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ABSTRACT

VOICES OF WOMEN COLLEGE PRESIDENTS: WOMEN’S PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER NAVIGATION INTO THE COLLEGE PRESIDENCY

Christine Mahady
Annie McKee

Institutions of higher education have a glass ceiling: women are underrepresented in the college presidency with 30% of college presidents as women, 83% white and 17% women of color. By nature, the culture of higher education has been traditionally male centered, with female professors and researchers struggling to advance in their careers. Contributing factors that may lead to the lack of women college presidents may be linked to long-held systemic views of women and gender biases that create barriers in career advancement. The objective of this qualitative study is to explore the ways in which women, from their perceptions, navigated opportunities and managed obstacles as they advanced into the college presidency. For the women who did advance to the highest level of leadership in IHE—the college presidency—what did they experience as they advanced in their career, and what enabled them to navigate the system and transcend the barriers? Qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis process through convergent and divergent coding tools. Four key findings emerged from this study: (1) Women were intelligent, talented, successful, savvy, and brave; (2) Servant Leadership; (3) Gender Fluid Characteristics; and (4) Support and Well-Being for current
college presidents. This study offers an increased awareness of barriers that are limiting women from progressing to the college presidency in institutions of higher education. It also offers an increased awareness of the phenomenology of women college presidents and the ways that they managed obstacles and took advantage of opportunities as they advanced in their careers.

Key Words: women college presidents, women’s career advancement, women leaders, patriarchy, gender roles.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Although women have been leading intuitions of higher education since the end of the 19th century, few studies have been completed on women college presidents. In *A Measure of Equity: Women’s Progress in Higher Education*, Touchton, Musil, and Campbell (2008) discussed that, in relation to the number of tenured women in institutions of higher education, women still remain underrepresented in the college presidency. The most recent research on college presidents, published by the American Council on Education, *The American College President Study* (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017) reported that 30% of college presidents are women; of the 30% of women presidents, 83% identify as white and 17% as women of color. This percentage of female college presidents marks a steady increase over the past 35 years as the percentage of college presidents who were women increased 4%, from 26% in 2011 to 30% in 2016 (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Considerable growth has occurred for women since 1980 when only 10% of college presidents were female; however, women are still underrepresented in the position of college presidency (Colorado Women’s College, 2013). Van Ummersen (2009), in *Women in Academic Leadership*, proposed that there may be an underrepresentation of women in the college presidency due to the patriarchal or male norms that circumscribe the culture in colleges and universities. Walby (1990) defined “patriarchal relations” in the workplace as the denial of access by men against women (p. 161). The dominant group in power has socially constructed leadership in the United
States; according to Sharma and Kaur (2014), men assume leadership in organizations while women are often confined to work in other roles.

The concept of women advancing into a college presidency is a complicated and an under-researched topic, layered in the ways society views women, women of color, the reception of women into the male-dominated culture of higher education, and women’s access to the workforce and leadership roles (Van Ummersen, 2009). In *Communicating Gender Diversity: A Critical Approach*, DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2007) noted that “The university professorship traditionally has been considered a male position, and men continue to dominate this profession” (p. 185). The authors observed that women and minority faculty face obstacles in getting hired, being evaluated positively by students and administrators, and becoming promoted or advancing into a position of leadership. Smith (2014) discussed the work of Black legal scholar, Kimberle’ Crenshaw who revealed the idea of intersectionality, an examination of the ideas and beliefs around race, gender and social class. Essentially, women of color face an additional set of obstacles that they must manage surrounding race and gender.

For all of these reasons, women, and particularly women of color, may not advance into a college presidency due to the patriarchal culture, as they are often overlooked as leaders (Helgesen & Johnson, 2010). Helgesen and Johnson (2010) noted that the idea of women’s advancement is not isolated to higher education; the patriarchal nature of the United States, in general, has affected women’s advancement. Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013) discussed that women's involvement in organizations and education has been difficult due to entrenched systemic beliefs about women based on male-defined gender roles and power. According to Eagly & Carly (2007), the discrimination might not
intentional, but the psychology that lies beneath prejudices against women leaders, is
driven by conscious and unconscious psychological associations by men and women, and
leaders. Beliefs about women may make people conclude that females don’t have what it
takes to be an effective leader (Eagly & Carly, 2007). In summary, the concept of
advancement in higher education runs parallel to women in the workforce: women are
not advancing to the most senior positions in numbers equal to their representation in
organizations or institutions of higher education. And, while we understand some of the
reasons why this is the case, there is little, if any, information about how women who
ascend to the presidency manage to do so. This study is intended to do just that: find out,
from female college presidents, what they believe has helped and hindered them in their
careers.

Problem Statement

While there have been small gains for women leaders in institutions of higher
education, women are still underrepresented as college presidents, and only three out of
every 10 presidents are women (Gagliardi et al., 2017). More women are needed in the
role of college presidency for several reasons: Firstly, Johnson (2016) suggested that, as
more women gain degrees and enter the work force, it is important that they experience
women leaders as role models in higher education. Statistics reveal that more women are
attending college and graduating with advanced degrees than at any other time in the
history of the United States (Colorado Women’s College, 2013). In 2016, the American
Council on Education published a report indicating that, since 2006, women have earned
more than 50% of all doctoral degrees (Johnson, 2016). Moreover, Johnson (2016)
asserted that, as men enter the workforce, it is equally important for men to experience
women in senior-executive positions so that they become accustomed to women in power.

Secondly, Gagliardi et al. (2017) reported concerns that minority leaders are unrepresented in institutions of higher education. The study noted that, within the next five years, of the college presidents surveyed, 50% plan to leave their roles. Further research is needed to learn how women successfully advanced into the college presidency in order to help other women advance into senior-leadership positions in institutions of higher education.

Lastly, several gaps in the literature support the need for additional research into women’s advancement into the college presidency. There are a number of research projects (e.g., Fels, 2004; Helgesen & Johnson, 2010; Van Ummerson, 2009) that suggest that the male-dominated culture of higher education is holding women back from advancing. The studies that have been completed imply that there is a lack of scholarship in the area of women college presidents because there have been so few women to have attained the role.

**Research Questions**

The objective of this study is to explore the women college presidents’ advancement process and, from their perception, the skills and competencies that enabled them to acquire a college presidency appointment. This research will study critical incidents and the ways that women college presidents navigated their way into senior positions in private universities. I used purposive sampling to select participants who reflected a
percentage of women of color and Caucasian women. The targeted populations were women college presidents in:

- Small to midsized universities (1,000-7,500 students)
- Private institutions of higher education that offer bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees.

Specifically, this study is intended to understand what women who did advance to the highest level of leadership in IHE—the college presidency—experienced as they advanced in their careers, and what enabled them to navigate the system and transcend the barriers. The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

**Question 1:** What obstacles and opportunities have women college presidents experienced as they advanced in small private colleges and universities?

- Which specific abilities helped women take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles?
- What types of professional support helped women take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles?
- How did networks and other personal support play a role in helping women advance?

This is an exploratory phenomenological study of the experiences of women presidents in small private colleges and universities. I want to understand how women college presidents perceive their abilities to navigate a male-dominated system and ultimately break through barriers to acquire a college presidency post. Chapter 3 provides additional details regarding research design and methods for conducting this study.
Theoretical Framework

This study is built upon the feminist theory and scholarship of three foundational obstacles that hold women back from advancement into college presidency: patriarchy, systemic views of women, and gender biases. Layered into the discussion concerning the barriers to advancement is a general historical context, women’s place in society, and their roles in education, occupation, career advancement, and leadership (David, 2007; Debebe, Anderson, Bilimoria, & Vinnicombe, 2016; “Gender stereotypes,” 2016; Johnson, 2016).

Definitions of Terms

In support of my research questions, several conceptual and theoretical terms emerged as I reviewed the literature (Chapter 2). To better explain the concepts ingrained in my study, I have provided comprehensive definitions below:

**The Patriarchy:** I will use the term *patriarchy* to refer to a complex system of social structures that oppress women and place men in a dominant power position (Walby, 1990).

**Gender:** Gender is the idea that the differences between men and women are socially constructed and are not inherently biological (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007).

**Gender Roles:** Gender roles are ideas and characteristics that society has assigned to men and women. For example, in the past, women were assigned as “care takers”; their role is to run the family. Men were assigned as “aggressive”; their roles were to work outside of the home (Eagly & Carly, 2007)
**Gender Biases:** Scholars use the concept of gender biases or gender stereotypes to denote the perceived differences between the ideas about women and men, male and female (Rose, 2013) Gender biases are holding women back from career advancement and success (“Gender Stereotypes” 2016).

**Glass Ceiling:** The glass ceiling is a metaphor used to describe the invisible barrier that prevents women from moving into the highest levels of leadership (Glass Ceiling, 2013). I use this metaphor in the study to describe a major barrier that holds women back from attaining a college presidency.

**Glass Cliff:** The glass cliff, another barrier toward women’s success in the workforce, is an illustrative metaphor that denotes hazards that are present when a woman is appointed to the highest level of leadership while the organization is in crisis (Bruckmiller & Greene, 2010).

**The Labyrinth:** The labyrinth is another term that acts as a barrier to women’s career advancement. The concept behind the labyrinth denotes indirect challenges women face as they travel on their path to leadership (Eagly & Carly, 2007).

**Institutions of Higher Education (IHE):** IHE are educational institutions that (1) admit as regular students only persons having a certificate of graduation from a school providing secondary education or the equivalent; (2) are legally authorized within a state to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (3) provide an educational program that awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a two-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward a degree; (4) are a public or other nonprofit institution; and (5) are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association (Find Law, 2016).
**Intersectionality:** the idea of intersectionality proposes that the experiences of women of color are inseparably connected to race and gender (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Women have to manage experiences around identifying as a woman and as a woman of color.

**Systemic Views of Women:** Systemic views of women are the ways in which the culture in the United States views women, including women’s role in society, personality characteristics, and roles pertaining to gender (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007).

**Background and Women’s Career Trajectory in Higher Education**

Johnson (2016) and Gagliardi et al. (2017) have suggested that it is more likely for women to advance into a college presidency at a community college. Community colleges, otherwise known as junior colleges, typically offer associate degrees that are competency in two years. Although it is more difficult for women to attain the role of college president, other types of universities that women serve are public and private universities. Public universities, or state universities, are publicly funded through the government of the state in which the universities are located. Each state within the United States houses a public university. Public universities and private universities offer bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees, although there are certain private universities that only offer master’s or bachelor’s degrees (Burrow, 2018; Gagliardi et al., 2017). Private universities are not funded or operated by the government; the main economic driver of private universities is tuition and major gifts or endowments, which are given by private donors (Burrow, 2018). Many private institutions are religiously affiliated or MSIs (minority serving institution such as an HBCU [Historically Black College or
According to *The American College President Study*, women were more likely to become presidents of public, versus private, doctorate-granting universities where 23% of college presidents are women in the public sector. It is more difficult for women to become the president of a private university where 29% percent of presidents were women, in private, master’s-granting universities; and 22% of presidents of doctorate-granting universities were women (Burrow, 2018; Gagliardi et al., 2017). This study was designed to understand how women do succeed in private universities, despite those being the most difficult to navigate.
**Historical context, women in education.** From a historical perspective, women have had difficulties advancing in education and occupation (Colorado Women’s College, 2013; Lucas, 2006). In order to understand the reasons why women are not advancing to leadership roles in higher education, it is beneficial to understand the historical context of the ways that the patriarchy and systemic views of women have influenced women in higher education and women’s place in the workforce. Women had limited access to education until the mid-19th century. Higher education was highly privileged, geared toward male education, and therefore only admitted white men (Lucas, 2006). Patriarchal ideals in the 18th century were skeptical about women’s learning. For example, it was commonly believed that women’s brains were too small; therefore, they could not compete with men. Society also thought that education might make women too masculine, or that learning could make women unfit wives and mothers (Solomon, 1985).

There was also the notion that, as women did not have a role in the workforce, it was a waste of time to engage in higher education (Eagly & Carly, 2007). In the late 1800s, a woman’s place was in the home, attending to her husband and children. The denial of education for women can be explained by very strong societal roles placing women at the helm of family life and child rearing, with society placing strict boundaries on females receiving higher education and wanting to enter the workforce (Lucas, 2006).

Early feminists in the early to mid-1800s fought against the ideas that women could not learn, and they worked to add co-educational programs to existing colleges and open institutions of higher education that women could attend. They wrote articles, opened women’s clubs, and advocated for women to have more choices in life than that of a housewife (Solomon, 1985). At this time, women made progress, as did women of
color in higher education. Oberlin College was the first co-educational institution of higher education and opened in 1837; from its inception, it admitted women and African Americans (Titcomb, 2018). The first African American woman graduated with a bachelor’s degree from Oberlin College in 1862, and the first black female graduated from medical school in New England in 1864 (Titcomb, 2018), and the first women’s college that was equivalent to a male college, Wellesley College, opened and was led by a female president in 1875 (Lucas, 2006). Progress continued for women into the 19th century: institutions of higher education were admitting females, and jobs were created for women. For example, women were hired as Deans of Women in coeducational schools, and they were also hired to lead women-only institutions (Lucas, 2006). However, despite the fact that women’s access to education increased, work in higher education for women in the 20th century continued to be difficult. For example, according to DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2007), women and minority faculty are more harshly evaluated than white male faculty. They are typically more closely observed and are more likely than men to prove their competence.

**Women in Higher Education Today**

The need for more top-level, visible, talented and diverse women leading colleges and universities is important as the gendered landscape of the country evolves (Johnson, 2016). In higher education, women are earning more undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees than men (Colorado Women’s College, 2013). The numbers of women in higher education has been rising, solidly, since 1982, Catalyst (2014) reported that, in the 2011-2012 graduating class, women received 57.3% of all bachelor’s degrees, 59.9% of master’s degrees, and 51.4% of doctoral degrees. The year 2006 defined the
moment when women began to earn more doctorates than men (Catalyst, 2014). Despite this progression, the system of meritocracy has been slow to work in women’s favor, as faculty and women presidents are still a minority (Van Ummersen, 2009). According to Ford (2009), the disparity in women leaders can have deep impacts on the student body. For instance, the author argued that, in order for women college students to meet their full potential and have greater confidence in their skills and abilities, it is important that they witness and experience women role models in the administration and faculty. Subsequently, men also need experience a culture that values women; women college presidents, faculty and other women in administration roles will have a role in shaping men’s views and relationships with women in their homes and the workplace.

There are also issues of pay gap: at four-year institutions that offer bachelor’s degrees, women earn close to 20% less than their male counterparts. In terms of inequality between men and women in tenure-track positions, as faculty members, women comprise only 29.1% of tenure-track positions at doctoral institutions (Colorado Women’s College 2013). The American Council in Education (2016) reported that, in a moment of progression, women represented 55.88% of researchers who were grantees for awards in education, health, humanities, and science, yet women are still greatly underrepresented in the highest levels of leadership—the college presidency—with only 30%. However, according to Johnson (2016), this is notably higher than women CEOs (under 5%).

The White House Project: Benchmarking Women’s Leadership (2013), a recent study in women’s leadership, captured the performance and career placement of women across 14 sectors, including higher education. The study reported that there is a pay
inequity at four-year institutions, women earn close to 20% less than their male counterparts. Women represent only 29.1% of tenure-track professors at doctoral institutions but comprise 55.88% of high level researchers and grantees (Colorado Women’s College, 2013).

**Historical context: women in the workforce.** Women’s historical access to the workforce runs parallel to women’s access to education. At the end of the 1800s, the expectation that men worked and the majority of women were housewives was the trend of the era. For the women who did work, they found employment in teaching, nursing, and industrial/agricultural jobs (Milkman, 2016). Most of the women who earned a paycheck were unmarried, separated, or widowed. This trend was less consistent with women of color; most married women worked due to the fact that their husbands, largely men of color, had a difficult time making wages (Farmer, 2014). During the Depression era of the 1930s, newly formed labor laws protected women’s jobs; however, as unemployment started to climb for men, a powerful argument ensued to get women out of industry to make openings for men. However, women did not leave their positions because they, too, had to provide for their own children and families. This solidified wage-work, as a necessity; the Depression solidified the idea that women had earned a spot in the labor unions (Farmer, 2014).

The effects of men leaving the United States to serve in World War II led employers to actively recruit women to replace the men, thereby staffing the industries producing items for the war. Business went as far as introducing childcare, meals, and other resources to entice female employees (Farmer, 2014). This ended when the men came back home, but women learned that they could care for families and work a full-
time job. Other jobs opened in the 1950s, when the Korean War broke out, and women, again, were recruited to fill jobs that produced products for war (Farmer, 2014). There was progress for women in the workforce, but the pay was very poor, and it was expected that women would drop out of the workforce when they had children. President Kennedy sought to address these issues in 1963, with the Equal Pay Act, and the Civil Rights Act in 1964 that forbade discrimination in terms of race, skin color, and sex. This time frame began the second-wave women’s movement (Milkman, 2016).

Although progression for women in the workforce has been steady since the 1960s, women still lack equal pay and equal opportunities for advancement (Colorado Women’s College, 2013; Eagly & Carly, 2007). According to the United States Department of Labor Women’s Bureau (2015), women comprise 57% of the workforce. Despite this representation, there are gross inequities in salary—wherein women earn 21% less than men annually—and women often fail to reach professional advancement into senior levels of leadership (Department of Labor, 2015; “Gender stereotypes,” 2016).

The Women’s Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that, in the United States, 57% of women participated in the workforce (2015); however, as reported by Colorado Women’s College, across 14 workforce sectors, only 20% of positional leaders are comprised of women. These statistics demonstrate that the United States has certainly made significant gains in reducing gender inequality for women in the workforce, but we are still facing a large disparity (Milkman, 2016). For example, in political and governmental leadership positions, women hold 22.8% of the roles (Colorado Women’s College, 2013). Catalyst (2016) revealed that women represent only 4% of S&P 500 CEOs, less than 3% of Fortune 500 CEO positions, and less than 6% of senior leadership
positions in 2016. According to Fry (2014), a series of ongoing studies tracked women’s progression in Fortune 500 companies from 1995 to 2014, noting that women CEOs grew from 0% to 5.2%.

**Barriers to Advancement**

*The American College President Study* reported that, in higher education, the pool of candidates for the college presidency is currently skewed toward white men as hiring committees are prioritizing experienced presidents (Gagliardi et al., 2017). To understand the disparity between men and women leaders in institutions in higher education, it is critical to review barriers to advancement that women are facing.

Due to the complex social system influenced by the practices of the patriarchy, obstacles remain that hold women back from gaining power in education and occupation (Colorado Women’s College 2013; Sandeen, 2015). Researchers have defined a series of obstructions and theories, subtle and overt, that hold women back from advancement: the concrete wall, the glass ceiling, the labyrinth, the glass cliff (Bruckmiller & Greene, 2010; Eagly & Carley, 2007), and gender biases, also known as the unseen barriers (Ibarra et al., 2011).

The concrete wall is an overt barrier that holds women in a stagnant position. Eagly and Carley (2007) have suggested that society traditionally views men as the breadwinners and women the homemakers; with this ideal still in place, the concrete wall literally stops women from entering the workforce, or when they do, they may not leave entry-level positions. The “glass ceiling” is a subtle barrier that emerged after many of the exclusionary “old boys club” tactics created by men ceased and women were allowed into middle management positions, only to be restricted from the highest, senior-level
positions (Eagly & Carly, 2007). The theory of the “labyrinth” suggests that the pathway for women to ascend into leadership may be challenging and indirect (Eagly & Carly, 2007).

Women who break through the glass ceiling or navigate through the labyrinth may find themselves on the glass cliff (Bruckmiller & Greene, 2010). Bruckmiller & Greene (2010) discussed the glass cliff as the phenomenon of employing women in leadership positions at “times of organizational crisis” (p. 1). The phrase “glass cliff” is a metaphor for the nature of the hazardous situation for women leaders (Bruckmiller & Greene, 2010). In essence, women may inherit an organization that is failing financially or is in crisis. According to the Harvard Business Review (Addison-Lavelle, 2016), when companies are in peril, women are more likely to be hired as CEOs. Perhaps men are not available or less men applied for the position due to the amount of risk associated with leading a company in crisis (Addison-Lavelle, 2016; Hewlett et al., 2008). As the top person in the company, the woman is isolated, lacks mentorship, and often lacks social capital (Hewlett et al., 2008). Unfortunately, if the woman is unable to turn around a company with a high propensity toward failure, corporations are merciless. The woman ends up assuming blame for negative outcomes that have already been forecasted long before her appointment. Sadly, this research also revealed that women in science, engineering, and technology believe that if failure occurs, redemption is impossible (Addison-Lavelle, 2016; Hewlett et al., 2008).

**Patriarchy and systemic view of women.** Gilmore (2001) asserted that, around the world and throughout all religions and cultures, men have set ideas about women in motion that have influenced the way society views women. In this case, because men rule
the world and have done so for centuries, male views of women have directly affected the way the entire system has created gender roles that are specific to men and women (Myers, 2008; Rose, 2010). As discussed by Prime, Carter, and Wulbourne (2009), men have roles in leadership because their assigned characteristics are competitive and aggressive; whereas women are more often stereotyped as “care takers.”

Long-standing systemic views of women have placed women in second place, with men at the top in the power positions (Eagly & Carly, 2007). A potential contributing factor to female marginalization and such a low representation of women leaders could be a result of the ways in which American society views women. As a result, these influences have had a direct impact on the advancement of women (Gilmore, 2001; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Lerner, 1985; Solomon, 1985). Systemic views of women or societal views of women have to do with the psychology that runs beneath the way people view women. People spontaneously think that women should be nice, nurturing, and kind; men are to be strong, assertive, and ambitious (Eagly & Carly, 2007). The manner in which women are viewed within the social system, due to gender roles, is still having a major impact on women’s advancement professionally, specifically related to leadership. (Ibarra et al., 2013). Eagly and Carly (2007) asserted that people in an organization may automatically assume that women are to behave in a nice, caring and encouraging ways and therefore do not have what it takes to be a leader.

**Gender roles.** Gender roles and gender biases have defined women’s experiences in society and the workplace (Solomon, 1985). In 2018, the concepts of traditional women’s roles and conventional thinking still have their place in families and organizations. The concept of gender has deep roots in the patriarchy and conveys
specific social roles, beliefs, and practices that males and females are supposed to enact. As such, it is significant to examine how ideals from the patriarchy have informed systemic views of women as they relate to gender and, moreover, how these views continue to obstruct women’s career advancement in higher education.

In 2010, Rose argued that gender roles are derived by culture, set forth by ideals in the patriarchy. These defined gender roles have influenced the systemic view of women that hold women back. The idea of gender domination is espoused from primitive times when men and women had defined roles to survive and take care of a family (Rose, 2010). Men were stronger, could run faster, and could protect the group; these necessary skills for survival placed men as the dominant group (Lerner, 1985). Women stayed at home to raise children and prepare the food the men provided (Lerner, 1985).

These roles influenced deep systemic beliefs that modern women are still dealing with today. Men supposedly possess the skills of a typical leader, implying that women would be atypical leaders (Catalyst, 2007). Unfortunately, when women act in concert with the female stereotypical gender behaviors, they are seen as weak leaders (Eager, 1987). These behaviors include being overly emotional or nurturing.

