? Women can do whatever. I didn't ever consider gender in my decision to become a president or the preparation to become a president. I'm conscious of it and worked it to my advantage intentionally as much as I could.

Wilma stated her gender has been very advantageous. She shared,

I've had opportunities by being one of three females in the room. I think in my graduate work; in my doctorate work, I was an anomaly and maybe even something to be dealt with and had good fortune of not being around people that held me down with that. I think that just helped more doors open for me, or at least I thought they were doors when I barged on in. I think being a female has not been a bad thing.

Callie has thought a lot about how her career decisions related to gender. She stated,

I think no matter what goes on with me, I'm just meant to do some things. I mean, I've thought about it, particularly the number of interviews, the number of things where I see women, and their challenge to step into the next step. When you're in a rural area, in general, college presidents are seeing the gender issue quite a bit. I often hear that I'm not who they expected, right? You know, typical in women, we've got to have somebody tell us three-four-five times that you might want to go this route.

Trina shared that because she had advanced through the hard sciences, she had dealt with gender issues previously. She expressed,

I didn't feel like it was something that really held me back, but I can tell you that I grew up in a household of brothers, so I have been a tough cookie most of my life. I think that because of that, I've never seen gender as a stumbling block.

Lacy stated,

I didn't choose to apply somewhere or not because I'm female. I grew up in a place that was pretty liberal during the Kennedy kind of years. I was raised really gender-neutral. We weren't gender-tracked. I've never put myself in a position because of my gender.

When Margie considered CEO level leadership in community colleges, as opposed to universities or industry, the college leaders were supportive about having female leaders. She remembers thinking,

Okay, this is going to be doable. Women are getting to the top in these community colleges, and there's women you know that when you get there, you'll have some colleagues.

Gender Impact on Women's Experiences

Participants stated that women have relationship-building skills and are good multi-taskers. Some participants stated that women are collaborators, consensus builders, and good listeners. Participants consistently stated that women bring people together. Many participants talked about being role models for girls and other women.

Angel stated,

I think when you live in a community where relationships and partnerships become more critical, I believe that gender – women bring more to the place with less need for ego and more desire for people to work together. I think that makes a powerful difference.

Angel also shared,

One of my biggest findings in my doctoral research was on gender. Gender made the difference in maintaining and growing collegial relationships. That was extremely insightful for me because I did not predict it and did not have it in my research up front. That would be a difference mainly because I had experienced collegial relationships and did not see gender as a difference.

Wilma shared, “Women are much better at multi-tasking and keeping conflicting ideas around in their minds at the same time. That's not being sexist, I just really think we are. The presidency is nothing but multiple priorities.”

Bella explained,

I'm not a gender specialist, but I do consider myself a feminist and I don't believe that there is any thinking job that a woman can't do just as well – if not better – than a man. I think the way men are from Mars and women are from Venus. It's the perfect example. I think most women lead from consensus-building and have extraordinary listening skills.

We don't tend to be autocratic until we have to be. We build; we're collaborators. We build consensus and so I do think that my own leadership style mirrors that.

Bella continued,

There weren't a lot of male presidents I wanted to emulate, but as the culture of the council of presidents changed, and I think as I got more comfortable about the skillset I had, would make the transition, I think that's how it became part of the determining factor for me. When I think back to some of the college presidents that were there when I started, they were bombastic as hell – and there was so much testosterone in the room. If anything, they taught me how not to act.

Wilma started in community colleges in 1989 as an assistant dean and she would go to state meetings. She shared,

There were three women in the group and maybe there was one person of color. The rest were all men. I had an opportunity to watch this change. I think it is important for women who have an opportunity to do leadership roles, to do that because that next generation is who we're responsible for. I think being a female and working with the legislature is very advantageous. People tend to talk to me and I think maybe gender has something to do with that. I think it's been beneficial. We need to be a powerful force for women in leadership and for our female students.

Trina explained,

Maybe it is a female characteristic to always be looking for those support networks or that comfort level with other people but that may have played a role in reaching out to colleagues and not being afraid to admit when you don't have the answers. I will tell you as I was interviewing at other institutions, I would always look at that particular institution to see what their history was and whether they'd had females in leadership positions before or not, whether their community was embracing that or not, just to try to do some background work to see what kind of mindset might already exist because I know, when they lay out the picture of finalists that are coming in to visit a campus, people look at that. They look to see if they're all white guys that are 60 or if there's any sort of diversity in the group or if there's a female presence in the group. The thing I don't want to do is be the "female" candidate. I just want to be one of the candidates, fully-qualified candidate that deserves to be there. I don't want to be there because I'm a woman.

Lacy believed, "I put up my own glass ceiling when I was in my 20s by thinking, okay, I could become a dean." She shared,

He [my mentor] was the one that broke the glass ceiling in my mind when he said, "Why not a president?" At that time, I didn't even know what a glass ceiling was. Had he not

done that, I don't know if I would have become a president. I don't know because I have a lot of grit and maybe I still would have had the gumption to keep going, but it might have taken me a little longer to get there. I was never raised with that kind of a ceiling, maybe I did that to myself. I don't know if that was gender or not, but let's just put that out there.

One president stated she was the first female vice president at her college. Another president mentioned that male mentors were comfortable taking her under their wing and she believes it is because she was not a threat to them. Several presidents mentioned it was important that they try to be a role model for girls and women in their communities.

Rachel believes that often, as women, people will see leadership in you before you see it in yourself versus men who often over-estimate and women underestimate their capabilities. She explained,

I'm sometimes like, "I can't believe I am the president. I look in the mirror and I, I just think you know, I'm a president of a college." You know, and it's been eight years, and I still have those moments. And I've been totally successful...it's weird. I don't think men ever do that. I think women tend to be our own worst critics.

Angel stated, "It is more acceptable for women to play second chair versus always being in the first chair for men." She shared,

I also think because I don't need a lot of credit. It doesn't mean I don't love being valued. I think it also lets you play differently with people. When you run into – and most of the people I run into that need credit in their life are men. I do think you have to have a spine. I think you have to have an opinion. I think you have to be willing to stand up for what you believe in. I think you can do it in ways that aren't in somebody's face. I think it is easier to forgive and forget and move on for me as a female and for the other females I know than it is for some guys.

Trina shared,

When I first arrived at the community college, there were people that were so excited that they hired a woman chemist to teach for them. They were looking for role models for their little girls in the community. I did become cognizant of that and did try to reach out a little bit and role model for some of the younger girls in the community and in a way that empowers them to show them that anything is possible. I also became the first female vice-president at the community college. They still have not had a female president there.

In the state where I am now, around half of us are female, we are very inclusive and supportive of one another.

Lacy worked with a lot of older male professional colleagues. She explained,

I wouldn't call them all mentors, because I would call just two of them really good mentors, they were more professional colleagues that took an interest in my growth and development. They were all males, and they did not have an issue at all with me being female. They were willing to help march me right up that ladder, in various situations and various locations. I didn't really have too many woman, really just one female mentor. Now, it couldn't have been more gender biased as time went on, because it seemed like men didn't have a problem responding, where the women seemed to. Then I just tended to go to the men because the males just didn't seem to be threatened by a female. I also didn't fall into the good old boys' bullshit. Pardon the expression. When the guys would go around the table, they would posture. I didn't pay any attention to any of that crap. I didn't buy into it. I still spoke my mind.

One president found that other women criticized and held her back. Wilma explained,

While this generation of women that is ahead of me was very cruel and unkind, my job is to make sure that I'm taking care of the next ones, and so I kind of found my role in developing women, not letting anyone else go through what I had gone through. To be a positive force for women in leadership.

Importance of Women Making a Difference in People's Lives

Women in this study talked about making a difference in people's lives, young and old.

These women discussed their motivations to make a difference for other people, and their words were heartfelt. Women talked about their personal abilities to effortlessly form relationships.

Some women in this study stated that women nurture and create hope in their communities.

Sheila stated,

Women care about our students and about communities in which they're raising their families. Women are really good "fits" for the ruralness. You've got to have pretty good boundaries, but because we, as women, can love and nurture, rural communities need nurturing because as we've all seen in rural America, industries are moving out. The jobs are going away. We need people in our rural community colleges to help take care of that. What I found is that a community college's purpose is to create hope. Women are some of the best people I know to create hope. Women know how to do that, and so the community college is the best place to be able to do that. My passion is in community college and making a difference for these students.

Wilma felt like she could make a difference at a rural college. She explained,

That's what the rural college gives me, is an opportunity to still see the lives of young people and older people that are changing. I guess it was selfish on my part, but I just did not want to be away from the core mission.

Gender Discrimination Realized by Women Presidents

Some women stated having had negative experiences because of gender. Some mentioned gender discrimination, lower salary or pay inequity and more effort than men must use to be heard and taken seriously. Margie mentioned, "As a woman, you have to be pretty careful not to speak in a way that can ever be interpreted as strident." Some women stated that women's thinking held them back. Rachel shared, "For example if women don't have all the skills then they can't do it, if a man has one or two skills they think they can do it." All participants in the study believed that gender should not be an issue.

Angel explained that she has lived with receiving lower salaries and working harder than men. She watched the numbers of women leaders grow in her state. She shared,

I think gender plays in that I've lived through that gender experience. I've lived through smiling and not being rude to legislators who might use terminology that might be offensive. I think for me, women as leaders, period, I've always thought they – their gender should not be an issue around leadership. I observe that it might be at times.

Bella worked in the state for a year and a half, and at that point in time, there were many male presidents. There was only one female president, and she was the only female president for a while. Bella explained,

She [the one female president] left and I felt like I was being judged by all the presidents but particularly the male presidents who had doctorates and had all this experience. They were all white males so there wasn't a single president that was nontraditional; all of them had come up through the ranks. We had a governor who had a natural affinity for men. Not sexual; just he had an affinity for men and the way in which their brains work. I attempted to have him describe what he thought leadership looked like in the future and felt that there was a real inequity at play around gender.

Margie thought gender discrimination is real, and it has not gone away, including that there is a pay disparity for women. She explained,

There's the meeting effect of, "It doesn't get heard until a man says it." All those kinds of things, and I've always been conscious and aware of it. I've known as a woman, I have to do better, always. That as a woman, to get ahead, you have to be recognized and promoted and to advance, you have to be excellent, as opposed to white men who can be mediocre, and still get ahead. But also, I haven't ignored gender, and it is freeing sometimes how I approach things. You have to work a little harder to be taken seriously, and to be heard. Overall, being a female leader at a community college is one of the places to lead that is less tilted against women, than industry or universities.

Sheila felt the preparation and the process were different in relationship to gender.

Whereas, she did not consider gender in the mix, she stated, "...it [gender] comes into play once you're starting to do some of this kind of stuff [laughter]." She shared,

It's been interesting being in the community where I am, it's rural and conservative. There's a particular church that is more patriarchal in their doctrine. I've had to really change my interactions because I am this assertive woman, with some men from this church they don't quite know what to do with me.

She continued,

Also, when I interviewed there were older trustees that knew what it was supposed to look like. I wore a skirt, which I don't really like to wear. I wore hose, which I also don't really like to wear [laughter]. I wore heels because I knew I needed to look like the professional woman that they wanted their president to be like in the interview process. Now I wear pants. In my interview – and it's an illegal question – everybody knew I had a baby. This trustee says, "What are you gonna do about your baby?" I made sure, even though it was an illegal question, that I addressed it because they wanted to know. You just have to deal with some of those men. They just don't know any better. Seventy-year-old men don't know that; they're going come up and hug you around the waist and kiss you on the cheek [laughter]. They just don't know. It is harmless.

Callie has always pushed against the stereotype because she was a math teacher, faculty, and a researcher. She has also experienced age discrimination. She shared,

I hear all the time, you are young to be a president – but I can have a man standing right next to me, who's a college president, who is my age or younger, and he's never had that. There are times, definitely, in that, I had to have the reminders and encouragement along the way, which is certainly more gender-related. I would say that I had to have the

development along the way, and pay attention to what the nuances, and differences were. I had to be aware that there were differences between men and women, and the expectation in how we view them in this position. They say men have to be good, women have to be perfect. Men have to show up, women have to show up and look good. It's just amazing. I did pay attention to that. I was aware of that. How we change that or create a level perspective is by being in this position, and then humanizing it a little bit more.

Wilma shared,

One of the trustees said I shouldn't make what they were going to offer because it was twice what I was making as a Dean in another state. I'm not sure he would have said that about a man. I've had that in other places. I've also had that in other places where they said, "Your husband is an attorney, so you don't really need as much to support the family."

Trina recalled a time when her boss was upset that she did not show up for a meeting when she was a division chair. It was a meeting with an external group that was strategic planning, or something like that. She explained,

I was teaching that hour that the meeting was happening, and my students were more important to me than the administration of the college. I didn't want to tell my president that. I heard after the fact that he was upset that I wasn't there. He was upset that the only female division chair we had wasn't there. We weren't being represented in a way he wanted us to be represented, and that really ticked me off. He heard I was upset and came to my office to apologize, but I'll never forget that because it made me feel like I was in that role as a token woman, and I chafed at that. That really makes me angry.

Lacy shared her perceptions and experiences about negotiating. She shares her concerns,

I think that's where we as women really see some of those differences and feel them. When it's time to negotiate anything, whether it's your salary or your position title or your seat on the bus. Whatever it is. I think that sometimes that's so subtle, that we don't even see it. That's something, I think, we need to pay attention to more. When we are thinking about the next step, when we're thinking about a cabinet position, or we're thinking about moving into CEO, how do we negotiate with our current supervisors, those experiences that we need for our resume, in order to get us to the next step. How do we ask for additional perks and benefits because we know that we deserve them? How do we make that argument, and show that data that proves that we do have that experience and that we do deserve it at this time? How do we negotiate a CEO contract and not just take what's first given to us? A lot of times folks will say, "Make sure you have legal counsel look over your contract and negotiate it for you." How do we make sure our worth is valued? I would say negotiation is a huge piece.

Advice for Women Seeking Rural Community College Presidential Positions

In the interviews, the researcher asked the women presidents to provide advice for other aspiring college presidents. According to participants, women need to be prepared to live in a fishbowl. Everyone in the community knows the president and her business; this leaves the president with no privacy. Women should align themselves with the rural job to ensure a good fit. Women should find mentors in successful community college presidents with whom they can honestly discuss challenges. They should try to balance work and personal life. Women should not let the challenges of the position scare them away. Also, women reflected on whether or not they would have chosen a different career path.

Be Prepared to Live in a Fishbowl

Everyone in the community knows the president and her business; this leaves the president with no privacy. Women stated that in rural communities, where fewer people live, they were recognizable most of the time. Trina knew if she and her husband wanted to go out to eat or do anything for recreation, then they were visible in the community. Everybody in the community knew them, so there were very few places they could go and have privacy. They went out of town when they needed to go shopping.

Trina advised,

Women deciding whether or not to apply for a rural community college position need to be prepared to live in a fish bowl where everyone knows their business, there is no privacy around your personal business in small towns. Many times you have no real choice but to shop out of town or on-line.

