

2016

# Career Mobility Patterns of Aspiring Female Leaders at California Community Colleges

Tracy Lynn Johnson  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Tracy Johnson

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Walden University

2016

Abstract

Career Mobility Patterns of Aspiring Female Leaders at California Community Colleges

by

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MAM, University of Redlands, 2005

BA, Loyola Marymount University, 1992

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

December 2016

## Abstract

Many women struggle to move up the career ladder. Women aspiring to executive positions in community colleges within the United States may face gender barriers, family-work life barriers, and barriers regarding their leadership ability. The problem studied was a gap in knowledge of how women succeeded in attaining executive positions in community colleges. The purpose of this study was to examine ways that female leaders at Southern California community colleges assumed executive-level roles at their institutions and the barriers they faced to attain those positions. The theory of upward mobility and the concept of self-efficacy comprised the study's conceptual framework. The research questions in this qualitative case study focused on barriers to women's upward mobility and ways that women overcame these barriers. Face-to-face structured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of 12 women who held positions of vice president or above at 8 Southern California community colleges within 2 counties. Interview data were coded using clustering and classification and resulted in 3 themes per research question. The results suggested that executive leaders must demonstrate communication savviness to address difficult situations, engage in active information searching and empower others through helpful communication. Findings of the study suggest formal mentorship was crucial for women in their quest for leadership roles. Prospective female leaders in higher education may be able to use the study results in navigating their careers. Positive social change may result with the greater visibility of women in executive leadership roles, thereby leading to reduced gender disparities and women achieving their highest potential in the workplace.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my children, Justin Jeremiah and Jodi Justine Johnson. You have been and continue to be a source of inspiration for your mother. You encourage me through the individuals that you are becoming. It is my goal to serve as an example to each of you and remind you that you can do anything you set your mind to doing. Thank you for understanding this journey I have been on and supporting me along the way. Everything I do is with the best interest of the two of you at heart. I love you unconditionally and I am proud of both of you! To my father, Elbert Green, you have taught me to be all that I can through your example. Your honesty, candor, love, and encouragement have always been appreciated. Thank you for your undying love for me and for teaching me many of life lessons that a young girl can only learn from a dad. I love you! To my brother, Tony Lorenzo Green, you have been more than my brother, you are my friend. I am thankful for our relationship and all the times we talk because it means so much to me. You have been one of my biggest supporters, and for that I am extremely grateful. Finally, to my mother, Jodie Mae Green, I could only imagine what it would be like if you were here today to witness this accomplishment. All that I am as a woman today, I owe to you. Thank you for being my mother and for imparting your wisdom, love, care, and nurture into my very being. I will always love you. I pray you are proud of me.

## Acknowledgments

I want to first thank my initial chair, who subsequently agreed to be my committee member, Dr. Lilburn Hoehn. Dr. Lil, you stepped in to become my chair after I started my study with a different committee. You have been an advocate for my work and have been such a support. You have helped to ensure this document could be one that I will be proud of many years later. Your feedback and consistent honesty have been nothing short of amazing, and I am truly grateful. To my current chair, who was my former committee member, Dr. Stephanie Hoon, thank you for your questions that encouraged me to look deeper into my research for social change. Thank you for agreeing to become my chair toward the end of the process and for guiding me to the finish line. Dr. Karla Phlypo, thank you for agreeing to help me complete the dissertation journey as my content expert after the untimely and unexpected passing of my beloved first chair Dr. Lil. It was a difficult time for me and you made it a smooth transition with your timely feedback and advice. I really appreciate you for that! Dr. Jeffrey Prinster, I met you several years ago at residency in Spain, and you encouraged me at that time to reach out to you should I need any help later in the dissertation process. I did just that, and you have been right here along the way providing me positive words of affirmation regarding my topic and guidance so that I can produce a quality research document. I am grateful for your feedback and that you agreed to assist me through this journey. Working with individuals of your caliber has been my privilege.

I could not have arrived at this point without the love and support from my best friend of 26 years, Felicia Sterling. You are my wings that allow me to fly; I love you and

appreciate your constant and unwavering friendship. You have been so positive and encouraging, and for this, I say thank you! Ray Sterling, thank you for the words of encouragement and for supporting me as I worked towards this goal. To Dr. Moe Saouli, thank you for being an awesome colleague and for your encouraging spirit as I worked to obtain this degree. Your constant words of advice and checking on me during the process have been invaluable, and I appreciate you. I want to acknowledge my staff and colleagues who have made this journey achievable because I did not have to worry about work because you were always taking care of business and serving our students with excellence. Thank you for letting me share my journey with you, tell you all my stories, and lead you every day. I want to acknowledge all my friends and family who have said a kind word or asked how I was doing along the way. All of the thoughts have meant so much to me. To the new love of my life, Brian, you have supported me since you met me. You encouraged me to work on finalizing the process even when I was down or feeling discouraged. You let me know I could do this! I look forward to the new life we will share together! To my colleagues in the program, it was great sharing our ups, downs, and triumphs together. I pray your life is enriched as a result of this experience. To anyone who reads this and has ever had a dream or a goal, remember that you can do anything you set your mind to doing! Be blessed!



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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Women have more opportunities to obtain professional positions in community colleges than in other types of institutions in the United States because higher education institutions recognize the contributions of women. The opportunities include full- and part-time faculty positions. Although some women employed by community colleges occupy presidential positions (Townsend & Twombly, 2007), they have not achieved the same equity with men in terms of rank, salary, and tenure in executive positions (Burrell & Zucca, 2004). According to The White House Project (2009), women account for only 23% of university presidents. Furthermore, the rate at which women have risen to executive positions has slowed since 2006 because of the barriers women face (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Since women account for less than 30 % of these positions, the narrowing pipeline for presidential positions creates vacancies for these roles and expectations suggest community colleges will help increase the number of college graduates by 2020 and women will have the opportunity to fill these roles (Eddy, 2012; Eddy & Cox, 2008).

Women account for fewer leadership and executive positions outside of higher education, as well. The representation of women in senior organizational ranks has stagnated and, in some situations, even declined (Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009; Davidson & Burke, 2012; Vinnicombe, Doldor, & Turner, 2015 as cited in Ryan et al., 2016). In the United States and Australia, more women graduate from law school and practice law than men, but only approximately 15% eventually become equity partners in their firms (as cited in Pinnington & Sandberg, 2013). Among Fortune 500 companies,

only 15% of board seats 3% of CEOs are women (Lang, 2010). In information technology, women hold only 5% of technology leadership jobs and 19% of all software developers' positions (Ashcraft, McLain & Eger, 2016). In the field of construction, 7% of businesses were owned by women in 2013 (American Express Open, 2013). The barriers women face in these industries are a lack of confidence in their ability to do the jobs as well as inaccurate perceptions regarding their leadership characteristics.

Women are not experiencing equal opportunities for promotion in higher education as well as in other industries. In turn, the difficulty with viewing women as feasible contenders for executive-level positions arises with the exception of 2-year women's colleges (Townsend & Twobly, 2007). These institutions offer leadership programs designed to identify and prepare likely candidates for higher level roles. Therefore, in this study, I sought to provide insight about these barriers as well as identify concrete pathways for women to obtain executive positions particularly in community colleges in the United States. As women seek to gain equal footing with men in the workplace, achieve equity in pay, and gain respect for their talents and not their gender, this issue will require attention. Since women account for only 26% of full professors, 23% of university presidents, and 14% of presidents at doctoral granting institutions (The White House Project, 2009) further exploration of the topic is relevant.

In this chapter, I provide background information on my study problem and why it is important for female faculty, staffers, administrators and community college leaders to address. I present my primary research question and sub questions. The chapter also includes the theoretical framework used to structure the study. The remaining sections of

the chapter include discussion of assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

### **Background of the Study**

Community colleges have made a concerted effort to recognize the contributions and achievements of women in leadership. These institutions are a significant place to study women's career patterns because they appear more open than traditional 4-year universities to accepting women in leadership roles (Townsend & Twombly, 2006). Yet, women's ascent to positions at the vice-president and higher level has stagnated, despite improvements in their representation in other leadership roles. For example, the number of women presidents in community colleges grew at a rate of only 2% between 2001-2008 (Eddy, 2013; Eddy et al., 2008). While the growth rate of women presidents grew at just 2%, forty-five percent of the 2-year men and women college presidents are over age 61 (Eddy, 2008). Additionally, 84% of community college presidents plan to retire by 2017 (Eddy, 2013). This situation seems to be good for women to move into executive-level positions, but that would depend on the openness to the institutions to continue to provide opportunities for women to occupy the positions. Thus, knowing the steps women have taken to women progress in leadership positions careers may provide helpful information for women seeking executive positions within U.S. community colleges.