Ibarra, Carter, and Silva (2011) found that a gender gap does exist in leadership, and, as women become more comfortable with their power, organizations need to catch up by finding better ways to mentor women into key leadership positions. Cultural stereotypes and gender biases may also contribute to the lack of women in leadership; these stereotypes are known as the unseen barriers that hold women back from advancement (Ibarra et al., 2011). Unseen barriers that are related to gender stereotypes block women from career advancement. Catalyst (2007) noted that “Gender stereotypes
can become a powerful yet invisible threat to women” (p. 7). Further, if women do advance to a leadership role, the people in the organization or community may still be thinking about women in regard to female stereotypes. Prime, Carter, and Welbourne (2009) noted that women leaders can be perceived as violating their stereotypical feminine roles by communicating too directly or taking charge of groups.

Further, due to systemic female oppression and the ideas surrounding male leadership characteristics, stakeholders may not take women seriously (Ely et al., 2011). Miller (1996) reasoned that the expectations for men and women to behave in the expected gender-appropriate styles affect women in organizations. Catalyst (2007) discussed the ways in which society views women as threatening women’s advancement and current women in leadership roles. When women take on society’s impression of male characteristics, too soft or too hard, likeable or competent, the organization doesn’t know how to respond, and she is subject to criticism (Catalyst, 2007).

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, this study is designed to understand the perceptions of women and how they make sense of their own career advancement in higher education. Education, though a highly dominated female field (Johnson, 2016; Sandeen, 2015), is still vastly underrepresented at the highest levels of leadership in IHE—college presidents. Patriarchal beliefs have assigned gender roles to men and women, thus affecting women’s careers as leaders (Catalyst, 2007). Due to entrenched systemic beliefs, women are not always accepted in power roles (Ibarra et al., 2013). For women to overcome these complexities and an inherently oppressive system, it is important to understand
current college presidents’ perceptions of how they achieved a post as a college president. This project is designed to further illuminate how women who are in a college presidency position in the private sector managed the patriarchy and broke through glass ceilings in small to mid-sized IHEs.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of Chapter 2 is to review the literature and the theoretical underpinnings relevant to this study. In this literature review, I use feminist scholarship to build the case that, due to systemic views of women stemming from the patriarchy, women have had to fight for access to education, the workforce, and positions of leadership. I propose that the male-dominated culture of higher education and a gender-biased system function as barriers for women’s advancement into the college presidency. To solidify this argument, a discussion of the chronological integration of women into education, the workforce, and leadership provides context for the challenges women face when advancing into a college presidency. In this section, first, I present a conceptual framework for the study. Following this, I discuss the historical context of women in education and the workforce, thereafter presenting theoretical implications of women’s occupational roles in higher education and pathways to a college presidency. Next, I examine the barriers women face when pursuing leadership positions, specifically the scholarly and feminist perspective of the patriarchy, systemic views of women, and gender roles and how these concepts create barriers for women. Finally, I present an overview of leadership theories and the relevant literature regarding the need for specific leadership development programs for women.

Conceptual Framework

The barriers for women’s advancement in education, occupation, and leadership have deep roots in the patriarchy, systemic views of women, and gender biases (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). Therefore, we must have an understanding of the patriarchal ideas of women that create issues for those wanting to advance into leadership roles. More
specifically, the challenging personal and professional journey women must travel to achieve a college presidency is a direct result of women’s historical access to education, occupation, and leadership opportunities (Helgeson & Johnson, 2010; Walby, 1990). Figure 1 represents a visual of the conceptual framework for the study.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the study.

**Historical Context**

To understand why women are not advancing to leadership roles in higher education, it is helpful to comprehend the historical context of women in higher education and women’s place in the workforce in general. This section illuminates the context for how and why women had difficulties moving into the role of a college presidency.
**Women’s Access to Higher Education.** It is critical to understand that women throughout history had to fight for access to higher education and the opportunity to learn (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Solomon (1985) asserted that patriarchal ideals in the 18th century stated that women could not learn because their brains were too small. In fact, men in the 18th century society raised specific concerns about women’s ability to learn. Early feminists such as Mercy Warren, Abigail Adams, Judith Murray, and Mary Wollstonecraft pushed back against the ideas that women’s brains were smaller and weaker than men’s and therefore could not learn. They also argued that such concerns about women learning were false, and, in fact, education develops the mind, and women should enter academia and fully enter a process of self-development and growth (Solomon, 1985). Wollstonecraft was a pioneer in the notion that women had a duty to themselves first, as opposed to a man or family. Feminists published articles arguing that higher education would help women think for themselves, improve their place in society, and provide them skills for professional careers (Solomon, 1985).

American women have often struggled for the right to an education; in colonial times, personal choice for women was non-existent (Solomon, 1985). The deprivation of education for women can be explained by very strong social roles placing women at the helm of family life and child rearing. Essentially, society placed strict boundaries on females receiving higher education. If women gained access to an education, it would imply that they would be able to think on their own and create identities outside of the family life (Solomon, 1985). This literature implies that, in such a limiting narrative, women were portrayed as being mentally underdeveloped and too delicate for the rigors of higher education; women’s roles were restricted to family life (Eagly & Carli, 2007;
Solomon, 1985). In 1770, a baccalaureate degree was the hallmark of a leader. Because women were not permitted into higher education, women were not allowed to hold political leadership positions. In fact, male political leaders of the time feared the very concept of their wives and daughters developing into scholars and leaders. As Solomon (1985) observed, “These statesmen intended their daughter to be ‘notable’ as housewives, upholding the colonial tradition of piety, modesty, frugality and fertility” (p. 11). Women could not matriculate or attain the same credentials as men (Eagly & Carly, 2007).

Although these limiting notions about women’s roles were highly regarded by men and women in American society, the work of the early feminists began to have an impact. As women moved into the 1800s, Solomon (1985) noted that women began to refuse marriage and used education as a means of social mobility. The aggressive suffragist movement led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (NY chapter) created women’s clubs on the East Coast and demanded the right to higher education. In 1815, bridging the efforts of the suffragists, Catherine Beecher and other advocates for women’s education began to create schools that provided women with secondary educational opportunities, in essence providing women with an education that would help them be a suitable wife and mother (Lucas, 2006). Early women’s colleges, or better known in the time as “female academies” or “female seminaries,” became prevalent; these institutions of higher education for women were not equivalent to the male’s version of college, but were equal to a high school or secondary education (Lucas, 2006; NWHM, 2007). The academies or seminaries were the only choices for women who wanted to attain a collegiate education. Moreover, women’s colleges that were equal to men’s were not valued in society because women’s place in society was in the home as
companions to men; women’s place was not in occupation or workforce; therefore, there was not a need for equal opportunities for education (Lucas, 2006). In the 1870s, private institutions that wanted to advocate for equal educational opportunities were established. For example, Vassar, Wellesely, and Smith, women’s colleges, offered an education that equaled the male collegiate experience (Lucas, 2006). It is significant to note that, Radcliffe at Harvard and Barnard at Columbia, along with other universities, opened coordinate colleges offering schools for women. Although not the norm, there was also rising trend in co-educational colleges. At the end of the 1800s, co-educational colleges were prevalent; however, many institutions held on to the belief that women and men differed greatly in intellectual and emotional ability (NWHM, 2007). For example, according to Lucas (2006), beliefs about women becoming educated included (a) women were mentally and emotionally unable to compete with men in classroom and could suffer from nervous breakdowns; (b) women’s pure and benevolent nature was at stake, and, if they gained too much knowledge, it could corrupt them; (c) men were concerned that learning could make women too masculine; (d) that their reproductive systems could become damaged from too many rigorous educational pursuits; and (e) women’s role in the family could be compromised, for an educated woman could potentially be an unfit wife and mother or not want to marry (Lucas, 2006).

Despite the idea that women’s role in society was in the home and the concerns of women becoming educated, the onset of feminist thought and women’s efforts began to break down the barriers to higher education (Lucas, 2006; Solomon, 1985). Progress for women’s access to education was in forward motion; by the early 1900s, most schools had some form of co-educational institution.
In addition, women were finding positions of leadership in higher education (Brown, 2001). Brown (2001) observed that the beginning of the 20th century saw a rise in women leadership at the collegiate level. The women’s colleges began to appoint women as deans; in the coeducational schools, women became employed as Deans of Women, responsible for overseeing the academic and social needs of women attending the college. According to Astin and Leland (1993), there were three generations (or cohorts) of women in the 20th century that contributed to women’s advancement in education as well as the quality of women’s education programs: predecessors, instigators and inheritors. The first type, predecessors, ascended into leadership roles in academic settings around the 1920s, after having received significant higher education themselves; they placed the value of women’s higher education in high regard and helped women students receive high quality education (Astin & Leland 1993).

The second type, instigators, began serving in academic leadership roles around the late 1950s to the mid-1980s. The instigators were activists for women and women in education; their leadership style followed the ideas of the women’s movement. Acker (2012) noted that the focus of the instigators was on inclusive programs for women in scholarship and curriculum. These robust and dynamic leaders helped to bring female academic (professors and researchers) to the forefront (Acker, 2012; Astin & Leland, 1993). New programs and courses in women’s studies were introduced as well as new pedagogical learning models that included instructional strategies that benefitted the learning needs of women (David, 2007). The instructional strategies that benefitted women’s learning included reflexivity in qualitative research design, experiential perspectives, and personal reflection in research and practice and personal development.
The instigators introduced the ideas of feminist scholarship, which entails the integration of personal narratives, biography, systemic racism, and research that includes voices and experiences from ethnic groups (David, 2007). Concepts such as gender roles, equality, and discrimination were trailblazing not only for women’s education, but also for education in general. This robust time for women in higher education marked the addition of courses in women’s studies and highly increased the visibility of women academics and researcher within colleges and universities (Acker, 2012).

The third cohort, the inheritors, worked as role models for women’s leadership in institutions of higher education. Acker (2012) described inheritors as politically savvy, able to navigate through patriarchal cultural norms, and aware of power dynamics within systems. Another item to consider regarding women’s access to education, is presented by Fochtman (cited in Pasque, Nicholson & Errington, 2011), who concluded that there is a new generation of women, formally identified as inheritors, who are, in fact, also instigators. These women are continuing to break barriers in higher education by challenging the male-dominated culture in academia; she also found that they are actively mentoring their successors. David (2007) noted that as higher education began to transform, more and more women began to matriculate. By the 1990s, continued commitment to women’s access to higher education led to the development of professional programs and doctorate degrees. David attributed these changes to key women leaders in institutions of higher education who changed the landscape of education and opened doors for women to attend. She asserted that feminist critiques,
research projects, and feminist pedagogical learning models helped to give more and more women access to IHEs.

**History of women in the workforce.** Equality in the workforce and leadership roles for women is still being affected by women’s role in society (Ibarra et al., 2013). From the late 17th to the 20th centuries, education became more accessible for women; however, even at the highest level of learning, for the privileged few, education did not mean a better place in society or career (Lucas, 2006; Solomon, 1985). In 1904, the president of the University of California publicly addressed women, “You are not like men and you must recognize the fact…. You may have the same studies as the men, but you must put them to different use.” He emphasized, “You are … here for the preparation of marriage and motherhood.” If women were diligent in applying themselves, Wheeler promised, the education they gained would make them “more serviceable as wives and mothers” (Lucas, 2006, Kindle Locations 3642-3644).

Since the 1930s, American society has aligned certain types of jobs to “men’s” jobs and “women’s” jobs. Solomon (1985) discussed the onset of World War II and how the complete reconstruction of the country allowed women to gain access to education and to enter a profession. The dearth of men as a result of the war efforts provided women with the opportunity to funnel into professions and labor roles. Nursing, teaching, assisting male leaders, and secretaries are several examples of typical “women’s only” jobs (Solomon, 1985). As Milkman (2016) explained, through the better part of the 20th century, women in the workforce were limited to the category of “women’s jobs”: secretaries, teachers, and nurses (Eagly & Carly, 2007). For example, women were accepted in the field of nursing and teaching, and men were considered for lead roles in
government, doctors, lawyers, and senior leadership. For the typical men’s positions, ads for employment read “No women need apply” (Milkman, 2016), a clear indication that women weren’t welcomed into certain positions of employment (Eagly & Carly, 2007). This provides a prime example of the concrete wall: women earned credentials, excelled in training, and wanted to apply for the job, only to be denied that opportunity. Despite all of this, the number of women in the workforce continued to grow, and more were able to break into traditionally male fields.

Eagly and Carly (2007) observed that, in the 1980s, women began to gain momentum in career advancement and educational access, yet men continued to work in networks that held women back from power. The “old boys” network is a social construct designed to exclude women in the workplace (Eagly & Carly, 2007). However, male attitudes of not viewing women as leaders carried into the 1990s and the new millennium, even after the advancements of women’s rights in society (Conrad & Poole, 2005; Dubno, 1985). Everett, Thorne, and Danehower (1996) noted that, even though men in the 1990s had more experience with and exposure to women in school and select leadership positions, the attitudes about women and stereotypes about women in the workforce remained consistent.

On the other hand, since 1960, initiatives set forth by governmental policy and fair pay laws have gradually progressed toward equal pay for women (Milli, 2015). Businesses and corporations set plans in motion for inclusion programs, higher levels of diversity, and development programs for aspiring women leaders. Conrad and Poole (2005) reported that organizations began hiring women in managerial positions but did not afford them major decision making power or positional leadership. Unfortunately,
the practice of seating women as managers, not leaders, is common enough to be formally named, and *marginalization* is another tactic men used to stop women from attaining power within organizations (Conrad & Poole, 2005). Currently, the number of women in the workforce has reached an all-time high. Therefore, it is important to critically review gender as it relates to women, employment, and leadership. However, modern times reveal that women in the workforce are still experiencing inequities (Milli, 2015). For example, in 2015, a report by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research showed that there is still a 22% pay gap between men and women employed in equivalent positions (Milli, 2015).

**Women’s leadership struggle.** The above statistics note a low percentage of women in leadership positions. Women’s leadership and advancement have been studied by feminist scholars; located within this section are studies that provide evidence that women in the United States are struggling in leadership, advancement, and promotions. For instance, McKinsey & Company (2013) reported that men are three times more likely than women to become promoted from an entry-level position straight into middle management. The report went on to reveal that the statistics for women’s advancement are less than promising, as men are twice as likely to advance into senior management and vice president positions and five times more likely to move into the C-suite. Blanton (2005) contributed another valuable piece of evidence regarding the state of women in the workforce, noting that female CEOs in the United States average 4.8 years in the position of CEO, whereas male CEOs average a tenure of 8.2 years. The literature reports several similarities between the workforce and higher education institutions regarding attitudes toward women’s advancement, leadership, and career progression.
Working women in IHE. While women were gaining ground in the early 1970s, they held only a small proportion of academic positions and an even smaller proportion of professorships and leadership positions (Williams, Blackstone, & Metcalf, 1974). Researchers at that time conjectured as to the factors that were keeping women in inferior positions or blocking them from positions of power. The debate ensued as to whether the cause was discriminatory or due to “sexual division of labor” (Dillabough, 2007), indicating the delegation of different tasks between males and females.

In 2015, Sandeen studied women’s roles in education, noting that four out the seven of the Ivy League schools had hired women as college presidents: Brown, Cornell, Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania. Although gender equality in leadership positions in Ivy League schools is on the rise, other institutions of education are still working toward diversity in the college presidency (Sanden, 2015). Moreover, Sandeen (2015) posited that gender bias against women leaders in education may be impeding women’s career advancement. National statistics indicate that 37% of women (ages 25-29) had obtained bachelor's degrees; men ranked in at 31% in the same age group. K-12 educators are 76% female, and academic women in higher education make up 46% of professors (Sandeen, 2015).

Madsen (2012) argued that more women need to lead IHE because of the propensity for female role modeling and the positive effect it will have on both genders as they enter the workforce. She argued that it is crucial for young men and women to see females in the position of leadership because it breaks down the ideas surrounding leadership as male’s job. According to the White House Project (2009), when female professors and researcher work with both genders as leaders, researchers, and faculty
members, new and different questions are asked as feminist ideas and thoughts become incorporated into learning and research projects. Students are more likely to have positive experiences when working with female personnel in IHE (White House Project, 2009).

As senior leaders, women are most likely to be employed as college presidents at two-year institutions (Colorado Women’s College, 2013) and are more likely to serve in administrative departments in four-year master’s- and doctoral-level IHE as opposed to high-ranking faculty or leadership positions (ACE, 2012). Despite these positive studies on the presence of women in higher education, compared to men, women are underrepresented in college presidencies both in absolute numbers and compared with the number of tenured women eligible for these positions with 30 percent of college presidents as women (Touchton et al., 2008).

According to Colorado Women’s College (2013) and Sandeen (2015), women have made significant gains in higher education; however, at the highest level of leadership, the college presidency, women are underrepresented (Dominici, 2009). In private doctorate-granting colleges and universities, the percentage of female presidents increased from 7.6% in 2006 to 17% in 2011; and at master’s-granting institutions, there was a slight increase in women presidents from 20.3% to 24.2% (Johnson, 2016). Although women are breaking through the glass ceiling, the rate of change in their numbers remains slow and uncertain (ACE, 2012).

Debebe (2011) suggested that deep systemic patriarchal characteristics may be inherently ingrained in educational models, creating blocks for the aspiring female college president. A contributing factor to the low percentage of women in college presidency positions may be linked to the culture of higher education. In higher education
settings, leadership tends to be dominated by male ideals (Blackmore, 1999). In fact, Bianco (2016) claimed that discrimination in IHE is so long standing and pervasive that academia is “raging a war on women” (p. 1). DeFrancisco and Palczieski (2007) discussed discrimination against women, especially minority women in several areas: (a) women, especially minority women, are more likely to be evaluated harshly by students and superiors than that of white men; (b) women are more likely to have to prove their competence in teaching and research; (c) women are more likely to be judged on their performance and accomplishments and while men are judged on promises; and (d) men are assumed to be competent and have had to receive negative evaluations before being judged negatively, while women are more likely to be judged negatively from the onset. The authors pointed out that being a professor is and continues to be a masculine profession. Therefore, if a professor acts “masculine,” he is perceived as a better professor. On the other hand, if women professors act “feminine” or conduct “feminine research” (qualitative research), they may have difficulties being seen as a good professor (DeFrancisco & Palczieski, 2007). The implications for this research suggest that women are judged first on how they perform femininity, not their teaching.

The notion of gender bias and perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles suggests gender prejudice may play a significant part in the lack of women in leadership positions in IHE (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In addition, women may be denied positions within the university due to career breaks and time away from research, which pushes them to wait until they are certain to be promoted before applying (Acker, 1994).
Pathways to the college presidency. Colorado Women’s College (2013) and Cook (2012) outlined the accepted paths to earn the skills necessary to become a college president. A traditional career pathway to a college presidency includes a career trajectory in higher education, moving through all or most levels of the academic organizational hierarchy (Colorado Women’s College, 2013; Cook, 2012; Darden, 2006). This path includes time spent as a faculty member, department chair, dean, provost, and finally on to college president. Cook (2012) noted that, “institutions are increasingly selecting leaders with a great deal of senior executive experience in higher education” (p. 1). This approach could limit opportunities for younger leaders, women, and people of color.

Another accepted college presidency path, proving more difficult for women than men, is experience from a sector outside of education (Cook, 2012). Table 1 suggests that 52% of women who hold a college president position were previously employed as a provost or chief academic officer. The table also suggests that men have an easier time gaining positions as college presidents having not had any experience in higher education.

Table 1. Career Pathway to the College Presidency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Position</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President/CEO</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAO/provost</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other campus senior official</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside higher education</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Cook (2002).

Studies indicate that, with the rate of women receiving doctorates, there are more than enough women to fill the senior-level leadership positions in higher education (Colorado Women’s College, 2013; Johnson, 2016). However, the glass ceiling and the
unseen blocks still exist for women who want to advance into college presidencies. The data indicate that, even though the women may be credentialed, they are not holding high-level professor positions with the same frequency as men.

According to the charts below, in private institutions offering doctoral- and masters-level degrees, the majority of positions filled by women are entry-level, service, and adjunct. This is important because the preponderance of women who serve at these schools will never advance into a college presidency.

Table 2. Distribution of Faculty by Rank, Gender, Category and Affiliation (Doctoral) 2014 –15 (Percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution/Academic Rank: Doctoral</th>
<th>Private-Independent</th>
<th>Religiously Affiliated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Rank</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AAUP, 2014, p.33
Table 3. Distribution of Faculty by Rank, Gender, Category and Affiliation (Masters) 2014-15 (Percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution/Academic Rank: Masters</th>
<th>Private-Independent</th>
<th>Religiously Affiliated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Rank</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>53.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>47.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AAUP, 2014, p.33

This traditional career path is respected as the pathway that develops leadership competencies for a successful president; however, the results from studies on presidential effectiveness are inconclusive as to whether the president benefits from climbing the academic ranks—lecturer, instructor, assistant, associate, full professor to dean and finally provost (Darden, 2006).

As noted by Cook (2012), the pathway to leadership often includes higher education experiences; however, such experiences are not a necessity. There are cases of women who did not follow the traditional pathway but were able to secure a college presidency position (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Woollen, 2016). Woollen (2016) studied “non-traditional” paths in which several women who had industry or
organizational experience were given experiences as college presidents, with virtually no time spent in higher education.

Due to life circumstances (e.g., caregiving or child rearing), some women in academia may encounter career breaks, transitions, or spaces between promotions. Fitzgerald (2014) and Bornstein (2008) asserted that, for these reasons, women might have a difficult time climbing the career ranks. Studies show that women consistently compete with work and home more than men, thus creating barriers for advancement and lessening their chances for promotion (Butterwick & Dawson, 2005). Many women actually leave their careers and deny themselves leadership positions due to a lack of support and mixed messaging from organization leaders (Ballenger, 2010; Stone, 2013).

**Patriarchy and Systemic Oppression of Women**

This section discusses the ways in which patriarchal definition of women’s roles are still affecting our current social conditions, thereby contributing to the obstacles women face in career advancement. Furthermore, this section outlines several theories and scholarly discussions of the patriarchy and how these conventional systems are harmful to men and women.

As noted earlier, I have charted women’s progression in education and occupation over time. In 2018, equality in the workforce and leadership roles for women is still being affected by perceptions of women’s role in society (Ibarra et al., 2013). Ibarra et al. (2013) suggested that a subtle gender bias exists not only in organizations, but also in society, blocking women from the “learning cycle” that is crucial in advancing into higher levels of leadership. It is not enough to invest in leadership development. Whatever the occupational context, there has to be an inherent support system within the
organization that not only helps women feel motivated into leadership, but supported once she reaches a level of positional authority. Through a support system, a delicate process must happen in which the woman begins to see herself as a leader and be aware of how others within the system view her (Ibarra et al., 2013).