A consistent theme regarding advice for presidents was for women to be prepared to live in a fishbowl. That everyone knows your business. You have no privacy.

Sheila shared,

You can't buy a car out of town. You need to buy it locally because you know that car dealer, and the car dealer will know that you didn't buy your Ford pickup from him – that you bought it from somebody else.

Margie explained,

Everyone knows everyone, and everyone's going to know your business. You're going to try to be running a college, and every time you try to hire someone, they're related to somebody else, and living in the backyard of somebody else.

Callie stated,

I tell you, you are very, very visible, and people know who you are. I was well-prepared. I knew that in a rural area, anybody in a president position, male, or female, was going to be very visible. The prior president had been a woman, and she had been successful, but she was never fully accepted here because she didn't live here. She was never seen as one of them, which I think plays also a bigger picture in the women.

Wilma agreed with these presidents' sentiments. She shared,

You are living on the front page of the paper, all the time. You've got to be willing to give up a lot of privacy that you would have in a bigger institution. I think they need to understand that they're going to be in close contact with everybody they serve. They will see them in the grocery store. They have to be willing to pick up trash on city cleanup day and be at the baseball diamond when there's a community event. It's just incredibly important that people understand that you are always on show in a small community.

Bella wanted women to know, "You must be okay with ordering online [laughs]. My advice would have to be if you are going to be at a rural community college, you have to be prepared to live in a fishbowl."

She described,

You have to have – I think you have to have a sense of your own – not just a sense – you have to know what your values and beliefs are. You have to know what matters to you and what kind of positive impact that you want to have on that community. You have to be willing to share it and you have to be willing to be influenced by the community once you get there. If you walk into town and you think you're going to remake it – you're going to remake the town or you're going to remake the college – think again.

Align Yourself with the Rural Job

Women stated the need to align oneself with the rural job. Women need to research the community and make sure their values match the rural communities. Additional advice given by presidents is that women need to know whom they are. Bella and Callie stated, "You need to

have self-awareness.” Angel and Lacy expressed, “Are you the person to help solve problems the institution has?” Angel went on to say, “Know the financial situation. Think about the culture of the college.” Margie stated, “Rural colleges need sustained leadership.”

Women stated aligning yourself with the rural job meant doing extensive research about a rural community and the rural community college before accepting the presidential position. Most participants believed women should go to the community college before applying and determine if there is a good fit. They also believed you should work toward getting varied experience. Without exception, the presidents stated that applicants should be willing to attend community events and develop community relationships.

Angel advised,

Women should think about what the culture of the place is. How do you fit with that because you are not going to change it overnight whether they need it or don't need it? How do you fit with it? When you walk through the community, does it feel like your place? Can you be proud of it? Because if you can't be proud of it, and you want to avoid certain areas, that's not the place for you. Now it might be an okay stepping stone, whatever, but I think leadership is as much about stewardship as it is about leadership. Does this place feel like this is a good fit for me? I think the reason you have turnover of people is because they don't get good matches. The match between them and their values and their heart didn't really align with what was there in that community and that college. Also, you need to be sharp, financially as community colleges are strapped for money.

Bella stated,

You have to know yourself and what you have to know about yourself is aligned with the job you're about to step into, no matter the job it is. Then, you know you are doing it for the right reasons.

Sheila suggested,

You need good people in these jobs, and in rural communities we need people who care about our students and the community. Small, rural colleges – and most rural colleges are small – and most communities are small. Therefore, as president, you have to do everything. You sometimes take out the trash, you sometimes clean toilets. You sometimes drive students to the airport at 6:00 in the morning. You sometimes have students over to your house for dinner because they have nowhere to go for Easter. I think it is important for people to understand the role you play as a leader – not only on

campus, but in the community. You have to be involved in the Chamber. You have to be involved in an economic development organization. You have to go to the coffee club with 80-year-old men. You have to go to the grocery store and visit with people. You can't just be anonymous.

Lacy suggested,

You need to know who you are as a person. Knowing what you like, what you don't like, what you're good at, what you're not good at. What are you willing to do and what are you not willing to do? Be really, brutally honest with yourself. You don't have to share it with anyone else, but you have to know it for who you are.

The presidents generally stated that potential presidents should think about and determine in their minds what positive impacts they want to have on the community. Angel stated, "When you walk through the community, does it feel like your place?" Angel continued,

What I would recommend to people is first of all, does this community and this campus fit you? To be a president is okay – there's nothing against that, but I believe you need to understand the job's hard. Working 24/7 for a campus is hard no matter how much you love it. The more the 24/7 aligns with who you are, the style, the heart, the values, the community – the more that aligns, the easier it is to do 24/7.

Margie advised, "You need to understand the role you play as a leader on campus and in the community. While that can be difficult to do before you become a president, you need to make certain what you know about yourself is aligned with the job." Margie emphasized,

If you haven't lived rural – you've got to spend some time in it before you decide to go there. You can visit these small rural towns, and they're just beautiful for a weekend or a week. But the reality of living in the small rural town just can't be stressed enough. You have to know your rural [understand the culture], and you have to love your rural. Don't take a rural community college presidency just because that's the one that's less competitive or offered to you or whatever. Because it'll be bad for you and bad for that poor college. These rural colleges particularly need their sustained leadership.

Sheila recommended,

That you don't confuse wanting to be a president and getting the job with the work that's required to be the president. If you don't want to live there, you don't want to work with the board, you cannot be there. In rural community colleges, that concept is just heightened all that much more because it's painful for them when you leave. They miss you. Their kids have made friends with your kids. It impacts the community when you

come and go, and so it's important to consider the other people that are going to be affected by your decision long term in being a rural community college president.

Bella expressed,

We are all lucky if the legacy we had is that we did more good than harm. My advice is that you have to have a strong sense of your own priorities and why you want the job. They better be aligned with the institution and the community.

Callie offered advice on the need to work on getting varied experiences. She shared,

If you are in instruction, you need to try to be on a collaborative team that crosses areas of both administration/student services. Also, remember, it's about community and community-building—those are critical pieces, and the next thing is to do some professional development. We tend to, as women, believe that if we don't have all 10 items that are listed in the job description, we can't do it. Where, our male counterparts, if they have one or two items, they're like, "Oh, I can totally do this." We've got to get our women there, too. I think encouraging them to try other things, and then to do some professional development to support it.

Wilma stated,

There are just people that I have watched, in my life that have done these jobs and that I've admired. Just high quality, hard-working individuals. I watched one woman going from the business side into the presidency, and one of the things that I admired about her was watching her at the championship basketball game for her students. You would never see that at a large multi-campus district. It's that ability to be a part of the process.

Trina stated,

I encourage women to take every opportunity they can to learn something new and to be open to those new experiences. Whenever leadership opportunities arise, grab a hold of it, and make the best of it that you can because you never know where it might lead. You've got to learn every day.

Lacy advised,

When you start to think about a presidency, you need to think about where you want to be and what kind of institution you want to work with; what kind of problems does that institution have, and are you the person to help them solve it? What are the strengths that you bring to the table? Know yourself for certain. Also attend professional development like ACCT.

Find Successful College Presidents to Mentor You

Many presidents discussed that women should observe and work with successful college presidents and take every opportunity to talk and learn from other presidents. Women discussed mentors that set them on the path to becoming a president. Their mentors encouraged them to finish their doctoral degrees, attend professional development opportunities, and eventually pursue a presidency. Mentors gave them the confidence and the courage to know they could do the job. Women mentioned mentors as major influencers in their career pathways to the presidency. Bella suggested, “Women interested in being a president should find a mentor and have a good friend to call, someone to provide you with honest feedback.” Women shared that you need to realize that changes in rural community college cultures take time. Angel stated, “Also important is the need to realize that you are not going to change things overnight. You have college and community cultural issues you must deal with.” Several women also suggested mobility is important to find a presidency that is a good fit.

Cookie recommended,

Finding a mentor to help you. Be willing to be mobile, to move, to be willing to stay five to ten years, to make your legacy, to make your mark. As you prepare to learn different areas, learn the fundraising area because you have to go out and you have to meet with the community donors and you have to raise money. You have to get out of your comfort zone and try to learn many different areas. She believes that professional development is really important.

Lacy shared that women need to develop a mentor relationship with someone who will stay with them for life, or certainly, a significant number of years. She explained,

The mentor piece, I think, is huge! Sit down with them and look at a career map for yourself. Talk about what skills and experience you have and don't have. Be very intentional about getting there, if that's truly your goal and that's what you want to be. Also, pull out the physical map and sit down and talk to other presidents. Know what you are getting into.

Try to Balance Work and Personal Life

Women stated that living in rural areas could be challenging due to increased time on the job. Some women mentioned that balancing work and life was a concern and a challenge and suggested that women needed to realize that when they take on the role of a presidency, there will be diminished time with family. They suggested that everyone needed to understand and support this lifestyle. Wilma stated, “Try to balance work and personal life. Balance being a mother and a partner. Have a supportive husband and family. Note that you will have diminished family and personal time.”

Lacy strongly suggested that women try to balance professional and personal life. She also said it is important to know yourself. She recommended women think about,

What kind of quality of life do you want? You are going to live there, and it’s a stressful job. You’re going to want to make sure that there are – if you’re heavily into arts and culture, you want to make sure that there’s a very rich cultural community there for you to be involved in. Et cetera, et cetera. Knowing who you are and where you are at that point in your life and knowing what you want and what you’re willing to put up with and not put up with anymore in your life.

Do Not Let Challenges Scare You Off

Women shared that these jobs are complex and challenging at times, but women should not let the negative things overwhelm them. These women recommended to others that they work through the difficult times and stay strong. Women talked about the challenges of limited resources, high poverty areas, and the isolation of rural colleges in which they served.

Trina stated,

I would tell them to breathe deeply and trust themselves because none of us has all the answers, but we do the best we can every day. As long as you’re doing the very best that you can, you’re going to be just fine.

Callie stated,

These jobs are complex. They are hard. They are not for the faint of heart. Don't let the horror stories, and the negative things that have happened overwhelm you, or scare you off. You hear such negative things, but it's been quite wonderful. These are great jobs and we get to do great work. We shouldn't have fear of difficult challenges. Don't let the challenges scare you off.

Women's Thoughts on Whether a Different Career Path Would Have Been Better

Many women participating in this study stated that if they had it to do over again, they do not think they would change a thing. Lacy, Trina, and Wilma stated that if they had it to do over again they did not think they would change a thing. They firmly stated that they have no regrets. In contrast, a few women in this study stated that if they had it to do over again, they were not sure they would do this job again because being a rural community college president was difficult. These jobs are the most challenging jobs they have ever done. Callie and Rachel answered that they did not know that they would take this path because they like it, but it is just so challenging. Rachel stated, "It's hard. It's the hardest job I've ever had. And I'm not sure it is the most rewarding." Both Callie and Rachel felt like the benefits of it are that they are making a difference and helping to develop other women leaders.

Rachel mentioned,

If I had it to do all over again, I would have prepared myself better for the position because there were definitely gaps in what I knew coming into the position because it wasn't my path. I didn't have enough time in my administrative role to learn it. Like if I had done that for five or seven years I would have probably gotten more experience, but I only had two. So, I would have learned more about board's work and I would have learned more about the legislative process and about fundraising and foundations.

Angel stated, "It was not part of an end goal or an ultimate success because that's not how I got there." Margie stated, "I would have applied for the presidency sooner. I would have completed my Ph.D. sooner. Certainly, at the time I completed my Ph.D., it seemed like 90% of the jobs required it."

Wilma discussed a few other topics once she disclosed that she does not have any regrets.

She shared,

Working directly with the Board has been my biggest learning curve. It's just a different animal working with them. Also, doctoral programs are a little sad about talking about the challenges of working with faculty whether union or just on contract. We don't have unions as this is a "right to work" state so the contracts are administrative, and Board determined. We don't negotiate with the faculty the state association is just a representative body who makes sure we are following policy. So more doctoral programming that included working with a Board and the faculty. I would also learn more about who my direct reports were. I knew they had been there a long time, but I didn't know how long – that has been a long journey. You have to decide if you are going to go in and bring in a new team like a new football coach would. I don't think that's what they expect you to do as a female. It's, I think, a little different in a female situation.

Sheila suggested that she probably would have waited longer. She shared,

I was really young and green. I became a community college president when my youngest child was two months old. I often wonder what it would have been like not to have those 24/7 responsibilities and have a family. As I look at my life now, and had I waited, I would've waited 20 years to be a college president because I wouldn't have gone to graduate school. I wouldn't have taken the time to apply for presidency because my life is so full with kids' activities. I've learned that I will never get a lunch hour unless I take a lunch hour, I've learned that I will never get a vacation unless I take a vacation – that I have to say no. As I got more seasoned in this job and prioritize better because I've learned that nobody else is going to do it for me. I have to take charge and make it happen.

Answers to Research Questions

(1) How did women presidents realize becoming a community college president was a goal they wanted to pursue?

All the women discussed earning their doctoral degrees, the importance of their previous positions, and professional development as keys in their decision-making process. Nine out of 10 women previously served as community college administrators, and one served as a state agency head. All women had supervised large groups of people and believed that supervision gave them the skills necessary to lead.

Sheila, who is now in her second presidency, stated,

I went to college and earned my undergraduate degree in organizational communication. My first job out of college was in TRIO working for a student support services program. I then went into administration and after finishing my master's degree, my boss's boss, the vice president of academic affairs, encouraged me to go to the University of Texas doctoral program to prepare college presidents. It was kind of scary. I was 28 years old and starting a Ph.D. program with the intent of becoming a college president someday. I was a college president by the time I was 37.

Cookie reflected on her journey in pursuit of a community college presidency. She explained,

I received my bachelor's degree and my master's degree and wanted to then go on for my doctorate because at that time I was already teaching at a community college. I knew if I wanted to become an administrator I would need to go on for my terminal degree.

Callie had earned a master's degree, was teaching statistics and working in institutional research when she realized, "I had found my calling in life at community college! I went to college to finish my doctorate in higher education and community college leadership with a specialization in educational research."

Trina shared that she went to a university right out of high school. She stated,

I was scared to death for that transition because I grew up in a town of 2,000 people in a very rural part of the state. It was a really big step for me because the university was in a big city of 45,000 people and a six-hour drive away from home. I didn't know what I wanted to study, but my dad was a teacher, so I went into teaching. I got my bachelor's degree in chemistry and then went on for my Ph.D. I never thought in the world about a career path or what I would do with my degree. I just knew I wanted that degree and I wanted to be a teacher.

Most women in the study never planned to be a president and stated they arrived at the presidential position unintentionally. They found themselves moving up in the organization by taking on additional duties outside of their current jobs and found they could grow into the next position. Some women discussed their self-efficacy and grit.