Researchers have identified some factors that account for this stagnation. Reasons include lack of opportunity and support to move into leadership positions, discouragement and sabotage, and different expectations for men and women (Lapovsky,



2014). Other barriers include family life balance challenges (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Women also face challenges when their language, personal appearance or leadership style does not fit male norms (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Colleagues, subordinates or other leaders within the institution may classify women who exhibit the same transformational leadership style as men as less effective than them (Metcalf, 2010).

Other potential challenges include a possible lack of self-knowledge and - efficacy. Women who lack these personality components may find it difficult to face the challenges and obstacles of executive-level positions, according to Montas-Hunter (2012). For women to rise to high-level positions in higher education and in other industries, they must excel in leading and influencing others to achieve results for their organizations. Women must use their life experiences and self-knowledge to obtain professional success (Santovee, 2011).

I believe that employee' gendered perceptions of leader's warrants investigation. Women can be and are often effective in leading others (Ayman, Korabik, & Morris, 2009). According to Yammarino, Dubinsky, Comer, and Jolson (1997), female leaders often form "unique one-to-one interpersonal relationships" (p. 217) with subordinates, thus creating an encouraging and productive environment for employees to flourish. Ayman and Korabik (2010) contend that gender matters, and is thus, worthy of further study as male and female leaders experience different dynamics, power, and status in relation to their leadership styles. Women have an uncanny ability to engage the workforce they lead, gain support through collaboration and cooperation, and utilize

empathy to help organizations succeed. They simply want the opportunity to display their leadership qualities in a fair and balanced environment.

The multidimensionality of, and cultural influences on, leadership style are other reasons why it should be further examined. . Ayman and Korabik (2010) suggested that successful leaders, whether male or female, must use various approaches (i.e., trait, behavioral, and contingency). The trait approach suggests that leadership effectiveness is determined by one's personality. The behavioral approach suggests that a leader's behavior influences those one leads. The contingency approach suggests that organizational decisions are dependent upon internal and external factors. Men and women leaders have the responsibility to choose which approach works better to achieve organizational objectives. Men may be viewed as more successful with using the trait approach and behavioral approach, although this is determined by those one leads. Yet, women can be effective in each of the approaches as well.

Culture also matters. Leaders within organizations have different viewpoints based upon their experiences. Leadership styles vary and are not universal. Leaders utilize the approach they consider best as they work with others to meet organizational goals. Researchers studying women and leadership should conduct more cross-cultural studies with personality as a key variable (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Understanding leader personality traits could assist in reducing barriers women face in the workplace and allow them to lead without judgment as being inferior to male leaders.

If prejudice exists against women in leadership roles, it may be because some women prioritize their families over their careers. Social values and family lifestyle

choices of women tend to hinder women's leadership advancement opportunities (Belle, 2002). Continuing to explore women's work-life balance issues in organizations is important. It would be difficult to measure the power of women leading in organizations without considering work-life balance challenges they encounter (Belle, 2002).

Providing additional insight to women hoping to succeed in fields dominated by men is critical, I believe. In addition, helping women to identify their leadership interests early in their careers and seek out supportive mentors is important. Last, I believe it is paramount to help women gain the tools necessary to improve their perceptions of their leadership abilities. The benefit is two-fold for the organization and the women leaders if they both understand the challenges of leading others and women leaders are equipped with the vital information that could lead to their success.

### **Problem Statement**

Some women struggle to move up the career ladder and reach executive-level positions and higher in community colleges (Eddy, 2013). There is a disparity in the number of women in administrative and tenured faculty positions compared to men. Women who hold full-time faculty positions receive tenure in community colleges at about the same rate as men (Eddy, 2013), yet only 43% achieve executive-level positions and above (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). The problem studied was a gap in knowledge of how women succeeded in attaining positions of vice president and above in community colleges and the barriers they faced to attain those positions. Therefore, the focus of this study was on identifying what actions women can take to move to executive-level positions in community colleges.

The proportion of women among tenured faculty members is 30% at baccalaureate and master's degree-granting institutions in the United States (Eddy, 2013). At doctoral universities, this discrepancy is most striking, as only 25% of tenured faculty members are female (Eddy, 2013). However, women represent 47% of tenured full-time faculty in associate degree colleges (Eddy, 2013). This statistic demonstrates that women who hold full-time positions have an equal opportunity as their male colleagues to achieve tenure in community colleges (Eddy, 2013; Eddy & Cox, 2008).

Women have an increased opportunity to occupy executive level positions because forty-five percent of 2-year college presidents are over age 61 (Eddy, 2013). Additionally, 84% of community college presidents plan to retire by 2017 (Eddy, 2013). More women should, thus, have an opportunity to move into executive-level positions, based upon the openings created due to retirement. The rate of growth for women occupying executive-level positions in community colleges has slowed in recent years. This problem is prevalent in other industries as well.

According to Hurley and Choudhary (2016), only 24 of the CEOs of Standard and Poor's (S&P) 500 companies are women. Women face a number of barriers in moving to the executive positions such as the glass ceiling phenomenon. In addition, they sometimes face the glass cliff phenomenon whereby they still struggle to move up the hierarchy even after they have moved passed the glass ceiling. Women struggle with gender stereotyping as they seek to move up in executive level roles and create challenges for them as they seek to move forward in their careers. The effects of gender stereotyping can hinder the performance of aspiring female leaders and leave them

feeling disengaged with decreased leadership aspirations. As a result, these women may leave their careers in higher education or other industries prematurely before they reach executive level positions. Gender-based stereotype threat can be particularly impactful and present in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015). These effects on women cause some of them to not identify with an entire profession and leave few women in the pipeline to assume leadership roles. (Hoyt & Murphy, 2015).

Based upon their openness to creating sustaining relationships, I believe, some women may be willing to shift their thinking so that can be effective in executive-level positions. The openness to thinking differently requires women to use some nontraditional, creative, and innovative methods in making decisions and planning in the workplace. Women willing to think in new ways can help community colleges function more effectively, as organizations face a growing global workforce and competing demands to achieve organizational objectives. (Harvey & Buckley, 2002).

Women in the United States have earned more bachelor's degrees than men since 1982. They have earned more master's degrees than men since 1987. They have earned more doctoral degrees than men since 2006 (Catalyst, 2012; Lennon, 2013; Maloney, 2010). However, there is a gap in the literature on why women face challenges in moving through the ranks and experience roadblocks preventing career mobility in higher education and in other industries. Understanding what women have done to move into these top positions may aid other women in doing so in the future as well.

The reasons for the disparity in career mobility in California community colleges remain unknown. From a macro level, 43% of administrators in California community colleges in the highly placed positions of chancellor, vice chancellor, president, and vice president are women (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). Thus, uncovering the reasons for this disparity may help determine if current career patterns stifle women's advancement into executive-level positions in community colleges. The problem is a gap in knowledge exists regarding how women who have succeeded in attaining positions of vice president and above in community colleges were able to attain those positions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this qualitative case study, I investigated the actions that women who desire to lead in community colleges can take to overcome barriers to reaching executive-level positions. The primary data collection method was interviews. My specific focus was on the California community college system, where the representation of women in executive-level positions is disproportionate to that of men. Researchers began to collect data on gender representation for faculty in the 1980s, when 49% of full-time women had obtained tenure, compared to 70% of men (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Women have outnumbered men in attendance in community colleges, representing 70% of the student body population (Santovee, 2007), since the 1980s (Townsend & Twombly, 2007), yet they are not representative in vice president positions or above. There may be no better time for women to seek executive-level positions, as there may women in the pipeline who are willing to occupy these roles. This study may prove helpful and a significant factor toward changing the trend that currently exists for the underrepresentation of

women in the roles. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the actions women who desire to lead in community colleges can take to overcome the barriers to reach executive-level positions.

### **Nature of the Study**

I interviewed 12 women leaders from various California community colleges for this case study. The participants came from a pool of 19 women leaders at eight community colleges in Southern California. The potential participants received an information sheet and an informed consent form, and I asked about potential available interview times. Those who e-mailed back signed consent forms, and I included forms signed during the interview in the study. A qualitative approach was suitable because the study entailed learning more about the phenomenon based upon an in-depth view of the women's behavior and the setting involved.