We are living under the umbrella of a patriarchal society that places women in subservient positions, but can also be harmful to men, because they also have difficulty breaking out of their assigned gender roles. For example, social norms are taught beginning in infancy and we are all expected to fit into a certain mold based upon our gender (Helgesen, 1990). In The female advantage: Women’s ways of leadership (Helgesen, 1990) discusses that the way boys and girls learn to behave and think about gender occurs early in life. She explains that the psychological tasks children face, from playing games to interacting with others are learned early in life. Parents, whose thinking has been influenced by society’s expectations of gender, teach their children, as little boys and girls, the expectations of masculine and feminine behavior traits. Helgeson (1990), illustrates her theory that men and women play by two sets of rules learned early in child by suggesting that:

Male children learn to put winning ahead of personal relationships or growth; to feel comfortable with rules, boundaries, and procedures; and to submerge their individuality for the greater goal of the game. Females learn to value cooperation and relationships; to disdain complex rules and authoritarian structures; and to disregard abstract notions like the quest for victory if they threaten harmony in the group as a whole. (p. 38)

This set of gender expectations and male power that are imposed upon children create a psychological schema of gender ideas and behaviors that they will carry with
them into adulthood. Undoubtedly, these perceptions of gender are carried into school, workforce, and higher education (Orenstein 1994; Helgeson, 1990).

Orenstein (1994) *School girls: Young women, self-esteem, and the confidence gap* discusses that male superiority occurs at a very young age. He argues that it is insulting for a man to be called a sissy or a girl, considering it a sign of weakness, placing women and girls in a negative position. To illustrate this argument, Orenstein (1994) quotes that:

> The prevalence of sexual harassment reminds us that boys learn at a very young age to see girls as less capable and less worthy of respect. One need only consider that the most shameful insult that one boy can hurl at another is still to call them a “girl”, to understand how aware children are of female powerlessness, how important it is for boys to distance themselves from that weakness in order to feel like men. (p. 116)

These structures of male superiority and power are then transferred and built into schools and organizations. The conventional thinking and perception of gender and gender stereotypes becomes a part of the system and the cycle continues, not only harming women, but also keeping men in society’s mold of masculinity and hierarchy of power. Society views men as weak if they are referred to as females. For example, Orenstein (1994) argues that little boys learn that they need to act like “boys” in order to be respected, acting like a little girl, makes them weak. They are told that crying and talking about emotions is a sign of weakness. On a wider spectrum, Ornstein’s discussion on the ways that boys disrespect girls at a young age provide valuable insight into how young boys and girls begin to form perceptions of gender and leadership. Men and women in leadership roles are often influenced by these pre-conceived ideas about men and women; conversely, the men and women working for these leaders have also been influenced by these gender perceptions (Orenstein, 1994).
Furthermore, due to the complex social system influenced by the practices of the patriarchy, there are still obstacles in place that hold women back from gaining leadership roles in education and occupation (Colorado Women’s College, 2013; Sandeen 2015).

**Systemic views of women.** This section describes systemic views of women as they relate to ideals set forth by the patriarchy, specifically, pre-conceived ideas about gender have defined women and the expectations for women surrounding gender roles and characteristics. Systemic views of women are described as the ways society and culture view women and have defined women, the expectations for women, and gender roles (Rose, 2010). In this case, because men rule the world and have done so for centuries, male views of women have directly affected the way the entire system defines gender roles that are specific to men and women (Myers, 2008; Rose, 2010).

Allen Johnson (2014) discusses the idea of patriarchy in *The gender knot: unraveling our patriarchal legacy*. A critical point in his work moves through the notion that patriarchy, in today’s world, is not necessarily a precise effort done by men to dominate and oppress women. Instead, he discusses patriarchy as an antiquated system that we have all born into and continue to unconsciously participate in conventional ways of thinking about men and women (Rose, 2010). In 2010, Rose argued that gender roles views of women are derived by culture, set forth by patriarchal ideals. Coupled with the social norms of men’s and women’s roles and historical discrimination, noted earlier in the literature review, women are still facing obstacles in career advancement (Orenstein 1994; Helgesen, 1990).

The traditional roles enacted by the patriarchy have viewed women as caretakers, who stayed in the home, and men as ambitious and aggressive breadwinners, in the job;
these implications have influenced deep societal beliefs about women that organizations are still facing (Catalyst, 2014). The notion of the patriarchy and a set of behavioral norms designed and enforced by society is one lens, enabling deeper inquiry into understanding the power and privilege dynamics between men and women in the United States and explaining why there is inequality between genders (Walby, 1990). Walby (1990) defined “patriarchal relations” in the work place as the denial of access by men against women (p. 161), such as excluding women from education, occupation and advancement. The dominant group in power (largely white and male) has socially constructed leadership in the Unites States.

According to Sharma and Kaur (2014), “men assume leadership in organizations while women are often confined to work at home” (p. 1). Researchers have defined a series of defined obstructions and theories, subtle and overt, that hold women back from advancement: the concrete wall, the glass ceiling, the labyrinth, the glass cliff (Bruckmiller & Greene, 2010; Eagly & Carly, 2007) and gender biases, also known as, the unseen barriers (Ibarra et al., 2011). The concrete wall is an overt barrier that holds women in a stagnant position. The research of Eagly & Carly (2007) suggests that men should be the breadwinners and women the homemakers; with this ideal still in place, the concrete wall literally stops women from entering the workforce or when they do, they may not leave entry-level positions (2007). The phrase “glass ceiling” is a subtle barrier that emerged after many of the exclusionary “old boys’ club” tactics created by men ceased and women were allowed into middle management positions, only to be restricted from the highest, senior-level positions. The theory of the “labyrinth” suggests that the pathway for women to ascend into leadership may be challenging and indirect (Eagly &
Women that break through the glass ceiling or navigate through the labyrinth may find themselves on the glass cliff (Bruckmiller & Greene, 2010). In an interview transcribed and published by the Harvard Business Review “How women end up on the glass cliff,” Bruckmiller & Greene (2010) discusses the theory of the glass cliff as the phenomenon of employing women into leadership positions at “times of organizational crisis” (p. 1). The phrase glass cliff is a metaphor for the nature of the hazardous situation for women leaders (Bruckmiller & Greene, 2010). Modern examples of the glass cliff scenarios are Carly Fiorna, former CEO of Hewlett Packard; Zoe Cruz, senior banking executive and former co-president of Morgan Stanley; and Erin Callan, the former CFO of Lehman Brothers (Addison-Lavelle, 2016). According to the Harvard Business Review (2008) report, when companies are in peril, women are more likely to be hired as CEOs. Perhaps men are not available or fewer men applied for the position due to the amount of risk associated with leading a company in crisis (Addison-Lavelle 2016; Hewlett et al., 2008). As the top person in the company, the woman is isolated, lacks mentorship and often, social capital (Hewlett et al., 2008). Unfortunately, if the woman is unable to turn around a company with a high propensity toward failure, corporations are merciless. The woman ends up assuming blame for negative outcomes that have already been forecasted long before her appointment. Sadly, this research also revealed that women in science, engineering and technology believe that if failure occurs, redemption is impossible (Addison-Lavelle 2016; Hewlett et al., 2008).

**Gender biases and stereotypes.** Cultural stereotypes and gender biases may also contribute to the lack of women in leadership; these stereotypes are known as the unseen barriers that hold women back from advancement (Ibarra et al., 2011). Gender
stereotyping leaves women leaders vulnerable to harsh conditions in organizations from centuries of oppression. Across three domains—personality, occupation and domestic behavior — the system disables the woman due to strict gender stereotyping (“Gender stereotypes,” 2016). Examples of these stereotypes include but are not limited to males being accepted as competitive and aggressive, yet, women being held to the standard of being caretaking or warm (“Gender stereotypes,” 2016). “Gender stereotypes can become a powerful yet invisible threat to women” (Catalyst, 2007, p. 7). As outlined by Prime et al. (2009), women who do enter into leadership roles will often be seen as violating their stereotypical feminine roles. Furthermore, these issues are not limited to men. Due to systemic female oppression and the ideas surrounding male leadership characteristics, women may not see themselves as leaders in an organization; therefore, stakeholders may not take them seriously (Ely et al., 2011).

Men and women are still expected to behave in gender-appropriate styles (Miller, 1996). Men are seen as natural leaders because of their “competitive” and “aggressive” natures; however, women are more often stereotyped as “care takers” (Prime et al., 2009). Catalyst (2007) discussed the ways in which social conditioning is a threat to women in the workforce and women leaders. When women take on society’s impression of male characteristics (Catalyst 2007)—too soft or too hard, likeable or competent—women are rarely able to meet both ends of the spectrum (Catalyst, 2007; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2007). Ely et al. (2011) explained that blatant and unseen biases against women in leadership roles can collect and disable the woman in power (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010).
Men supposedly possess the skills of a typical leader, implying that women would be atypical leaders (Catalyst, 2007). Unfortunately, when women act in concert with the female stereotypical gender behaviors, they are seen as weak leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These behaviors include being overly emotional or nurturing. Ibarra, Carter, and Silva (2011) found that the gender gap does exist in leadership, and, as women become more comfortable with their power, organizations need to catch up by finding better ways to mentor women into key leadership positions. In *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and men at work*, Tannen (1994) argues that society’s expectations for how a person in authority should behave is in conflict with how a women should behave. If a woman speaks or behaves in a conventional fashion she is more likely to be liked than respected or see as the leader. This is an additional obstacle that women must understand how to navigate if she takes on a leadership position.

**Leadership Theories**

To understand women’s advancement, it is important to outline the leadership competencies that women may need in order to secure a position as a college president. First, this section introduces leadership and briefly presents leadership literature in trait theory, transactional theories, transformational theories and behavioral theories. Located within the behavioral theories is a definition of competencies. Presented in the last phase of this section is a discussion on leadership development theories and strategies that play a significant role in developing women leaders.

According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), leadership is difficult to define, let alone teach, because there are a myriad of theories and definitions in scholarly leadership literature (Yukl, 1989). Traditionally, the categories of leadership—trait approaches,
behavioral approaches, and contingency/situational approaches (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)—have focused primarily on characteristics of the leader—traits, behaviors, styles, and ways in which these leadership characteristics make the leader effective or ineffective (Northouse, 2015). It is important to note that these leadership styles were developed by and largely studied by men; therefore leadership theories were developed from a patriarchal perspective (Northouse, 2015).

**Trait Theories**

Early definitions of the trait approach to leadership were defined as the “Great Man” theories, because they centered on the natural characteristics said to be displayed by great leaders. Catherine the Great, Abraham Lincoln, and Joan of Arc are among the leaders identified as “trait” leaders (Northouse, 2015). Scholarly articles regarding trait leadership were popular from the 1900s to the 1940s. The 1970s and 1980s saw a resurgence in popularity of charismatic leadership. This theory has proven difficult to measure; researchers struggled to find ways to measures personality traits as they relate to leadership effectiveness. However, using the five-factor model of personality proposed by Digman (1990) as a framework for organizing leadership measurement, researchers examined the relationship between personality and leadership. They learned that extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness were positively related to leadership (Colbert, Judge, Choi, & Wang, 2012).

**Transactional Theories**

Transactional leadership motivates people to achieve by a series of contingent consequences, either positive or negative (Bass & Avolio, 1994). By closely monitoring workforce behavior, the leader rewards or punishes the employee based on the suitability
of achievement and performance. Also referred to as Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Theory, this premise focuses on the exchanges between the leader and follower and how this exchange influences workplace performance (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

**Contingency theories.** Fiedler (1967) defined contingency theory as leaders adapting the leadership strategy to fit the situation. For this reason, contingency theories fall into the situational leadership domain. Northouse (2015) discussed the notion that contingency theories center on the alignment of the leader’s style to the specific situation. As defined by Law (2016), the most effective level of leadership will occur when the leader positions his/her style to the characteristics of the group. It is important to note that other models recommend that the leader alter the work situation to suit his/her style rather than the leader alter the style to fit the situation (Law, 2016). This theory of leadership challenges the belief that there is an idyllic leader able to perform effectively in all situations (Bolden et al., 2003).

**Transformational Theories**

Transformational leaders focus on inspiring followers to “commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers’ leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring and provision of both challenge and support” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4). Stemming from trait theory, transformational leadership theory developed in the 1980s. Northouse (2015) described this theory as a process that can change organizations as well as people. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leadership creates awareness of the vision and mission of the team; this leadership theory is aligned with the concepts of motivating and inspiring teams to collaborate and “view their work from new
perspectives” (p. 2). The transformational leader listens to stakeholders, spends time in workspaces, and delegates work to develop followers. Furthermore, transformational leadership is focused on the whole person rather than on just the skills needed to make a good employee (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

**Behavioral Theories**

Behavioral theories concentrate on what leaders actually do. Leadership competencies are organized and observed through patterns of behavior (Bolden et al., 2003). Behavioral theories concentrate on a leader's actions, which are typically categorized and then aligned with specific tasks or actions. This theory stresses (a) the accomplishment of goals or objectives, (b) organizing structures (rules or designs), and (c) people orientation, which connects to interpersonal relationships and consideration for followers (Bolden, et al., 2003). Similar to trait and transformational theories, behavioral styles are thought to be subjective to the individual leader and to a specific context (Bolden, et al., 2003).

Several significant studies are notable in the development of behavioral leadership theories. For example, Ohio State University published a study measuring nine behavioral leadership domains; the findings of this study influenced the design of the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) comprised of 150 quantifiable behavioral descriptors (Nohira & Khurana, 2010). Behavior leadership theory depends upon defined actions and tasks. According to Spencer and Spencer (1993), the fundamental components of behavioral leadership are clearly defined measurable actions that can be learned. These behaviors can be measured through the use of competency frameworks and competency models (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).
Competencies, as defined by Richard Boyatzis (1982), are an ability or capability possessed by an individual. Woodruffe (1992) identifies competencies as a specific set of behavioral skills or patterns that are required of an individual to perform a task or job.

**Emotional intelligence and leadership.** In the book, *Management a Focus on Leaders*, McKee (2014) discusses that the key to successful leadership is mastering social and emotional competencies. Daniel Goleman (1998) in *Working with Emotional Intelligent Competencies* discusses emotional intelligence and its connection to leadership competencies. He proposed a framework of major EI competencies that introduced the fundamentals for EI: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Furthermore, he defined these competencies as directly affecting not only leadership but also career success (Goleman, 1998). Boyaztis and McKee (2005, 2008) and (McKee, Boyatzis & Johnson, 2008) extended the work of Daniel Goleman and organized emotional intelligence competencies into four domains outlining specific competency clusters: “self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management” (p. 28). Self-management and self-awareness refer to one’s ability to understand and self-manage his/her own awareness and emotions. Social awareness and relationship management are the domains that determine how well one identifies and understands the emotions of others, builds relationships and functions in intricate social systems. Figure 2 below represents EI competencies and their specific characteristics in detail (McKee et al., 2008 p. 25).
Goleman (1998) stated that emotional intelligence is the “sine qua non of leadership . . . without it a person can have the best training in the world . . . but still will not make a great leader” (p. 93). As Morse noted, (2014), “Women executives of the 21st century are faced with dynamic and complex roles requiring effective styles of leadership to ensure opportunities for advancement (p. 3). Modern leaders must be able to understand diversity and the role it plays in organizations, emotional intelligence, and critical leadership skills (Folkman, 2012).

Emotional intelligence accounts for 85-95 % of successful leaders compared to those that measure as average leaders (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Boyaztis and McKee (2005) characterized outstanding leaders as having the ability to harness their own emotions and those of others in “positive directions” (p. 28). The working environments that these leaders create are not only results-oriented but also have a healthy and vibrant affect. The reason that leaders are able to create this environment is due to their own

(McKee et al., 2008 p. 25)
emotional intelligence competencies. Not only can they manage their own emotions, but they can also manage the emotions of their teams and stakeholders. By including positive frames for driving results, they use empathy and inspire hope toward an exciting future. They are able to read the emotions of their stakeholders and the culture of the organization thus forging meaningful relationships. Instead of inciting fear or anger, which leads to anxiety and potential ineffectiveness, emotionally intelligent leaders use their emotions to inspire courage, motivate and demonstrate passion for the organization (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

By developing mindfulness, self-awareness and awareness of others, emotionally intelligent leaders understand how to use their emotions to build and maintain relationships as opposed to overreacting in times of stress and anxiety. A deep understanding of self and others affords the leader with greater opportunities for effectively leading groups and the culture of an organization (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

According to Boyatzis and McKee (2005), “Resonant leaders are in tune with those around them” (p. 4). Morse (2014) posited that leadership-training programs for women should strengthen the emphasis on emotional intelligence skills and content. Kerr et al. (2006) asserted that successful leaders have skills in emotional intelligence. The manner in which the organization performs is shaped by the ways in which the leader relates to the employees (Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall & Salovey, 2006; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005).

Understanding the system and how to motivate employees are key competencies in emotional intelligence (McKee, Boyatzis & Johnson, 2008). Shifting from a bureaucratic system to a more innovative and collaborative system facilitates the creative
potential in employees, unlocking personal gifts and allowing that person to share their gifts with the system (McKee, 2014 p. 284).

**Collaborative leadership theory.** According to Kramer & Crespy (2011), collaborative leadership theory is an approach to leadership that is shared with constituents, rather than a top-down or hierarchical approach. This shared process of decision-making and problem solving steers away from the otherwise maladaptive vertical or top-down approach that leaves the community feeling as if they are a cog in the wheel, reaching someone else’s goals. Collaborative leadership theory suggests that the people in the organization or school should have a voice or be invited to collaborate with leaders to make decisions and drive initiatives (Kramer & Crespy, 2011). In *Collaborative Leadership and School Improvement: Understanding the Impact on School Capacity and Student Learning* (Hallinger & Heck, 2010), the authors suggest that collaborative leadership encompasses governance structure and organizational processes that encourages agency and collaborative decision making between the leader and major stakeholders. This specific study focused on school improvement initiatives through collaborative leadership focusing on strategic school-wide actions, and shared efforts of faculty, students, administrations and others.

**Servant leadership theory.** Robert Greenleaf coined the phrase servant leadership because it pertained to the leader as servant first. The characteristics of servant-leadership are as follows: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Spears, 2010). Servant-leadership begins with the organic feeling that one wants to serve first and leadership follows; this concept is distinctly different from one
who wants to lead first, perhaps wanting to gain power or material possessions. The servant leader focuses on and prioritizes the growth and well-being of the community (Greenleaf, 2002).

This approach to leadership is not a top-down, vertical structure, but instead servant leadership is shares powers and places the needs of others first, by helping them to grow and perform (Greenleaf, 2002).

**The relationship between emotional leadership, collaborative leadership, and servant leadership to women.** As many organizations are experiencing change, financial hardship and increasing diversity, could women be naturally oriented with the skills to be outstanding leaders? Rosner (2000) and Hegleson (1990) offer discussions on the theory that women’s collaborative, empathetic leadership styles, coupled with the female experience can actually make organizations stronger:

The men are more likely than the women to describe themselves in ways that characterize what some management experts call ‘transactional’ leadership. That is, they view job performance as a series of transactions with subordinates, exchanging rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance. The men are also more likely to use power that comes from their organizational position and formal authority. The women respondents, on the other hand, described themselves in ways that characterize ‘transformational’ leadership, getting subordinates to transform their own self-interest into the interest of the group through concern for a broader goal. Moreover, they ascribe their power to personal characteristics like charisma, interpersonal skills, hard work, or personal contacts rather than to organizational stature. (p. 14)

This literature presents an interesting frame, that women are actually better suited to leadership than men, given the fact that they naturally carry with the traits of transformational leaders, collaborative leaders, servant leaders, and are intuitively equipped with emotional intelligent competencies. Helgesen (1990) discusses in her research that the female experience of managing a family, imparting information,
guiding, managing conflict, and the organizational skills that come with running a household have been valuable teaching tools in developing women as leaders.

**Women’s Leadership Development**

In order for women to break out of these molds created by the patriarchy and long-held systemic views of women, leadership development can be critical in preparing women for positional leadership roles in higher education (Madsen, 2013). According to Barton (2011), feminist leadership has its roots in transformation leadership and is crucial in creating student centered learning communities: “Feminist leaders keep issues of gender, race, social class, ability, and sexual orientation at the forefront of what they do. They are watchful for oppressions and they work to ensure that no one is treated unfairly” (p. 1). Strachan (2002) suggested that feminist leadership is grounded in celebrating and encouraging women’s experiences. Thus, as Steinem (1993) asserted decades earlier, leadership development programs should address the internal patriarchal messages of power and privilege as it relates to gender. The messages that may be intrinsically present could potentially block women from embracing their own unique skills and developing their own styles of leadership (Steinem, 1993). Debebe, Anderson, Bilimoria, and Vinnicombe (2016) identified several critical themes in the literature observing women’s leadership training programs. To address the habitual pattern of thought that women are not meant to be leaders because of their gender, they suggest a transformational learning process. Transformational learning can help them women see through the habitual patterns of oppression that may have been formed in their identity as well as within the constituents that they would be working with in the organization (Debebe et al., 2016).
Developing women is about the “‘doing of feminism’ and leading in a way that challenges and changes hegemonic institutional practices” (Barton, 2011, p. 3; Blackmore, 1993). Feminist leadership styles are defined as collaborative, transformational, relational, adaptive [according to context and organizational culture], emphasizes social justice and identity formation (Chin, 2003). The leadership styles would include resonant leadership, emotional and social intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004) and reflexivity in research and practice (David, 2007). According to Christensen, (2011), leadership development for women should move toward transparent communication with a clear articulation of vision, mission and processes for problem solving; relational and collaborative practices that focus on the building of communities, empowerment of social groups, equality, and ways to overcome systemic oppression.

Leadership development programs should address the internal patriarchal messages of power as it relates to gender (Steinem 1993). These messages that may be intrinsically present could potentially block women from embracing their own unique skills and developing their own styles of leadership (Steinem 1993). The leadership styles would include resonant leadership, emotional and social intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004) and reflexivity in research and practice (David, 2007).

Women’s unconscious “habitual patterns” of hiding emotion or sensitivity in fear of being looked upon as weak or not logical should be identified and then re-developed in leadership development (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2008). Morse (2014) posited that leadership-training programs for women should strengthen the emphasis on emotional intelligence skills and content: “Women executives of the 21st century are faced with dynamic and complex roles requiring effective styles of leadership to ensure
opportunities for advancement in leadership positions (p. 3). Modern leaders must be able to understand diversity and role it plays in organizations, emotional intelligence and critical leadership skills (Folkman, 2012).

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this literature review was to shape my conceptual framework with theoretical scaffolds and focus the topic and scope of my research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). I used three building blocks that defined the theoretical framework for the study: patriarchy, systemic views of women, and gender biases.

According to the literature, the patriarchy is at its core about white male power and gender (“Gender stereotypes,” 2016; Rose, 2010). Men long dominated women and placed women as subservient. Born out of these power roles, gender roles formed in primitive times and continue to shape how society views women even in contemporary times. Our current social system is still structured according to male viewpoints and male power. Although women have made progress in occupations and careers, the manner in which society views women leaves them behind in advancing toward senior levels of leadership (Sandeen, 2015; Colorado Women’s College, 2013; Solomon, 1985).