Margie was interested in business and came from a background of entrepreneurs. She explained,

Most of all grit, I think I have a lot of personal grit. I've encountered challenges in my life, and I've always had grit and been optimistic. I am first generation. My family immigrated and started a small business, so business seemed like a logical choice. I ended up going to work for a very large corporate entity in marketing and software support. Then, I became a single parent and left the workforce. When I came back into the career world, I made a switch to psychology. I then thought about moving into education, higher education, and potentially teaching.

Cookie reflected on her journey in pursuit of a community college presidency. She shared that she had a goal of becoming a president for a while before she realized her dream. She explained,

I received my bachelor's degree and my master's degree and wanted to then go on for my doctorate because at that time I was already teaching at a community college. I knew if I wanted to become an administrator I would need to go on for my terminal degree.

Rachel did not pursue a presidency, but instead, the board appointed her as an interim president and then later asked her to remain in the permanent position. One of the Board members said to her, "Get the job description and do the job." Rachel stated that she did not feel prepared, but she did it. She explained her leadership experience in FFA assisted her in being a successful president.

(2) What previous experiences led women presidents who participated in this study, to make their decisions to become rural community college presidents?

Women stated career history helped shape their decisions to become rural community college presidents. Career history was a major theme that emerged and included subthemes of the importance of degree for advancement to the presidency, the significance of previous positions in deciding to become president, how personal experiences and professional

development helped prepare women, whether women's decisions were intentional or unintentional, and the influence of incompetent leadership on their decision-making.

Women spoke passionately about their paths to the presidency. Many of the women earned master's degrees and then began careers as administrators or teachers. The majority of women grew up in small, rural communities and this was a major factor in their decision to become a rural community college president.

Rachel talked about her deep passion for community colleges and her experiences as a faculty member and in an administrative role in student services before becoming president. She shared,

I always was a big believer in starting at a community college. And I love the job and the college so much and fell in love with the community and got in a doctoral program in community college leadership that allowed me to pursue my doctorate while working. I came out of student services, but I was also faculty and had instructional experience. Getting that budgeting experience, running a program, administrative experience, and getting to know all the people at the college helped. I took on a lot of stuff myself just to learn how things worked in instruction and then I got this job and realized how much I didn't know about a lot of things [laughs].

Angel became a dean of student services, then a dean of student services and outreach, then a dean of regional partnerships and economic development. She was also a chief information officer and was on the executive committee of the college for 25 years. She shared,

I loved it because the college always gave me things I knew nothing about. If there was an area that was a sticky wicket, they would give it to me. I never wanted to be a president. My choice was to be a really good mom and a really good professional. My time working at the agency and working with all the colleges in the state helped me a lot. I worked with a lot of presidents and tried to figure out how to make things work. You wind up talking about a lot of issues and how it affects all colleges. I think that prepared me to be better at how I both work with my peers but also how to better help me work with my colleagues.

Margie talked about her career in business and in education. She shared how these experiences prepared her for her presidency. She also discussed preparing herself for instruction, working closely with the dean of students, foundation work, and accreditation. She shared,

Going back to the start in business and working in the corporate world, and that business degree and the MBA, it gives me the ability and the capacity. I think I can communicate and establish credibility with our industry partners. That business preparation, and then after the corporate work, when I took over the family business, I got to be an entrepreneur for five years and ran the small business. Teaching has also helped me relate to the work of our faculty (full-time & part-time). I moved from teacher to administrator and had a division of 30 full-time faculty. It wasn't quite clear to me that I was headed all the way to a presidency, but it was clear to me that I wanted to get to the VP level. I moved into a Dean of Instruction position and had some opportunities to sit in for the president, and then became the Interim Campus President. It was then I realized, "Yep, this is the work and position for me."

Cookie stated her background in academic as well as continuing education helped her as she moved through her career. She was fortunate and had the opportunity to be an administrative intern to the chancellor. She stated that another thing that helped prepare her was her fundraising experience.

Cookie shared,

I think my career path has been more the academic route, the instructional route. I've been a part-time faculty member, a full-time faculty member, tenured and promoted throughout the ranks. I've been a Dean of Instruction, a Vice President and Executive Vice President for Instruction, and Vice President for Advancement.

Callie taught statistics and two graduate courses at a university. She described,

I loved the teaching part of it. Then an adjunct teaching position opened at the college where I was a student. I got the adjunct teaching position, and quit my full-time job, and told my husband afterward. From then on, that was it. I knew I had found my niche at the community college, that the rural-based college provided access and opportunity to those who might not be able to even know what's available in this world. I had been a department chair, really like a dean. There were no vice presidents at that time, and I ran all institutional effectiveness, was a chair and a faculty member. In rural colleges, you get a lot of experience doing a lot of things. Next, I became a vice president and did policy work. Then I became a president.

Trina had a very traditional kind of pathway to the presidency; she moved from faculty to division chair to academic vice-president. She described,

There came the point at the college where I was teaching where they needed a new division chair, and one of the other people that wanted to become my boss as a division chair wasn't a good fit for the role, so I threw my hat in the ring, too. It was a self-defense move. The position was a half-time administrative and half-time teaching, so it still kind of fit. I guess I never looked back after that. I was also provost for a couple of years at a four-year institution, but I missed community colleges. The four-year institution was a great job, but it didn't feel right to me. I love community colleges, and I love what we do.

Professional development was critical in many women's decisions to pursue a presidency. Women shared that during and after attending week-long conferences and workshops with organizations like AACC, ACCT, and NILD, they found an interest to seek a presidency. These professional development opportunities gave them the confidence and the courage to act upon their dreams.

Lacy shared,

NILD was a key factor in deciding whether I was going to jump into a presidency. It didn't matter what everyone else said. Even though everyone else was very encouraging, extremely encouraging in fact, pushy, even. I didn't feel ready. Until I felt ready, I wasn't going to put myself out there for a presidency. I needed to hear what Narcisa Polonio, (ACCT) had to say.

Sheila stated,

One of the most influential factors was my president identifying me for NILD. I didn't know that NILD was to prepare you to be a college president and to be community college president at that point. As I look back on it, that was a huge, influential factor.

Cookie stated,

A lot of professional development workshops and seminars they sent me to had to do with women in leadership. It was the 80s, and at that time, they didn't have as many women. I think they looked and saw that [few women seeking leadership positions], and they encouraged me to go to – and they paid for me to go to week-long leadership conferences and workshops including AACC. This [professional development] helped me prepare to become a president.

Some women spoke of deciding to become rural community college presidents after their experience with an incompetent president.

Rachel explained,

There were two presidents that I worked with at my school, one that was successful and the one who wasn't...well, often I would look at the unsuccessful president and know if she could do this job that I could do this job.

Bella stated,

I didn't like the direction things were going where I was [at the state agency], so I decided well if I want to be a president, this might be a really good time. I was looking down the list of presidents who might be leaving the state. A sitting president at one of the colleges was very persuasive that I'd be a great president at the college they were retiring from. I knew the board. I knew their budget. So I decided to go for it.

Other women shared similar experiences with incompetent leaders that led them to their decision to take the next step. Trina shared her situation when she was working at a four-year university after working at a community college.

Trina explained,

You can have positive and negative mentors. When I was working at the four-year university, I realized that I didn't have the same kind of mentor support that I had at the community college previously. I recognized quickly that I was in the wrong place and needed to get back to my roots. It's amazing what a difference one person can make in your life.

Nine of the 10 women mentioned that they had roots in rural communities. Women shared their passion for living and working in rural communities and how important the rural fit is to have a successful presidency.

Callie indicated that the number one thing that helped prepare her, aside from everything that she did to develop her professional expertise, was her experiences living in a rural area. She clarified,

I am from a rural area, a very small town in the southern region of the United States. I had to drive 30 miles to the closest college. I actually got my start at a rural community college, which is where my deep love for the rural-based college, and what it provides, in

terms of access to rural America, particularly those from disproportionately impacted populations, and those from a very low socio-economic status area, which often is what occurs in our rural colleges, or you're very far away from a location. The amount of time it takes to get anywhere, and in a rural college, the visibility is really tough – particularly because of the amount of travel you have to do.

Callie continued,

I know influence in a rural area. I was a student at a rural community college. I get community dynamics, particularly in a rural area, where you have multi-generational families. You have complex family relationships, and particularly, if you're in, and many rural areas are, at high faith-based, where a whole lot of things occur around the community and the church community. You have to be aware that you are part of a community, and you are a community member.

Trina explained that she grew up in a rural area and had such an appreciation that she could never really envision herself in a big city. She described, "I think growing up in a rural environment and serving in different capacities at rural institutions really laid the good groundwork for me to be successful as a rural president."

Margie stated she did not want to be in an urban environment and looked for a rural or semi-suburban location. She indicated she was looking for colleges that were below 4,000 FTE, and she would not be against a smaller one. Margie went on to share that part of the reason stems from her background growing up in a small rural area. She indicated,

Rural was a good fit for me. Community colleges in a rural area have a broader impact. I like to be in that situation where I know all the players in the area and the leaders of the various entities. They're really interested in partnering with you, as well, because in these rural areas – I don't mean you individually. I mean your college mission is not going to advance without partnering with other entities. I do have that part of me, the early career, the business and industry, and I like partnering with that to provide for students. We also have wonderful elected officials. A lot of times in these small communities, you get some pretty dynamic people there that aren't career politicians. They aren't looking to leverage some step along the way, but are really there because they love the place, and they want to make a future better. Being part of that is, yay, rural.

(3) What role did gender play in the women president participant's decision-making process related to deciding to become a community college president?

Most women stated that they did not consider gender when preparing for the presidency and it did not play a role in their decisions to become presidents. Some women mentioned that they were conscious of gender and that being female gave them different insights than men might have, and they saw it as a positive. Participants believed gender should not be a part of preparing for a presidency.

Margie reflected, “I don’t know that I prepared for my career any differently related to my gender.” She explained,

The professional development that I did wasn’t female specific. The trainings were all with AACC and League for Innovation. I’ve never done any specific women’s programs around leadership. It wasn’t so much about the gender getting into the role, but that over my life, I have, for the most part, appreciated the leadership style of women more than the leadership style of men – and I know that is a generalization, and it’s not always true. There are more women that I’ve encountered that are communicative and collaborative in their leadership style. That’s the kind of colleague I wanted, so I’ll say that was attractive.

Sheila did not even consider gender. She expressed,

I just had enough verve and confidence, I figured, Well, I can do this. What the heck? Women can do whatever. I didn’t ever consider gender in my decision to become a president or the preparation to become a president. I’m conscious of it and worked it to my advantage intentionally as much as I could.

Wilma stated her gender has been very advantageous. She shared,

I’ve had opportunities by being one of three females in the room. I think in my graduate work; in my doctorate work, I was an anomaly and maybe even something to be dealt with and had the good fortune of not being around people that held me down with that. I think that just helped more doors open for me, or at least I thought they were doors when I barged on in. I think being a female has not been a bad thing.

(4) What role did gender play in the rural community college experience for women president participants?

Sheila stated she knew what she would experience in smaller communities. She knew the people that the college served and the community. She knew she did not want to be in a large city because had experienced that when working on her doctorate.

Sheila shared,

Those [rural, farming] kinds of experiences with my brothers as truck drivers and construction workers, being around those kinds of people my whole life, prepared me well for the talks I have with farmers and construction workers today. I can talk to any of them and be real comfortable. I had a student give me a piece of metal art that he donated to the college recently. I procured it for my office, and I said, “Look at the craftsmanship. You can’t even see this welding seam.” A faculty member turned to me and said, “You know what a clean weld seam looks like?” Well, of course, I do [laughter]. Those [rural, farming] kinds of experiences have prepared me well for this job. It sounds funny that that would prepare you to be a president, but in a rural area, it does. When I am working with a farmer, I can talk farming with the best of them because of my background, so I have an instant connection and gain their respect. It seems invaluable, these life experiences I have had to bring to this environment.

Women shared that they believe discrimination is present. Several women shared their experiences around gender, pay, and age discrimination. A few women mentioned discrimination by older men, whom they believed did not know any better.

Angel explains that she has lived with lower pay than men and working harder than she perceived they did. She shared,

I think gender plays in that I’ve lived through that gender experience. I’ve lived through smiling and not being rude to legislators who might use terminology that might be offensive. I think for me, women as leaders, period, I’ve always thought they – their gender should not be an issue around leadership. I observe that it might be at times.

Bella worked at the state for a year and a half, and at that point in time, there were many male presidents. There was only one female president. Bella explained,

She [the one female president] left and I felt like I was being judged by all the presidents but particularly the male presidents who had doctorates and had all this experience. They were all white males, so there wasn’t a single president that was nontraditional; all of them had come up through the ranks. We had a governor who had a natural affinity for men. Not sexual; just he had an affinity for men and the way in which their brains work. I attempted to have him describe what he thought leadership looked like in the future and felt that there was a real inequity at play around gender.

Margie expressed that gender discrimination is real, and it has not gone away. She explained,

There's the meeting effect of, "It doesn't get heard until a man says it." All those kinds of things and I've always been conscious and aware of it. I've known as a woman; I have to do better, always. That as a woman, to get ahead, you have to be recognized and promoted and to advance, you have to be excellent, as opposed to white men who can be mediocre, and still get ahead. But also, I haven't ignored gender, and it is sometimes freeing how I approach things. You have to work a little harder to be taken seriously and to be heard. Overall, being a female leader at a community college is one of the places to lead that is less tilted against women than industry or universities.

Sheila felt the preparation and the process were a little bit different of a dance. Whereas she did not consider gender as a part of the issue, but it is a part once someone is "starting to do some of this kind of stuff [laughter]." She shared,

It's been interesting being in the community where I am; it's rural and conservative. There's a particular church that is more patriarchal in their doctrine. I've had to really change my interactions because I am this assertive woman, with some men from this church they don't quite know what to do with me.

She continued,

Also, when I interviewed there were older trustees that knew what it was supposed to look like. I wore a skirt, which I don't really like to wear. I wore hose, which I also don't really like to wear [laughter]. I wore heels because I knew I needed to look like the professional woman that they wanted their president to be like in the interview process. Now I wear pants. In my interview – and it's an illegal question – everybody knew I had a baby. This trustee says, "What are you gonna do about your baby?" I made sure, even though it was an illegal question, that I addressed it because they wanted to know. You just have to deal with some of those men. They just don't know any better. Seventy-year-old men don't know that; they're going come up and hug you around the waist and kiss you on the cheek [laughter]. They just don't know. It is harmless.

Callie has always been pushing against the stereotype because she was a math teacher, she was a math faculty, she was a researcher. She has also experienced age discrimination. She shared,

I hear all the time, you are young to be a president – but I can have a man standing right next to me, who's a college president, who is my age or younger, and he's never had that. There are times; definitely, in that, I had to have the reminders and encouragement along the way which is certainly more gender-related. I would say that I had to have the development along the way, and pay attention to what the nuances, and differences were. I had to be aware that there were differences between men and women and the expectation in how we view them in this position. They say men have to be good; women

have to be perfect. Men have to show up; women have to show up and look good. It's just amazing. I did pay attention to that. I was aware of that. How we change that or create a level perspective is by being in this position, and then humanizing it a little bit more.