Qualitative research in management, business, and leadership involves an opportunity to build upon theory. Relating the theory helps to have a better understanding of the processes, the people, and the ways to lead people through changing times. Conducting qualitative research can provide helpful ways to increase employee engagement. I studied the women in their work setting and interviewed them at the community college. By investigating the relationships between the variables identified, researchers can describe or change the paradigm that has not been as inclusive in opportunities for women.

Types of qualitative data collection methods include focus groups, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. In this study, I used in-depth interviews of 12

women conducted face to face, which are suitable for collecting data on participants' personal history, experiences, and perspectives, especially when the subject explored is sensitive. Chapter 3 includes a more detailed presentation of the survey research with interviews being the primary data collection process for this qualitative study.

### **Research Questions**

I sought to answer two research questions in the case study. RQ1: What are some of the barriers to upward mobility that participants have encountered in their positions? RQ2: How have participants overcome perceived barriers to upward mobility in their positions?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I used the theory of upward mobility and the concept of self-efficacy to frame the discussion for women in leadership in community colleges. The occupational mobility theory includes major models grouped within it. The vacancy-driven model, the human capital theory, labor market segmentation, and the life cycle theory helped ground the study. According to the vacancy-driven model, which is the basis for much of the research for career mobility, the size and structure of job openings determines mobility and opportunities, and an opening happens either when someone creates a job or an employee leaves a position (Pindus, Flynn, & Nightingale, 1995).

Mobility relates to an individual's opportunity structure, characteristics, resources, time, and access to new jobs available. People may hold many jobs over a certain period, stay in a role for an extended period, or become unemployed. A career has meaning when there is a sequence of jobs where progress takes place in each job over the



work life of the individual. In most organizations, jobs are less plentiful at higher levels of compensation. Thus, an organization's structure and how often positions become open to make room for the promotion of others to the vacated positions serve as the basis for the opportunity for mobility. Organizational leaders consider several factors when promoting individuals to higher ranks, including education, ability, and work experience (Pindus et al., 1995).

Self-efficacy is a person's belief that he or she can influence the events that happen in his or her life. Thus, efficacy can help explain why some people experience success and reach their goals. Women who possess high self-efficacy and who desire upward mobility into executive-level positions may experience enhanced performance improvement, higher levels of emotional well-being, and increased job satisfaction (Petridou, Nicolaidou, & Williams, 2014). Self-efficacy is important to understand the context of this study, but self-efficacy is unlike confidence, as it helps to identify the effects of an individual's action. Furthermore, self-efficacy helps with the understanding, explanation, and appreciation of human behavior in a work context. The primary focus of research on self-efficacy has been primarily on leaders in business organizations.

Research related to the self-efficacy of school leaders is lacking (Petridou et al., 2014).

Self-efficacy can help determine the mind-set of leaders to accomplish tasks within the work environment and can affect the goals they set for themselves and the effort exerted to achieve the goals. The higher the level of self-efficacy a leader has, the more difficult are the goals set by the leader. Leaders with a higher self-efficacy will not shy away from difficult challenges and tasks. When faced with a difficult situation, more

self-efficacious leaders will increase their efforts to push through the challenge. Self-efficacious leaders will use the strengths and capabilities of those they lead to get the best out of their people in terms of goal attainment (Petridou et al., 2014). Further elaboration of the vacancy-driven model, the human capital theory, labor market segmentation, and the life cycle theory as well as self-efficacy, which were important in framing the theoretical discussion for women in leadership in community colleges, appears in Chapter 2. The conceptual framework related to a case study approach because the theory of upward mobility and the concept of self-efficacy could help provide a better understanding on why gaps exist for women occupying executive-level positions. I used the interview guide and the data collected from the interview and the survey to expound further upon what women who desire to move into executive-level positions can do to increase their likelihood to achieve these roles. The results of that data may then serve as a best practice to aid women in obtaining executive-level positions.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Community college:* The initial step in baccalaureate attainment for most students. The major type of educational institution that provides opportunities for students not traditionally served in higher education (Townsend & Twombly, 2007, p. 208).

*Equitable institution:* An institution in which leaders hire and admit women and men equally to work and study (Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

*Feminist leadership:* A focus on social justice by advocating for women and other marginalized populations (Barton, 2006).

*Higher education institution:* A school that has a minimum of 1-year training toward productive employment (Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

*Leadership:* The power, action, and capacity to select, equip, train, and influence followers with diverse skills, gifts, and abilities to obtain an organization's objectives (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010a).

*Mobility:* Individuals' economic and social rise through organizations and in society (Pindus et al., 1995).

*Stereotype:* An indiscriminate belief of attributes or characters of a certain cohort of individuals (Berkery, Morley & Tiernan, 2013).

*Transactional leadership:* A kind of leadership style in which leaders promote the compliance of their followers through rewards and punishment. The focus is on group performance, supervision, and organization (Judges & Piccolo, 2004).

*Transformational leadership:* A kind of leadership through which individuals undergo change and transformation. It is the capacity to let people desire to be led, to want to change and to improve. It entails evaluating the motives of associates, valuing them, and satisfying them (Northouse, 2001, p. 8).

### **Assumptions**

There are inherent assumptions about the research method. Individuals' beliefs and presuppositions usually comprise the basis of their assumptions. Individuals cannot live without assumptions and make judgments, interpretations, and inferences based upon them (Criticalthinking.org, 2013). One assumption made was that the method would be appropriate for conducting the study. A qualitative research method could result in the

consumption of more time than a quantitative research method, as researchers need to gather, analyze, and assess numerous documents as well as conduct observations.

Another assumption was that I was able to control my biases. I also assumed that the interview items were appropriate for collecting the data needed to answer the research questions. Interviews in most cases depend on the researcher's skills, yet the researcher may not have strong interviewing skills and will have to compensate for that weakness.

Another assumption was that participants would be forthcoming with responses based on their own experiences. Some participants may fear being honest during an interview.

Consequently, they may not provide a true response for fear that someone could use their responses against them. I also assumed that the selected method of choosing the participants would result in participants who could contribute to the study. The assumptions were necessary in the context of the study because I was dependent upon others for the information necessary to investigate the gap in the literature regarding women's ability to move into executive-level positions in community college.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of the research consisted of approximately 12 women interviewed and observed. I selected eight community colleges in Southern California and interviewed women from each of the colleges to understand their journey. As "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 244), my goal was to decipher what I wanted to know and to understand the purpose of the inquiry, what I would find useful, what was credible, and how much time and resources would be available to me for the research. I sought more quality from the interview questions and thus limited the

interview questions to 13, with the ability to ask follow-up questions for more clarity. I asked for documents that may reveal the template for hiring decisions of executive roles, but was unsuccessful at securing any additional documentation. I discussed with participants their job history to have a better understanding of the minimum qualifications of the various executive roles. I met with participants in their natural setting to observe behaviors that the women may have had in common, which assisted in the effort to provide recommendations to other women on the behaviors helpful for women to display in executive-level roles.

The delimitations of this study included the objectives chosen by the researcher to conduct the research. I included factors that contributed to the lack of career mobility opportunities for women who desire to lead in community colleges in California. Consequently, I could not cover other states and regions having been bound by this objective. The research questions also served as another delimiting factor because their focus was explicitly on the careers of women and the ways women struggle to assume higher ranks. In addition, only women in executive positions or who aspired to hold executive positions in community colleges in California participated in interviews. The choice of the problem of the study was also a delimitation. I concentrated the study on gender inequality in career mobility opportunities for women to occupy vice president positions and above in community colleges in Southern California. Finally, I did not include the percentage of men who hold full-time or part-time leadership positions as compared to women in leadership positions.

I achieved transferability with regard to external validity by outlining specific stages and strategies adopted during the pilot and final study process. Therefore, I outlined each process and its justification, as well as the selection process for participants. In this case, I only validated women participants in the interviews because the study scope included their plight in career mobility among community colleges in Southern California. After that was complete, the outcomes in this study were transferable to future peer research.