Systemic views of women, role congruity and critical race theory have held women to gender roles. Unfortunately, if a woman does advance, the system simply may not view her as a leader because she is a woman or a woman of color. This leads to many obstacles, subtle and overt, within organizations that hold women back from career advancement (Catalyst 2007; “Gender stereotypes,” 2016; Ibarra et al., 2011). The literature review revealed that women are receiving more undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees than men and they are out-performing men in careers. Even though
women comprise 51% of the work place, they are still lagging behind in salary and representation in senior level leadership positions across 14 sectors (Colorado Women’s College, 2013; Johnston, 2016; Myers, 2008).

Ideas such as the glass ceiling and the labyrinth are haunting women in higher education. Most of the women who advance to college presidencies rise up the ranks as faculty and into chief academic officer positions. The literature indicates that, as the rank of the position increases, the representation of women in those roles decreases, implying that women have a lower chance compared to men of ever attaining the college presidency position. (Colorado Women’s College, 2016; Johnston, 2016).
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 defines this study’s research design and methodology. This chapter describes the rationale for why I designed an exploratory, qualitative study and discusses the methods for participant selection and recruitment. Lastly, I delve into the qualitative interviewing techniques and the strategies used for data analysis.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I established that, in general, women have had difficulties in the workforce due to systemic views of women enabled by the patriarchy. Due to gender biases, women have a difficulty rising to top levels of leadership across 14 sectors (Colorado Women’s College, 2013). Although women comprise 51% of the workforce, they fail to reach senior-level positions, and they suffer from pay inequities in business, government, and higher education (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010). This study was interested in looking specifically at the advancement of women in institutes of higher learning. In particular, for the women who did advance into a college presidency, how do they perceive their opportunities and challenges?

The objective for this exploratory study is to investigate women’s perceptions of their career navigation into a college presidency. This study is not a comparison between men and women in a college presidency, but rather seeks to understand women’s career experiences. Located in Appendix A, I designed an interview protocol that enabled me to collect data through open-ended, semi-structured individual interviews. During the individual interview, I included questions related to behavioral events to understand specific behaviors that women employed to navigate the system and advance professionally. This design section will serve as my strategy for answering the research questions below.
Research Questions

Question 1: What obstacles and opportunities have women college presidents experienced as they advanced in small private colleges and universities?

- Which specific abilities helped women take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles?
- What types of professional support helped women take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles?
- How did networks and other personal support play a role in helping women advance?

Overview of Research Methodology

In order to achieve the goals of the study, I employed a phenomenological, qualitative research approach with a qualitative research instrument. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research contains five approaches: grounded theory, narrative, ethnography, phenomenology, and case study research. The interview approaches associated with qualitative research are ideal data collection strategies for studying phenomenology, as they allowed me to design deep interview questions that explore unique patterns, themes, individual perceptions, and experiences in context-specific situations (Maxwell, 2012; Patton, 2011).

Creswell (2009) described phenomenology as being concerned with delving deeper into the nature and individual perspective of specific experiences. A phenomenological approach allowed me to focus on how participants perceive and make sense of their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To that end, a phenomenological
approach aligns with the scope of this project due to its exploratory nature and propensity toward understanding subjective experiences of female college presidents as they advanced into a college presidency (Creswell, 2009).

To deepen the complexity of the dialogue, in addition to the open-ended questions, I embedded a behavioral event interview (BEI) into the research instrument. Associated with qualitative research methods, the BEI was designed for collecting data regarding specific events (Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland, 1998). BEIs emphasize behavioral details that occurred during an event. At the time of the interview, the participant was asked to recall and explain the context, what specific behaviors they engaged in to handle the event, the roles of others, their own thoughts or interpretation of the event, their feelings associated with the event, and their feelings and interpretations associated with the outcome of the event (Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland, 1998; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

My goal was to encourage provocative dialogue that would result in complete stories with experiences and behaviors as defined by the participant. To that end, the embedded behavioral event interviews enabled me to find reoccurring themes and patterns in data analysis and to understand the women’s experiences from their lenses.

**Participant selection strategy.** This section describes the participant selection strategy, site selection, sample size, criteria for selecting participants, and participant recruitment approach. According to Maxwell (2013), “particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 97). Additionally, Creswell (2007) and Patton (2011) purport that choosing participants that
are most likely to contribute valuable and credible information are crucial to the study. For these reasons, I chose purposive sampling with two criteria for selecting participants in mind: (a) women of color and Caucasian women who currently hold positions of college presidents and (b) women college presidents in small to mid-sized private universities.

Site selection. The site selections were based on small to mid-size, private, religiously affiliated or historically black institutions of higher education that grant doctoral, master’s, and bachelor’s degrees. Small to mid-sized IHEs serve between 1,000 and 7,500 students. Research indicates that most female college presidents are located in schools that grant associates degrees (Johnson, 2016). Therefore, I wanted to understand the experiences of women college presidents that lead in institutions granting at minimum a bachelor’s degree. This study was designed to explore current college presidents employed in private universities or institutions of higher education; therefore, I excluded women who were presidents of public institutions and women that held the title of president emeritus or interim president. This arrangement of criteria including women presidents of private college and universities granting at minimum bachelor’s degrees significantly limited the pool of potential candidates. However, the study was purposefully designed in this manner to focus on a specific area of women’s leadership (Maxwell, 2013).

Sample size. I wanted to be sure that I had enough meaningful data from women of diverse backgrounds in college president roles to meet the goals of my study and answer my research questions. Therefore, I interviewed 20 participants. Interviews lasted sixty minutes each. The women interviewed reflected the percentages of women
of color and Caucasian women in college president roles in institutions of higher education. The success of this study depended upon my accessibility to women college presidents that met the selection criteria and would be willing to participate in the study. Therefore, I engaged my professional networks and dissertation committee to source and recruit potential participants.

**Participant recruitment approach.** Once participants were identified and had agreed to participate in the study, I sent an email defining the scope of the study, duration of the interview, talking points, and informed consent, located in Appendix C. Many times, I was invited personally for on-campus interviews. When schedules and location permitted, I was able to meet with 11 college presidents on campus; the other nine interviews were conducted over the phone.

**Methods for Data Collection**

The purpose of this section was to define my methods for data collection. In the following sections, I describe the purpose for a qualitative research design, the steps taken for data collection, and the details of my research instrument.

**Qualitative data collection.** According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), the design should unfold organically, driven by the goals of the study and the nature of the research questions. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, qualitative data collection is an appropriate design approach to best answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study. At the heart of qualitative research is engaging with people’s experiences and perspectives. I was interested in the women’s subjective interpretations of their own competencies, experiences, and context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This approach allowed me to accomplish my goals of creating a collaborative relationship with
the participants, providing space for them to think deeply about the questions, and making meaning of their experiences (Maxwell, 2007).

**Interview protocol.** My research objective relied upon an instrument that consisted of in depth interviews and open-ended questions that explored women’s perceived notions of opportunities and obstacles the encountered as they advanced in their careers. In order to best capture meaningful, rich data and better understand the phenomenon that I was studying, I designed a research instrument that facilitated organic dialogue between the participant and myself (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). After the international review board at the University of Pennsylvania approved my study, I piloted this research instrument with two professional colleagues, my dissertation chair, and two college presidents who agreed to participate in the pilot. The presidents who participated in the piloting of the research instrument were not included in the data analysis or the total number of women college presidents interviewed.

To meet the goals of my study, I inserted a modified behavioral event interview (BEI) into the semi-structured interview. McClelland (1973) developed the BEI based on the CII (critical incident interview) tool to extract the participants’ narratives and behaviors from critical events. He wanted to understand the motivation underlying the specific behaviors at the time of critical events. In the case of my study, the objective of the BEI was to encourage discussion between myself and the participant to obtain very detailed descriptions of how the participant behaved during a critical event. My role was to encourage the participant to tell complete stories that described her specific behaviors, thoughts, and actions in previous situations (McClelland, 1998). This type of dialogue led the participant to reveal specific behaviors she demonstrated before, during, and after the
event (Boyatzis 1982; McClelland, 1998, 1973). Through BEIs, participants were asked to discuss their motivations behind their choices and the thought processes that brought about the behaviors and decisions surrounding major outcomes and critical events (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). According to Boyatzis (2008), BEI techniques are focused on unearthing an interviewee’s stories for a number of critical events (Boyatzis, 2008). This approach allowed me to design the interview using questions and probes concerned with attaining rich, behaviorally-centered descriptions about the participants as they related to the research topic—women’s perceptions of their own career advancement (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Additionally, the BEIs allowed me to naturally explore specific behaviors that occurred in the participant’s life that helped her advance into a college presidency. In the interview, through open-ended questions, the participants were asked to delve deep and describe their thoughts surrounding their experiences as well as discuss their feelings about the roles that others played during the event (Boyatzis 2008; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). These interviews provided rich data for the coding and analysis of themes, patterns, and identified competencies (Shermon, 2004; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

**Interview format.** In order to achieve the goals of the study, I conducted 20 semi-structured, hour-long, qualitative, individual interviews with an inserted BEI (Boyatzis, 2008). Geographic location and detailed scheduling allowed for 11 in-person interviews and nine phone interviews. According to De Leeuw and Van Der Zouwen (1988), a very small difference between telephone and personal interviews is notable; therefore, two forms of interviews were appropriate. After the participant was recruited, I scheduled with her personally or with her assistant via email or phone call. I sent the
informed consent document through email as well as talking points when requested by
the president. At the time of the interview, informed consent was reviewed and either
signed in person in hard copy format or was scanned and sent via email by the president’s
assistant. With the permission of the participant, each session was recorded and
professionally transcribed; each participant understood her rights to privacy and
confidentiality.

To increase the validity of my study, I used the transcribed interviews and the
methodological triangulation of my research journals, field notes, and memos to ensure
that I yielded data from various sources (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The questions contained
in my research instruments were formulated around understanding the “contextualized
descriptions of experiences and perspectives” of the participants (Weiss, 1994, p. 147).
Although my research instrument questions were purposeful with open-ended questions
and prompts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), the semi-structured format allowed room for
adjustments as new data emerged. Consequently, the conversation often moved away
from the protocol as the conversation and dialogic process organically shifted to issues
that were important to the participant.

**Research memos and field notes.** According to Maxwell (2013), data collection
memos can be used to refine methods and to capture meaning as researchers make sense
of fieldwork and all incoming data. To help me understand the data collected, I included
research memos (Maxwell 2013); the memos comprised the notes taken as I worked
through the interviews. My goal in the memos was to write down any notable moments
that occurred within the process of the interview. I paid close attention to the emotional
process as well as the content that was described to me by the interviewees, taking notes of poignant talking points or feelings that emerged.

According to Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007), data gathering and analysis are immediate and ongoing. Therefore, after each interview was completed, I immediately wrote a research memo that incorporated any notes taken during the interview, as well as my immediate thoughts, reflections, and specific instances that I wanted to examine deeper upon reviewing the recordings and transcripts. Once the transcripts were complete, I used the memos and field notes for reflective practice to delve further into the complexity of the research. The field notes were helpful as I reviewed the data through different lenses in order to help make sense of my findings in the analysis portion.

**Research journal.** I created a reflexive journal in order to structure and reflect on the process of the study. This writing tool was the location in which I captured moments of interest, thoughts, encounters, or any other important feelings that occurred throughout the data analysis process (Anderson et al., 2007). In the end, I amassed one hard copy journal that contained any notes made during the interviews, or immediately after the interview, and one electronic journal filled with research memos that I combined into a large digital research journal. As noted by Maxwell (2013), writing throughout the process captures and promotes thinking. The research journal writing helped me analyze the data through different lenses at different points throughout the process.

**Methods for Data Analysis**

The objective of data analysis is to answer the research questions of this study. This section describes my approach to analyze the data through inductive thematic analysis, including the inserted BEIs. Boyatzis (1998) noted that thematic analysis is a
form of pattern recognition within the data; emerging themes become the categories for the analysis.

**Qualitative data analysis.** I utilized inductive thematic analysis to search for themes that surfaced as the participants made sense of and described the phenomenon of being an elite number of women who advanced into a college presidency. The purpose for the inductive thematic analysis was to capture the perspective of the participants’ motivations surrounding the behaviors, contexts and interactions at the time of critical events; the inductive strategy allowed me to explore the data and recognize patterns within the BEI (Ravitch & Carl, 2015).

**Inductive thematic analysis.** I used an inductive thematic analysis approach to explore the information, recognize patterns, code data, and identify emerging themes and subthemes within the data set. Patton (2011) discussed the assets of joining qualitative interviews with a thematic data analysis approach, defining inductive thematic analysis as the process of identifying general patterns and later creating coding categories that result from the open-ended questions and emergent data of the phenomenon being studied. This multi-dimensional process that unfolded during the analysis of my data set is entitled Convergent Data Analysis and Divergent Data Analysis. Patton (2011) further discussed the usefulness of in-depth and open-ended interviews in augmenting the surfacing of underlying meaning, emotions, and personal values in the emerging data. This strategy was helpful in the identification of themes during the analysis of the Behavioral Event Interview. Ravich and Carl (2016) described inductive thematic analyses as an emic approach to making sense of data. Emic coding remains as close to the participants’ voices as possible by using their own words to create the codes. This is
opposed to etic coding, which invokes the voice of the interviewer to create the segments and interpret the data. To that end, I was able to create codes and identify themes through the participants’ voices.

Patton (2011) observed that the processes associated with thematic analysis are an ideal strategy for identifying and describing meanings, themes, and beliefs held by the interview participants. I completed thematic data analysis using two distinct processes: divergent and convergent analysis. First, I used the divergent analysis method by using three interpretive lenses to code the qualitative data: language, emotion, and essence. The results of the divergent analysis were used to inform my convergent analysis. I developed several codes from the divergent analysis that were used throughout the convergent analysis process. The results of the divergent and convergent analyses are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

**Divergent thematic analysis.** The thematic analysis process began with a divergent analysis. This inductive thematic analysis tool helped me begin the process of coding and analyzing the data. As an overview, Patton (2011) suggested that divergent thematic analysis enables a robust and comprehensive examination of data from multiple lenses with the intent of identifying indistinct relationships, underlying meanings, and information that is not stated verbatim in the interviews (Patton, 2011). The divergent analysis stimulates free-flowing idea generation that can aid in an understanding of the data that are not readily apparent, in explicit and implicit terms. The process was iterative; I read through the data several times, including reading and coding it through several lenses. I selected three interpretive lenses—*language, emotions, and essence*—to describe the results.
**Lens 1: Language** is in reference to the data in which participants chose a particular way to articulate their thoughts, ideas, and experiences. *Language* refers to data in which participants chose to communicate in a unique way to articulate or add meaning to their story. Patterns and experiences emerged as a result of reading the data through this lens. For example, participants described in detail their experiences through anecdotes, reflection, and metaphors. As they spoke, I noticed that they offered insights into their relationships, were self-reflective, and described leadership competencies that led to career advancement. For example, several participants described how they learned the skills to become a leader through other leadership roles.

**Lens 2: Emotions** refers to the participants’ underlying feelings around a certain topic or experience. Not only did I capture the language and dialogue verbatim through participant responses and transcribed interviews, I took copious field notes during the interviews. As participants discussed their disappointments and successes, I created field notes of what was happening in the moment, during the dialogic process, and through hearing, seeing, and sensing the emotions behind the stories. Specifically, I paid close attention to the process of affect and conversation. I took note of instances when participants expressed their emotions during an interview. For example, several participants were excited and delighted to discuss an experience, whereas others expressed sadness or disappointment.

Because the interview transcripts only capture text, I listened to the interviews while reading the transcripts on several, separate occasions. During this time, I noted my observations of their voice tone, pauses, and commented on the entire process of the interview and commented on the entire process of the interview. My goal was to tune
into the emotional process and effect of the participants as they were detailing their experiences; I wanted to be aware of notable points in the conversation, as they related to my research questions, in a systematic manner. The use of real-time field notes, after interview research memos, and listening to the recordings while reading the transcripts aided me in capturing underlying subtext and deeper meaning behind what participants were really trying to communicate with me.

**Lens 3: Essence** references who the woman is at her core and what she was trying to tell me on a deeper level, beyond language and emotion. I came to this final lens while reading my research memos and listening to and reflecting on the interviews. I was moved by the stories that were emerging. Often times, she was trying to share her gifts, talents, or struggles with me through anecdotes. Additionally, the women in my study often relived traumatic events, discussed current issues as a college president, and used narratives to describe her roots and who she is at her core.

I became aware that I was in conversation with the women about their entire life stories: how they were shaped, who shaped them, what defined them, and how they reacted to their proudest and saddest moments. I realized that their true essence, who they were at their core, was an important lens in reporting the results of this study.

Through the essence lens, ideas about culture and the patriarchy emerged as participants discussed their experiences in higher education as it related to their family of origin and upbringing.
Convergent thematic analysis. After I completed the divergent thematic analysis, I proceeded onward to the convergent thematic analysis, a second tool of inductive analysis. As discussed by Boyatzis (1998), the convergent thematic analysis is a data-coding process in which the researcher interprets the meaning of the qualitative data after obtaining the findings and constructing a theory after the discovery of the results. The end result of the convergence process is the organizing of data into sub-themes and themes. My intention with the convergent analysis was to use codes to group the data into themes in order to interpret them individually and as part of the theme.

The convergent thematic analysis allowed me to create a comprehensive and robust code set based upon the patterns in the data. With the use of the lenses from the divergent coding—language, emotions, and essence—I completed the convergent thematic analysis in several separate cycles by viewing the data through the theme lenses (Patton, 2011). For the reader’s convenience, I present the results of the convergent thematic analysis in a visual format in chapter 4 (see Table 1).

Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity

My goal was to achieve validity and credible findings while attempting to answer my research questions. Data triangulation—viewing the data through multiple angles—can be achieved by multiple sources of data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This strategy increased the level of validity and credibility of the data (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007).
Validity Concerns and Mitigation

By nature, this exploratory study opens itself up for researcher bias and threats to validity. As described by Maxwell (2013), research bias works in conjunction with my role as a researcher; the ways in which I interact with the participants and how I interpret data can be influenced by my prior experiences and predisposed beliefs. I was careful to mitigate these concerns by noting my positionality below.

Positionality. Gregory et al. (2009) defined positionality as how the researcher’s social, cultural, and power positions; psychological processes; and role in society affect not only the questions they ask but how they frame and make sense of information. Maxwell (2013) referenced Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997), who argued that “relationships that are complex, fluid, symmetric, and reciprocal—that are shaped by both researchers and actors—reflect a more responsible and ethical stance and are likely to yield deeper data and better social science” (pp.137-138). Moreover, they emphasized the “continual creation and renegotiation of trust, intimacy and reciprocity” (p.92). Concurrent with my strategic data collection plan is my positionality as the researcher. Due to my own biases regarding the patriarchy and systemic views of women, I wanted to be sure that I was not influencing findings nor realizing my own biased agenda. To this end, it was important that I let each woman describe her own perceptions, experiences, and critical events on her pathway to leadership without the impediment of my own biases during the interview. I purposefully sequenced the interview protocol in an open-ended manner, used active listening strategies and paraphrasing techniques, and asked questions that regarded her perceptions instead of my own. The behavioral event interview, which consisted of open-ended questions, allowed
the participant to discuss her competencies and behaviors. These data were rich and meaningful to the participant; I simply reported on the data described in the participants’ words.

I remained authentic to the participants by producing an emic report of my findings in the inductive coding section (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used divergent and convergent analysis techniques that helped me describe the experiences, behaviors, and suggestions as they were viewed and described by the participants. I coded the data according to their voices. This is referred to as emic, phenomenological, or subjective research (Anderson et al., 2007).

Gregory et al. (2009) defined reflexivity as the researcher’s reflection upon the ways that research is designed, produced, and disseminated. In the case of my study, reflexivity and reflection were accomplished through the use of journaling and thought partners, who were specifically willing to help me reflect on my positionality in relation to women’s leadership (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I understand the need to be aware of my own biases, as discussed by Maxwell (2013). Journaling and thought partners were effective in challenging my own assumptions as a woman leader. These steps allowed me to report the findings while staying true to the participants’ experiences and narratives.

**Conclusion**

The goal of Chapter 3 was to define the methodological approach utilized for meeting my goals and answering the research questions in my study. A qualitative research design method was best suited for this dissertation, given that the advancement of women into a college presidency is a phenomenon that is under represented in leadership literature and feminist literature. The purpose of the qualitative design allowed
me to study the specific behaviors and critical incidents the participants describe on their journey to a college presidency. I want to understand individual’s “lived experiences, and understand them in complex and contextualized ways” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 17). Using a phenomenological approach, I focused solely on the participants’ ways of making meaning of their experiences.

Through semi-structured interviews, I designed instrument protocols with BEI as the basis for my questions. This technique allowed me to focus on participants’ perceptions of their behaviors, context, self, and interactions with others. BEIs aligned perfectly with the objective of my study, as it was intended to explore the major opportunities, obstacles, and high and low points of women college presidents’ careers. In the case of my study, I explored the phenomenology of women’s career advancement and embed the BEI so that I could understand the women’s specific behaviors that accompanied specific situations and their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings surrounding the roles that others played in their advancement to the college presidency.

I interviewed 20 women through purposive sampling. Women selected to participate were identified, fit the criteria of college president in a small to mid-sized college or university, and reflected women of color and Caucasian women.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results from the thematic analysis described in Chapter 3. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and career advancement of women college presidents in higher education. In this chapter, first, I describe in brief the experience of the interview process. Then, I outline a composite story that encompasses the totality of the sacred experiences of the women college presidents who participated in the study. I refer to the interview experiences as sacred because each woman interviewed shared her personal experience, and essentially her whole life with me. Before the details of the analysis are reported, I wanted to give space for the women college presidents’ presence and voices to be heard and experienced. After the stories, I present the full analysis of the results from the inductive thematic analysis as reported by the 20 participants. Through the process of inductive thematic analysis, I was able to glean seven themes and 23 associated subthemes from the twenty 60-minute interviews. In Chapter 5, I aggregate the results of the thematic analysis and report on major findings of the study as well as provide recommendations for further research and implications for practice.

Voices of the College Presidents

Twenty college presidents were interviewed from private universities. Of the women interviewed, 15 identified as white, while five identified as African American or women of color. The age range of the presidents ranged from mid-40’s to mid-70’s. The average age of the college presidents in the cohort was 65. The current IHE’s that the women leading are each unique, varying from religious institutions such as, Catholic, Presbyterian, Christian, to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and
private/independent colleges. The presidents interviewed were employed in a wide arrange of liberal arts bachelor’s only degrees to schools with online degrees, professional programs and doctoral granting degrees.

In the beginning of every interview, I opened with the question: “How did you become the president of this University?” This question helped to connect with the participant, opening the door to rich dialogue regarding how the woman prepared for her career as a college president. I was delighted in the fact that the women interviewed were willing to share rich details of their personal and professional experiences. Topics discussed included opportunities, obstacles, and critical incidents within their careers that helped them prepare for the role of college presidency. The imbedded behavioral event interview and questions related to affect helped to encourage dialogue surrounding their feelings and thoughts, behaviors, insights and lessons learned. Additionally, this study and the interview protocol were designed to understand women’s advancement into a college presidency, yet every woman interviewed referenced experiences not only prior to the college presidency, but also in her current role as a college president.