For Wilma pay discrimination was present. She shared,

One of the trustees said I shouldn't make what they were going to offer because it was twice what I was making as a Dean in another state. I'm not sure he would have said that about a man. I've had that in other places. I've also had that in other places where they said, "Your husband is an attorney, so you don't really need as much to support the family."

Trina recalled a time when her boss was upset that she did not show up for a meeting when she was a division chair. She shared, "It was a meeting with an external group that was strategic planning, or something like that." She explained,

I was teaching that hour that the meeting was happening, and my students were more important to me than the administration of the college. I didn't want to tell my president that. I heard after the fact that he was upset that I wasn't there. He was upset that the only female division chair we had wasn't there. We weren't being represented in a way he wanted us to be represented, and that really ticked me off. He heard I was upset and came to my office to apologize, but I'll never forget that because it made me feel like I was in that role as a token woman, and I chafed at that. That really makes me angry.

Lacy shared her perception and experiences about negotiating. She shares her concerns,

I think that's where we as women really see some of those differences and feel them. When it's time to negotiate anything, whether it's your salary or your position title or your seat on the bus. Whatever it is. I think that sometimes that's so subtle, that we don't even see it. That's something, I think, we need to pay attention to more. When we are thinking about the next step, when we're thinking about a cabinet position, or we're thinking about moving into CEO, how do we negotiate with our current supervisors, those experiences that we need for our resume, in order to get us to the next step? How do we ask for additional perks and benefits because we know that we deserve them? How do we make that argument, and show that data that proves that we do have that experience and that we do deserve it at this time? How do we negotiate a CEO contract and not just take what's first given to us? A lot of times folks will say, "Make sure you have legal counsel look over your contract and negotiate it for you." How do we make sure our worth is valued? I would say negotiation is a huge piece.

- (5) What role did other individuals play in women president participant's decision-making process related to becoming a community college president?**

All women discussed mentors who played a critical role in the president's decision-making process as they were becoming community college presidents. Some women shared that a family member or friend was essential in their decision-making process.

Participants stated that mentors helped them realize they had the ability and skills to do the job. In addition, women mentioned that mentors assisted in setting career and education plans for them. Importantly, women shared that mentors provided them with the confidence and courage to pursue their dreams and goals.

Lacy shared that she started her degree as a pre-medical student, but then discovered psychology, and ended up in a med-psych discipline. Her mentor pointed out that many of the things that she enjoyed were a part of Higher Education. After talking with him, Lacy decided,

Yeah, I could be a dean. I could see myself being a dean. He said to me right then, "Why not a president? Why didn't I think of that?" Then he invited me to attend a couple of his classes to see if there was something I would be interested in. From that point on, my career path was, though not completely planned, very thoughtful. It was very linear. He helped me put together my plan.

When Sheila went through her Ph.D. program, she did an internship with a female mentor that influenced her. Sheila described,

She not only influenced me to become a president in the first place – she encouraged me and helped me. She also gave me the confidence to know that I could do the job by watching her and shadowing her. Then I also had an opportunity to do an externship with another female leader who was a huge influence because she kept telling me, "Well, you've got to do this. We need people like you in leadership. Once I retire, people like you need to do it."

Margie shared,

I've worked with some really great presidents and also boards. People in those situations gave me those opportunities to access some "road to the presidency" professional development, but also, gave me the opportunity to really take ownership of some things, and see where my leadership goes, and that's really built my self-confidence.

Trina had a mentor who was very encouraging and supportive. She shared that he gave her the confidence to know that she could do the job well. Trina stated,

Without that kind of mentor, I don't know that I would've been able to take that step. I really do owe it to him, and I've told him that. He was pretty pivotal in my pathway. I also think the network that I grew along the way of colleagues that she I can call and talk with was important and helped me be successful as I became a president.

Some women talked about deciding to pursue a presidency because of their experiences with incompetent presidents. Rachel only considered it after she was appointed the interim president at her college. Rachel explained,

There were two presidents that I worked with at my school, one that was successful and the one who wasn't...well, often I would look at the unsuccessful president and know if she could do this job that I could do this job.

Some women also talked about how their families influenced their decision-making process in becoming a rural community college president.

Trina shared,

My grandma went through the third grade, and my mother was fortunate that she was able to graduate from high school. Since my mom was the youngest in her family, (none of her sisters were able to graduate from high school) there was no one else left at home to take care of, so she was able to graduate. They both (mom and grandma) instilled in me from early on that I would go to college. With that kind of backing, who's going turn away from that, right?

Rachel's parents did not help her decide to be a president, but they helped encourage her to pursue whatever goal she was interested in achieving. She shared,

They taught me that I could do anything I wanted to. The people that helped me, in my decision to pursue this position permanently versus being an interim, were some of the people that were at the college, some other people in the state, friends and my husband.

Cookie shared, "My parents taught me about education from their own backgrounds, values, and education and pushed me to be educated and to get my degrees. They were very, very proud of me."

Essence Statement

Women discovered their self-efficacy and internal strengths through pure determination, grit, and verve in becoming rural community college presidents. These women credited their successes to their education, pursuit of advanced administrative positions, personal experiences, professional development opportunities, mentors who helped them build their confidence, and the support of their families. They also shared the importance of balancing work and life.

Most of the women in this study did not set out to become community college presidents. Only two women spoke of their planned intent to become community college presidents. For most women, they stated it was more serendipitous than planned. The majority of women stated that they had no regrets and would not change a thing.

Women shared the importance of growing up rural, the need to understand rural communities, and having good community relationships as being imperative to having a successful presidency. Some things specifically mentioned as critical to succeeding were building relationships with local business and industry partners. Most women participants also shared being a good fit with the local community and culture as imperative.

These women spoke of their internal desires to succeed and shared their commitment to being good leaders while listening to their constituents and making the tough decisions. They stated that making a difference in other's lives is what motivated them. They talked about the importance of being positive role models for other women and young girls.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand what influenced women's decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges. Major themes that emerged from the results included how career history shaped decisions; the role support groups played in women's decision to become president; the importance of rural roots and the "right fit" to becoming successful rural presidents; the influence of gender on women's decisions to become presidents; and advice for women seeking rural community college presidential positions.

Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the meaning of each finding organized by major themes, how the findings and themes relate to the literature, implications for practice, and implications for future research. This study and the findings add to the body of knowledge concerning what influenced women's decisions to become rural community college presidents.

Discussion of Findings

The results showed that skills and abilities necessary for women participants to lead at rural community colleges are specialized. This finding is congruent with the literature. Leist (2005) found presidents need a special set of traits and characteristics to lead at rural community colleges successfully. This researcher's findings and those from Leist indicated that successful rural community college presidents needed to be heavily engaged in their local communities and must participate in civic organizations, fundraisers, chambers of commerce, county fairs, and partnerships with business and industry. According to the literature, those traits and characteristics included technical leadership skills, but also "to genuinely engage, respect, and embrace the local citizens and culture." (Leist, 2005, p. ix). In other studies, Bigelow (2009), Eddy (2007), Wallin (2003) and Kools (2010) found that rural presidents must have elevated

interpersonal skills. The literature also showed that rural leaders should have a hands-on leadership style (Kools, 2010). Findings in this study were similar to those published in that the participating presidents needed to understand the culture of the community college and the local community to be successful. In essence, the participants stated that presidents need to “know their rural”, meaning that women participants believed that presidents must get to know the local people, and genuinely understand and embrace the local culture. The rural environments and cultures where these participants grew up influenced them to lead in rural community colleges. Participants found they needed to assimilate and be able to develop relationships with local business owners. Similar to other results, findings in this study indicated that rural community colleges ought to find ways to attract qualified applicants to avoid a leadership vacuum (Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2005; Pennington et al., 2006).

Relationship of Findings to the Literature

How Career History Shaped Decisions

Women presidents in this study perceived their career history helped shape their decisions to become rural community college presidents. Women stated the importance of earning doctoral degrees for career advancement, the significance of previous positions on their career pathway, and the impact of personal experience and professional development. These were found as key in influencing women’s decision to become rural community college presidents.

Importance of Degrees for Advancement to the Presidency

All the women in this study had earned their doctoral degrees. The majority of the women participants stated they felt they needed these degrees to advance into their higher education leadership positions. Other researchers have also found the importance of earning the

doctorate for these women. Krull (2011) and Kuharski (2009) stated that many of the women in their studies believed achieving a doctorate may provide more opportunities for advancement into a presidency. According to a 2000 nationwide survey, the total percentage of administrators completing a doctoral degree increased or remained at 87% since 1985 (Amey et al., 2002).

The majority of participants in this study held advanced degrees in education or higher education. Similarly, for public two-year colleges, Hartley & Godin (2009) found that 75% of first-time presidents' degrees were predominantly in the field of education or higher education. The percentage was remarkably higher than other academic disciplines were.

Significance of Previous Positions in Deciding to Become President

Women in this study came from a variety of career pathways. This finding is consistent with Amey et al. (2002) in their national study of community college administrative careers. Their results indicated a diversification of career pathways to the presidency. Career pathways of the women in this study included a chief academic officer, chief student services officer, chief information officer, chief planning and improvement officer, director of a state agency, and other academic areas. Women arriving at presidencies through non-traditional career pathways came at a good time as demand is outpacing the supply of presidents (Eddy, 2004; Eddy, 2012).

The findings in this study are congruent with the results from other research because some of the women participants in this study arrived at the presidency through the academic administrator roles. However, there is also a pattern in the results indicating that half of the participants came through diverse, non-traditional career pathways. Hartley & Godin (2009) described a pattern observed from a 2001 ACPS survey where those with non-academic administrator's positions were rising to the presidency at a rate that outpaced those coming through chief academic administrator/provost positions. In a subsequent 2006 ACPS study,

Hartley & Godin, described a reverse of this trend; those advancing from chief academic administrator and provosts were doing so at a rate outpacing non-academic administrators moving to presidencies.

This research indicated most participants were external candidates to their institutions. Consistent with previous literature, institutions had hired most of these presidents from the outside. Amey et al. (2002) found that a characteristic of the career pathways of many presidents was that they moved between institutions rather than staying at one. A significant number of women in this study advanced their careers inside the walls of educational institutions, and this is consistent with Powers (2005) results. According to Powers, the majority of women who were promoted had careers in education, 64% of these came from an academic institution other than their own, and 11% advanced within their educational institution before assuming the presidency.

Using data from the 2006 ACPS study, Hartley & Godin (2009) found that community colleges hired 38% of first-time presidents internally. In contrast to the 2006 ACPS study, the findings from this research indicated that the rural community colleges in this study hired only 20% of women presidents internally. The distinctions in the populations sampled in these two studies may explain the differences in the results with the ACPS study. In this study, the participants were rural community college presidents, but the ACPS study included presidents from all sectors of community colleges where the president had risen from inside the institution.

Personal Experience and Professional Development Helped Prepare Women

Women in this study indicated that personal experiences and professional development were key components in preparing them to become rural community college presidents. They stated that without opportunities for personal and professional growth they would never have

considered a presidency. These two components helped many women make the presidential decision.

Women in this study realized they wanted to become presidents as they moved up into administrative level positions. Similar to findings in the literature, the majority of women in this study described how they were willing to take on additional responsibilities and roles, and all eventually understood their potential and desire to lead an institution. Women in this study mentioned their drive and ability to stretch themselves to take on those duties outside of their roles. Vanhook-Morrissey (2003) found that women's interests in becoming presidents changed as they moved into more challenging positions. Krull (2011) and Cox (2008) found women's willingness to take on additional responsibilities as key.

Some women in this study talked about how their grit and self-efficacy were the main drivers for their ability to become community college presidents. Leaders above their ranks and advisors to these women encouraged them to take on additional duties and responsibilities, and they rose to the challenge. Cox (2008) found that "self-efficacy influenced their effort, persistence, and choices of responsibility," and women believed they had the skills to do the job (p.10).

The majority of the participants in this study talked about how self-efficacy influenced their decision to become a rural community college president. These women counted on themselves to have grit, be persistent to accomplish their goals and deal with all the other stresses of life at the same time. Cox (2008) found that women's "self-efficacy influenced their effort, persistence, and choices of responsibility," and women believed they had the skills to do the job (p.10). As the women in this study took on more and varied responsibilities, their confidence grew, and they realized they had the skills to be leaders. Realizing they had the skills

to be leaders helped them take on even more advanced responsibilities. Vanhook-Morrissey (2003) found that socialization experiences, informal female role models and mentors, self-efficacy, and “multiple role challenges influenced women’s career development process.” (p. 136). One of the most significant skills women in this study discussed included the ability to communicate with faculty, staff, the board, and the community. Some of the women in this study shared the importance of multi-tasking skills to be successful in their presidencies. Powers (2005) found that women desiring to become presidential leaders at community colleges ought to be multitasking visionaries and motivators who inspire others to achieve institutional goals.

In addition to personal experiences, the majority of the women in this study mentioned professional development playing a critical role in their ability to rise to the presidency. The importance of women having access to professional development was prevalent among the participants in this research and the literature. Luzbetak, (2010) discussed the importance of women’s ability to obtain professional development training opportunities to grow their knowledge and skills to take on the role of leading at a community college. Whether women decided to become community college presidents was many times evidenced by internal and external leadership development opportunities (Amey and VanDerLinden, 2002; Krull, 2011; Powers, 2005). Without these professional development opportunities, most women in this study would not have realized they wanted to become presidents.

Most women in this study mentioned they realized they wanted to become a president when they attended professional development conferences and workshops. They described these professional development experiences as the determining factor in making their decision to pursue a presidency. Several of the women stated that they were encouraged and even pushed to attend professional development. Subsequently, they decided to become a community college

president. Other researchers have indicated that finding ways to engage more individuals in professional development and training opportunities could potentially enlarge the pool of applicants for high-level administrative jobs (Luzbetak, 2010; Violino, 2012; Wallin et al., 2005). Wallin et al. (2005) shared that progressive colleges invest in succession planning for institutional sustainability (p. 1).

Decision to Become President Intentional or Unintentional

The majority of women did not set out to become presidents. For several women in this study, it was not completely obvious that they were heading all the way to a presidency, but it was clear that they wanted to get to a higher administrative role. Several other women stated that becoming a president was not their goal. Not intentionally planning to become a president is consistent with trends found in the literature. Arriving at the presidency was a meandering, non-traditional pathway for many women who were not consciously choosing to rise to presidential level positions (Amey et al., 2002; Cox, 2005; Jaschik, 2007; Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Switzer, 2006; Thompson-Adams, 2012).

Women in this study did not set goals to become presidents. Cox (2005) studied the motivating “factors influencing women’s decisions to pursue upper-level administrative positions in higher education” and found that women did not set career goals even after entering education (p. 123). Cox’s (2005) participants used language like serendipitous for their career paths and indicated that they just fell into their positions (p. 123).