### **Limitations**

Findings from this empirical undertaking are not generalizable to all community college populations, because the data came from eight colleges in two counties. A second limitation was the distribution of participants in two counties that included several other community colleges was equal, and peers, colleagues, or other administrators did not validate the subjective experiences. Some of the selected participants in a study of this nature may not have time for an interview, which placed the researcher in a precarious situation because of the potential low response rates. Various limitations to qualitative research were likely to affect the study. Gathering and analyzing qualitative data was time consuming and thus expensive. Additionally, researchers are usually participants in qualitative research through observation, and thus bias can come into the final analysis. To control the bias as a researcher, I was aware of the potential for bias up front and ensured that I focused on the experiences of the women interviewed rather than my own thoughts and potential conclusions that I wanted to draw from the data. Qualitative research has a comprehensive and in-depth approach to the collection of data, which

limits its scope. Qualitative methodology does not involve formulating statistical data. Qualitative research is more time consuming and tends to have a small number of participants to avoid budgetary constraints. A final limitation related to the sample size was it was small relative to the percentage of higher education administrators within the community college system.

### **Significance of the Study**

Based upon the perceived number of community college executive-level positions that will be open within the next 10 years, this research was suitable to understand how to fill the gap in positions in the future, especially with regard to women leaders. The implication of the effectiveness of women in higher education in various studies highlighted the ability for women to change their paradigms in leadership through their experiences (Lloyd-Jones, 2011; Yanez & Moreno, 2007). Other researchers have underscored the impact of women's inability to crack the glass ceiling and advance into roles they desire and are qualified to perform (Belle, 2002; Chugh & Sahgal, 2008). In addition, recent theoretical advances brought to the forefront a phenomenon known as the glass cliff whereby women are more likely to receive promotions in firms that are struggling or in crisis (Ryan & Haslam, as cited in Glass & Cook, 2016). Other researchers have applied insights from token theory and role incongruity theory to explore the challenges women face in male-dominated leadership positions (e.g., Eagly & Karau; Heilman, as cited in Glass & Cook, 2016).

Researchers have indicated that women tend to receive promotions to high-risk leadership positions and face significant constraints post promotion (Gabaldon, de Anca,

Mateos de Cabo, & Gimeno, 2016; Glass & Cook, 2016; Hennessey, MacDonald, & Carroll, 2014). Literature that includes an emphasis on gender labeling of leadership signifies there is a lot to do to change the perception of women in leadership (Alimo-Metcalfe, 2010b; Billing & Alverson, 2000). Despite the growing pressures on regulators and corporate boards to review their chief executive officer (CEO) selection criteria, and a well-established academic literature showing the virtues of the more collaborative and authentic styles of leadership that should give female job candidates an advantage (Gardner; Nichols & Erakovic, as cited in Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016, p. 355), relatively few women are reaching the executive ranks in large corporations (Catalyst; McKinsey, as cited in Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016, p. 355). In short, the progress of women in the United States, United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia into executive, CEO, and board roles is at best described as glacial (Catalyst; Smedley, as cited in Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016, p. 355).

Investigating the factors that contribute to the lack of promotional opportunities for women who desire the chance to make a difference through leadership roles in the community colleges in which they serve is important to the perception of equitable treatment of women. Perhaps more women will not feel marginalized in only occupying faculty and support positions. In turn, they may aspire to achieve positions of vice president or above. Furthermore, community colleges could identify interested women, prepare them, and create succession plans for positions that administrators who retire in the coming years will vacate (Eddy, 2012; Santovec, 2010).



From a social change perspective, the study provides more information regarding the potential opportunities for women who have not had the chance or who have not been able to attain executive-level roles. From this, perhaps women will attempt to occupy these roles to make a difference in community colleges, which could open up more doors for other women who may not have chosen that path. Furthermore, from a global social change perspective, implementing programs that develop the skills and talents of women faculty and staff could help organizational leaders promote diversity in senior leadership across higher education (R. Madsen, Longman, & Daniels, 2012). Moreover, women may have the opportunity to experience upward career mobility, equitable pay for equal work, and increased involvement in roles that make overarching decisions to help other women progress in leadership roles.

### **Summary and Transition**

In most community colleges in California, the integration of women into faculty leadership positions of vice president or above is an important concern. Community colleges are a suitable place to study women's career patterns because community colleges appear more open than traditional 4-year universities regarding the acceptance of women in leadership roles. Yet, women's ascent to positions of vice president or above is stagnant, despite improvements in women's representation in other leadership roles in these colleges. For example, women presidents of community colleges grew at a rate of only 2% between 2001 and 2008 (Eddy, 2008). Thus, knowing how women progress in their careers can be fruitful to other women and contribute to charting the course to obtain the highest levels of office within community colleges.

In the subsequent chapters, I provide insight into the remaining details of the study. Chapter 2 includes a literature review on women's leadership in community colleges and leadership in general. Some of the themes discussed in this chapter revolve around reasons why women's career patterns in community colleges for vice president positions and above is stagnant. The discussion also includes the lack of opportunity and support to move into leadership positions, discouragement and sabotage as women aspire for presidency, and different expectations for men and women (Lapovsky, 2014). Other themes discovered in the literature review for women's career ladder issues are the family work life challenges that women have when they must choose between executive level roles in community colleges and family obligations.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Researchers began to collect data on gender representation for faculty in the 1980s, when 49% of full-time women had obtained tenure, compared to 70% of men (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Although they have examined faculty representation, the same has not been adequately achieved for women who desire executive level positions within the community college. The problem explored in this study was the gap in knowledge that exists regarding how women who have succeeded in attaining positions of vice president and above in community colleges were able to attain those positions. The reasons for the disparity in career mobility in California community colleges remain unknown.

From a macro level, 43% of administrators in California community colleges in the highly placed positions of chancellor, vice chancellor, president, and vice president are women (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). Women face a number of barriers in moving to the executive positions such as the glass ceiling phenomenon. They face gender stereotyping regarding their leadership characteristics. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the actions women who desire to lead in community colleges can take to overcome the barriers to reach executive-level positions.

Chapter 2 includes a literature review centered on women's leadership opportunities and performance in U.S. community colleges. Drawing from Lapovsky (2014) and other researchers, I consider reasons why women's pursuit of positions at the vice president and higher level is stagnant. After discussing my literature search strategy,

I present my conceptual framework, after which I begin my review of relevant literature. My review begins with a review of research regarding female leader's identity as they have moved to upper levels of responsibility. The glass ceiling is the next topic presented as a barrier to women's quest for upper-level positions in organizations. Women's ability to balance career and family and the way those decisions affect their career paths is the next area discussed. Information on women, mentorship, and networking, as well as women and their career paths are the next topics in the review. The remaining topics of the literature review include women and leadership, the barriers to women's leaders' development of their identity, the few role models that women have, and gendered career paths and work. The final topics concern women's access to networks and sponsors and the visibility of women leaders.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The research strategy searches began between September 2013 and July 2016. I used databases such as SAGE Publications, ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, and PsycARTICLES to locate many of the journal articles included in my literature review. Some databases were more useful than others because they focused primarily on women's issues and were very specific for the case study topic. The publications that were particularly helpful were *Gender in Management*, *Gender, Work & Organization*, *Human Resources Management*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Advancing Women in Leadership*, and the *Harvard Business Review*.

I found and reviewed more than 150 journal articles. I also purchased a book, *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg that was relevant for this topic. For the conceptual

framework literature search, I conducted keyword searches using words such as leadership, transformational leadership, and transactional leadership. Some other keyword searches I used during my literature search included leadership identity, the glass ceiling, women's career and family balance, career paths of women, and women and mentors. Additional keyword searches I conducted for the literature review included women's role models, career paths, networks, and visibility in the workplace. Although my specific keyword search occurred through July 2016, I continued to look for relevant information as I worked on iterations of the literature review. Peer reviewed sources were paramount during the literature search and ongoing as I updated the literature review in order to garner the most up to date information on the topic.

### **Conceptual Foundation**

My conceptual framework is based on the theory of upward mobility and the concept of self-efficacy. Mobility relates to an individual's opportunity structure, characteristics, resources, time, and access to new jobs available (Pindus et al., 1995). Employment growth and job creation (e.g., when employers create positions for individuals with special talents and abilities or when employees choose self-employment) can spur mobility on the part of the workforce. Investments in human capital, redistribution of jobs, and movement of those in senior positions are other drivers of mobility. Thus, an organization's structure and how often positions become open to make room for the promotion of women to vacated positions serve as the basis for the opportunity for mobility. Organizational leaders consider several factors when promoting individuals to higher ranks; including education, ability, and work experience (Pindus et

al., 1995). In turn, women who aspire to executive roles may have the opportunity to move into these positions.