The eloquence of the women’s stories was authentic, representing their experiences as they advanced in their careers. I was highly impressed with each interview, as all of the women who participated in the study were exceedingly talented, motivated, and dynamic forces of nature. They were all deeply engaged in the interview process, committed to leadership, and interested in helping other women move into leadership roles. Many shared their greatest failures, daily obstacles, triumphs, and personal stories of the ways in which they believe they were shaped to succeed in the role of a college president. In totality, the stories included narratives from family of origin;
trials of marriages and children; experiences of systemic oppression; gender, racial, and sexual biases; and attacks based on appearance. The women also shared impressive success stories that showed that these women are savvy at navigating the obstacles embedded within patriarchal systems. They are so savvy, in fact, at navigating the patriarchy, that they were able to use their gifts and talents to reach the level of a college presidency.

**Composite Story**

This section features a composite story from the college presidents. I chose this story because it paralleled many of the stories, quotes and narratives shared with the women from the study.

The president of University A did not aspire to be a college president; she earned her doctorate by the age of 30 and began her career as a professor. She was happy with her role in teaching and research in the arts and humanities at a small liberal arts college that served around 3500 students. Her first leadership opportunity came along when there was a need within her division and she stepped into action. She relayed that the division chair stepped down and she was asked to take on a leadership role because of her strong relationship with faculty members:

I was a tenured faculty member, taught in the arts and humanities. I loved teaching and I loved the students. At this time, the department chair stepped down and the dean approached me to take on the role, I had to make a decision in my career about whether I wanted to really commit myself to teaching and scholarly work, focused on my discipline, I thought I could help the department, so I took the job and became the chair of the department. When she became the division chair, within several years, she was also approached by the president, her mentor, and was appointed to lead several committees. She was asked to work with the board on the writing and implementation of a strategic
plan. These experiences in leadership afforded her skills to manage faculty groups, write strategic plans, and work with a board of trustees. In her time managing faculty, she was aware of the gender dynamics between men and women. After several years as a division head and leader of various committees, she was approached to serve in the role of academic dean. Aware of gender dynamics between men and women, she discussed that women have a different set of expectations when in the position of leadership:

One of the things that I think that every woman who's in leadership experiences is an uneven playing field in a variety of ways. Certainly with a career higher education, I spent a lot of time in a highly male dominated field. In almost every position I've held in my life, probably less so as the chair and then dean, I always felt that when a woman enters a leadership space, there are different expectations that are placed on a woman that don't exist with a man. For instance, we're always criticized for not enough process. We're expected to care about people. When you listen to individuals who have worked for men, you rarely hear that he cares about the people who work for him. You rarely hear anything about a man not following a particular process in terms of making a decision. This is unwritten but a very clear expectation that a woman will always make decisions with a clear process that can be articulated and that it's transparent.

When she was asked what shaped her experiences in leadership, she noted that her family had taught her how to be a leader, and she discussed the resiliencies of her parents:

I was exposed to leadership and taking risks early on, I think it helps to make you a risk taker as well. You know, my dad was pretty resilient in business ups and downs. So you know just the basic way, I started life and the opportunities that I've had. And I think it's about successes too. You know, so growing up in that kind of a family background.

She relayed that her journey into leadership was due to her love for the school and the mission: “In this case what took me into the dean role and what ultimately took me into the presidency was the care and the love of a particular institution.” In her time as academic dean, she was able to lead the faculty through a rigorous curriculum revision and served on a committee to fundraise and build a new library. A woman college
president, another mentor at a neighboring university, suggested that she attend leadership training programs through the Council for Independent Colleges and was able to gain a full scope of what a college presidency entailed. At this time she decided to move into the role of associate provost and face an obstacle in regard to gender:

But it was a lot harder than I thought to transition to a new University, and I actually had more experience than the provost [male] did. He was forced to hire me, but it set up a really toxic environment. For me with this person, but I had made a choice to move into this role. I wanted to do the very best that I could for the University. I knew that I could do a good job, and I just set about the business of building relationships and becoming a strong member of that team. So that was hard but ultimately prepared me to take on a college presidency. I had to decide, was I going to dig down? I wasn't going to let that person define who I was because I knew the kind of work I could do.

In this university, after the arrival of a new president, she was eventually promoted to interim provost and then provost. As the interim provost, the president asked her to lead a curriculum revision in a very short time frame. She relayed that:

When the year ended, the president brought me in and offered me the role. The president had gone to the faculty and, ok, the interim provost has done X, Y, and Z. We can do a search if you think we need to, but I'm not sure we're going to find a better fit. She said, the faculty said in enough voices, "No, we don't want to do a search," she would've done it, and they didn't. Then she appointed me. And I think it was because I was collaborative, transparent, and committed to the mission of the school. I am real and people tend to appreciate that about me. I reflect on my mistakes and I try to include the voices of others when making decisions.

She worked for several years as a provost and received a call from a search consultant to be the president of a private university. She was excited to have made it to the final round only to have a disenfranchising conversation with a member of the hiring committee:

I said "Sir, I'm really sorry, I'm not sure why you were not aware of this, because this was fully disclosed to the search consultant, but my husband and I have been in a commuter marriage for years, he will not relocate with me. He's not moving,
sir." The member from the search committee said, "Well, you can't be the president without your husband being here." I said "Well, I am very sorry that you didn't have this information, but if that's a disqualifier, then I guess I'm not going to be your next president."

Disappointed, she did not get the job at that university, but instead went back to her role as provost. She relayed that she had given up on a college presidency and would focus her energy on working with the president of her current university that truly supported her and saw her gifts, to enhance the vision and mission. In a surprise and unexpected turn of events, she received a phone call from a search consultant and decided to do one more round of interviews. She was offered a contract to lead the university as the first female president:

I think I had credibility, I think I had a very deep understanding of the organizational culture and I definitely think people saw the leadership qualities I have. The board knew me, they recognized the work that I had done as a provost and now I am the president. All those qualities, was what the institution needed and I think the board saw that. And the University was ready to hire a woman.

**Inductive Thematic Analysis Results**

This section describes the results of the inductive data analysis. To identify the themes and subthemes presented below, I first used the divergent analysis method by using three interpretive lenses to code the qualitative data: language, emotion, and essence (see Chapter 3). The results of the divergent analysis were used to inform my convergent analysis. To that end, I developed several codes from the divergent analysis that were used throughout the convergent analysis process. For the readers’ convenience, I present a table below to outline the major themes and subthemes. The results of the divergent and convergent analyses are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.
As represented in Table 4, the data is grouped into seven major themes: (1) double standard, (2) self-awareness, (3) resilience, (4) bravery and courage, (5) heal the organization, (6) relationship management, and (7) preparation for a college presidency.
Nested under the themes are various sub-themes that were identified in the analysis. Also included in the table are the total number of participants and the percentage of participants the referenced the theme or sub-theme. For example, the theme of “double standard” was coded a total of 84 times and was reported by 20 participants: 100% of all participants. The sub-theme of a marriage under the “double standard” theme was coded a total number of 10 times and was discussed by five participants: 25% of all participants.

In the paragraphs to follow, I provide the definition of each theme and sub-theme, as they are related to the data in this study. In order to strengthen my argument and substantiate the results within each theme and sub-theme, I make extensive use of participants’ quotes.

Theme 1: Double Standard. A double standard is defined as a code or policy that favors one group over another (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb, 2013). The idea of a double standard appears in this study, as women becoming caught in a situation in which there is one standard or set of expectations for men and an entirely different standard or set of expectations for women. The theme of a double standard was pervasive throughout the interviews, referenced 84 times by 100% of the participants in the study.

There are two perspectives to note in this section; although the study and interview protocol were designed to focus on women’s advancement into a college presidency, many women referenced double standards in previous roles, and they also discussed the ways that they have experienced double standards while actually in the role of college president. The double standards that women experience are in essence obstacles that women have had to navigate in order to be successful. In general, one participant reported, “Women have to work harder, they have to prove themselves harder”
(Participant #7, Personal Communication, September, 2017). Moreover, there were several poignant conversations regarding salary negotiation, policy, communication, and schedules in the paragraphs to follow.

Concerning a double standard in wages, one participant shared a story with me about a time that she was negotiating for her salary as a provost. She discussed the unfair treatment that she received while negotiating for her salary and was clear that there was a double standard between men and women in institutions of higher education when negotiating for salaries. She described:

But it was a very interesting conversation when we were negotiating my salary because we got into things like, my husband worked, so they assumed, I didn’t need a higher salary, because of course, we never say that about men when we are negotiating their salary. We never say we can low-ball him because his wife works. But I do believe people think they can low ball women. I think we have a responsibility to educate young women about expectations and how they really need to be mindful of the fact that things are not fair to men and women. Men and women are treated very differently in the workplace. (Participant #2, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

Another college president referenced a double standard in regard to a lecture that she participated in, specifically regarding women college presidents. She noted that “There’s a whole different set of standards and expectations, they gave examples, concrete ones, of how a woman president got a DUI and she got fired. A male president got a DUI, and they were sent for counseling, and on a leave of absence, and they were back within a month” (Participant #6, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

Regarding a double standard of communication between men and women, another participant relayed:

It did remind me that as a female leader, one of the things you recognize is just people's expectations of how you conduct yourself have a lot to do with gender. When I described that initial meeting that I’d had with the faculty when this blew
up that was so difficult, lots of women told me afterwards how they were really impressed by how professional I was. Two different man said, "I couldn't believe how cold and unfeeling you were at the meeting," I mean, literally. (Participant #, 1, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

Another president felt a double standard when it came to men and women presidents and the expectations around how they schedule their time off or leisure activities with family and friends. She reported:

And we [women] don't give ourselves that leverage, and you have to schedule it, just like you schedule other things. So when my friends call, but I tell them, you've got to give me like a three-month notice. I don't have that flexibility. And men do that. They'll go golfing on a Friday afternoon, which is them spending time with their friends. And so, for a woman, if I say I'm going to go and have my nails done and get a massage, that's somehow seen as frivolous. So you have to schedule your time a way, when a man says, "I'm going to take off on Friday because I'm going to golf in a tournament," that's him spending time with his friends and laughing and doing something luxurious. (Participant #9, Personal Communication, September 2017)

In addition to the stories above, four subthemes emerged as result of a double standard for men and women in higher education. In the following paragraphs, I present the data in the four sub-themes—discrimination, parallel truths, marriage, and appearance. Participants described their experiences as women leaders and how the double standard regarding the sub-themes, have plagued their careers not only on the road to a college president, but also as a college president.
Discrimination based on race and gender. The data presented are in reference to the participants’ responses to the ways power and privilege play out in higher education, specifically related to double standards not only between men and women, but at the intersection of race and gender. Women and women of color faced discrimination in higher education—18 participants referenced this sub-theme 31 times.

The following story is in reference to a participant who experienced discrimination because she was a woman of color. She relayed that she was highly experienced for a position, but she was not offered a contract for a college presidency because she did not have a doctorate. She described the situation as hitting a glass ceiling. And, while some might argue that a doctorate is a prerequisite for the presidency, so this is not discrimination, the person who did get the job was a much younger and inexperienced white male without a doctorate: “And then I hit the glass ceiling where I did not qualify for a job because I didn’t have a doctorate. Now, a white male got the job without the doctorate, but as a woman, especially as a woman of color, I’ve got to have every credential that's required, because it gives people, that's just reality, a reason to push me aside or put me out of the pool” (Participant #9, Personal Communication, September, 2017).

The participants discussed being discriminated against by colleagues, supervisors, board chairs, mentors, and supervisors. For example, one participant was discussing her interactions with the faculty and how they view women leaders. “Faculty seemed to listen to the male leaders of the committees over the women; those are moments that have always stuck with me, just because they were so patriarchal. You know what I mean, that
whole situation where men thought they knew more about where the curriculum should go more than the women” (Participant #6, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

The president shared a story with me regarding her role as the leader of a committee:

> For people who are going to be persuaded about who I am based on my gender and my race or my age, I can't spend time on that, because there's other important work that I could be doing for people who will be impacted by my leadership and for people who are open to learning about who I am or what my university is. I try to be very discerning in how I'm going to give my energy to people. For the people who are going to judge me based on my age, my race, or my sex, it says more about them than it does about me. I just have to let those people go. (Participant #4, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

Participants discussed not getting accepted into doctoral programs; not being offered contracts, not only for the presidency but also other positions; having to leave universities because of male colleagues; and having to work twice as hard as male counterparts due to systemic biases and discrimination around gender, race, and sexual orientation.

I think it is much harder for women to get Presidencies, and higher education I think it is a gender issue, for sure. I remember talking to a couple search consultants, who were experienced and worked on presidential searches. There were a couple of searches that I came in like number two. Number two. And when I asked for feedback, what could I have done differently? What were things that I should have done differently that will help me? Do you think it's harder for women to have, to get Presidencies? And they said, their immediate reaction, was, "Absolutely. Absolutely, it's much harder." (Participant #17, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

**Parallel truths.** These data are in reference to a participant’s responses to how she saw herself in relationship to the preconceived expectations of the college presidency. This theme was coded a total number of 20 times and was discussed by 17 participants: 85% of all participants. As the women in the study tried to fit into the double standards of expectations between men and women, the idea of parallel truths emerged. The concept of parallel truths represents the women’s knowledge of her identity versus the
expectations of a college president: “Personal style and people's expectations do play into how they perceive you as a leader” (Participant #9, Personal Communication, September 2017).

Often, not only did women have to manage the double standard for men and a different set of standards for women, they also had to manage conflicting ideas or beliefs of their own as they related to the systems expectations of woman college presidents. Women not only have to adjust a set of expectations, but they have also had to adapt to a new truth to navigate the patriarchal world of higher education. Many of the women were unconventional in their approaches to leadership, simply because how they led were different than the male norms. The data suggested that it’s a constant negotiation as well as fitting into a set of expectations. For example, one participant discussed her identity in relation to the expectations of a college presidency: “I'm an introvert, and I don't like cocktail parties, so I had to come up with some accommodations to help me be able to navigate that successfully” (Participant #6 Personal Communication, October, 2017). In the behavior event interview, she mentioned specific tactics that she uses to overcome her distaste for cocktail parties. She relayed that she works with her advancement staff to help her understand the specific people or donors with whom she should cultivate a relationship at the event. When at the party, she focuses on relationships with specific people and discusses her passion for the school or current project that will best serve the university community. She mentioned her style is very different from the former male president, who would talk to everyone at cocktail parties and not necessarily focus the conversation around the university. She said “My style was an adjustment for the advancement staff, but several years into the job, they have come to appreciate how I
conduct myself at cocktail parties and they see that I have had a successful presidency” (Participant #11 Personal Communication, October, 2017).

Participants described the ways that they personally were different from what the university or system was expecting from a college president; their truth is different from the system’s definition of a college presidency or the mission of the institution. One participant reported that she had to manage competing constituencies. “I'm needing to make decisions that support the my universities affiliation with a specific Religion, but have to open to the multiple religious and spiritual needs of the students on my campus. That's a competing interest” (Participant #20, Personal Communication, October 2017).

Many participants described that they must live in two worlds or carry two truths. As a participant was discussing the various memberships that she is affiliated with, she mentioned that there was a different set of expectations for her when she attended meetings or gatherings that were male dominated. In this case, I grouped this reference in parallel truths because not only does she have to adjust her communication style to be taken seriously, she has to “adopt” another way to communicate, a second truth to her normal communication style. She explained that she had to change the way that she interacted and spoke in order to be taken seriously in the meetings: “When I think of groups of, whether it's presidents or local business leaders or some of the groups that I belong to, when I think of the couple that are most male-dominated, I absolutely have to adopt a different style of speaking in those settings for my point to be heard and taken seriously”. (Participant #7, Personal Communication, September, 2017). In the behavior event interview, she described that she is often times very direct, but when she is direct or “too pushy” in the meetings with the men, they tend to disregard her in the conversation.
She mentioned that, in a specific incident, she was trying to get her point across so she engaged another man in the room whom she knew who agreed with her.

Another participant thought that, once she reached a college presidency, she could adjust her personal truth and style to the community’s expectation of the ideal college president. In reality, she liked to dress in bright colors. She reported, “I thought that I could pretend to be one of those higher ed, dyed-in-the-wool types, but I really can't be that” (Participant #17, Personal Communication, September, 2017). She later discussed that, after she demonstrated success with a fundraising campaign, she had to begin to live her truth and combine her identity by wearing bright suits and high heels.

Through the lens of emotion, the idea of mixing truths can be difficult. One woman discussed how her moods were always on display, and often times she has to hide her true emotions to appease the community. She said, “And you're also the tone of the school, so you can't go in and say, ‘Oh my God things are horrible’ or ‘I'm exhausted.’ They expect you to be upbeat and positive and set the tone for the University” (Participant #9 Personal Communication, September, 2017).

**Marriage and partnerships.** I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses to marriage, partners, and spouses. This sub-theme was mentioned 10 times, by 25 percent of the participants. The participants who referenced a double standard between men and women regarding marriage disclosed that they are in commuter marriages or non-traditional partnerships. Commuter marriages were described as living in separate states from their partners or spouses. Essentially, their husbands/partners do not live on campus or in close proximity to their university or college. During the interview process to become a college president, women discussed
that they did not get offered college president contracts because of their non-traditional marriages. One participant reported,

So the complexity of managing, and there's a number of us who manage long distance marriages, is very interesting, particularly when you assume a college presidency, because people often see this as a couple's role. So yes, I have had experiences where I didn’t advance into a college presidency, and it's directly related to my not fitting in the box of expectations. Here is an example related to me. Here’s an example, I was interviewing for a college presidency in Pennsylvania, when we were on our way back from dinner, one of the men trustees said to my husband, when will you two start looking for a house, and my husband said well we won't look for a house because I'm going to stay in California. I didn't get the position - the search consultant said to me, they didn't think you were serious. (Participant #20, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

Another participant disclosed, in a similar story, that, after advancing quite far in the interview process for a college presidency, a board member directly told her that if they hired a woman to be the president, they wanted her to bring a husband. She also did not get the job. She described: “They wanted a couple to be the president. Well the presidency isn't a couple. Your husband doesn't come to work with you during the day and help you make decisions, nor does the wife go with her husband who's a president during the day to make those decisions. Are you in the community together? Yes. Do you have to be in the community together? No” (Participant #3, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

Appearance. I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses to an expectation around women’s appearance as college presidents. The theme of appearance was referenced 23 times and was discussed by 16 participants: 80 percent of all participants. According to the responses, there is a systemic expectation that the women must dress in a certain manner to please the constituency groups. One women reported
that she discusses her outfit choices with her spouse before she leaves for events; she said, "'I'm not sure this outfit is very presidential,' and my spouse says, ‘Well, you're the president, so it must be presidential.'"

Many reported that men have a different and more lenient set of expectations regarding appearance: “For me, and other women, women's dress and appearance as well as being on all the time is difficult. I feel like I have to be in make-up and perfect manicure every day, in the morning and then return looking better for evening events. I don’t even have time to get a manicure, but I schedule it in. I think women have a whole other level of pressure on them, the higher you get” (Participant #10, Personal Communication, September, 2017).

The women also reported that the community has critiqued their make-up or lack of make-up, attire, and others ideas related to appearance. For example, one women shared:

I had a meeting with a fellow president, a male who I just adore, and we were talking about attire. I was telling him that all he has to do is change his tie, and maybe the color of his shirt, and it's okay. For me, I had to start turning the hangers around in my closet so that I wasn't repeating the same outfits over time. Because people take pictures of you, now, at the age of social media, I was like, "I just had that suit on like two days ago. And it's like, she doesn't have any clothes - that president doesn't know how to dress. You know, and I love shoes, so I can't have my heel run down. Because people look at everything. If I’m tired, or, I don't wear makeup, so if I look tired or something, you know, people are constantly critiquing me, constantly looking at me. And if a man's hair is messed up, you know if one side's not combed, no one's going to say, "Oh, look at his hair." If my hair's not combed, then I'm under a whole different level of scrutiny. Which is another added level of pressure because a part of my role is perception, of how people perceive me. (Participant #5, Personal Communication, September 2017)

One participant shared her experience regarding appearance. She says:
I am really conscious of it, of how I looked and how I was perceived, because I knew that is something that people paid attention to.... So, obviously I wear pants here, and I wear pants suits, but if I'm going to more of a high powered meeting, I pull out things where I know, because I know people are going to look at how they regard you, first impressions, professional how you dress. (Participant #14, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

She was discussing that she wears pants and pant suits to work on a daily basis, but she is cognizant of how she is dressed when she is attending the meetings that are high powered. Through the lens of essence, she cares deeply about her role as college president and she doesn’t want to let people’s perception of her appearance minimize the great work that she is doing in her university.

Theme 2: Self-awareness

I also grouped references in which participants described the ways that they were self-aware. According to Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2013), the most obvious sign of self-awareness is a proclivity toward self-reflection and thoughtfulness on emotions or thoughts. For example, a self-aware person and leader finds time to reflect on this/her actions, ideas, and behaviors. This theme of self-awareness was referenced 89 times, by 100 percent of the participants. Four sub-themes emerged in the areas of self-awareness: self-care, support through professional networks, support through family and friends, and a level of awareness around isolation. Additionally, as demonstrated by the quotes in the above section, women are aware of how they, as women, they fit into the double standards and different set of expectations. As such, women have a greater responsibility to be self-aware in order to navigate their environment. In regard to self-awareness when dealing with constituent groups, one participant stated,

When I’m leading a meeting, as a woman, I have this self-awareness and I can feel what's going on in the room, what's it like for me emotionally whenever I’m
maybe not connecting with people or I realize the pattern’s off or something? Then I think about what it’s like for me and figure out what to do about it? I don't claim to have perfected this, but I do feel like, I try to be aware of myself in meetings. (Participant #1, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

This president shared a story with me about a time in her life in which she was a faculty member and she had a personal conflict with her department chair. She described the relationship to be quite abusive and unhealthy for her. In this case, she went to the dean to discuss her issue and described the way that she used self-awareness to heal from the toxic environment:

I think the more self-aware an individual can be, the more resilient they're going to be. If an individual can take time to really reflect on, like that toxic experience I shared with the dean, what I learned from that and two years is quite a long time to go through a re-self-discovery, transformational process, but that can make all the difference in the world in terms of being resilient. (Participant #13, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

Through the lens of emotion, she was struggling; this point in her career marked a critical incident that helped to develop her skills in overcoming adversity.

Self-awareness also includes an awareness of one’s own strengths and weaknesses (Goleman, Boyatzizs, & Mckee, 2013). For example, one participant reported, “I know that I need a really good administrative assistant to help with my schedule and run the president’s office” (Participant #5, Personal Communication, August, 2017). Another indicated that, although she is has a strong background in English, she “relies on her chief financial officer to be the expert in finances” (Participant #20, Personal Communication, October, 2017). In regard to strengths, this president suggested that she is very good at accomplishing goals:

I know that I am goal driven, we have a strategic plan, we’ve got action items at the end of every quarter, and I say "What did you do, and what's the impact of it?" And so people have clear goals about what they have to do their job, but then by
the end of this year, these five big, important goals need to be met or we're going to measure you against those goals. (Participant #6, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

**Self-care.** These data indicated that the women in the study understood that they needed to be aware of the ways that their needs can be met through self-care in difficult and often isolating settings throughout their careers. This theme was coded a total number of 25 times and was discussed by 100 percent of the participants.