A few women participants in this study explained their career paths to the presidency as intentional. One identifiable difference between these women and the other participants interviewed was that they were younger when they made the decision to pursue the presidency. This could be a generational difference or just coincidence, but noteworthy to mention. These

women described that while their paths may have been indirect, once they decided to pursue a presidency, the choice was intentional and planned. These women put their minds to becoming presidents and set a course to reach their goal. This finding is in contrast with most of the literature, but consistent with Powers (2005) study where she found some community college women presidents intentionally chose their path.

Decision to Become President Influenced by Incompetent Leadership

A few women in this study shared experiences with incompetent leaders that led them to their decision to take the next step into leadership. These women shared their situation of working with an incompetent mentor or leader that helped them realize that they could do the presidential job. Once they gained confidence and understood they could do the job, they began their journey to the presidency. These women realized the difference that one person can make in someone's life. Realizing that a mentor or supervisor is an incompetent leader is consistent with the literature where a few presidents spoke of negative mentors from whom they learned how not to lead (Krull, 2011; Powers, 2005).

Role Support Groups Played in Women's Decision to Become President

Importance of Mentors to Women Becoming Presidents

Women in this study were keenly aware of the powerful impact of mentors who provided support. Several women mentioned mentors that significantly influenced them. In many cases, mentors paved the way by creating educational, positional, and professional development opportunities for these women. Findings were similar to other studies where women described the most significant factor in actually getting into a presidency was mentors, someone that found women with talent, capability, encouraged women and saw someone who could make a difference (Kuharski, 2009; Luzbetak, 2010; Thompson-Adams, 2012).

In the literature, mentors were mentioned as one of the most important influences for women's career development; this was in addition to seeking leadership positions, and in pursuing presidencies as important factors (Ballentine, 2000; Coughlin et al., 2005; Cox, 2008; Getskow, 1996; Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Luzbetak, 2010; Moore-Brown, 2006; Powers, 2005; Rabey, 2011; Thompson-Adams, 2012). Not only did mentors encourage women participants in this study, they also gave them confidence and helped them along the way to pursue presidencies by providing externships and internships. Participants shared that mentors were chief influencers for them as they advanced into leadership positions and that mentors helped them be more courageous. Kuharski (2009) found that women were not always aware of their abilities and talents until someone recognized and encouraged them. Kuharski and Luzbetak (2010) found that mentoring is critical in training women and its importance at their institutions in their development as future campus leaders and in supporting those who sought to move into new or higher-level positions.

All of the women in this study utilized either a mentor or supervisor on their pathway to the presidency. It was important for them to have someone who believed in them, encouraged them to take on additional roles, and pushed them to pursue further formal education and professional development. Women shared that mentors made a profound difference in their rise to the presidency. Participants emphasized the importance of mentors in encouraging and supporting them all the way to the presidency. Krull (2011) found that presidents had a colleague or mentor who encouraged or supported their initial advancement into leadership roles. For the women participating in this study, this meant that mentors encouraged them, opened doors for them, guided and directed their careers, and gave them opportunities which attributed to their success. The importance of having a mentor in reaching the presidency was present in most of

the journals and studies reviewed for this research. Many presidents claimed mentors became important early in their careers, believed mentors encouraged and supported them by providing personal and professional development opportunities, groomed them for the position, and put them on the path to their presidency (Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Moore-Brown, 2006). Eddy (2004) and Powers (2005) also found similar significance for the roles of mentors in the lives of women leaders.

Women participants stated they were able to gain confidence and skills when they had supportive supervisors. Several of the women in this study mentioned the importance of support from supervisors as a critical aspect of their decision making as well. Kuharski (2009), Cox (2008) and Krull (2011) also found that encouragement and emotional support from superiors are necessary.

Importance of Family Support to Women Becoming Presidents

The women in this study stated the importance of family in their decisions to become rural community college presidents. These women spoke passionately about having supportive husbands who made sacrifices so that their careers could blossom. Some women referred to their husbands as saints and talked about how they gave up their professions to stay home and raise children.

Women also talked about making decisions about where to seek presidential positions being a joint decision between themselves and their husbands. Women found it extremely important to have husbands that are supportive of their career goals. Without this support, they would not be successful. Women also talked about children and the importance of their support and understanding. Switzer (2006) found the majority of women she interviewed indicated the complexity of balancing work and family. Some women shared that they involved their spouses

and children in the events and activities of the college to spend more time together. Townsend and Twombly (2007) found that community colleges were a fitting place to work because of the flexibility of balancing family and a career. This literature spoke about women in community colleges in general, and faculty predominantly, but it points out that there is a good match between women and community colleges because of the flexible work schedule.

Importance of Rural Roots and the "Right Fit" to Becoming Successful Presidents

In this research, women who decided to become rural community college presidents recognized the challenges they faced in being a leader in a rural area as it related to location, culture and constituency influence. These women spoke vividly about the need to understand the culture of the local community and constituency. Leist (2005) stated that individuals who decide to become a community college president at a rural community college should understand the unique challenges they will face in leading in a rural area. Leist identified “geography, politics, and culture as unique demands placed on rural community college presidents.” (p. 168). Findings from this study mirrored Leist’s conclusions. Some of those unique demands include the fact that a president may be isolated and may need to understand local rural politics, the importance of visibility in the rural communities, and the need to embrace the culture of a rural setting to sustain a good fit.

The majority of the women in this study stated that it was critical to know your rural. Knowing your rural means a person has knowledge about the culture of the rural community and that they engage in it. Women participants suggested that presidents need to be involved in community organizations like the local chamber of commerce, civic organizations, and county fairs to name a few. Leist (2005) alleged that community involvement for rural community college presidents is a condition of employment. Leist shared that a president must embrace and

respect the local culture and immerse oneself in it to be successful. Leist also emphasized the result of not attending local events and engaging in the community could lead to an ineffective presidency.

Women in this study talked passionately about the need not only to be actively engaged in the community but the importance of partnering with local community leaders to move their institutions forward. Women stated that community colleges are the local economic development engines for their local communities. Being the local economic engine means that citizens are counting on their local community college to help establish economic prosperity in the region. Bigelow (2011) and Eddy (2007) also claimed that the value of connectivity and relationships in rural communities drove how much support there was for the local community college. The value of connectivity and relationships included the success of raising funds for capital campaigns, raising scholarship funds, passing bonds, and collaborating with business and industry for equipment, services, and supplies. Leaders at rural community colleges need to be highly informed and actively engaged in a distinct brand of politics with local, state, and regional economic agencies to move their institutions forward (Eddy, 2007; Bigelow, 2011; Leist, 2005; Wallin, 2003).

Rural Roots Led Women to Rural Presidencies

For women in this study, growing up rural helped them know the influence of a rural area. It helped them understand the community dynamics and complex relationships. This meant deeply understanding the importance of building relationships in the community. This is consistent with the literature because community college presidents required a solid connection and engagement with the public in rural communities where relationships are critical (Switzer, 2006). The importance of these solid relationships meant that women who grew up in rural areas

believed they had a natural understanding and connection with rural communities. Many participants in this study grew up on farms and were very involved in their local communities where they knew the local farmers and construction workers and felt completely comfortable around them. Women spoke passionately about the meaning of growing up in a rural environment as being an advantage. Consistent with Leist's (2005) findings, women presidents in this study stated having rural roots as a big plus for appreciating the local citizen's allegiance and high regard for their community college and its culture.

Women in this study advised strongly against using rural community colleges primarily as a pathway to a better presidency. Eddy (2007) and Leist (2005) found that sometimes leaders use rural community colleges as a stepping-stone to a more desirable presidency. Women in this study emphasized the importance for a president to stay for the long term to learn the culture of the rural community college, the value of the local area, and the culture of the people they served before they could become effective in their roles as president. Therefore, it is essential not to consider a rural community college simply to advance a career to get to a more prestigious presidency.

Women in this study repeatedly talked about the importance of a good fit between themselves and the rural community colleges they serve. Researchers stress a good match between the candidate and the needs of the college because it may make a difference for a successful presidency. When a president is not successful, it is equally hard on the rural community college because it takes so much effort to find and hire presidents. Because he believed it was so important for a president to be a good fit, Leist (2005) created a conceptual framework for rural community colleges that was based on situational context. Leist's

conceptual framework was a mechanism to more accurately illustrate and advertise for the professional qualities needed for a match between the president and the rural community college.

Influence of Gender on Women's Decisions to Become Presidents

Gender Impact on Women's Experiences

Most women in this study stated that they did not consider gender when preparing for the presidency and it did not play a role in their decision to become presidents. For women, this meant that they did not utilize professional development or training specialized for females. Some women mentioned that they were conscious of their gender and they believed being female gave them a different insight. Women saw being female as a positive and several mentioned using it to their advantage. Switzer (2006) emphasized that women continue to be in a double-bind hindered by society's expectations of a leader's skills and socialized gender roles (p. 1). In Switzer's (2006) study, women were from different educational sectors; the findings reflected the participants' varied experiences, but there were common threads including that being female gave them skills advantages. These skill advantages included "enhanced fundraising, administrative effectiveness, and work with their boards." (p. 3).

Importance of Women Making a Difference in People's Lives

Women in this study talked about making a difference in people's lives, young and old. These women discussed their motivations to make a difference for other people, and their words were heartfelt. The results from the literature also contained the theme of making a difference in other's lives. Kuharski (2009) found the participants in her study were influenced because of who they were, their careers were on track, and they allowed mentors to support them. The women shared that making a difference was important to them; these women formed relationships effortlessly and honored those around them. Women in this study perceived that

women created hope in rural communities. Krull (2011) found the ability to “impact student’s lives through learning, making a difference in colleagues’ lives, and being able to affect the campus culture change seemed to motivate women to step into leadership positions.” (p. 94).

Gender Discrimination Realized by Women Presidents

Some women in this study also talked about having had negative experiences because of their gender. Some mentioned gender discrimination in the form of pay inequity; the discrimination also took the form of working harder to be heard and feeling the need to bring more to the table than men so that they might be taken seriously. These undesirable experiences meant women were still feeling the impact of discrimination even in today’s educational institutions. Women in this study experienced board member’s suggestions that the college pay them less because their husbands were in well-paying jobs. Women shared having to be careful about what they said so the board would not interpret them as strident. Even after “almost half of a century of equal opportunity legislation, women’s opportunities for leadership are anything but equal” (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p.1). Several women in this study discussed pay inequity and feelings they were judged differently than men.

Some women presidents in this study experienced age discrimination when compared to a male president who was the same age or younger. Women also discussed having to speak loudly and have superior skills as compared to men so that others would hear and recognize them. Women described that those in the college and the community expected them to show up and look nice while stakeholders just expected men show up. Other women participants mentioned that they were asked inappropriate interview questions and were hugged inappropriately. Discrimination against women continues to manifest in many ways. Kellerman and Rhode

(2007) discussed how gender stereotypes, bias, and inequality along with inflexible workplace structures and inadequate public policies continue to challenge women.

Advice for Women Seeking Rural Community College Presidential Positions

Be Prepared to Live in a Fishbowl

In the interviews, the researcher asked the women presidents to provide advice for other aspiring college presidents. They shared that a woman needs to be prepared to live in a fishbowl. Everyone in the community knows the president and her business; this leaves the president with no privacy. Women stated that in rural communities, where fewer people live, they were recognizable most of the time. Women shared that the stakeholders and community expected them to look and play the role of the president most anytime and anywhere they went. Being visible most all the time meant that it is not acceptable to go out in public dressed in anything less than presidential attire. It also meant that presidents have no privacy in rural communities and that everyone appeared to be aware of what she was doing on a daily basis. Participant's perceived that they had no privacy in rural communities is consistent with findings from other studies. Eddy (2007) identified rural presidents as highly visible when out in the community: there was no running to the grocery store in sweats and tennis shoes because everyone in the community knows the president and expects them to represent the college at all times. Several studies confirmed that presidents were on the job all the time representing their colleges, and their communities and that leading at a rural community college was different than in more populous areas (Bigelow, 2011; Eddy, 2007; Leist, 2005). Eddy (2007) described, "Leading in a rural community truly lives out the cliché of being a big fish in a small pond." (p. 288), and that several presidents interviewed mentioned trips to the grocery store as providing opportunities to interact with community constituents. Women in this study reported the same experiences at the

grocery store and viewed these trips to the store as a positive. Women in this study considered trips to the store as an opportunity to connect with local community members.

Participants' emphasized presidents must be involved in the community and attend events. A president needs to know their values and beliefs and know what kind of impact they want to have on the community before taking the job. Women shared that they needed to purchase things, like vehicles, in the town. Involvement in the community means that a president must patronize local businesses and build relationships with the community to succeed. Eddy (2007) emphasized that building formal and informal relationships was a key element and that communication methods were particularly important and needed to be effective for presidents to succeed. Given the necessity of cooperation, these presidents had to spend substantial time forming relationships and fostering associations in the community (Bigelow, 2011; Eddy, 2007; Wallin, 2003).

A few findings from the study were important but had no supporting literature. One finding was that everyone knew everyone else in small rural communities and that many people were related to one another. When someone is fired or hired, he or she is likely related to someone else living in the community or living in the neighborhood. Presidents should be aware of these close relationships and know that there could be difficult and sensitive decisions to make that could affect someone's friend or relative. Another finding women shared was that they were living on the front page of the newspaper and that can be difficult for their families. This public life meant the women needed to prepare their families for the possibility of potential negative publicity.

Align Yourself with the Rural Job

The results strongly suggested that women needed to align themselves with the rural job. Women need to research the community and make sure their values match the rural communities. Aligning yourself with the rural job meant doing extensive research about a rural community and the rural community college before accepting the presidential position. Eddy's (2007) research question was "how rural community college presidents construct their leadership given their rural locals." (p. 272). Eddy (2007) found that rural presidents were highly visible with no anonymity; thus, cooperation and relationships within the community were key, but networking opportunities were minimal. Eddy concluded that rural community college leaders must find a fit between themselves and the institutions at which they work and that it was difficult to locate individuals to lead in rural and isolated settings. Eddy shared that presidents were always in the spotlight in their community.

Women in this study stated that there were demands on their time. These included travel time when trying to cover large service areas, getting to and from airports and meetings, and working more work hours to perform all the other duties of a presidency. Time constraints and long work hours were consistent with the finding in the literature. Leist (2005) and Bigelow (2011) claimed that for presidents living in rural areas it could be challenging due to increased time demands versus presidents in urban or even suburban areas. Leist pointed out that these time demands on rural presidents were partly because of geographical location requiring travel across expansive service areas, travel to airports, a legislative session, or a professional development opportunity and to and from state meetings. These activities take a tremendous amount of time.