Self-efficacy is a person's belief that he or she can influence the events that happen in his or her life (Pindus et al., 1995). Self-efficacy is the core belief and foundation for human motivation and one's accomplishments. I deemed this to be an appropriate concept for my study because women who possess self-efficacy can persevere despite obstacles they face in reaching executive level roles. When faced with difficulty or, in this case, the perceived inability to achieve upward mobility, individuals who do not possess a level of self-efficacy to reach mastery may be unable to attain an executive-level position in higher education.

### **Upward Mobility**

U.S. community colleges typically have a diverse student population, many female faculty members, and a bureaucratic structure (Eddy, 2012). Thus, women not only have access to higher education but they could potentially have the ability to increase representation in executive level positions should they aspire to achieve those roles. Some women build coalitions, include others in decision making, and connect with their employees through relational leadership (Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999). One method that community college leaders can use to determine how to increase the number of women who have access to executive-level positions is to explore the theory of upward mobility. Leaders of higher education institutions may be able to draw on the concept of upward mobility as they develop succession plans for key positions that become available because of retirement, shifts in the job market, or individuals' career changes (Pindus et

al., 1995). The basis of mobility is an individual's opportunities, characteristics, resources, time, and the access to new jobs available (Mandel, 2013). The focus of the study was on four models to help ground the study within the framework of upward mobility.

There are major models grouped within the occupational mobility theory. The models are the vacancy-driven model, human capital theory, labor market segmentation, and life cycle theory. People may hold many jobs over a certain period, stay in a role for an extended period, or become unemployed. The vacancy model assumes equal opportunity for all individuals for positions within an organization (Pindus et al., 1995). However, the model does not include the changes in resources over a span of time, as with the human capital model, which includes both the acquisition and the exodus of human capital (Pindus et al., 1995).

The human capital theory is different from the vacancy model. The human capital theory includes individuals as conduits for earnings opportunities based upon their skills and knowledge in the workplace. When an individual acquires proper education and job training, the human capital factor improves and allows the individual to become an addition to the supply of highly skilled workers. The higher the level of skill, the more valuable the human capital is, and thus compensation is commensurate with the skill level. Therefore, human capital directly raises future earnings and potential earnings in certain occupations and indirectly by enhancements in career paths (Pindus et al., 1995).

The focus of the labor market segmentation theory is upon the demand aspect of the labor market. This theory posits that divisions exist in the market and that the

opportunity for job openings is possible. The market has primary and secondary segments and jobs. Primary jobs are more attractive because they offer higher compensation, more job security, and greater career advancement prospects. Secondary jobs are the opposite, in that they are less stable, do not offer chances for advancement, and pay substantially less in compensation. The theory is that the opportunity for upward mobility is lacking because of the confined selection of primary jobs (Pindus et al., 1995).

Economists coined the life cycle theory, which is important to mobility, as how time affects an individual's career process. In the early stages of a career, an individual may move frequently between jobs and even occupations. As individuals age, they engage in fewer job changes with the onset of more seniority in the work, tenure, and experience within the organization or occupation. An individual is less likely to leave after gaining seniority within his or her career. As age barriers impede mobility, organizational leaders may consider some workers too old or too young for particular promotions. Several elements affect the awareness of the process of mobility and career ladders from within the firm and over the life cycle (Pindus et al., 1995). The vacancy-driven model, the human capital theory, labor market segmentation, and the life cycle theory each supported this study because they represent the potential stages that women who seek executive-level positions may go through at any time during their career. Levels of mobility may change, and leaders of community colleges who incorporate the theories of upward mobility, specifically the models noted, can use succession plans to fill executive-level positions with these tenets in mind during the planning process.



## **Self-Efficacy**

The concept of self-efficacy is important for women who wish to seek leadership positions in community colleges because expectations of personal mastery determine whether an individual will have the coping mechanisms necessary when confronted with difficult situations or circumstances. The strength of an individual's conviction can predict the ability to initiate and persist in unfavorable circumstances. Efficacy expectations determine the amount of effort an individual will put forth in adverse circumstances. Success leads to mastery expectations, which in turn develops strong efficacy. The level of efficacy influences an individual's performance and thus is influential in personal mastery (Bandura, 1977).

Self-efficacy is a key factor in determining human action (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004). People with high self-efficacy for a specific task are more likely to pursue and persist in this task (S. R. Madsen, 2012). Such a realization depicts that a lack of self-belief inspires a reduction in motivation and a desire to assume the top spots in leadership. S. R. Madsen (2012) asserted that it is only until women start to believe that they are capable of holding the top management positions in institutions that they will be able to put an end to self-limiting behavior. Such an approach will then pave the way for a higher level of self-efficacy. The act of building self-efficacy, or confidence, in a particular area refers to the beliefs individuals hold about their ability to perform a particular behavior or be successful in a task.

The ability to build self-efficacy is important for women who aspire to or hold leadership positions. It is also particularly relevant for women in other high-level

capacities as they follow their career paths. Creators of social cognitive theory posited that factors such as direct experience, verbal persuasion, and affective states like emotional arousal determine an individual's level of self-efficacy. Male-dominated work environments in which men have a higher proportion of the decision-making functions affect the self-efficacy of women who may not have had the same depth of experience as male leaders. The depth of experience helps improve self-efficacy, because experience creates confidence in the ability to complete a task appropriately. Sometimes the only leadership experience some women have is observing women leaders in leadership positions; thus, they lack experience, which can lead to low self-efficacy (S. R. Madsen, 2012).

Self-efficacy is changeable under certain conditions, and successes experienced in a specific field will have a significant impact on perceived effectiveness (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2007). Thus, that as women continue to fulfill challenging tasks successfully, their confidence, and subsequently their self-efficacy, continues to grow. When women who initially record low-self-efficacy levels receive challenging tasks to manage, the impact to their self-confidence and self-efficacy levels depends on their success on the assigned task (Billing, 2011). When successful, the women's self-efficacy level increases significantly, which then leads to a new perspective on this issue because success gives individuals confidence that they can complete a task successfully. Failure can create self-doubt, which at times leads some individuals to avoid tasks they had previously failed. Women working in colleges should receive more challenging tasks if they are to gain the experience needed to enhance the self-efficacy necessary for success

in the top leadership positions. Such a perspective emphasizes strategies that build self-efficacy in management endeavors. In addition, self-efficacy can contribute to building the professional identity of leaders and provide the ability for them to feel safe in their leadership roles. Such experiences then become important aspects of their professional identity.

## **Literature Review**

### **Lack of Leadership Identity**

Women tend to have negative perceptions about their own ability to lead (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004; Tan, 2008). In a wider context, women tend to have a negative perception of other women in leadership positions because some question the leadership capabilities of women. Such negative perceptions tend to hold even in reference to their abilities. Women's negative perceptions of their own abilities then translate to a negative construction of professional identity as a leader, which can highlight the tendency of women to internalize gender stereotypes. These stereotypes have the effect of making women feel inferior to their male counterparts in the work environment and manifest in top management positions. Therefore, women are less likely to consider themselves as competent leaders, as there is a common belief that men are natural leaders while women are followers (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Women recognize challenges that prevent them from assuming leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Women internalize perceived incapability to the extent that they have a poor cultural fit in male-dominated cultures. The focus of the lack-of-fit

approach is on the attitudes of self-limiting women, which is the primary finding in this subsection. Thus, the interpretation of the self-assessment on gender and leadership alignment, which is often in more traditionally masculine terms, leads to a negative self-evaluation of women in their careers (Eagly & Carli, 2003). As women may have a negative perception of their capabilities, they may be less likely to pursue their quest for top leadership positions.

### **Glass Ceiling**

The concept of the glass ceiling is often used to describe the obstacles and barriers to women's endeavors in the upper levels of organizations because it denotes a series of obstacles that affect women and minorities as they try to improve their employment situation (Johns, 2013; C. L. Williams, 2013). Barriers women face make it hard for them to advance up the management hierarchy. Despite efforts from the leaders of many organizations to change the trend, mobility to executive ranks for women is still slow (Brighton, Buckalew, Konstantinopoulos, Russell, & El-Sherbini, 2012; Friedman, 2013; McKinsey & Company, 2012; Peters & Kabacoff, 2013). Lyness and Thompson (2000) were curious whether male and female managers followed similar paths to climb the career ladder and established that women face greater obstacles than men and need different strategies than men to succeed in their careers. To be effective leaders, women must overcome the challenge of gender-stereotyping and pressure performance (Adams & Funk, 2012; Appelbaum, Shapiro, Didus, Luongo, & Paz, 2013; Skelly & Johnson, 2011).

Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vannemen (2001) contended that the concept of the glass ceiling is increasingly becoming a generic form of racial and gender inequality. Cotter conceded that the point of immobility can occur in all professions, but if jobs have the same limits at all levels of the professional hierarchy, then this fits the description of racial or gender inequality, not a glass ceiling. The most effective way to define glass ceiling is when discrimination increases in severity with the movement up the occupational hierarchy (Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, & Haslam, 2014; Dobeles, Rundle-Thiele, & Kopanidis, 2014; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2007; P. Smith, Crittenden, & Caputi, 2012).

To ascertain the existence of a glass ceiling, there must be four key criteria (Cotter et al., 2001). When the four criteria exist in the workplace, women experience barriers to advancements in their career. The first criterion is the existence of a gender difference in the workplace not attributable to a definite cause. As such, there is a disparity in employment is not attributable to any institutional policy. The second criterion is the presence of disparities in income of the different genders (Karamessini & Rubery, 2013). In such cases, the incidence of disparity is greater with advancement up the career ladder. It also tends to be lower with a lower employment levels. This disparity in income is such researchers cannot explain it using any other rule or tenet in the workplace (Cotter et al., 2001). The third criterion is that the proportions of gender in higher levels of management are not fair. The fourth criterion is when an individual experiences actual forms of gender-based discrimination in the workplace. When this criterion is met, then a glass ceiling exists. The effect of a glass ceiling is that it inhibits

the progression of women up the career ladder simply because they are female and not because they do not have the ability to manage jobs in the higher levels of leadership (Cotter et al., 2001; Isbell, Young, & Harcourt, 2012; R. A. Smith, 2012). Thus, the term refers to the barriers to entry in proposed higher management positions.

Few researchers have conducted field studies to examine whether the decisions of actual promotion into management positions reflect the phenomenon of the glass ceiling (Cook & Glass, 2014a; Johns, 2013; J. Williams, 2000). In summary, the glass ceiling refers to both the visible and the invisible barriers that separate the level of advancement of the technical and organizational hierarchy for women. Specifically, women who believe that the phenomenon of a glass ceiling works to their disadvantage are less likely to seek promotions than are men with the same qualifications. Thus, to avoid the glass ceiling, organizational leaders ought to take into account the perceptions of their female employees regarding the process of making decisions for promotion. A negative perception on the promotion decision-making process has the effect of perpetuating the existence of a glass ceiling. A positive perception has the effect of reducing the perpetuation of the concept of glass ceiling (R. A. Smith, 2012; J. Williams, 2000).

### **Women Career and Family Balance**

Establishing a balance between work and family life can be a problem to career advancements for women (Legault & Chasserio, 2013; Moen, 2011). Not addressing this issue can contribute to the perpetuation of the glass ceiling phenomenon. Women are usually the primary caregivers for children and for the elderly (Adkins, Samaras, Gilfillan, & McWee, 2013; Bashevkin, 2013). Assumptions are that women should be

available to undertake their work duties effectively, and they ought to work without interference from family responsibilities (Wattis, Standing, & Yerkes, 2013). Some organizations cannot offer life work programs or support obligations from outside the organizational setting, which may hinder women who work in high-level positions (Laufer, 2004).

As a plausible solution to the work life family challenges that women encounter, some women may choose to work fewer hours than men and dedicate this extra time to their families. Women have a tendency to measure professional success differently than men, which has the effect of putting them at a disadvantage with regard to climbing the corporate ladder. Pregnancy reduces the chances of promotion for women in the workplace given the perception of increased responsibilities accompanying childbearing (Lord & Brown, 2004). Given the declining potential for promotion, some women opt to leave their careers prematurely to raise children. The diminishing potential for promotion for women is attributed to the maternal instincts of mothers to care for and protect their newborn rather than to receive a promotion within the organization. Some employers may be reluctant to promote women because they fear that women will make their families the first choice instead of the organization (Stead & Elliott, 2009).

Nevertheless, leaders in a growing number of companies recognize that women need time and have sought to motivate their women employees. The leaders of such companies have promoted the equality of women in the corporate world. The potential for women to choose their family over their work has played a large part in the existence of a glass ceiling. Leaders of higher education institutions do not always

appreciate the critical roles women play in institutional management, yet their contributions in the workplace breed diversity and thus play a key role in the success of institutions (Dezso & Ross, 2011; Eagly & Johannesen, 2007).

Many women who occupy leadership positions may not feel properly prepared for such positions. Women tend to internalize the risk of professional conflict and thus may have a difficult time balancing between their ambition for professional development and the need for a family life. In addition, women may feel their personal skills and talents are not sufficient for professional roles, but are able to meet the demands of work and family life simultaneously. There is a notion that women do not have concerns about the need to advance up the hierarchy of management positions because of the difficulty of reconciling their responsibilities. Such understandings are facing increasing challenges (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Eagly & Johannesen, 2007; S. R. Madsen, 2012).

Women have the need to succeed in their professions while balancing a family life. Some researchers do not agree that having children is a significant determinant in the deterrence of women seeking leadership positions and advancing up the corporate ladder (Hall, 2012; Mason, Wolfinger, & Goulden, 2013). However, the age of dependent children at the time of promotion and part-time working hours could affect career progression (McIntosh, McQuaid, Munro, & Alai, 2012). A developing tendency for the inculcation of family-based initiatives into institutional management has paved the way for women to move up within organizations (Hall, 2012). These initiatives are often child care programs, maternity leave arrangements, or part-time work. Such programs have the capacity to enable women to reconcile their family needs with the needs of their jobs



(Hall, 2012). Women who use the family friendly practices of their organizations combined with promotional practices and diversity practices can find success in reaching upper-level leadership positions (Levine, 2010).

### **Women, Family and Geographical Mobility**

Three mental behaviors block the career progression of women executives. These mental behaviors are feelings of victimization, limiting personal beliefs, and lack of sufficient determination (Tan, 2008). Laufer (2004) asserted that some professional women are unable to exploit the right opportunities for career development because of the travel involved in their work. For all industries, occasional business trips could be an obstacle for women who have the desire and accompanying qualifications to become leaders. One of the conditions for advancing employees up the management hierarchy is their degree of mobility.

Leaders who transfer their female employees less frequently than their male counterparts can slow progress and income in the women's career. Such discriminatory practices are common in the corporate world (Billing, 2011). Some women executives would not consider the option of a transfer if provided the opportunity. Generally, women are less flexible regarding geographical mobility than their male counterparts (Elacqua, Beehr, Hansen, & Webster, 2009). The need to follow their spouses geographically increases the difficulty of women moving up the hierarchy of institutional leadership. Loyalty to professional ambitions affects traditional roles in the family. Professional mobility has been at the mercy of the level of allegiance that women give their partners and their family (Stead & Elliott, 2009). The degree of professional mobility is declining.

As a result, women may not have the ability as leaders to properly adapt to the demands of the corporate world (Hall, 2012).

Women's ability to have professional mobility is critical given that geographical mobility is not a challenge for men in most cases. Women seem to be more willing to quit their jobs and move to help their spouses to fulfill their professional obligations. Women in the corporate hierarchy are more likely to leave their institutions to meet their family responsibilities than to have a stronger interest in career progression (Stead & Elliott, 2009).

Conversely, Merignac and Falcoz (2000) noted that a company's proposed support may influence the acceptance or rejection of mobility by a partner, in this case a woman. Among dual-career couples, the mobility of a woman may be a problem for her husband. As such, organizational leaders included the aspect of mobility within job conditions (Kauffman & Coutu, 2009). Institutional leaders then appoint the work in a specific location to those individuals who showed no objection to travelling. Finding people who do not have issues with traveling may limit the positions women can fill. Organizational leaders have yet to solve the problem. Geographical mobility continues to play a significant role in the potential for advancement up the management hierarchy (Stead & Elliott, 2009).

Geographical mobility is an important factor for couples who will make decisions about their future. For a professional couple with dual careers, juggling work and family responsibilities has never been easy, but in a global economy where local employment opportunities may be more difficult to find, new challenges arise. Opportunities for

advancement often fall to men because they have more access than their female counterparts do to development opportunities such as mentoring and networking (Garza, & Eddy, 2008).