I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses around self-care. Self-awareness also involves a level of self-care, sometimes in the form of exercise, spiritual life or prayer, or a deep understanding of self (Goleman et al., 2013). Participants discussed ideas around spirituality and exercise as top forms of self-care.

“For me, also, my spirituality is incredibly important to me. Sometimes it's just about just sitting quietly and praying because that's an important element of who I am” (Participant #9, Personal Communication, August, 2017). This woman discussed how one hour a day is her time, wherein she uses 30 minute to exercise. She finds this one hour vital to her self-care: “I’m really good with the hour a day, where I am unplugged, ‘cause that's usually when I go across the street and exercise or I have a small weight room” (Participant #2, Personal Communication, August, 2017).

This participant runs a faith-based institution. Although her denomination is different than that of the school, she finds her spiritual life is paramount in helping her to re-center and stay grounded as a leader. She is also a runner and uses exercise to minimize her stress level: “The other thing that really is important to me is mind/body/spirit. I do a lot of reflection and I tend to be a spiritual person, and I also do a
lot of, jogging is my thing. I have to work out to feel that I can continue to lead in a very positive and objective way” (Participant #18, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

Participants also discussed self-awareness and self-care in ways that involved positive self-talk for dealing with harsh emotions: “I think I stand up to stress pretty well, relatively speaking. I can put it in context and say, ‘That was not my best week, or event, but I can learn from it and move forward.’ It's as simple as what everybody tries to do, which is put things in perspective” (Participant #11, Personal Communication, August, 2017).

One of the participants discussed a critical incident in her career, a meeting that she was unhappy with. She discussed reflection and lessons learned as a form of self-care. She stated:

My first disastrous faculty meeting was when I was a graduate dean. I had a plan that I thought was an excellent plan, that I had worked out with some administrators and also a committee, this was 15 years ago or something, to put all the course evaluations online. Students then were writing them by hand. Faculty, I knew, were resistant to this, but I thought I had made such a strong and compelling case that who could argue with it. In fact, it was a perfectly logical case, but emotionally, faculty just didn't like it. When I presented, the plan with the committee, and we've come up with this and I presented it at the meeting. I'll never forget a senior faculty member standing up and saying, "I don't think you understand the situation here." He said, "When we vote this down, it will be for the following reasons." That's how he started his remarks, and he was quite right. It was voted down quite decisively. That was much harder because it was one of my very first leadership opportunities. But as I said, I think my theme of learning has always been a salvation. I do think genuinely that allows you to put something in a framework where, instead of it being about your disaster as a dean, it's about, "You made a mistake here. There was something you missed. (Participant #19, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

From the critical event, the participant learned from to rebound and think differently about collaboration, faculty voice, and empathy. She used this event to help shape her leadership skills.
Support from family and friends. The sub-theme of support through family and friends was referenced 24 times by 100 percent of the participants. The participants reported that time with family and friends were ways that they learned to decompress from demanding careers. Many of the women in the study referred to spouses, siblings, and friends as means of personal support to help them reach their career goals. They described leadership in higher education as rewarding, yet difficult. Many felt that it was important to maintain positive relationships with family members and friends. In fact, they felt that support from family and friends were crucial.

Many women reported that the higher they advanced into leadership roles, the more their personal relationships with colleagues diminished. It was clear in the data, that the college presidents were not comfortable talking with members of the organization about their personal or professional issues. In one situation, the president was facing a critical issue in her career, before she was president. This issue had to do with the denial of tenure for a faculty member, which eventually reached the president and the board. This woman described her spouse as being a main supporter:

Fortunately, I have a wonderful partner, so that was key, and on the one hand, I would tell my spouse things that were happening, but they understood when to support me and when to step back a little bit because you can't be any more vulnerable than you already are. For me, there were days when I just needed to have my armor on, and I would say that to her. Today I can't feel vulnerable. I just need to have my armor on so I can do my work. (Participant #7, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

Another president also defined a critical moment in her career. The university had been through two administration changes, she felt as if the weight of the world was on her shoulders. She relayed that she became more resilient and gained more strength
because of her propensity toward self-reflection and support through her family and networks:

I think self-awareness is a huge part of that, that healing process, just really understanding the strengths in self-awareness and self-reflection. I think that's huge. I think it was all of that. I think the other part of that is having positive individuals in your life. My mom, my parents, have always been extremely supportive. My husband and my adult children were excellent sounding boards during that time. (Participant #9, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

Although time with the support network is crucial, many reported that it was difficult to schedule time with family and friends and that scheduling is crucial when making time for relationships outside of work. One participant reported on her relationship and support through her husband: “I try to find time in the evening to watch a little bit of sports with my husband, or maybe read for pleasure, although I always take stuff home too. My briefcase tonight is packed, and I have a fundraising dinner as well, but . . . I carve out what I can to be with him” (Participant #5, Personal Communication, August, 2017).

This participant relied on her sister for emotional and mental support. She was discussing a story about disgruntled faculty. When she became frustrated with the situation, she called her sister.

My sister is my candid feedback person. I can tell her exactly what the situation is, and she's going to come at me strong, whether I dealt with it well, or whether I'm thinking about this in a bad area or not. She's my best friend, my sister, and my confidant. She's not going to run out and tell everybody I'm thinking about firing 10 people. (Participant #2, Personal Communication, August, 2017)
Support through professional networks. Many of the women described colleagues from previous settings, other college presidents, and staff from within their current system as support. This theme was referenced 22 times by 100 percent of the participants.

One participant described her chief of staff as her support. She went on to mention that she built a team of people to support her day to day. She clearly defined her professional network as internal, comprising people within the university:

My chief of staff, I have a very strong chief of staff. And my chief of staff is in this with me, and he knows who I am as a person, and he's always got my back unconditionally. So, even if I make a decision that's not a good decision, he's that I can trust unconditionally, even when we don't agree. I know when the stuff goes down, he's going to be right there with his armor on to help me through it. Even when I'm weak, he's going to be strong. (Participant #16, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

Many women referenced the Council of Independent Colleges and the external networks that they have become affiliated with. They mentioned that they will call other presidents or friends in the network to discuss issues related to higher education or leadership. This participant reported, “CIC is probably my strongest network. I just feel like if I have a question, I can reach out. I had a president say to me at the president's meeting last January, “You know, if you reach out they'll do one day of consulting for free” (Participant #14, Personal Communication, September, 2017).

It was important for women in the study to be involved in networks with other professionals in the same roles or dealing with similar issues. One participant enjoys discussing similar issues with people who may have already been through an incident or has insight into what her university might be going through. If she doesn’t know an answer, she can reach out to her network:
I'm really big in making sure that I'm part of professional network with other women leaders. When I was a Vice President, I had this network of colleagues that were in similar roles at other institutions, and so they understood the challenges and opportunities of people in my role. Having that professional association and networks was really important and I do the same thing as the President. (Participant #17, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

**College presidency can be isolating.** I grouped this sub-theme in the self-awareness theme because the women in the study were aware and clearly discussed the isolating nature of leadership. This theme was referenced 14 times by 11 participants:

The women in this study were impressively aware of their isolation and discussed strategies to overcome the feeling of isolation. One participant exclaimed, “If you have been talking to college presidents, you know that we don’t have any friends” (Participant #20, Personal Communication, October, 2017). She went on to say that she did not feel lonely, but she was aware and circumspect about whom she confides in within the organization. Another reported, “It’s really lonely at the top, as they always say. I can't confide in people at the institution” (Participant #9, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

The theme of isolation is paralleled with self-care, as the participants were aware that self-care is a must. Many explained that they turned to family, friends, and professional networks; however, due to their busy schedules, many had to find time to schedule in moments for self-care. This participant discussed the importance of a network to talk with:

I do think that being the president, they're very lonely positions. And so being able to have a good network that you can call on to deal with challenges that you have is really important because you can't really talk to your school community, Your community needs to see that you've got a vision and you need to have people that you can talk to that are safe in that network. (Participant #2, Personal Communication, September, 2017)
The participants demonstrated clarity as to whom they interacted with, how they take care of themselves, as well as that venting or processing through any university issues was not an option with colleagues:

I talked with people outside of the University, so that I can just get the toxicity out of me. Like, the faculty are disgruntled about something, or the students are upset about something, or there's a conflict on campus that I'm trying to manage through. I want to talk to him about it just to vent, and that's the role he plays for me. (Participant #17, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

They explained that they maintained clear boundaries with constituents, but these boundaries also held them back from personal relationships within the organization. One participant explained:

It was important that have networks outside of the institution much more than inside. I think any organization, it's a small thing; you've got to be careful in terms of who you trust. Not because people are not trustworthy but because there's certain things that just never remain confidential, and so you really have to make sure that your networks of individuals are people that don't have an emotional connection to the institution or the organization. (Participant #8, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

Another participant expressed that she felt lonely in her position, but she qualified her response to loneliness with her commitment to the university mission: “It’s difficult to maintain friendships within the institution because nobody wants to hear your complaints or true feelings, they want to know that everything is going well within the institution, even though you know sometimes it’s not” (Participant #13, Personal Communication, August, 2017).

For the role of college president, it is important that women develop skills or become mindful of the ways that self-care and develop networks outside of the work place. I gleaned from the data that women had very clear ideas about how to self-care.
Theme 3: Resilience

I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses to obstacles and challenges. According to Schiraldi (2018), resilience is the tendency to bounce back from set-backs and adapt to stressful situations across various areas of life. Resilient people have a knack for thriving by finding creative ways to solve their problems (Schiraldi, 2018). When adversity strikes, resilient people discover more ways to cope and persevere. Resilience can always be increased as new skills are learned to engage and overcome obstacles (Schiraldi, 2018). Further, resilient people don’t just survive—they thrive by finding ways to continually build their muscles in adversity recovery (Schiraldi, 2018). The theme of resilience emerged 113 times, and 100 percent of the participants discussed ways that continued to thrive despite adversity.

As described by several women in the study, “The college presidency is a really hard job, you are never going to work harder in your life” (Personal Communication, Participant #20, October, 2017). The data revealed that, according to the women in the study, the college presidency is one of the toughest, most demanding jobs. One participant said, “You will work very hard and often times the job is thankless” (Personal Communication, Participant #16, October, 2017). Another described the college presidency as being difficult emotionally:

Emotionally, it's really tough... you feel like a fight or flight sometimes. Some days you feel like you've made a few steps forward and then you need to take several steps back with what happens, so my ... tenacity, really not giving up on the fact that this is the right thing to do. You have to focus on the why: why is this goal important, how is going to make the organization stronger and work from there. I think you have to be comfortable in yourself and your ability to lead through that process because it's tough. (Participant #18, Personal Communication, 2017)
They also described that the skills and prior experiences, learned in other leadership positions in academia, helped them to work through obstacles and develop the strength and confidence to lead as a president. The college presidents in the study continued to advance and succeed despite challenges, struggles, and obstacles, throughout their careers. As one participant reported:

“I loved the students and because I had friends and colleagues who said, you just have to ride above it. You know, do your best work and recognize that there are always going to be forces in an academic environment that are going to go low, and you have to go high. (Participant #6, Personal Communication, August, 2017)"

Before the college presidency, every college president in the study held a position of leadership with significant responsibility, either in an institution of higher education, non-profit, K-12, or business. As women moved through their careers, skills in resiliency were crucial to develop as women navigated their way through adversity and obstacles. Three sub-themes emerged under the theme of resilience: overcome obstacles, stamina, and managed feelings of disappointment.

**Overcome obstacles.** I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses surrounding obstacles that had the potential to hold them back from a promotion or a college presidency. Each woman shared a potential obstacle that could have held her back from either advancing in her career or not receiving a contract for a college presidency. In each interview, we discussed that leadership roles are difficult emotionally, mentally, and physically, and, in order to reach the level of a college presidency, a significant amount of leadership is required. One woman discussed that she came out of a professional discipline and was leading liberal arts schools. Faculty continually challenged her in every across several leadership positions:
I came out of a professional discipline, and I've actually had to overcome that at each step along the way, and so what I mean by that is that in private liberal arts colleges, where I have spent my entire career, generally there's an edge that is against faculty in what are deemed the more professional programs. (Participant 2, Personal Communication, October 2017)

She went on to discuss that she continued to build positive relationships with constituents and navigated her system through adherence to mission and vision. Through the lens of essence, she did not pay attention to negativity or allow a negative opinion to deter her from doing her job.

Women in the study also overcame obstacles by managing feelings of disappointment, as this college president discussed, she was rejected from a doctoral program: “the mentor of mine told me, well, you've got to have that doctorate to grow in higher education. So I applied and I was rejected” (Participant 5, Personal Communication, October 2017). She went on to discuss that the rejection pushed her further toward her career goal; she applied to other programs and was eventually accepted. Included in the dialogue was a reflection on how her life would have turned out if she had given up and changed career paths, based on the initial rejection.

**Stamina.** The theme of stamina related to this study indicates that women have sustained energy over time to lead through adversity. The women indicated that the jobs in higher education administration are difficult and that one must have the energy and stamina to stay the course. They reported that, often, higher education moves slowly, and a certain level of patience must be present. One participant discussed a school that was in drastic need of a strategic plan. She understood that it will take time to implement and reap the efforts of her work; however, she seemed committed to overseeing the plan.
She delighted in discussing the efforts made with the strategic plan and action items for university growth:

I'm very proud of that effort, and we've currently written a functioning strategic plan for the university. I expect five years from now that we'll be in a very different place here. So I think that one of the things that for me brings the macro and micro together is just real intentionality. You have to name it and then you have to figure out how to get there. (Participant #5, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

In a similar situation, this president discussed her responsibility to open a new building; she understands that it will take time to raise money, but she is going to continue to fundraise: “I have a responsibility to the College and moving it from point A to point B. During my time, I'm going to move this school to point A to point B. I'm going to make it stronger and make it better. It's going to be stronger financially and we will build the new building” (Participant #14, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

Many women talked about organizations that needed a significant amount of work and reform. One president inherited a school that was lacking in enrollment: she noted that it took several years to turn around and knew that she needed more funding and enrollment for optimal functioning. Before taking the job, she reflected and decided that she wanted the challenge:

Well, I think people want leaders that can deal with challenge, but people also don't want anybody to think that their institution has any problems. Do I have enough energy and stamina, resilience, to make the kind of change that I know needs to happen? Or you know, and I could just move on to the next job where I don't have to go through all that mess here. (Participant #9, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

She further discussed that she had a passion for the institution and students. Therefore, she made a choice to implement reform efforts, despite the adversity and potentially long time frame.
Theme 4: Bravery & Courage

The idea of bravery and courage emerged as participants took risks and were willing to put themselves in the spotlight, despite being the only woman. The women in the study presented as brave and courageous, able to manage large constituency groups that often discriminated against them. As one president remarked, “I am, often times, the only woman in the room” (Personal Communications, Participant #3, August, 2017). She skillfully navigated her way through dialogue and decision-making in male-dominated meeting. The women in the study recalled that they knew from past experiences that the men in the room would disregard their opinion, yet they continued to find ways to navigate the patriarchy and find different ways to communicate or dress so that her voice is heard. “All of the vice presidents were men, except for me. I was always aware of how I dressed to go to the meetings, I always wore a pant suit. When I spoke, directly to them, I seemed take them down a notch and they didn’t know what to do with me. I kept showing up for meetings though” (Participant #8, Personal Communication, September, 2017).

Many women in this study were a series of “firsts.” They relayed that they were the first woman to be a dean at all-male schools, the first female college president, the first female Chief Financial Officer, the first woman of color. The data revealed that women understand the male norm culture in higher education, yet they had the courage to navigate their careers into administrative positions in higher education. Their bravery was savvy, as they remained persistent and navigated through a system that inherently wanted to hold them back: “I was the first woman vice-president to lead at an all-male school. I think I got the position because of my work as an academic and full time
professor, I was also a department chair” (Participant #8, Personal Communication, September, 2017). She went on to say that she was honored and thrilled to get the positions and “I actually didn’t think much of it” (Participant #8, Personal Communication, September, 2017). She relayed that there were tensions between her and her superior; and that superior her direct did not respect. She relayed, “I think I was too feisty for him. I was difficult to control and I don’t think he liked that. I ended up leaving the school as soon as I got a role as a provost in a larger University” (Participant #8, Personal Communication, September, 2017). During the behavior event interview, she revealed that she had no problem standing up to him or standing up to any faculty in the room. She felt confident in herself and her work, and, therefore, she felt free to speak her mind.

The women in this study were not afraid to go after what they wanted. They did not hide their ambitions, but they found ways to reach their career goals. For example, in a direct and ambitious manner, a college president asked her boss for time off to finish her doctorate. She laid out the plan and discussed strategies with him to finish her degree. Her conversation was direct and clear; her boss agreed to her proposal and she finished her doctorate:

I went to my boss and I said, I've got a deal for you. If you give me Monday and Fridays off, I don't know how many, but I can do this job in three days a week. Because I could. I said I will stay with you for another year. Otherwise I'm really bored and I've got to go, and do something else. (Participant #20, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

The women in this study were ambitious and aggressive; they went after what they wanted, moving across states, often without their families or spouses to take opportunities in order to advance in their advance in their careers. Their courage to seek
new environments, often alone, is noteworthy. All of the college presidents in this study had a significant move. As one president shared, “I moved from an eastern state to a western state, Arizona, in order to take my first position as academic dean. I ended up hating the college and toxic environment in Arizona, so I left when a provost position opened in PA. Traveling across the country is hard, but I don’t mind taking risks” (Participant #13, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

**Wrote her own narrative.** I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses around not letting others define them despite the set of expectations placed on women for a college president specifically and a leader in general. The presidents incorporated their brave attitudes into their work and, despite discrimination based on race and gender, they did not let anyone hold them back from their goals: “I think sometimes for women in particular, we can be so prone to hearing other people's narratives about ourselves that we either don't craft our own narrative or we let those other narratives drown our own out. I can't solve the world's problems around gender and race” One participant reported, “I had a terrific upbringing. I had wonderful parents. My parents taught me that nobody else defines you. They never said those words, but they gave me that sense of self, and you can do whatever you want, whenever you want. Don't let anyone else tell you can't” (Participant #6, Personal Communication, August 2017). This influenced her career advancement into the college presidency. This woman and others described emotionally tough experiences in which they felt marginalized or discriminated against; however, instead of allowing someone else’s opinion of “she can’t do this job” hold her back, she wrote her own story and achieved her goals.
Participants described in detail their stories of expectations and a sense of self that remained consistent through their careers. In other words, they did not let someone else’s expectations hold them back from advancing in their careers. They set their own expectations and strategically navigated their way into a college presidency. One participant shared a story in which someone tried to discourage her from her leadership role:

For me with this person, because he resented my arrival from the day I stepped in the door, and I knew it, but I had made a choice to move into this role. I wanted to do the very best that I could for the University. I knew that I could do a good job, and I just set about the business of building relationships and becoming a strong member of that team. So that was hard but that was one of those pivots. I had to decide, was I going to dig down? I wasn't going to let that person define who I was because I knew the kind of work I could do. (Participant #9, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

She was confident in herself and her abilities, writing her own narrative into the role of a college president.

**Takes a stance and defends herself.** I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses to defend her opinions, ideas, and thoughts. At times through their careers, they had to make hard decisions and take a stand. This theme implies that these women are strong willed and they have persevered through adversity or conflict. The data revealed that the college presidents were collaborative and empathetic in nature, but they were also feisty and opinionated. They were certainly willing to hear the voices of their constituents, but they were not necessarily going to make decisions in their favor. They stood up for what they believed in, were self-confident and stood up for what they believed in. One participant reported that she was aggressive in nature:

I have to tell faculty members, ‘I'm sorry, we're not rehiring you.’ We had somebody here who was on staff for a very short time, we let them go and that
was a faculty. I'm still the bad guy, but I think that there are enough people with open eyes who can see the good and the bad. (Participant #6, Personal Communication, August 2017)

Participants, in general, were not afraid to take a stance and defend their opinions or who they were as a person. One participant was very direct in letting the hiring committee know who she was:

What you see today is what you will get if you choose to offer me this job, and I accept it because I don't have a second personality to bring. This is just me.” And that doesn't mean to suggest that I have no filter or that I can't be political when I ... not at all. But if you're expecting that there's one person in the interview, and then a second person's going to show up in the job, that's just not how I roll. (Participant #20, Personal Communication, October 2017)

The women in this study are also adept at managing conflict. In fact, they are not afraid of conflict or adversity. They are direct in their language know who they are and what they want. One participant shared a story with me about an associate dean who made derogatory remarks about her appearance. She said that “I worked with an associate that was passive aggressive and always made comments about my body type. I think he was intimidated by me. I ignored his rude and off-color comments, until finally I said…” Are you intimidated by me? Listen . . . you can speak to me when we are discussing professional things, other than that, I don’t want to hear from you.’ He didn’t make any more comments about my height” (Participant #12 Personal Communication, September, 2017).