Find Successful College Presidents to Mentor You

In this study, women discussed mentors that set them on the path to becoming a president. Their mentors encouraged them to finish their doctoral degrees, attend professional development opportunities, and eventually pursue a presidency. Mentors gave them the confidence and the courage to know they could do the job. Women mentioned mentors as major influencers in their career pathways to the presidency. Participants significantly valued mentors, and most women believed that mentors were the individuals who gave them the courage to pursue a presidency. Similarly, women presidents in other studies spoke of the importance of having mentors. Many presidents claimed mentors became important early in their careers, and described that mentors encouraged and supported them by providing personal and professional development opportunities, groomed them for the position, and put them on the path to their presidency (Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Moore-Brown, 2006).

In multiple studies, presidents discussed colleagues or mentors who had encouraged them. These colleagues or mentors encouraged them to seek an additional degree or apply for a position with increasing responsibilities and opportunities for experience. The mentors modeled professional and leadership behaviors and created leadership opportunities through professional development or promotional opportunities (Brown, 2005; Krull, 2011; Kuharski, 2009; Shults, 2001).

Try to Balance Work and Personal Life

All the women in this study were married. Participants discussed the need to balance work, family, and personal life. Similar to results from Cox (2005), the majority of women interviewed by Switzer (2006) indicated the complexity of balancing work and family. Kuharski (2009) stated that the participants in her study took care of themselves physically and

emotionally and worked hard to have a balanced home life. Participants suggested that having a supportive husband and family was critical to their success. Some women mentioned bringing their husbands and children to college events to spend more time together. Others mentioned the importance of choosing an area to live where they could spend time doing activities outdoors with their spouses. Participants found that these jobs were time-consuming and that they had to be sure to take the time to spend with family and have a personal life because there is enough work such that a president could work continually.

Some women mentioned that balancing work and life was a concern and a challenge and suggested that women needed to realize that when they take on the role of a presidency, there would be diminished time with family. They suggested that everyone needed to understand and support this lifestyle. Eddy & Cox (2008) and Krull (2011) stated that the pressures for women to have a balanced work and life created fears of failing as mothers and wives while attempting to succeed in their careers.

Do Not Let Challenges Scare You Off

Some women in this study discussed the idea of not letting the challenges “scare you off.” They suggested that these jobs were not for the faint of heart. These jobs are complex, and challenging at times, but women should not let the negative things overwhelm them. These women recommended to others that they work through the difficult times and stay strong. Not being faint of heart meant that they ought to be resilient, and confident that they are doing the best job possible with the resources at hand when making complex decisions. Not becoming overwhelmed meant that at times presidents might feel alone and isolated, so keeping a network of others to talk with during the challenging times was important for success.

Leist (2005) indicated while there is a common set of qualities of expertise that a community college president needed to have, rural community colleges were unique. He stated that individuals who decided to become presidents in rural community colleges should understand the unique challenges they would face in leading in a rural area. Leist identified “geography, politics, and culture as unique demands placed on rural community college presidents.” (p. 168). He described those unique demands as the reality and sense of geographic isolation, understanding rural politics, and visibility, and embracing the culture of a rural setting to promote a good fit.

Morelli (2002) studied partnerships in rural areas and found that rural Colorado community colleges faced challenges that were deeper than urban community colleges. Similar to Leist (2005) and Wallin (2003), Morelli’s findings supported these college’s issues were “exacerbated by limited resources, geographic isolation, and a static economy.” (p. 1). Women talked about the challenges of limited resources, high poverty areas, and the isolation of rural colleges in which they served. These findings are similar to Eddy (2007), Leist (2005) and Morelli (2002) who indicated that leadership at rural community colleges was challenging due to geographic isolation, few local economic resources and many times highly impoverished regions.

Women’s Thoughts on Whether a Different Career Path Would Have Been Better

Many women participating in this study stated that if they had it to do over again, they do not think they would change a thing. They firmly stated that they do not have any regrets. Some women shared they would have completed their doctoral degrees sooner and applied for a presidency sooner. The majority of women believed that their career path was the right one and

that they are satisfied with where they were in their careers. Others would have waited longer or gained more experience before taking over as a president.

In contrast, a few women in this study stated that if they had it to do over again, they were not sure they would do this job again because being a rural community college president was difficult. These jobs are the most challenging jobs they have ever done. A few presidents likely would not have ascended to these positions if they could do it over again because of the time demands and the complexity of the decisions.

Implications for Practice

This study raises several key points for women to consider when deciding to pursue rural community college presidencies. The importance of earning a doctoral degree is an advantage and provides more opportunity to rise to the presidential position. Colleges select presidents from among diverse leadership positions. The creation of development opportunities for those seeking to advance to higher-level roles and responsibilities is a key factor. Providing opportunities for professional development are critical in helping to increase the growth of community college presidents. The advantages of having mentors and family support are key for women considering community college presidential positions. The importance of establishing relationships in the local community is key. It is critical that presidents find a good fit with the culture of the rural community college and the communities it serves. The significance of having rural roots appears to be an important factor in those individuals seeking rural community college presidencies. Gender was not emerging as influential in women's decisions to become rural community college presidents, and this was notable. The sharing of advice for women seeking rural community college presidencies is useful.

Regarding the advantage of earning a doctoral degree, doctoral degrees enhance the opportunities for women to advance to presidencies. Earning a doctoral degree also gave women the confidence that they could successfully obtain a presidential position. If more presidential openings are available to them, then there would be more opportunities to find the right fit.

Concerning career and educational goals, traditional career pathways appear to be changing and creating more opportunities for individuals who are outside of academic track positions including areas like student services, chief information officers, and chief planning and improvement officers. This diversification affords a broader range of people the prospect to apply for presidencies and opens a new world of opportunities for different pathways to the presidency.

This expansion of pathways can afford the opportunity for broader access depending on personal and professional development experience. Expanding personal experiences to include more responsibilities and learning new skills may assist in opening more doors to pursue higher level leadership positions. Many times, once someone takes on new responsibilities and is successful, their confidence and courage grow and they possess more skills to expand to the next level of position attractive to them. At this time, many individuals realized they could lead and do the job, sometimes realizing they could do the job better than other leaders. It is critical for people to learn from those who led before them.

It is crucial for those in the pipeline to find encouragement and for those who have the potential to be in the pipeline to become convinced to pursue more responsibilities and professional development. Once an individual develops confidence and they realize they can be successful leaders, they may consider moving up to the next level. It would be helpful for individuals to have a stated career plan to follow once they determine they have leadership

interests. It will also be useful if colleges have established formal and appropriately funded succession planning opportunities to assist those individuals who are interested in pursuing leadership positions.

It would be important for individuals to have career goals more intentionally planned out. Once established goals are in place, it is typically easier for individuals to be intentional by pursuing their path through professional development, degree attainment and expanded job opportunities. It is helpful for supervisors and mentors to be able to see and understand the interest that people have in advancing to potential job opportunities, so they can assist and encourage them.

It would be valuable for colleges to provide formal mentoring programs to assist individuals in their pursuit of career and educational goals. Mentors can assist individuals in gaining the confidence and courage needed to understand that they can handle these complex presidential jobs. Mentors can help encourage and even push individuals harder to realize they have the ability and skills to do the job and to know when one is ready.

It would be advantageous for rural community colleges to encourage leaders who have grown up in rural areas and who have advanced leadership aspirations to receive professional development for rural community college presidencies. Professional development would be valuable for reasons of assisting leaders in finding the right fit with rural colleges and local community cultures. Encouraging leaders who have grown up in rural areas and who aspire to advance to join the applicant pool is valuable for a rural community to find the most talented candidates for presidencies.

While the women in this study did not identify gender as influencing their decisions to become rural community college presidents, they did mention gender discrimination. It would be

valuable for women to empower and encourage other women to rise above the gender barriers and jump over the hurdles they perceive in rising to the presidency. According to the women in this study, there is still a concerning presence of discrimination to overcome. It would be important for women to feel free from discrimination and empowered to continue to push back against it.

Advice from women rural community college presidents to other women seeking rural presidencies is to prepare oneself for living in a fishbowl with little privacy; these women must know that for every decision and move they make, those around them will likely judge them. It is essential for women to understand the implications of this very public and visible life. Also, activities like going out to eat in another city or shopping online may be needed at times due to the low accessibility to a variety of items.

Additional advice given for women is to make sure to align themselves with the values of the rural area. Being sure that women aligned with the values of the local region is extremely important as is being prepared to live in the spotlight at all times. It is important to understand the area and be prepared to cover a large, isolated geographic region as many rural community college districts cover thousands of miles with tiny communities and small populations of people. One needs to be sure they are ready for these types of challenges.

Finding other successful community college presidents with which to network and trust is essential. It is important to have other presidents to call and talk with about the college because sometimes a president may need a safe place to discuss issues only another community college president will understand. It is important not to let the challenges of leading at a rural, isolated community college scare one off. It is also important to strike a balance between work and

family life as being a college president takes a tremendous amount of time. These are very complex jobs, but they are also very rewarding at the same time.

Implications for Future Research

According to AACC, many community college presidents are at or near retirement age, and more than 50% of all community colleges in the US are rural, it is likely that rural community colleges will find themselves in tremendous need of a number of new leaders (Eddy, 2007). Rural community colleges are likely to have a more difficult time attracting presidential applicants due to their isolation, lower wages, and lack of resources (Leist, 2005; Eddy, 2007). Additional research around why women decide to become rural community college presidents could be instrumental in securing presidents for these future leadership positions.

The women participating in this study indicated that earning a doctorate was key in rising to the presidency. It is unclear whether women leaders have adequate release time and funding to earn advanced degrees; researchers could help settle this issue with further study. Results from this study and those from others support the importance of doctoral degrees for women leaders to make them viable candidates. Women may forego applying for a presidency if they have not yet earned a doctorate. Research concerning investment by colleges in professional development of this type can be helpful for decision-making in practice and informative to researchers.

A key for supporting preparation of potential candidates for the presidency may be transparent succession planning on the part of the college. If colleges are planning for succession, then women apply for these positions because they have more information as to how to plan their careers; this may include that women will take on more responsibilities to prepare for advancement. However, the idea remains untested, and researchers can contribute if there is

sufficiently transparent succession planning such that women can take advantage of these opportunities at rural community colleges. Many presidential candidates may not consider rural community colleges because of their isolation and lack of resources. Presidential candidates may also consider utilizing rural community colleges as a path to a more desirable presidency. By using succession plans focused on inside tracks, rural community colleges could invest in developing presidential leaders from within the institution. Moreover, researchers should investigate whether there is sufficient investment in developing capable mentors for women interested in pursuing presidencies. Rural community colleges would benefit from accessing or implementing formal mentoring programs and cultivating future rural community college presidents. A descriptive or exploratory study could be informative to learn if there are states that have set up formal mentoring programs to assist community colleges with supporting women who are seeking future presidencies.

Researchers could also contribute to understanding how to mentor these women by determining if there are specific skill sets that prime women to lead at rural community colleges. Using this knowledge, mentors could guide the women to attain these skills. Understanding how sitting community college presidents could utilize these skill sets to develop and facilitate mentoring and training programs for women in rural community colleges could be helpful. This could add to the literature and help rural institutions identify future women leaders.

More research may elucidate the barriers that prevent women from advancing to rural community college presidencies. Interviewing women in the positions of deans and vice presidents could be helpful to determine their aspirations and what kinds of barriers they perceive to rise to the presidency. If women do not aspire to a presidency, the reasons for this decision could be determined. These results might inform the body of work useful to rural

community college boards and leaders. It would be interesting to compare the barriers faced by women attempting to ascend to the presidency from inside the institution versus those who enter an institution as an external candidate. In this study, 20% institutions had promoted women from the inside to become president. Results from other studies indicated that as high as 38% of women have risen to the presidency from inside an institution. Using data from the 2006 ACPS study, Hartley & Godin (2009) found that community colleges hired 38% of their first-time presidents internally. It would also be of interest to learn which related issues may contribute most significantly to limit the numbers of women pursuing a presidency. For example, are there fewer women in rural community colleges willing to make a deliberate decision to move toward the presidency? Do a lack of funds for professional development and no clear succession plan contribute to women's reluctance to consider advancement? Are there other unexplored reasons that researchers are unaware of that compete or contribute to these issues?

More research regarding the barriers for women who were the first woman presidents at their rural community college could be useful. These women may have faced significantly more, or distinct challenges, such as gender discrimination barriers, and knowledge of these could assist the next women in leadership as they move forward. It is possible that women do not actively pursue a presidential position decision if they have witnessed discrimination against other female leaders. Bornstein (2007) pointed out that the first female presidents at any institution were "critically examined by both internal and external audiences, particularly early in her presidency." (p. 21). This research could add to the current literature on this topic.

A study designed to compare the differences between men and women in their decision-making process to become rural community college presidents would be informative. If there were differences, it would be interesting to learn more about why they exist. Researchers could

perform another study similar to this one but with 10 to 15 male rural community college presidents. This would add to research concerning why individuals decide to become rural community college presidents.

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APPENDIX A: COLLEGES QUALIFYING RURAL-SMALL, RURAL MEDIUM

College	Location	Carnegie Classification
Aims Community College	Greeley, Colorado	Rural
Arizona Western College	Yuma, Arizona	Rural
Big Bend Community College	Moses Lake, Washington	Rural
Blue Mountain Community College	Pendleton, Oregon	Rural
Canada College	Redwood City, California	Rural
Casper College	Casper Wyoming	Rural
Central Arizona Community College	Coolidge, Arizona	Rural
Central Oregon Community College	Bend, Oregon	Rural
Cerro Coso Community College	Ridgecrest, California	Rural
Clatsop Community College	Astoria, Oregon	Rural
College of Southern Idaho	Twin Falls, Idaho	Rural
College of the Siskiyous	Weed, California	Rural
Colorado Northwestern Community College	Rangely, Colorado	Rural
Columbia College-Sonora	Sonora, California	Rural
Columbia Gorge Community College	The Dalles, Oregon	Rural
Community College of Aurora	Aurora, Colorado	Rural
Crafton Hills College	Yucaipa, Colorado	Rural
Flathead Valley Community College	Kalispell, Montana	Rural
Great Falls College Montana State University	Great Falls, Montana	Rural
Klamath Community College	Klamath Falls, Oregon	Rural

Lamar Community College	Lamar, Colorado	Rural
Laney College	Oakland, California	Rural
Linn-Benton Community College	Albany, Oregon	Rural
Los Medanos College	Pittsburg, California	Rural
Mohave Community College	Kingman, Arizona	Rural
Moreno Valley College	Moreno Valley, California	Rural
North Idaho College	Couer d'Alene, Idaho	Rural
Northeastern Junior College	Sterling, Colorado	Rural
Northwest College	Powell, Wyoming	Rural
Oregon Coast Community College	Newport, Oregon	Rural
Otero Junior College	La Junta, Colorado	Rural
Oxnard College	Oxnard, California	Rural
Palo Verde College	Blythe, California	Rural
Rogue Community College	Grants Pass, Oregon	Rural
Sheridan College	Sheridan, Wyoming	Rural
Shoreline Community College	Shoreline, Washington	Rural
Skyline College	San Bruno, California	Rural
South Puget Sound Community College	Olympia, Washington	Rural
Southwestern Oregon Community College	Coos Bay, Oregon	Rural
Tillamook Bay Community College	Tillamook, Oregon	Rural
Treasure Valley Community College	Ontario, Oregon	Rural
Trinidad State Junior College	Trinidad, Colorado	Rural
Umpqua Community College	Roseburg, Oregon	Rural

Wenatchee Valley College	Wenatchee, Washington	Rural
West Hills College-Coalinga	Coalinga, California	Rural
West Los Angeles College	Culver City, California	Rural
Western Wyoming Community College	Rock Springs, Wyoming	Rural
Yavapai College	Prescott, Arizona	Rural

APPENDIX B – INVITATION LETTER/E-MAIL TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Date
President
Community College
City, state, zip

Dear President:

My name is Dana Young and I am a graduate student at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado under the direction of Dr. Linda Kuk in the Higher Education Leadership Program within the School of Education.