### **Women, Mentorship, and Networking**

Many researchers have devoted their research to studying mentoring. Mentoring is used by organizations to cultivate professionalism and instill loyalty among their employees (Hakim, 2006). Mentoring programs have been successful in many organizations. Mentoring is a resource that includes opportunities for both professional and personal development (Clarke, 2011; Hall, 2012), which is among the reasons why the development of mentoring relationships has increased in recent years and mentoring has become a common practice in organizations. Women have less access to mentoring opportunities than men. As such, they are incapable of fully exploiting the advantages of mentorship programs (Hall, 2012).

The number of women pursuing high-level positions within organizations has increased (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Although the number of women in the workplace has increased, there is still a need for gender equality in the workplace (Catalyst, 2014; Lips, 2013; Vanderbroeck, 2010). With regard to upward mobility, there is still some level of inequality between men and women (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Mandel, 2013). It is often difficult for women to become the best in their jobs in light of the many high-level jobs dominated by men. Therefore, women need someone to motivate and direct them to success in leadership positions. Effective mentors have the skills to meet this need and can accompany them and help them move through the ranks. Even after women

have advanced up the career ladder, they often face more obstacles than their male counterparts (Hall, 2012).

Women lag behind in creating and using networks (Groysberg & Connolly, 2013). Doing so could help them connect with policy makers, which could culminate into advancement opportunities in the workplace (Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008). For example, Bird (2011) established that women who occupy corporate senior positions reported an absence of informal networks with their male peers. Further, women tend to believe that there is little room for growth opportunities in the development of informal networks with men. Mentoring is one way women can gain increased access to the informal networks they have felt excluded from in organizations. Organizations whose leaders provide mentoring relationships to female leaders can help them advance in their careers. Organizational leaders can also provide sponsors. Sponsors are an extended mentoring relationship with mentees in an organization. They are individuals willing to take a risk on behalf of a mentee. Sponsors speak about their mentee's strengths in the mentee's absence, often believe in the mentee more than they believe in themselves, advocate for the mentee's next promotion, and pave the way for a promotion to occur (Hewlett & Marshal 2014; Johns, 2013; Women in Architecture, 2011).

Mentoring is a process that occurs in stages. According to Sluss and Ashforth (2007), the four phases of mentoring are the initial phase, culture phase, separation phase, and redefinition phase. The initial phase involves becoming acquainted with a mentor, and the culture phase involves becoming acquainted with the environment. In the secondary phases of mentoring, which are separation and redefinition, the two key

capabilities that serve as mentoring aspects are professional and psychosocial support (Leimon, Moscovici, & Goodier, 2011). The professional support of a mentoring relationship helps mentees with potential exposure and visibility in activities that suit the mentees' skill set. In addition, mentees receive potential sponsorship with career advancement, coaching to learn new skills, and challenging assignments. Psychosocial support enriches a mentee through motivation and approval from the mentor, the acceptance and confirmation of the mentee, and helping him or her recognize value in him or herself. Additionally, mentees receive counseling and friendship from mentors (Goodyear, 2006).

If a common goal exists, then mentoring may have many positive outcomes for mentees. The cumulative benefit of mentoring for mentors who offer support and advice for mentees is the opportunity for developing a profession and thus improving a career (Isaac, Behar-Horenstein, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2009). Thus, mentors gain access to protected resources and networks that help them to realize long-term success in their career. The leaders of more than one third of large enterprises in the country have developed mentoring programs. Most of these programs are formal mentoring programs to assist in the professional development of staff and the development and implementation of succession plans (Garza & Eddy, 2008).

Organizational leaders who provide their employees with key resources such as career development opportunities and management training experience increased retention. They also have effective ideas for succession planning and the inclusion of more women in high positions of leadership (Billing, 2011). Organizational leaders

should structure mentoring programs using ideas from their employees. Given the focus on employees, there will be a higher potential for the programs to meet the needs of employees. In the long term, companies whose leaders are not careful in reviewing the structure of their mentoring programs may prevent their employees from developing new skills and abilities (Elacqua et al., 2009).

Organizational leaders ought to define the correct processes to monitor performance, measure expected benefits, and ensure the adopted mentoring approach is tailor-made for the employees. Some techniques are effective in developing mentoring programs that meet these criteria. These techniques include conducting needs assessment, establishing clear program objectives, clearly outlining the key roles of the mentor and mentee, and developing clear procedures for monitoring and evaluating the relationship (Leimon et al., 2011). Applying this technique will ensure the likelihood of a staff prepared for mentoring.

Because of the numerous successes that mentoring has had, it has become a common approach in organizations. The use of mentoring as a resource for women and minorities to advance their careers and break the glass ceiling has become an effective approach (Thomson, Graham, & Lloyd, 2008). In appreciation of the capacity-enhancing capability of mentorship programs, women have the capability to break and surmount the glass ceiling. Such a realization is among the core reasons why there is a need for incorporating mentorship programs in the management of institutions. If the mentoring experience will also serve as a means for developing individuals over time, it is critical that it meet the needs for developing the staff (Isaac et al., 2009).

The lack of empirical research on effective technical mentoring means that there is a risk that an adopted mentoring approach will be ineffective in the long run (Caldwell, Embry, & Padgett, 2008). Ineffectiveness refers to the inability to meet the predetermined goals of a mentorship program. Some elements have the effect of improving the probability that the adopted mentorship approach will be ineffective, including a lack of interest in mentoring, poor effort, lack of commitment, and limited respect between the mentor and the protégé (Billing, 2011). Such negative effects can hinder the protégé's career development. Mentoring must depend on the existence of an engaged relationship between a mentor and a protégé. Thus, the mentee will ascertain the effectiveness of a mentorship program to a certain degree.

One of the main obstacles limiting women when they try to climb the career ladder is access to the support and mentoring that are inefficient compared to what is available to their male colleagues. As a result of this limited experience with mentoring, women face difficulties and obstacles in advancing up the career ladder. As noted herein, career obstacles are more evident for women than for men. With the aid of mentoring, women can overcome many barriers to their career advancement ambitions. Mentoring is a powerful tool for professional development and can help to overcome obstacles (Caldwell et al., 2008). Despite the achievements and successes related to mentoring, some factors still limit the opportunities for women.

Some individuals who advance in their careers have had some form of mentoring experience. Women, however, are slow to seek out mentors because they are often not comfortable asking for help or have limited access to mentors (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004).

The role of mentoring serves to support participants in building their professional identity and assisting them in refining their leadership approach. As such, it aids participants in differentiating between their own self-knowledge and aspects of their self at work, which is their professional identity.

### **Women's Career Paths**

Many women decide to forgo their career aspirations to focus on child rearing, while other women may desire to work outside the home full time. Not all women share the same understanding of the traditional role of motherhood. The choices that women make regarding their career versus their family life become a difficult balance, especially given the pressures for women to choose one path over another (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004). A change of attitudes in women has become evident in the contemporary generation of college female students. It was common in the past generations for women to endeavor not to meet the needs of their traditional roles. However, in contemporary society, there has been a shift in adopted mind-sets regarding the need to satisfy the traditional roles of women. Women in colleges have shown that they are more susceptible to putting aside their professional endeavors to satisfy their traditional roles (Kellerman, & Rhode, 2007).

The tendency of women staying at home and being the stay-at-home partner is growing. An increasing number of women intend to work part time and attend to their families' needs. Some women expect their husbands to stay at home with their children while they pursue their careers. An increasing number of women have noted that either they or their husbands will stay at home (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004). The underlying



principle is that one of them has to stay home. The one who has the longest career will probably be the one to pursue that career (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004).