**Theme 4: Heal the Organization**

The previous theme presented the direct and ambitious side of the women in the study. This theme presents the ways that a college president has the natural inclination for healing the organization. These data revealed that participants described the ways that
they managed and cared for the institution as a result of their connection to the
institution’s mission. They had a propensity toward innovation, forward thinking and new
programs that would ultimately help the organization financially and drive the school
forward and they spoke with fond affect toward their institution mission and love for
students: “Well, I think [I have] a real passion for education, I really mean that, education
of the students keeps me in this role” (Participant #11, Personal Communication,
September, 2017). Many of the women reported incidents in which they demonstrated
behaviors of crisis management, conflict resolution, and used humble language instead of
a top-down approach to leadership that was solely focused on what was best for the
institution. Note that, contained in many of the quotes, the women use the language
“serve” and “care,” implying that they are caretakers and servants of their institutions.
For example, women described that they did not plan to arrive at a college presidency
position. One participant discussed her pathway to a college presidency position. She
discussed that she set out to become a professor, but she responded to needs within the
organization:

I began as a professor and research, but was quickly asked to serve on committee
because I was able to motivate other members of the faculty. “I then moved pretty
quickly through leadership positions at my previous institution, then became
provost, which is sort of second in command to the president, so the chief
academic officer and second in command to the president. (Participant #1,
Personal Communication, August, 2017)

Women often began their careers as scholars or professors and quickly found
themselves in leadership positions. Many of the women were appointed to various
committees and very often tapped on the shoulder to a move into another leadership
position:
In my career I had only been teaching maybe a couple of years when I was asked to serve on some of the curriculum committees and that kind of thing. I think as soon as an institution realizes that they have people that care about the whole institution and care about the education of students and not just their own discipline then those are the kinds of people that are going to get drawn to serve as department chairs and on strategic planning task forces, and long-range planning committees. (Participant #6, Personal Communication, August 2017)

**Mission-centered, see a need with in a system, respond.** I grouped these data as a result of participants’ response to an institution in need. Many of the participants reported that they did not necessarily have the goal in mind of becoming a college president. Women in the study, often times, saw a need within the university and stepped in to get the work done. The adherence to the mission kept them motivated. When I asked this participant how she got into her role as a provost, she said that someone tapped her on the shoulder and suggested that she apply. I then asked, what she thought they saw in her that would make her a good leader. She replied:

I think two things. Number one, I really cared about the institution and its capacity to educate students probably in part of being brought up on a college campus I was very aware of the institution and not just my own discipline and number two I had been serving the institution in other capacities, they saw my potential. (Participant #16 Personal Communication, October, 2017)

Another participant noted that she highly disagrees with a top-down approach to leadership; she described herself as worker bee that gets the job done. She was also approached for a college presidency prior to actively seeking out the role; when I asked her what did she thought other people saw in her, she said:

I really think they saw that and it was more through my actions, not through anything I did. I'm an individual that believes in promoting, I think self-promotion is extremely inauthentic, so I think they just observed and, also, of course, I had credibility. I think people said, "Yeah, she can do this. This is an individual that we need to actually ... to lead this institution". I think it was all of those pieces. (Participant #13, Personal Communication, October, 2017)
Most of the women noted that they did not plan to arrive in a college presidency position. One participant stated:

When I got to talk with the provost, whom I knew ... I realized that he really wanted me to tell him what I wanted to do in the coming year besides teach. He said, you’re an excellent communicator, because he knew I was an English faculty member, had taught rhetoric and critical thinking. He has observed me in faculty senate meetings because the provost attended all of those, and I was really appreciative of his vote of confidence, and so thus began a year when I worked as an associate, or a faculty associate, I had different titles, for the provost, as well as have time in the English Department, as I was working to advance to the rank of full professor. (Participant #1, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

**Institutional Care.** This theme emerged as the women described having a deep sense of care and concern for their institutions and the people that they serve, their faculty staff, and their students. They spoke of this sense of mission as driving their motivations and behaviors to serve others. Specifically, they discussed how they are comfortable making a difficult decision when they center the decision on what is best for the institution. They further described how leading with a sense of service and care for the institution helped them to make decisions for the University.

The women in study discussed that in some cases, they had put departments back together or work to reinvigorate the culture. One president reported that “Past leadership had disrupted the status quo to the point where individuals became very fearful of what was going to happen, and so we were in a crisis situation; we were in such a drastic shift in what the leadership of the institution had been, that I think it was important that the hiring committee bring somebody in that could reestablish some calm at the institution” (Participant #7, Personal Communication, September, 2018). She went on to describe that she cared for the institution by establishing by helping to reestablish trust with administration, calming the anxiety of others and bringing in new programs to increase
enrollment and revenue.

Moreover, many of the women in the study described how their innovation helped to care for organizations in need of reform: fiscal, enrollment, or human resources. One participant reported, “I felt like the institution needed that stability, they needed somebody that understood the institution and its fabric, and its organizational culture, and felt like, without sounding arrogant because it was by no means that, I felt like I was needed there” (Participant #8, September, 2017).

**Innovation, expansion.** I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses in terms of innovation. According to the data, these included innovative expansion of programming and curriculum, faculty development, research, technology, and innovative spaces for learning. For example, women discussed that they had oversight on library renovations, science buildings, athletic spaces, partnerships, and professional programs were critical experiences.

One president discussed ways that she bring new programs into the university. Her goal was to attract new students and increase enrollment:

The institution was in sore need of innovation. So I have in my background, I have new program development. I was able to lead the faculty in adopting online education at [XX], which led to a two-million dollar annual net revenue, and so many of the kinds of things that I had done before I think were very appealing to this board of trustees. I have a lot of experience in shared governance. I have experience in running promotion and tenure. I had experience in helping institutions turn around. I had experience serving on a college board. I served on a college board before I came here, so I have the experience of both being a trustee as well as now having the responsibility of leading the institution. (Participant #4, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

Another participant worked collaboratively with the board to design a strategic plan that was tied to the board’s priorities:
I mean new program development, online learning. The other thing that was important to this institution, we're 67% students of color, and so in my previous institution, I had changed the vice president's cabinet from being all Caucasian to having five African American and Latino deans and other administrators that answered to me. So that was also very important to them because there was no diversity in the administration, so again, experiences that I had that aligned with things the board thought should happen here. (Participant #17, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

Another president spent a significant amount of time working with the faculty to innovate and implement new programs. However, there was dissent among the faculty with the new changes coming to campus:

I spent a lot of time and sometimes you feel like you have to repeat things 755 times before it's actually heard and before you change that mindset and that behavior because it's tough to do, because the team was not getting along. They really did not get along. I spent a lot of time trying to bring them together and get them to understand why it was important that they work together and why it was important that they accept this faculty, they were part of the institutional faculty and really trying to get that faculty to become one. (Participant #2 Personal Communication, August, 2017)

**Theme 5: Relationship Management**

The women in this study described the multiple relationships that they have had, before and during their presidency. At some point, they were learning to work with colleagues, build teams, manage conflict in interpersonal relationships, and work with students, faculty, staff and board members. The college president has to learn to manage a large number of constituency groups, both public and internal. The following sub-themes emerged under the theme of relationship management: empathy, collaboration, lead teams, and manage conflict/crisis.

**Empathy.** This sub theme presents data that are in reference to the participants’ responses to the ways that they were able to actively listen, understand and hear the thoughts of another. Goleman, Boyatzis and Mckee (2013) described empathy as sensing
others’ emotions, actively listening, taking other people’s perspectives into consideration, and being genuinely interested in the concerns of others. For example, in one conversation, the participant was discussing how she learned to motivate and lead teams: “You’ve got to know the faculty as human being first before you know them.... You got to know them personally and professionally. You have to know their passion. You have to know their family. You have to know their fears. The more you can understand the people that you're trying to bring out the more successful the team (Participant #4, Personal Communication, August, 2017). The women in this study discussed ways that they were able to actively listen and understand the voices of others: “because I'm a learner I love to listen to others and learn from them” (Participant #7, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

Participants also described how showing an active interest in other people’s perspectives greatly contributed to their ability to de-escalate tension and stress when having a difficult conversation. In alignment with the definition of empathy as described by Goleman et al. (2013), participants discussed situations in which they could put themselves in the place of another as an effective way to navigate through complex situations. They discussed that they could remove their own ideas about a situation, allowing them to open up their judgment to why the other individual may be feeling or behaving in a specific manner. The data indicated that the women were listeners and cared deeply about stakeholder voices and well-being. One president relayed that she changed policy because of her time spent hearing the concerns of her constituents: “Then the next faculty meeting, when we talked about it, I was able to have made some changes in policies, unrelated to the tenure case, that I knew were also a concern to people. I had
learned that through the process of hearing those complaints” (Participant #15, Personal Communication, September, 2017).

**Collaboration.** I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses to collaborate with other colleagues, board members, students, faculty, and other members of administration. When this woman was discussing a key leadership role, she relayed that she wanted to set the tone for collaboration authenticity:

I spent a lot of time with the faculty and I spent a lot of time explaining and listening to faculty and what their concerns were. Most institutions of higher ed can be top-down, and I think were that way. I want to say, for the most part, it's hard to change that mindset. I think that the board saw those kind of qualities that I really purposely tried to have a faculty because I think that's important and I think they saw that work and then I think they asked faculty and found out that that was authentic and that was really how I was. (Participant #9, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

Another participant that she viewed collaboration as a process and a mindset:

You can look at the organization like a prism and these different compartments and then you've figured out that you can't do everything on your own, so you're bringing teams of people together and getting them to work collaboratively toward this articulated mission or vision. (Participant #1, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

**Lead teams.** I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses to the ways that they were able to build teams, lead meetings, be transparent in communication, and drive results. One college president reported,

I think that, because these really arose out of my work on committees, I think, in academia, because the ability to run an effective meeting in which people feel their voices or heard and in which you actually arrive at some conclusion that you can articulate and act on. Sounds obvious, but we've all been in meetings where that wasn't the case. Not everyone is necessarily good at getting a group of people to come to some joint conclusions and agreements. (Participant #7, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

Regarding transparency and organizational leadership, one participant stated:
And in transparency people like and hate that word at the same time. But I think transparency can be your friend in change. But you have to be willing to deal with it and everybody around you has to be willing to deal with it too. Because it really creates noise. And it's really messy. So if you like everything to be neat and positive and have that really great face forward, you can't get that in a change conversation. (Participant #3, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

**Manage and resolve conflict and crisis.** Boyatzis and McKee (2005) described conflict management as the ability to understand different perspectives, resolve differences, and find common goals that everyone can endorse. I grouped these data in reference to the participants’ responses to how they manage and resolve internal and external conflict. Many participants noted that, in their current role as presidents, they manage conflict and crisis. At some point in their career, they have become adept at resolving not only interpersonal conflict, but also major crises and traumatic events:

It's much more subtle, but now in my career, I recognize that people are lashing out because they are afraid or they're lashing out because the change is too much, there's uncertainty. But, I still have to ... Now, in my career, when people lash out, I tend to lean into it. (Participant #15, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

They spoke of taking a proactive approach to resolving conflict rather than avoiding it. They also described their ability to move on and not hold things against other people after having a difficult conversation with them.

**Theme 6: Preparation for a College Presidency**

As a result of participants’ descriptions of their careers and experiences prior to accepting a contract as a college president, a major theme that emerged was preparation for a college presidency. According to Gagliardi et al. (2017), these skills include budget management, strategic planning, governance, knowledge of mission and vision, fundraising, marketing, policy and enrollment efforts. As this participant stated:
I think that what I was able to bring to the table was a combination of the academic credibility of being a respected teacher and scholar with also just a little more capacity and interest in running things. I did have a lot of leadership roles in college, and have always been someone who really enjoyed getting things done.” (Participant #7, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

**Prior experience.** Under the sub-theme *Prior Experience*, I grouped references that discussed prior employers and important experiences held before the college presidency. This theme was referenced 67 times by 100% of the participants. The major roles held before a college presidency included academic deans, deans of students, provosts, chief financial officers, professors, department chairs, non-profit leaders, information technologists, and former K-12 employees. All of the women possessed at least one doctorate, and the women came out of either liberal arts, education, STEM (nursing), or business administration backgrounds. According to one participant, “One of the things that's interesting about an academic administration pathway is that administrative skills are rarer than they might be in a business setting. It's not something you cultivate in grad school. Nobody tells you, ‘Here's how you run a meeting. Here's how you write a memo. Here's how you supervise people’” (Participant #3, Personal Communication, August, 2017).

A prior experience that helped to shape one woman’s leadership skills was committee work. She was able to gain experience as a committee chair to undertake curriculum revision:

I was on a committee at a time that it had two charges. For two years, I chaired the committee. One year, we were revising some pretty significant curricular requirements and proposing a different kind of divisional distribution of courses within the curriculum, so relabeling some courses and thinking differently about how do you group courses and assign distribution requirements to them. (Participant #19, Personal Communication, October, 2017)
She went on to discuss that her work on the committee developed her planning skills, her competencies for collaboration, leading teams, and presentation skills:

That was difficult in the sense that you had to hear from lots of different departments, and you had to have patience in working through people's anxieties. In the end, when we presented to the faculty and it was approved, I think it was partly because we had really laid the groundwork by lots and lots of the individual conversations that helped get people on board. I think, sometimes, people chairing a committee, you have the illusion that you control something because you're controlling a room and you're controlling a conversation. (Participant #19, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

Opportunity for advancement is a key portion of this study. It should be noted that the women in the study who were able to successfully move toward opportunities that would ultimately prepare them for roles as a college president. Several participants remarked that the opportunity to receive a doctorate was a key element in moving them toward a college presidency. Other presidents moved toward employment opportunities, such as deans or department chairs in order to advance in their careers.

**Mentor.** According to Brown (2005) and Tolar (2012), women need role models and mentors to affect their careers positively and help them develop as leaders. Their research suggests that, within higher education, without a mentor, it is very difficult for women to advance to senior levels of leadership. The data show that mentors were referenced 43 times by 100 percent of the participants. Many women had several mentors throughout their career, either in their college or engaged with a president on another campus willing to help them advance. As one participant noted, “I worked for a president, he had this way of teaching me things without me even knowing that he was teaching me things. He helped me be successful” (Participant #15, Personal Communication, September, 2017).
The women reported having professional mentors, both men and women, who supported, promoted, or groomed them into a college presidency. According to one, “So my mentor saw me, for nine years, thriving in this wonderful chief program and operating officer, and so she saw in me the potential to be a college president. I had been, before that, an academic dean, she recommended me for this job that I am in now.” (Participant #7, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

One woman discussed the ways that she learned how to manage constituencies, issues related to governance, and crisis management from her mentor. She states:

He is a male and I truly appreciated the accomplishments that he had at my last institution. So I really learned sitting on his footstool, watching and observing his leadership and the way he managed through different things at the institution that we were at. So I would say that I do try to model some, not all, because I always put my own personality to it, but some of his leadership traits and styles. (Participant #7, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

Another woman described her mentor as a huge part of her personal and professional life. She was a college president and gave the introduction for her at her own inauguration. She stated: “My mentor thought bigger than I did, this type of relationship has to be a part of your network. People who can help you to think bigger. Who you've learned something from every time you talk to. Not people that just commiserate with you” (Participant #6, Personal Communication, October, 2017). In this case, this college president had a long-term relationship with her mentor and regularly met with her, even as she moved in to her own college presidency. From the dialogue, their relationship seemed to comfort her as her mentor would reassure her of decisions made and share similar issues that she been through.

For one college president, her mentors helped her to unlock her potential and push
her into higher levels of leadership or new opportunities: “There were many people on my journey who saw something in me that I didn't realize, and didn't see it for myself, who really said, you need to go for this” (Participant #19, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

**Leadership preparation programs.** This subtheme was referenced 61 times, by 100 percent of the presidents. Every president had either experienced formal leadership training programs or attended conference workshops. Many of the women participated in structured professional development programs. As one woman stated, “in the leadership program, I learned a lot about how to manage a board, how to manage communication, larger issues in higher education” (Participant #20, Personal Communication, October, 2017).

The data indicated that there were several popular development programs for women leaders in higher education, these included: The Council for Independent College’s women’s leadership program, the American Council on Education or the Harvard Program for women in the study were discussed College Presidents. “When I was at the Harvard program a year ago, I got a great book that inspired me to create grassroots innovation programs” (Participant #5, Personal Communication, September, 2017).

These programs are specifically designed to give women the training necessary to lead institutions of higher education. This president discussed that her mentor suggested that she get into a leadership development program to learn leadership skills in higher education, “Rather, he wanted to provide me an opportunity to move into administration. So when he told me this, I was very surprised, and he said, ‘If you're interested, I'd like to
send you to a Harvard management development program in the summer,’ which I wasn't familiar with” (Participant #14, Personal Communication, September, 2017).

One woman discussed that she learned about critical issues in higher education through the Council of Independent Colleges:

So it was a great opportunity. And then, through CIC and through ACE, and through an earlier consortium of colleges, I got a lot of exposure to the larger issues of higher education, got to meet, as you have, some other deans and provosts and presidents. So that kind of professional development, beyond my campus was invaluable in training me for a college presidency. (Participant #20, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

Another woman discussed a program that fit her lifestyle, as she was able to bring her spouse to the conference with her:

Lilly Foundation funded through CIC this fantastic program called The Vocation of the Presidency, and they had enough money for people to bring their partners with them. So it was a year-long program. We met three times but we were connected for a whole year. And it was all about, what vocationally moves you to want to lead an institution. (Participant #11, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

**Family of origin.** I grouped these data from the participants’ responses to experiences that shaped them into leaders. These data indicated that their upbringing, childhood, or family of origin helped shape them into leaders. This sub-theme was referenced 14 times, by 11 participants: 82% of the total participants. They reported that the ways in which they think about organizations, manage budgets, and work with others; how they view themselves; and how they view culture are all related to their upbringing.

One participant discussed her family of origin: “So I think for me, being a people person, I was raised in a very nurturing family with high expectations of me. So I tend to have the highest and the best expectations of other people because that's always what was expected of me” (Participant #5, Personal Communication, August 2017).
Another president discussed that she was born into leadership and her family teaching her about being socially aware. “I think so born into a big part of my fabric, in terms of who I am, it's something that I really challenge myself to be very cognizant of myself and the people around me. A lot of it, honestly, had to do with my growing up and my parents, our ethnicity and my family’s standard for me” (Participant #4, Personal Communication, August 2017). She went on to discuss that her parents encouraged her to push herself, even if people told her she couldn’t do it, to do it anyway:

I think it's a part of everybody's story; the environment you're raised in, you know, what's in your heart, what you care about. I think we classify all that stuff as mushy stuff, and you know, you can't qualify it, I'm sorry, you can't quantify it, so we tend to kind of not give it the merit that it is. But I think, you know, the family that you grow up in, your work ethic, your innate drive that I talked about earlier, wanting to do well, even being a people pleaser, wanting people to feel good about what they do. (Participant #11, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

Conclusion

As a result of the divergent and convergent analysis, I was able to define patterns and codes in the data that helped me develop themes and sub-themes. Through the use of three lenses—language, emotion, and essence—the process for making meaning of the data was iterative and multidimensional. These lenses helped me create a robust set of codes through which I was able to glean seven themes and associated sub-themes. In the next chapter, I will present my findings, expound upon the data analysis, and discuss implications for further study and research.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In Chapter 5, I discuss my interpretation of the data and present four findings. In their totality, the findings provide insight into my research questions and embody the meanings that I have made as a result of this research. Moreover, I discuss this study’s findings that go beyond the research questions, providing relevance into the fields of women in higher education, leadership, and gender biases. Lastly, I present implications for further research and practice. This study attempted to understand how women college presidents managed opportunities and obstacles as they navigated their career advancement. Throughout this chapter, I illustrate the findings through the voices of the college presidents; I make use of participant quotations found in the data.

Findings

When I synthesized the results from Chapter 4, the data analysis, four major findings emerged. Additionally, the findings answer the research questions stated in Chapter 3. **Question 1:** What obstacles and opportunities have women college presidents experienced as they advanced in small private colleges and universities?

- Which specific abilities helped women take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles?
- What types of professional support helped women take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles?
- How did networks and other personal support play a role in helping women advance?
Finding #1: Women were intelligent, talented, successful, savvy, and brave.

The college presidents in this study were driven and successful. They were intelligent and savvy at managing issues of the patriarchy within higher education. They bravely navigated complicated relationships with a variety of constituencies, had the competencies to run a school and a multi-million dollar business, and were experts at resolving conflict and leading teams. As organizational leaders, they knew how to work toward a vision, design strategic plans, and structure organizational systems that drive their schools forward or heal schools that have been in jeopardy. They are the voice, representative, and cheerleader for their university:

The woman who accepts a contract as a college president is intelligent and successful. The faculty want to respect their leader. One of the things that faculty would expect, is a certain degree of intelligence. (Participant #4, Personal Communication, August 2017)

According to The American College President Study (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017) the skills needed for a college presidency are complex and diffuse, requiring a high level of intelligence, success and talents. The college presidents in this study were shaped through previous professional and personal experiences. At the surface level, they learned organizational skills, institutional advancement skills, and leadership competencies. These skills and competencies include managing teams, managing change, fiscal management and skills in strategic planning, mission and vision, fundraising, marketing, and enrollment efforts.

In every position that the women had prior to the college presidency, they experienced a great deal of success, professionally. As stated by one college president, “The women that make it to the college presidency, myself included, were incredibly
successful in their other roles, or else they wouldn’t have made it this far” (Personal Communication, Participant #6, 2017). The sub-theme of innovation and expansion proved that they were intelligent forward thinkers who brought in grants, developed new programs, increased enrollment, and led successful teams. After all, all of the women in the study were highly educated and had significant experience as leaders. However, the ways in which they used their intelligence to navigate the patriarchy in higher education made them unique. They were so savvy that they managed and overcame the obstacles in the male-normed culture of higher education, the patriarchy, and reached the position of a college president.

**Managed obstacles.** In relation to the obstacle portion of the research question, this section defines the specific obstacles that women experienced as they advanced in their careers; it also discusses the specific abilities that women either developed or innately possessed to manage the obstacles that helped them to advance in their careers. The research questions that will remain the focus for this section are what obstacles and opportunities have women college presidents experienced as they advanced in small private colleges and universities and which specific abilities helped women take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles? The obstacles are defined as gender and theme 1: double standards. To manage the obstacles, the women in this study overcame issues related to gender and double standards by building Resiliency (theme 3), making brave choices Bravery and Courage (theme 4), and they defined their own narrative (sub-theme): “I have had people say all along the way as a very young faculty I had men make the typical comments about, ‘Oh isn't this interesting that as a women you teach in this discipline. I've never seen women teach these courses.’ Things like that. You
could either react to those comments and get very sensitive and upset or keep doing what you are doing” (Personal Communication, Participant # 10, September, 2017). They did not pay attention to those who criticized them or made them feel ineffective; on the contrary, they built resiliency and made brave choices to write their own story. One college president defined how she learned early on in her career that she had to have tough skin to advance in higher education:

You learn to have tough skin early on, and that's where I think women sometimes are better prepared for the complexities of the criticism of the presidency because women have had to learn all along the way how to deal with people who are surprised that you're where you are, people who didn't expect to find women in that role, and you just had to learn to deal with all that kind of stuff. Whereas I think many men have never had that kind of thing and they get to the presidency and they have a split board or they have faculty who are critical, and they just never met that. I think the very adventurous and surprising road that most women in leadership in any part of our society are in they're just prepared better for realizing that not everyone's going to think you're wonderful. (Personal Communication, Participant #9, September, 2017)

Women in the study were intelligent and savvy in the ways that they negotiated the obstacles surrounding the patriarchy. In addition to resiliency and bravery, their skills in theme 6, relationship management and theme 7, self-awareness helped them to lead effective teams and have awareness about themselves surrounding interpersonal relationships and self-care. In essence, their self-awareness helped them to know when to take breaks, engage with family, pay attention to their emotions, and ask for help from professional networks. Self-awareness also helped them to manage their relationships within the system, lead teams, and have difficult conversations as they advanced, especially relationships that may have been filled with conflict or felt undermining: “You have to know yourself really well to survive in the presidency. You have to know your strengths and you also have to know your limitations and that gets into how you hire
people, how you work with people” (Personal Communication, Participant #13, October).