I am conducting a qualitative study to learn what influenced women's decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges. The title of my research is, "Why Women Make the Decision to Become Presidents at Rural Community Colleges."

I am requesting your participation that will involve the following three components:

- Two audiotaped interviews. One via face-to-face videoconference should take approximately 60 - 75 minutes. The other follow up interview questions will be via telephone and should take approximately 15-30 minutes.
- Completion of a demographic questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes.
- Review of the interview transcript and thematic analysis for accuracy and your approval should take approximately 2 hours.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose or need to withdraw from the study at any time, there is no penalty. Your name, and the name of your college, will not be used with the results of this study. I will evaluate data from interviews with approximately ten to fifteen female community college presidents and evaluate them for themes. There are no known risks associated with this research, and even though there will be no direct benefit for you, your information will contribute to current information about female community college leaders. The digital audio tapes will be erased after three years of completion of the study and all transcripts will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to call me at (307) 254-0278 or Dr. Linda Kuk at (970)222-1337. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU Institutional Review Board at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; (970) 491-1553.

Sincerely,

Dana M. Young

Please sign below to indicate your willingness to participate in the above study and return utilizing the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope. You may also simply reply via e-mail to danamyoung8@gmail.com and indicate your consent to participate.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

APPENDIX C – DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Demographic Information

Name: _____

Age: _____

Phone Number: (____)_____

Address: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

_____/_____/_____

City/State/Zip Code

Marital/partnership status: Married/Single/Divorced/Partnered/Widowed (please circle one)

Date you began as President at your current institution: _____

Is this your first community college presidency? Yes/No (please circle one)

Is this your first rural community college presidency? Yes/No (please circle one)

Previous position(s) held please list position title and dates:

If not previously employed at a community college, please describe your experience.

Academic background, specific discipline area(s) studied.

APPENDIX D – FOLLOW-UP LETTER

President
Community College
City, state, zip

Dear President:

About two weeks ago I sent you a letter seeking your participation in a study of women community college presidents. As of today, I have not yet received your response. The focus and the title of my dissertation is *what influenced women's decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges?*

Please consider my request. Your participation is important to the success of this research effort.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Dana Young
Doctoral Candidate
Colorado State University

APPENDIX E – THANK YOU LETTER

President
Community College
City, state, zip

Dear _____:

Thank you for participating and contributing to my study on women community college presidents.

Your personal time and commitment meant a lot to me, not only for this study, but also to ... (personalize each letter)

Please contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached during the daytime at (541)881-5580 in my office or on my cell at (307)254-0278 on the weekends or during the evening. I can also be reached by e-mail at danamyong8@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Dana M. Young
Doctoral Candidate
Colorado State University

APPENDIX F – RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Summary:

A presidency typically represents reaching a high point in one's career in higher education. It is suggested strongly in the literature that the road to a presidency is generally unintentional and that women make up only about 30% of community college presidencies. To fulfill in part the requirements for the Ph.D. degree in Higher Education Leadership, it is my goal to share the views of women and why they decided to become rural community college presidents.

Research Questions:

The central research question to be answered is as follows:

What influenced women's decisions to become presidents at rural community colleges?

The associated sub-questions to be answered are as follows:

- (1) How did women presidents realize becoming a community college president was a goal they want to pursue?
- (2) What previous experiences led women presidents who participated in this study to make their decisions to become rural community college presidents?
- (3) What role did gender play in the women president participant's decision-making process related to deciding to become a community college president?
- (4) What role did gender play in the rural community college experience for women president participants?
- (5) What role did other individuals play in women president participant's decision-making process related to becoming a community college president?

APPENDIX G – INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Please state your full name for the digital recording. Thank you.

Guiding Questions:

1. Please tell me about your academic background and your career path to the rural community college presidency. How do you believe your career history shaped your decision to become a rural community college president?
2. When did you know you wanted to become a rural community college president? Describe how you knew.
3. What were the most influential factors that led you to become a rural community college president?
4. Please describe to what extent or how other individuals played into your decision-making process to become a rural community college president.
5. How did gender play a role in your decision to become a rural community college president?
6. What role did gender play in your preparation to become a rural community college president?
7. How did your pre-presidency experience prepare you most for deciding to become a rural community college president and why?
8. What do you think best prepared you to become a president at a rural community college?
9. If you had it to do over again, what would you do differently in making your decision to become a community college president?
10. What advice would you give to a woman who desires to become a rural community college leader about their decision-making process?
11. Is there anything else about your decision to become, or your decision-making experience in becoming, a rural community college female president that would be helpful for me to know in order to understand your perspective?

APPENDIX H - THEMES TABLE

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Theme 1: How Career History Shaped Decisions	Importance of degrees for advancement to the presidency	Doctorate programs
	Significance of previous positions in deciding to become president	Pre-presidency job experiences
		Increased responsibilities
		Diversified career pathway
		Varied experiences
	Personal experience and professional development helped prepare women to become president	Opportunities for personal growth, realized they could do the job, confidence, courage
		Diverse, varied background
		Self-efficacy, grit, persistence
		AACC, ACCT, NILD
	Decision to become president intentional or unintentional pathway	Accidental, serendipitous career path
		Never planned to be a president
		Goal was to become a president
	Decision to become president influenced by bad leadership	Incompetent leadership, bad leaders/mentors
	Theme 2: Role Support Groups Played in Women's Decision to Become Presidents	Importance of mentors to women becoming presidents
Mentors paved the way, increased responsibilities, promotions		
Mentors gave support, confidence, and encouragement		
Importance of family support to women becoming presidents		Supportive husbands, family made sacrifices
		Family support imperative, balancing work and family

		Parents encouragement
Theme 3: Importance of Rural Roots and the “Right Fit”	Rural roots led women to rural presidencies	Grew up rural
		Comfortable with geographic isolation
		Attended civic organization meetings and county fairs
	Right Fit	Understand local culture and politics
		Build community relationships
		Do not to use it as a “stepping stone” to a more desirable presidency
Know your rural setting to sustain a good fit		
Theme 4: Influence of Gender on Women’s Decision to Become Presidents	Gender impact on women’s experiences	Gender did not play a role in decision
		Conscious of their gender and used it to their advantage
	Importance of women making a difference in people’s lives	Making a difference in people’s lives very important
	Gender discrimination realized by women presidents	Many forms of discrimination are still prevalent
Theme 5: Advice for Women Seeking Rural Community College Presidential Positions	Be prepared to live in a fishbowl	Very visible, always representing the college
		No privacy, everyone knows your business
		Trips to the grocery store – relationship building
		Big purchases should be done locally if possible
		Get involved in your community
		Everyone knows everyone else and many times they are related
	Align yourself with the rural job	Do research before taking position

Theme 5: Advice for Women Seeking Rural Community College Presidential Positions		Rural isolation can be a challenge
		Large service district/area - takes time to travel to and from meetings, conferences, legislature
	Find successful college presidents to mentor you	Mentors/networking important for rurally isolated presidents
	Try to balance work and personal life	Supportive husband and family is key to success
		Diminished family time
		Take family to college events
	Do not let challenges scare you off	Rural presidential jobs not for the faint of heart
		Work through difficult times, stay strong, try not to get overwhelmed
	Women's thoughts on whether a different career path would have been better	Would not change a thing, no regrets
		Would have waited longer to take a presidency
		Would not have done it, very challenging and complex

APPENDIX I – IRB

PROTOCOL
Social, Behavioral &
Education Research
Colorado State
University

Protocol # 10-1772H
Date Printed: 03/16/2018

Continuing review.....	1
Personnel Information.....	2
Subject Population.....	3
Study Location.....	3
General Checklist.....	4
Funding.....	4
Expedited Paragraphs.....	5
Purpose,Study Procedures,Background.....	6
Subject Population.....	7
Subject Population.....	8
Risks.....	8
Benefits,Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality.....	9
Potential Conflict of Interest.....	10
Informed Consent.....	11
Assent Background.....	11
Attachments.....	12
Obligations.....	12
Event History.....	13

Protocol Title: Why Women Make the Decision to Become Presidents at Rural Community Colleges
Protocol Type: Social, Behavioral & Education Research
Date Submitted: 09/17/2017
Approval Period: 10/12/2017-10/11/2018
Important Note: This Print View may not reflect all comments and contingencies for approval. Please check the comments section of the online protocol. Questions that appear to not have been answered may not have been required for this submission. Please see the system application for more details.

***** Continuing review *****

Continuing review: In the space below, provide the requested participant number information. As in the previously used H-101 form, the numbers you provide must include: a) Total number of participants approved to date; b) Number of participants studied since the last approval date; c) Total number of participants studied since the beginning of the project, and d) Number of participants remaining to study. Input NA if not applicable. Do not leave any questions blank.

1. Summary - Number of Participants Associated with the Protocol:

- a. Total number of participants approved to date (please list by participant group):

Original approval was to recruit up to 15 participants

- b. Number of participants studied since the last approval date:

10 participants studied

- c. Total number of participants studied since the beginning of the project:

10 participants since the beginning

- d. Number of participants remaining to study (total number of participants approved LESS the total number of participants studied to date):

0 participants remaining to study

- e. Please explain if there is a discrepancy in participant numbers (e.g., more participants responded to a survey than had been expected and approved):

N/A

- 2 a. Reasons and number of withdrawals from the research (both subject and investigator initiated) since the last approval date.

N/A

- b. Number of subjects lost to follow-up since the beginning of the study.

N/A

- c. Description and number of any protocol deviations/violations or unanticipated problems (UPs)/adverse events (AEs), particularly those that may have affected the risks to subjects since the last approval date.

N/A

- d. Complaints about the research during the last year.

N/A

3. Description of the remainder of project:

- N Do you plan to enroll more subjects?
Y If "No," have all subjects completed all research-related interventions?
N Are you following subjects for longitudinal study purposes? Note: Protocols must be renewed to continue recruiting participants and/or collect data.
Y Are you only performing data analysis?

4. Summarize all changes in the protocol since it was last approved.

N/A

Proceed to the appropriate section(s) of the protocol and make your changes. Make necessary changes in Consent Form(s) or Alteration of Consent Form(s) (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script), or other attachments when applicable.

5. List of Protocol Sections (and questions) that have been changed/modified.

N/A

*** Personnel Information ***

IMPORTANT NOTE: Mandatory Personnel on a protocol are: Principal Investigator and Department Head. Only the Principal Investigator can submit the protocol; although other personnel listed on the protocol can create the protocol. Human Subjects Protection Training is mandatory for Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator, and Key Personnel (as defined by NIH). Training must be updated every three (3) years.

Principal Investigator Mandatory

Name of Principal Investigator (Faculty, Staff or Postdoc)	Degree	Title
Kuk, Linda	Ph.D.	Associate Professor
Email	Phone	Fax
Linda.Kuk@ColoState.EDU	(970) 491-7243	
Department Name	Campus Delivery Code	
School of Education		
Human Subjects Training Completed? Pls must complete Training every three (3) years		Y

Co-Principal Investigator

Name of Co-Principal Investigator (This can include Master's or Ph.D. students)	Degree	Title
Young, Dana		Educ & Human Res Studies
Email	Phone	Fax
Dana.Mae.Young@colostate.edu		
Department Name	Campus Delivery Code	
244		
Human Subjects Training Completed? Co-PIs must complete Training every three (3) years.		Y
No training data is available.		

Department Head Mandatory

Name of Department Head	Degree	Title
Gloeckner, Gene		Professor
Email	Phone	Fax
Gene.Gloeckner@ColoState.EDU	(970) 491-7661	
Department Name	Campus Delivery Code	
244		
Human Subjects Training Completed?? Training is not required for Department Heads. Select "No" if you do not know if your Department Head has completed training or not.		N

***** Subject Population *****

Subject Population(s) Checklist

- Select All That Apply :
- Adult Volunteers
 - Elderly
 - Employees
 - Mentally Disabled or Decisionally Challenged
 - Minors (under 18)
 - Pregnant Women
 - Prisoners
 - Soldiers
 - Students
 - Other (i.e., non-English speaking or any population that is not specified above)

***** Study Location *****

Study Location(s) Checklist

Select All That Apply - Note: Check "Other" and input text: 1. If your location is not listed, or 2) If you would like to list details of your already-checked location (e.g., specific school within a school district)

Aims Community College
Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment
Colorado State University
Colorado State University - Pueblo Campus
Denver Public Schools
Poudre School District
Poudre Valley Health System (PVHS)
Rocky Mountain National Park
Thompson School District
University of Colorado - Boulder
University of Colorado - Colorado Springs
University of Colorado - Denver
University of Colorado Health Sciences Center
University of Northern Colorado

- X Other (In the box below, list your study location if not checked above. You may also list details of your already-checked location (e.g., specific school within a school district))

Research will be conducted via video conference in community college president's offices, or at a location of their choice

*** General Checklist ***

General Checklist

Select All That Apply :

Cooperating/Collaborating Institution(s) -Institution where recruitment will occur OR Institution where Collaborating PI will conduct associated research.

Federally Sponsored Project

Training Grant

Project is associated with the Colorado School of Public Health

Program Project Grant

Subjects will be compensated for participation

Behavioral observation

Deception

Human blood, cells, tissues, or body fluids. If checked, is IBC approval needed? List PARF approval date and number.

- X Interview

- X Study of existing data

Survey/questionnaire

- X Thesis or Dissertation Project (Attach Methodology chapter in the Attachment section)

Waiver of consent

Other (clarify in text box to the right)

*** Funding ***

Funding Checklist

X NONE

NOTE: If applicable, Grant Application must be attached in the Attachment Section (#11).

Funding - Grants/Contracts

Funding - Fellowships

Funding - Other

Gift Funding

Dept. Funding

Other Funding

*** Expedited Paragraphs ***

PLEASE READ: The criteria for expedited review are listed below. Please review these criteria to evaluate if your protocol meets the expedited-review criteria. For expedited review, a protocol must be no more than minimal risk (i.e., "not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life") AND must only involve human subjects in one or more of the following numbered paragraphs. If none of the expedited criteria are appropriate for your project, please move to the next screen without selecting any of these criteria; your protocol will be reviewed by the full IRB. Note: The IRB will make the final determination if your protocol is eligible for expedited review.