It is notable that the women in the study displayed skills of emotional intelligence. Self-management and self-awareness refer to one’s ability to understand and self-manage his/her own awareness and emotions. Social awareness and relationship management are the domains that determine how well one identifies and understands the emotions of others, builds relationships and functions in intricate social systems Boyatzis and McKee (2008). Their competencies in emotional intelligence and knowledge of leading teams, collaboration, motivating others and managing conflict (all sub themes of theme 6, relationship management, helped them in navigating a system that was inherently biased against their advancement. This savvy and smart attitude led to women making brave choices around the theme of double standards, and the sub-themes of appearance, communication, marriage and partnerships. The women in the study had to negotiate between fitting in to expectations, and standing up for yourself. Below is an example of a double standard and the courage it must have taken to stand up to a board member:

I got back to the office, and my boss called me, and they said, “I was very disappointed with you today.” They said, “You know the problem with you,” and I said, “What's that,” they said, “You don't let anybody in.” My boss said, “We don't know anything about you.” I said, “What don't you know about me?” and they said, “Well you don't ever tell me anything about your personal life.” Not very patiently, I said, “Would you ever ask a man to share his personal life with you as part of getting to know him? Because that just doesn't happen. As long as you sign my check and give me an evaluation, we're not friends. We can be friendly, but we're not friends. That's not the relationship we have, and it's very unfair of you to expect that of me.” We've gone on to have a fine relationship. They later called me, and said, “You're absolutely right I shouldn’t expect that of you.” (Participant #11, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

After the meeting, I will say it can't be coincidence that five or six women said, "I have real concerns about this issue, but I have to say you handled that meeting beautifully. I was so proud to see a woman president be professional," and two different men actually literally said, "You seem very cold and unfeeling. It was
like it didn't matter to you." I thought, "That's got to be about gender." There was expectation that to be female, you're expected to be emotional. Of course, it was very difficult. It's not like it wasn't emotionally difficult for me, but my role was to be professional and that's what I strove for. (Participant #7, Personal Communication, September, 2017)

Theme 4, *bravery and courage*, supports this finding. Women wrote their own narrative, despite people telling them that they couldn’t advance or didn’t meet expectations that define male leaders. The expectations that define male leaders is theme 1, *double standard; bravery and courage and double standard* intersect in the ways that women handled and managed conflict while being criticized for not meeting gender stereotypes. Participants also discussed obstacles related to discrimination, disappointment professional setbacks, and personal life: “It did remind me that as a female leader, one of the things you recognize is just people's expectations of how you conduct yourself have a lot to do with gender, you can’t let it get to you” (Personal Communication, Participant #6, October, 2017).

Another college president shared a similar situation in which she was dealing with discrimination for her gender. She was brave in confronting her colleague and she made a decision about how to be effective in the organization, despite his thoughts and treatment of toward her:

I had a male colleague in the system that undermined my decisions. I decided what I needed to do, I had to confront some things with him, so we had some tough conversations about the way it was working and his ideas about me weren’t working. So I made the decision that I, in order to do my job well, I had to really dig in and get to know the faculty, and become somebody who could be counted on to represent the faculty and do the best work that I could. (Participant #3, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

*Opportunities.* The women in this study had a variety of opportunities that included prior administrative roles, working with mentors, attending leadership programs
and taking other opportunities when a superior encouraged them. As the women in the study were navigating their lives and careers before the college presidency, they pursued leadership opportunities that directly shaped them for the emotional rigor of a college presidency. They excelled at managing conflict, overcame adversity, and directly accepted challenges. Most importantly, they kept pursuing career through obstacles, specifically personal, professional, and systemic biases against them.

In the narrative below, one participant gained experience as a provost and discussed her reflection on learning to lead the faculty:

I was able to learn to lead the faculty when I was a provost. When you're Vice President for Academic Affairs or Provost, I think the way in which you lead faculty is extremely important. I was a faculty member and I think faculty are these independent thinkers, so when administrators try to manage faculty very seldom are they successful because faculty don't like to be managed. I think it's really important that you use an appropriate leadership style, such as, taking consensus, hearing the voices of others, with faculty to get them to understand why a particular organizational pull is important and why we're moving in a certain direction. (Participant #8, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

**Finding #2: Servant leadership.**

When I synthesized the data, I connected the themes of awareness, institutional care, and relationship management to the findings of servant leadership. Servant-leadership is organic; it begins with the idea that one wants to serve first, and then come in to leadership as they fill a need within an organization (Greenleaf, 2002). Several characteristics of servant leadership as they relate to this study are listening, healing, and awareness. Servant leaders make sure that their highest priority is meeting the needs of the organization and the needs of others before their own (Spears 2010; Greenleaf, 2002). As related to the first finding, it is also notable that the women in the study, overall, had high competencies of emotional intelligence; essentially, servant leaders demonstrate
high levels of emotional intelligence. According to the literature, emotionally intelligence leaders display competencies in empathy and self-awareness (Boyatzis and McKee (2008).

In regard to power, women in this study approached the college presidency from a place of service. The tone from interviews suggested that ideas of ego or rising to the top to fill a power-driven agenda were far from how these women made sense of their careers and current positions. For example, one college president reported, “I think if you survived this long somewhere along the line you have learned to put your ego out of the way and I don't know that our ego ever entirely disappears, but these jobs are hard and if you don’t love the work you won’t stay” (Participant #12, Personal Communication, October, 2017). The women in this study humbly talked about their position as a college president and their rise to the top. Many reported that they had a love for an institution, a love for students, or adherence to a university mission. Often, the women in the study discussed that a position needed to be filled or a job needed to be done; they were either asked to serve in a role or stepped in to ensure that the work got done. I found that the college presidents in this study did not talk about their careers or current roles from a place of ego or power. The women in the study, talked about work that needed to be done in their institution and the ways that they accomplished the work.

You’ve got to know the faculty as human being first before you know them.... You got to know them personally and professionally. You have to know their passion. You have to know their fears. The more you can understand the people that you're trying to bring out the more successful the team (Participant #4, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

Connected with the concept of theme 3, through the lens of essence, the women in the study cared about the voice of their constituents, took time to hear their people, and
wanted to understand herself and how she fit in with others to best lead and care for the organization. They genuinely wanted to care for all aspects of the institution from personnel needs to financial matters:

I spent a lot of time with the faculty and I spent a lot of time explaining and listening to faculty and what their concerns were. Most institutions of higher ed can be top-down, and I think we used to be that way, I came in to the role differently than the past leader and wanted to make it about the people in the college. (Participant #8, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

Through the lens of language, many women used words such as “serve,” “care,” “mission-centered,” and “people centered.” Such words in the quotations are italicized:

For instance, “the new president asked me to serve as the interim chief academic officer for a year, and then ultimately hired me into that position, so I served as the chief academic officer for several years” (Personal Communication, Participant #7, September, 2017). This president discussed her service mentality as it relates to women:

**Serve:** I know this is very typical, but I think that women still even in this day and age tend to be more acculturated and socialized to work with a service mentality so you're not as easily put off by criticism or negative comments. (Participant #6, Personal Communication, October, 2017)

**Care:** Another thing that women do, is we put everybody else first, and we're taking care of everybody else. And you've put yourself on the back burner. I had to teach myself to care for myself. (Participant #2, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

**Mission Centered:** Understanding and adhering to mission, a clearly articulated sense of mission, being able to demonstrate passion for and commitment to a mission that takes it above education. I so respect the profession of education
that I think everyone who cares enough to choose it as a profession, not just an occasional, I tried it for four years and then I moved into something else.

I think all of us are blessed with a sense of dedication and mission. (Personal Communication, Participant #16, October, 2017).

They also discussed how it important it was to hear the voices of their constituents and to empower other women into leadership roles by becoming mentors themselves:

“Someone called me and asked if I would mentor her, she’s thinking about advancing in higher education. I had a mentor, you really need someone to help you along” (Personal Communication, Participant #4, August, 2017).

My experience has taught me that you have to listen, and I am a listener. I remember when my former president, appointed me as interim, she said to me, "What's the first thing you'll do?" My answer was, "Listen." That's what I'm doing here. I'm having listening circles. People can sign up for them, and I announced that when I did the opening assembly. Because you have to hear. You have to hear people. I don't know everything, and in my role as college president, I do the same thing, I want to hear what people have to say. (Personal Communication, Participant #19, October)

The literature states that the characteristics of servant leadership are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people and building community, many of these characteristics tie directly back to the themes of Theme 2: Self Awareness, Theme 5: Heal the Organization, Theme 6: Relationship Management and related sub-themes (Spears 2010; Greenleaf, 2002). As defined by Spears (2010), servant leadership:

Is based on teamwork and community, one that seeks to involve others in decision-making, one strongly based in ethical and caring behavior, and one that is attempting to enhance the personal growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of our many institutions. This emerging approach to leadership and service is called ‘servant leadership’. (p. 11)
It is important to note that the women in the study demonstrated these characteristics and relayed information in regards to serving their institutions. It is a significant finding that the women in the study did not address their want for power or ambition to rise within their organizations. Through the lenses of emotion and essence, the dialogue felt humble and service oriented. There weren’t any interviews that reflected a woman’s need for power; instead, they discussed in great detail how difficult the role of a college president was and the ways that they serve the people in the university due to their love for education, mission, or service. Connected to the literature on women’s roles in systems and gender biases in the workplace, I am wondering if they have they learned to talk about service and not power because the service and mission rhetoric is socially acceptable for women? The data shows that the women were truly committed to leading their Universities, their care for their institutions is remarkable, but it is significant to note that many women did not address ambitions toward becoming a leader in their careers. Perhaps this is another saavy manner in which the women in the study have learned to navigate a system that is not ready for women to discuss ambition and power. For example, the literature states that it is socially acceptable for women to discuss her need to serve others, people spontaneously think that women should be nice, nurturing, and kind while it is socially acceptable for men to be strong, assertive, ambitious and seeking power (Eagly & Carly, 2007). In 2010 (Rose) discussed the ideas that conventional gender roles may be holding women back from advancement; although these women advanced in their careers, as noted by (Eagly & Carly, 2007), have the systems of convention influenced the ways in which the women in the study see themselves as leaders or have they learned to discuss service as a means to get to the presidency – a role
that she had been dreaming about her entire career? Eagly and Carly (2007) asserted that people in an organization may automatically assume that women are to behave in nice, caring and encouraging ways, she can be criticized or disregarded if she is too ambitious or shows a need for power (Catalyst, 2007). In 1990, Sally Helgeson writes in *The Female Advantage*, “girls learn to value cooperation and relationships . . . to disregard abstract notions like the quest for victory if they threaten harmony in the group as a whole.” (p. 38) Gender expectations and the acceptable nature of male power that have been pre-taught could potentially be driving the service rhetoric. This finding has implications that carve out a need for further research on the ways in which think about power, specifically how they see themselves in power roles and what it means to them. Not how conventions have defined power, but how they define ambition and a want for power. This discussion will be further outlined in the implication section.

**Finding #3: Gender-fluid characteristics.** To set up the context for this finding, it is first relevant to review the ideas discussed in the literature review and relevant sources. Prime et al. (2009) noted that women leaders are often seen in the system as violating their stereotypical feminine roles (Ely et al., 2011). The literature states that men and women are still expected to behave in gender-appropriate styles (Miller, 1996). Catalyst (2007) discussed the ways in which social conditioning is a threat to women in the workforce and women leaders. When women take on society’s impression of male characteristics (Catalyst, 2007)—too soft or too hard, likeable or competent (Catalyst, 2007; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2007), they find themselves in a double bind, not knowing how to behave or interact. In this finding, the college presidents displayed behaviors and characteristics that embodied traditional male and female characteristics. For example,
the behaviors that emerged during the behavioral event interview were confrontational, bold, assertive, dominant, warm, nurturing, collaborative, warrior-like (conquering adversity), empathetic, care-taking—traditional male and female characteristics exhibited in one space, in one person, in a very fluid manner. Depending on the nature of the situation or event, women fluidly moved between traditional male and female characteristics. The title of this finding is *gender-fluid characteristics* because the women in this study, once again, in a savvy manner, adapt their behaviors and characteristics to specific situations. Through the lens of essence, gender characteristics are holistic and characteristically fluid when it comes to traditional characteristics of male and female.

Synthesizing the concepts and themes of the women’s natural inclination to *care for an institution* and have *brave characteristics*, one woman reported:

> I was talking with someone recently and they described that I was intimidating. I really don't think anyone would ever describe me that way, but I can be if I have to be, but I also listen and invite people to bring their ideas to me (Participant #17, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

Another participant explained a story in which she had to deliver news to faculty. She described that, often, she was a very collaborative leader; however, in this case, the decisions had already been made, due to structures in governance:

> No male president is going to have the guys come up to him and say, "I thought you were too cold in that meeting." Did they expect me to burst into tears? I don't know, but it was interesting. At times, I have to deliver information in an assertive way, do I think the tone is cold? No, but women are often criticized for tone, men are not. Other times, I present information in ways that feel more care-taking and warm, I ask questions, I allow other people to weigh in on decisions, but in this case, I had to be matter of fact and this meeting was not open for dialogue. (Participant #17, Personal Communication, August, 2017)

This discussion regarding gender-fluid characteristics answers the research question: *What obstacles and opportunities have women college presidents experienced*
as they advanced in small private colleges and universities? The gender-fluid characteristics were her obstacles and opportunities. On one hand, being female and traditional feminine characteristics created obstacles pertaining to gender biases. When women demonstrate behaviors that are stereotypical feminine behaviors, they are seen as weak leaders (Eagerly and Carly, 2007). These behaviors include being overly emotional or nurturing. However, on the other hand, her gender-fluid characteristics of bravery, resilience, boldness, ambition, and warrior-like essence helped her to manage the obstacles and move into other opportunities. According to the psychology literature, gender is defined by culture and implies what one should do their life, how they should act and behave (Bornstein, 1998. These pre-learned ways of conforming to gender were taught at very young ages and have become acceptable for men and women to behave in certain, prescribed ways (Nagoshi, Brzuzy, & Terrell, 2012; Bornstein, 1998). The data suggests that behaviorally, women went beyond the conventions of acceptable gender behavior for women. When compared with the literature on the level of masculine and feminine characteristics, the women in the study moved fluidly between conventional male and female behavior characteristics. For example, this woman said:

I just mention that as an example of a place where, I think, it's at those moments of real challenge or difficulty that the underlying [gender] expectations do come out. That even people who would never think or say, "I don't want to have a female president," that's not really what they're saying, they still have an expectation of what leadership looks like that's shaped by the last three presidents they knew, who were all men. Understanding that a little bit, and recognizing that, and factoring that in consciously, this is about gender. It just reminded me that you have to strike a balance and that on other occasions, being as warm and friendly as possible would mitigate that sense of over-professionalism or bold. (Personal Communication, Participant #19, October, 2017)
This finding implies that, for women to advance and tear down some of the barriers, the systems should think of women as possessing both characteristics and become comfortable with nurturing and ambitious behaviors.

**Finding #4: Support and Well-Being.** This point goes beyond the scope of the study, but informs and answers research questions pertaining to the ways in which women navigated and prepared for a college presidency—one hundred percent of the women in the study talked about their current role as presidents. This hidden theme helped me to understand the types of resiliencies and competencies she had to develop before she assumed the role.

Although this study focused on how women made sense of their careers before a college presidency, every participant took a great deal of time talking about her current role as a college president. Each discussed the essence of her love, successes, and struggles for the institution with me. Many women reported that they work with an executive coach, which made me wonder what supports can be put into place for the woman who cares for and nurtures an entire institution.

The role of a college president can be lonely and isolating due to gender biases, the system not understanding her as leader, the general isolating nature of leadership, complete commitment to the job, a variety of situations around separation from family and marriage, and heavily scheduled university appointments that often limit time from family and friends. The women reported that, in a college presidency, they work harder than they have ever worked, often sacrificing time with family or intentionally being in commuter marriages, and living states away from their spouses. Although the women all
reported that they relied on other college presidents for support, by nature, many schools are competing with each other for admissions and enrollment. To that end, the women presidents can rely on each other to discuss similar issues, but they are still competing with each other for students and funding. This makes it difficult to share every detail of your institution and experience. This portion answers my research question what types of professional supports helped women to take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles? Women in the college presidency had to learn to fit a certain set of public expectations that are dictated by the university or college mission, vision, or religious affiliation.

From what I learned in the study, women college presidents have to fit certain guidelines and maintain public appearances and expectations, not only from the organization and the board, but also from the community. The theme of self-awareness ties to her ability to practice self-care, both professionally and personally. As one participant reported, “One of the things a board member suggested that I take a month off read, and rest, and review. I did and I actually found that helpful” (Participant #7, Personal Communication, September, 2017). It is evident that she learned to care for herself as she was navigating her career, pushing through obstacles, staying resilient, and managing disappointments.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this study offer implications for future research. First, future studies on current college presidents should focus on how the unseen biases and gender fluid characteristics affect her ability to lead organizational system. Essentially, it would be interesting to gather the results from 360-leadership assessments and understand how
the system views, understands and react to women college presidents and potentially women in other organizations, and sectors.

Second, there is an implication for future research on women and power in organizations. The work of Sally Helgesen studies women and power in systems of organizations, her work should be extended to college presidents to study the needs and values of women; moreover, it would be interesting to understand what women want in academic careers. Not what conventions suggest, but what the women in academic careers value and want out of their careers. I suggest that there has to be more dialogue and a paradigm shift about women in power and a shift in cultural thinking that is acceptable for women to be ambitious and strive to advance, just as it is for men. Overall, a more equitable view of women and men as they strive for and come into power positions in organizations.

Third, future research and literature should focus on women leaders from the standpoint of gender-fluid characteristics, women and men, moving seamlessly through classical gender characteristics. The basis for this study could attempt to understand how systems can better understand women and view her as a leader when she exhibits traditional male and female characteristics. This implication has ties back to the second implication. Society needs a reframing or a new lens for women and “traditional” personality characteristics. Moreover, new ideas pertaining to women’s roles and capabilities need to be studied. For example, more scholarship around the effectiveness of women leaders that attempts to define their specific personality characteristics and behaviors that make them successful. The results from this study could impact current societal views of women, thus creating new lenses and frames for women in
organizations and the ways that women view themselves as leaders—what they value, who they are outside of conventional thinking.

Fourth, the literature should be written for the millennial generation on feminism and contemporary points on feminism as it relates to women leaders, systemic oppression, career advancement and possibly men’s oppression. Society needs to understand the current barriers for women in organizations and in the work force and the ways that the patriarchy might be oppressing men, as well. Once the context is presented, scholarship and practical ideas should be designed to change the ways society views women and men.

Fifth, there is an implication for governance and boards of trustees that are working to diversify the presidency and include women and women of color. Further studies and research on how to prepare the board for searches that include women as well as how to prepare the board to support and retain women as presidents.

Sixth, there is an implication for a comparison study between men’s experiences and women’s experiences as they navigated their careers. This study attempted to gain insight into women’s experiences, however a comparison study would illuminate the similarities and differences in men’s and women’s experiences as they were shaped as leaders and navigated their careers into a college presidency.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand how women college presidents perceive their own career advancement into the role of a college president. The research questions attempted to answer how women managed obstacles and took advantage of opportunities within in their careers. The study’s results led to four findings. The first
finding was that the women who advanced to a college presidency were intelligent, talented, successful, savvy, and brave. Second, they exhibit servant leadership, whereby the woman is mission centered, cares for the organization, is empathetic, and creates space for other voices to be heard. Third, this study identified gender-fluid characteristics, and, fourth, this study found, that although the study was focused on career advancement, the presidents talked about their current roles. The findings of this study have important implications for future research in women’s leadership and gender fluid characteristics. In essence, how can we help systems understand that women are powerful leaders and can display both sets of traditional male and female characteristics fluidly? Further literature on new ideas of feminism can positively impact not only future leaders but can work toward transforming the ways in which systems view women and women leaders as well as helping men to break out of the gender normative roles and characteristics.
Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Research Questions:

Question 1: What obstacles and opportunities have women college presidents experienced as they advanced in small private colleges and universities?

- Which specific abilities helped women to take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles?
- What types of professional supports helped women to take advantage of opportunities and manage obstacles.
- How did networks and other personal supports play a role in helping women to advance?

Introduction & General Instructions:

- Hello, my name is Christine Mahady; thank you for taking the time to meet with me, I have been working with college presidents and I am understanding more and more the nature and scope of your work. My dad is a professor, so I kind of grew up on a college campus, surrounded by academics. I was actually very close with the president and provost. I honestly don’t know how you do it all. I am very appreciative for your willingness to help me, especially with such a busy schedule.
- Before we get started on the interview, let me tell you a little bit about the format. I am interested in your story, how you became a college president. I may be asking you a series of questions pertaining to your previous jobs or people that helped you along the way.
- The interview will last around sixty minutes, is that ok with you?
- Our conversation and all data will remain confidential. I will not disclose any names, at any point in my study. Names will remain anonymous through use of pseudonyms.
- Can I have your permission to record the conversation?

Opening:

1. So tell me, how did you become the president of this university?

Possible Probes:

- What was that like for you personally?
- What was the situation?
o Who was involved?
o What were the events that led up to the event?
o What did you actually do or say?
o What was going through your mind?
o Is there anything else you could have done?
o How did this experience affect you emotionally?

If someone discusses they got a call or someone helped them.

Possible Probes:
o Person: In your eyes, what do you think the person saw in you that made them call you? Or offer you the job.
o Specific Job: What kinds of things were you doing in that job? (publishing, teaching, etc?)

2. Along your journey, did anything get in your way? Something that made you think you wouldn’t continue into leadership?
o How did you manage the road block?
o What was that like for you?
  a. What was the situation?
  b. Who was involved
  c. What did you actually do or say?
  d. What was the outcome?
  e. What were you feeling?

3. What do you think prepared you to be a leader?
4. From your perspective what was it about you that got you into the position of a college president?
5. Can you tell me about any personal supports that contributed to your advancement?

Closing

• Is there something that I didn’t ask that you would like to share as it relates to your journey?
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form for Individual Interview

June ___, 2017
Christine Mahady
724-454-5844

Purpose of the study:
I am a doctoral candidate in the educational leadership program at the University of Pennsylvania. As part of my research, I am conducting a qualitative exploratory study: “How do women navigate the opportunities and obstacles in higher education as they advanced to the college presidency?” I am specifically interested in which abilities or competencies are needed to assume the role of a college president and how women make sense of navigating an inherently male system to beat the odds and gain employment as a college president.

What will participants be asked to do?
Your participation in this research would be completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without fear of any consequences. As a participant, your involvement would consist of participating in an individual interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped by me, and transcribed by a third party company. The transcriptions will not include your name or any identifying information and will be kept on a secured server. I am respectful of your time, and will accommodate the individual interview around your schedule and availability.

Confidentiality
Any notes and audio-recordings of the interviews will be stored on my private laptop or personal iPad, both of which are password-protected. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the study to keep all names confidential. After the interview has ended and the data analysis is complete, I will delete the recorded data. Any transcriptions will be password encrypted as another form of confidentiality and will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

What are the risks and inconveniences to participating in the study?
There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research study, as there are no experimental procedures involved. You reserve the right to skip a question, ask to revisit the question at a later time, or simply refuse to answer the question. You can choose to stop the interview at any time and/or stop participating in the study at any time. Your identity and your school’s identity will be made anonymous in this study through the use of pseudonyms, and any other potentially identifiable information will be masked, so it is impossible that you could be identified in my dissertation.
When you sign this document, you are agreeing to participate in this research study as described. If you choose to participate, please sign and return one copy of this form to me (electronic signatures and submission by email is fine). If you choose not to participate, there is no need to reply; you may simply discard this document. Thank you for your consideration!

I assent to being part of the study, and do so voluntarily.

________________________________________________
Print your name

________________________________________________
Signature Date
Appendix C: Results of Convergent Thematic Analysis

Table 5. *Results of Convergent Thematic Analysis*

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References