Expedite Criteria:

1. Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met.
 - a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.)
 - b) Research on medical devices for which
 - i) An investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or
 - ii) The medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.
2. Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows:
 - a) From healthy, nonpregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8-week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or
 - b) From other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8-week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.

3. Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means.
4. Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications.)

Examples:

- a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy;
 - b) Weighing or testing sensory acuity;
 - c) Magnetic resonance imaging;
 - d) Electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography;
 - e) Moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.
5. Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis). (NOTE: Some research in this paragraph may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)
- X 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- X 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

***** Purpose, Study Procedures, Background *****

Original Protocol Number (e.g., 07-226H)

Title (Please indicate if the protocol title is different from the proposal title)

Complete Sections 1 - 11. Specify N/A as appropriate. Do not leave any sections blank.

1. Purpose of the study

- a) Provide a brief lay summary of the project in < 200 words. The lay summary should be readily understandable to the general public.

- b) What does the Investigator(s) hope to learn from the study?

2. Study Procedures

- a) Describe all study procedures here (please do not respond "See Attachment Section"). The box below is for text only. If you would like to add tables, charts, etc., attach those files in the Attachment section (#11).

The investigator will conduct research to identify ten to fifteen female community college presidents who are serving, or have served, at least two years in a rural community college presidency in the western region of the United States.

The participants will be contacted via email and asked to consider participating in this research. If no response is received within 7 days, the Co-PI will reach out to the potential participant via telephone to ask if she may be interested in participating. The research will include completing a short demographic survey online, participating in 2 interviews, and the review of the interview transcript and thematic analysis for accuracy. The first interview will be conducted via online videoconferencing, and the follow-up interview will take place via the telephone. The total time commitment is approximately 2 hours.

- b) State if audio or video taping will occur. Describe how the tapes will be maintained during and upon completion of the project. Describe what will become of the tapes after use (e.g., shown at scientific meetings, erased, etc.).

The investigator will use a digital voice recorder during the interviews. The investigator will store the recordings on a personal computer until such time as dissertation is completed. The recordings will be kept for up to three years and then erased.

- c) State if deception will be used. If so, provide a rationale and describe debriefing procedures. Submit a debriefing script in the Attachment section (#11).

No deception will be used.

3. Background/Rationale

- a) Briefly describe past findings leading to the formulation of the study, if applicable.

There is limited information regarding why women community college presidents choose to lead at rural community colleges in the western region of the United States. This study is to determine if there are specific key factors influencing why women choose to lead at rural community colleges.

*** Subject Population ***

4. Subject Population - In the space below, please describe the participants that you are requesting to recruit (include requested participant number and description of each group requested).

- a) Requested Participant Description (Include number that you plan to study and description of each group requested, if applicable).

Ten to fifteen women community college presidents who have served at least two years in rural community colleges in the western region of the United States.

- b) What is the rationale for studying the requested group(s) of participants?

To determine the key factors influencing why women community college presidents choose rural locations.

The female researcher is currently serving as a rural community college president.

- c) If applicable, state the rationale for involvement of potentially vulnerable subjects to be entered into the study, including minors, pregnant women, economically and educationally disadvantaged, and decisionally impaired people. Specify the measures being taken to minimize the risks and the chance of harm to the potentially vulnerable subjects.

No potentially vulnerable subjects are involved in this research.

- d) If women, minorities, or minors are not included, a clear compelling rationale must be provided. Examples for not including minors: participant must be a registered voter; the drug or device being studied would interfere with normal growth and development; etc.

Women will be included in this study. Minors will not be included in this study.

- e) State if any of the subjects are students, employees, or laboratory personnel. They should be presented with the same written informed consent. If compensation is allowed, they should also receive it.

None of the subjects are students, employees, or laboratory personnel of CSU.

- f) Describe how potential subjects will be identified for recruitment. Examples include: class rosters, group membership, individuals answering an advertisement, organization position titles (i.e., Presidents, web designers, etc.). How will potential participants learn about the research and how will they be recruited (e.g., flyer, email, web posting, telephone, etc.)? Attach recruitment materials in the Attachment section (#11). Important to remember: subjects cannot be contacted before IRB approval.

Potential subjects will be female community college presidents serving at rural institutions in the western region of the United States. The researcher will search lists from the Carnegie Classification (IPEDS) to determine potential subjects.

Potential subjects will be initially contacted by e-mail, and follow-up telephone calls to explain the research project. Prospective subjects will be asked to participate in the research through a face-to-face video conference interview in their presidential office, or a location of their choice, and then a follow-up telephone interview, if necessary. The researcher will send a follow-up e-mail confirming the time and day of the interviews.

*** Subject Population ***

4. Subject Population (continued)

- g) Identify the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion will be rural female community college presidents in the western region of the United States. Male presidents will be excluded.

- h) Compensation. Explain the amount and schedule of compensation, if any, that will be paid for participation in the study. Include provisions for prorating payment.

No compensation will be paid for participation in the study.

- i) Estimate the probable duration of the entire study. This estimate should include the total time each subject is to be involved and the duration the data about the subject is to be collected (e.g., This is a 2-year study. Participants will be interviewed 3 times per year; each interview will last approximately 2 hours. Total approximate time commitment for participants is 12 hours.)

This is an 12-month study. Participants will be interviewed up to twice during the twelve months. Each initial face-to-face video conference interview will last approximately 60-75 minutes. The follow up telephone interview, if necessary, will last 15-30 minutes. Participants will be asked to review the verbatim transcript and thematic analysis for member checking. Total approximate time commitment for each participant is 4 hours: 2 hours for interviews and 2 hours for member checking the transcript and thematic analysis.

*** Risks ***

5. Risks (Input N/A if not applicable)

US Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Regulations define a subject at risk as follows: "...any individual who may be exposed to the possibility of injury, including physical, psychological, or social injury, as a consequence of participation as a subject in any research, development, or related activity which departs from the application of those accepted methods necessary to meet his needs, or which increases the ordinary risks of daily life, including the recognized risks inherent in a chosen occupation or field of service."

a)

For the following categories, include an estimate of the potential risk. Input N/A if not applicable.

Physical well-being.

N/A

Psychological well-being.

N/A

Political well-being.

N/A

Economic well-being.

N/A

Social well-being.

N/A

b) In case of overseas research, describe qualifications/preparations that enable you to evaluate cultural appropriateness and estimate/minimize risks to subjects.

N/A

c) Discuss plans for ensuring necessary medical or professional intervention in the event of a distressed subject.

N/A

d) If audio/video taping will be used, state if it could increase potential risk to subject's confidentiality.

The digital recording will not increase the potential risk to subjects. The subject's interviews will be transcribed and kept confidential by assigning a pseudonym and keeping a separate list.

*** Benefits, Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality ***

6. Benefits

a) Describe the potential benefit(s) to be gained by the subjects or how the results of the study may benefit future subjects. Indicate if there is no direct benefit to the participants.

There is no benefit to the subjects. There is a benefit that this research will add to an existing minimal body of literature.

body of literature.

7. Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality

- a) Describe the procedures in place that will protect the privacy of the subjects and maintain the confidentiality of the data. If a linked list is used, explain when the linked list will be destroyed. Provide a sample of the code that will be used, if applicable.

Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym. The researcher will keep track of each participant with a linked list by the assigned pseudonym. The researcher will include only the pseudonym in the transcript. The digital recordings will be destroyed within three years of the time the dissertation is completed.

- b) If information derived from the study will be provided to the subject's personal physician, a government agency, or any other person or group, describe to whom the information will be given and the nature of the information.

N/A

- c) Specify where and under what conditions study data will be kept, how samples will be labeled, who has access to the data, and what will be available and to whom. Federal Regulations require that study data and consent documents be kept for a minimum of three (3) years after the completion of the study by the PI. For longitudinal projects, the PI may be required to keep the data and documents for a longer time period.

The digital recordings and transcriptions will be kept on a password protected computer. All transcriptions will be given to a professional to transcribe and will be kept on a digital recording, USB drive, and returned to researcher upon completion of the transcription. The transcriptionist will sign a confidentiality contract with the researcher.

All digital files and transcripts will be destroyed within three years of the time the dissertation is completed.

***** Potential Conflict of Interest *****

8. Potential Conflict of Interest

Although you have already submitted CSU's official Conflict of Interest form (COI/COC) to the University, it is the IRB's responsibility to ensure that conflicting interests related to submitted protocols do not adversely affect the protection of participants or the credibility of the human research protection program at CSU. Please answer questions a-d below. Please note that if you indicate that you have a potential conflict of interest in relation to this protocol, your CSU COI/COC Reporting Form must reflect this potential conflict. Link to CSU's Conflict of Interest policy: <http://www.provost.colostate.edu/print/coirev.pdf>.

- a) N In connection with this protocol, do you or any of the protocol investigators or their immediate family members (i.e., spouse and legal dependents, as determined by the IRS) have a potential conflict of interest?
- b) N/A If you do have a potential conflict of interest, is this reported in your current COI/COC?
- c) N/A If you do have a potential conflict of interest, is there a management plan in place to manage this potential conflict?
- d) N/A If you do have a potential conflict of interest, is this potential conflict of interest included in your consent document (as required in the Management Plan)?

If you have reported a possible conflict of interest, the IRB will forward the title of this protocol to your Research Associate Dean to complete your COI file.

For more information on CSU's policy on Conflict of Interest, please see the Colorado State University Academic Faculty and Administrative Professional Manual Sections D.7.6 & D.7.7: <http://www.facultycouncil.colostate.edu/files/manual/sectiond.htm#D.7.6>.

Link to CSU's Conflict of Interest policy: <http://www.provost.colostate.edu/print/coirev.pdf> .

***** Informed Consent *****

9. Informed Consent See sample consent forms at <http://web.research.colostate.edu/ricro/hrc/forms.aspx>

NOTE: In order to complete this protocol, you must upload either a Consent Form or an Alteration of Consent Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script) OR (if neither of those apply to your project) you must complete the Waiver of consent information.

In the space below, provide consent process background information, for each Consent Form, Alteration of Consent Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script), or Waiver of consent. You will not be able to submit this protocol without completing this information.

Informed Consent

Title	cover.letter.FINAL
Consent Information Type	Alteration of Consent
Consent Form Template	X Attachment Invitation Letter to Participate in the Study.FINAL

Who is obtaining consent? The person obtaining consent must be knowledgeable about the study and authorized by the PI to consent human subjects.

How is consent being obtained?

What steps are you taking to determine that potential subjects are competent to participate in the decision-making process?

Address the following four points. A Yes/No response is not adequate.

The research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects.

The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects.

The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration.

Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

***** Assent Background *****

10. Assent Background

All minors must provide an affirmative consent to participate by signing a simplified assent form, unless the Investigator(s) provides evidence to the IRB that the minor subjects are not capable of assenting because of age, maturity, psychological state, or other factors.

See sample assent/consent forms at <http://web.research.colostate.edu/ricro/hrc/forms.aspx>

If applicable, provide assent process background information for each Assent Form, Alteration of Assent Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script), or Waiver.

Assent Background

*** Attachments ***

11. Attachments

Attach relevant documents here. These could include: Collaborating Investigator's IRB approval and approved documents; Conflict of Interest information; Debriefing Script; Grant/Sub-contract; HIPAA Authorization or Waiver Form from HIPAA-covered entity; Interview/Focus Group Questions; Investigator's Brochure; Letters of Agreement/Cooperation from organizations who will help with recruitment; Methodology section of associated Thesis or Dissertation project; Questionnaires; Radiation Control Office approval material; Recruitment Material (e.g., flyers, email text, verbal scripts); Sponsor's Protocol; Surveys; Other files associated with protocol (can upload most standard file formats: xls, pdf, jpg, tif, etc.) Please be sure to attach all documents associated with your protocol. Failure to attach the files associated with the protocol may result in this protocol being returned to you for completion prior to being reviewed. Students: Be sure to attach the Methods Section of your thesis or dissertation proposal. All PIs: If this protocol is associated with a grant proposal, please remember to attach your grant.

To update or revise any attachments, please delete the existing attachment and upload the revised document to replace it.

Document Type	Other Protocol Material
Attachment	CHAPTER 3 - September 15, 16
Document Name	CHAPTER 3 - September 15, 16
Document Type	Other Protocol Material
Attachment	Data Collection - Demographic Information
Document Name	Data Collection - Demographic Information
Document Type	Interview/Focus Group Questions
Attachment	Interview.questions.topics
Document Name	Interview.questions.topics
Document Type	Recruitment Material (e.g., flyers, email text, verbal scripts)
Attachment	Invitation Letter to Participate in the Study.FINAL
Document Name	Invitation Letter to Participate in the Study.FINAL

*** Obligations ***

Obligations (Researcher's Responsibilities)

The Principal Investigator is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project. Obligations of the Principal Investigator are:

Conduct the research involving human subjects as presented in the protocol, including modifications, as approved by the Department and Institutional Review Board. Changes in any aspect of the study (for example project design, procedures, consent forms, advertising materials, additional key personnel or subject population) will be submitted to the IRB for approval before instituting the changes (PI will submit the "Amendment/Revision" form);

Provide all subjects a copy of the signed consent form, if applicable. Investigators are required to retain signed consent documents for three (3) years after close of the study;

Maintain an approved status for Human Subjects Protection training. Training must be updated every three (3) years (Contact RICRO to check your current approval/renewal dates). For more information: Human Subjects Training Completed?

Submit either the "Protocol Deviation Form" or the "Report Form" to report protocol Deviations/Violations, Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events that occur in the course of the protocol. Any of these events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible, but not later than five (5) working days;

Submit the "Continuing Review" Form in order to maintain active status of the approved protocol. The form must be submitted annually at least four (4) weeks prior to expiration, five (5) weeks for protocols that require full review. If the protocol is not renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed;

Notify the IRB that the study is complete by submitting the "Final Report" form.

X The Principal Investigator has read and agrees to abide by the above obligations.

*** Event History ***

Event History

Date	Status	View Attachments	Letters
03/21/2010	NEW FORM CREATED		
09/16/2016	NEW FORM SUBMITTED	Y	
09/19/2016	NEW FORM RETURNED		
09/20/2016	NEW FORM RESUBMITTED	Y	
09/30/2016	NEW FORM RETURNED		
10/02/2016	NEW FORM RESUBMITTED	Y	
10/06/2016	NEW FORM PANEL ASSIGNED		
10/10/2016	NEW FORM REVIEWER(S) ASSIGNED		
11/01/2016	NEW FORM MOVED		
11/01/2016	NEW FORM APPROVED	Y	Y
09/17/2017	CONTINUING REVIEW 1 FORM CREATED		
09/17/2017	CONTINUING REVIEW 1 FORM SUBMITTED	Y	
09/27/2017	CONTINUING REVIEW 1 FORM APPROVED	Y	Y