Women who decide to stay home instead of enter the workforce could mean that less qualified women are in the workforce for society. The notion that many young women are considering withdrawing from their high-power careers presents a dilemma. When factoring in the steps and achievements in the promotion of equity in the workplace made thus far, it is possible to understand the gravity of the situation in its entirety. Administrators have worked so hard to open academics and other opportunities for women (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004), but some women choose their families first rather than their careers. Therefore, the leaders of some companies have established programs to accommodate women and their familial responsibilities (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

Even though there is support in the workplace for women, some women feel they need to forego their careers to focus on their families (Phelan et al., 2008). Researchers at the U.S. Department of Labor reported in 2009 that 122 million women over the age 16 comprised the labor force in the United States (Lang, 2010). Women meet the social and psychological needs of the family, while men meet the economic needs. This choice by women represents what women did in previous generations on behalf of their families (Lester, 2008). Equality in the workplace is paramount so that women seek advancement. As organizational leaders have addressed the opportunities for more women in leadership positions, the priorities of women's experiences are shifting towards the family. If and when this shift is left to perpetuate, the level of equality witnessed in the corridors of leadership will experience a downturn (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

The shift is not necessarily a problem that women created, but it is a result of the lack of adequate training on the mechanism of generating a balance between professional life and personal life. Institutions of learning ought to embrace the need for programs that equip women with the necessary tools for fostering this balance. Such an absence creates an enabling environment for women to give higher precedence to meeting their traditional roles compared to advancing their careers (Lester, 2008). Diversity is important, and the absence of women in positions of leadership might mean that organizational leaders will find it hard to realize their potential.

### **Women and Leadership**

The price set in taking up positions traditionally characterized by male leadership is often too high to pay. The focus on enhancing the capabilities of women remains important. The search for authentic ways of being in a leadership role in a culture that favors male leadership continues to need attention for women (Piterman, 2008). Success in their leadership positions for women means that they need to adopt authentic leadership in their approach to organizational leadership. The realization that this model of leadership has the capacity to be successful even in adverse conditions motivates such an approach. Central to this model is the professional identity of the people who assume the leadership roles. Authentic leaders with a deep sense of the definition are clear about their values and beliefs and therefore are able to advance themselves to management positions over time (Avolio & Gardner 2005).

To be successful in leadership positions, women need to exhibit genuineness. Self-authenticity is a critical element of the success as leaders, and women without this

element cannot expect to be successful in leadership endeavors. The presence of self-authenticity aids in creating a professional identity. It is not until women develop self-authenticity that they will be able to realize their potential. Thus, the most potent leadership approach that they employ is authentic leadership. Women have yet to appreciate the potency of this approach in mitigating their success with regard to leadership (Piterman, 2008). Although women may plan and manage their careers and a leadership style that is different from men, these decisions do not have to affect their career progression (Cody & Spiller, 2013; Manfredi, 2010; Vinkenburg, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011). Because women have impressive leadership skills that correlate with organizational factors such as retaining talent, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and profitability, their career progress can be favorable (Zenger & Folkman, 2012).

The interactive and interpersonal aspects of mentoring entail helping women explore aspects of their career identity that will enable them to have an authentic approach to leadership. As such, mentoring is one of the best ways that women can gain the requisite skills to develop authentic leadership, which is an effective model for success. Women need to embrace this approach for their leadership endeavors to be successful. The key is that a flawed leadership approach will mean that women will be unable to exploit the leadership opportunities they have. Poor performance in small leadership tasks will mean that the chances to receive a higher level of leadership tasks will diminish (Cook & Glass, 2014b; Hakim, 2006). The difference in leadership style for women does not have to be a barrier, as women have the ability to reach higher level

positions using the skills and abilities they possess, such as being people centered and authentic in their interactions with employees.

### **Barriers to Women's Development as a Leader**

The belief system women have adopted regarding the assumed identity of leaders is a core determinant of how women view their capacities as leaders. In most cultures, individuals associate the role of leadership with masculinity. Members of societies have long understood leaders to be decisive, assertive, and independent. In contrast, people consider women to be friendly, altruistic, and caring, and therefore lacking the necessary qualities to succeed in leadership positions (Phelan et al., 2008). These characteristics often found in women are also critical leadership traits.

Culture defines the role of an individual in society. In many cultures, women assume the second position after men. Many women have leadership potential; however, society has perceived them as lacking the requisite skills to be effective leaders. The mismatch between women's skills and the qualities necessary in leadership roles results in fewer management positions available to women (Green, 2008). As a result, women are unable to access their fair share of leadership positions. Moreover, one impediment, and probably the most potent, is the biased understanding of the qualities of leadership that women lack. Society then may perpetuate the notion that women lack the requisite capacities to become effective leaders (Katila & Eriksson, 2013). Some women have strived to prove society wrong, as contemporary society has had a number of revolutionary female leaders. There is still room for more women to assume leadership

positions (Green, 2008; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2013; Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013; Stainback, Kleiner, & Skaggs, 2015).

Stereotyping of women is one of the elements that perpetuates women's inability to take up leadership positions (Baker, 2014; Berkery, Morley, & Tiernan, 2013; Greenlee, 2014; Morley, 2013; Rudman & Phelan, 2015). Members of society have created limits for women regarding the ways they act and behave. Within these confines, women can be mediocre in leadership positions. Societal mentality is one of the core obstructions for the development of women in their leadership capabilities (Thomson et al., 2008).

Other obstructions exist to the development of women's leadership identity. These obstructions, such as gender stereotypes associated with women regarding qualities such as caring, kind, friendly, or soft-spoken, are not as powerful as societal perceptions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010; Sinclair, 2013; Wajcman, 2013). Another gender stereotype women must work to overcome is the difference in personality types of women who exhibit enabling behaviors versus their male counterparts who exhibit challenging behaviors (Brandt & Laiho, 2013). Furthermore, women who are unable to exhibit the political skill of being liked will find it difficult, based upon these societal perceptions, to have high levels of promotability in the organization, and thus they must be cognizant of their behavior (Shaughnessy, Treadway, Breland, Williams, & Brouer, 2011). Developing political skill has a close link to positive networking in the workplace, as well as emotional intelligence; thus, it is critical from a societal viewpoint for women to exhibit and employ political savvy and the characteristics of an emotional quotient in the

organization (Meisler, 2014; Oerder, Blickle, & Summers, 2014). Even if organizational leaders resolve these barriers but do not address societal perceptions, it is highly likely that women would still be unable to effectively and unanimously develop a leadership identity (Eagly, & Carli, 2007).

### **Few Role Models for Women**

Compared to their male counterparts, aspiring female executives have less social support for learning from credible leaders. People learn new roles in identifying role models, experimenting with temporary identities, and evaluating their experiences against internal and external standards of the organization (Stead & Elliott, 2009), but a lack of a significant number of women in leadership positions means that young women have few role models whose styles are in line and consistent with their self-concept (Jackson, 2001). When factoring race and other types of diversity in women into the equation, the extent of limited role models becomes apparent. There exists a bias that men have more opportunity than women given that they have plentiful role models to follow (Garza & Eddy, 2008).

Moreover, because women have smaller margins for error during the learning process, they may feel less inclined to take risks and thus limit their ability to exploit their potential (Jackson, 2001). Women underrepresented in leadership positions may be indicative of the viewpoint that women are a liability. In the position of leadership, women remain underrepresented. As such, older women in top leadership positions are rare, which means that young women have few older women to whom they could look up

to as role models. Social dynamics create a lack of opportunity for few role models for young women (Thomson et al., 2008).

A study to identify development among young professionals who transition to senior positions showed how these dynamics are at play for women who aspire to top leadership positions in institutions (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). For men, the basis of the role transition is imitation strategies, experimenting with strategies, and behaviors used in a wide range of styles mostly by other men. When men express aggressive behavior they are often viewed as credible and their behaviors are viewed as appropriate to the requirements of their business, even if other colleagues or leaders consider these behaviors abnormal. These are the result of the plentiful role models men can learn from, whereas women tend to use self-educated strategies during their transition (Phelan et al., 2008).

Women strive to appear modest and more neutral in an effort to avoid disapproval. For example, women have sought to prove their competence in the long term by demonstrating technical proficiency to prove their capabilities. Women have asserted that their adopted strategies are more authentic than are those adopted by their male counterparts and are thus a source of pride (Green, 2008). The lack of adequate role models has compelled women to develop their own unique approaches to leadership, but these approaches are often inadequate given that no one has tried or tested them. A lack of role models thereby undermines the quality of leadership that women can practice (Green, 2008). This lack of role models may also limit the motivation for young women to seek positions of leadership in various institutions.

### **Gendered Career Paths and Gendered Work**

The development of most organizational structures and working methods took place when women had only a small presence in the labor market. As such, organizational characteristics reflect the lives of people and situations to the extent that there is no framework for the equal treatment of women (Phelan et al., 2008).

Organizational leaders can support women taking jobs traditionally preserved for male workers. The traditional understanding of leadership is that men are more suitable for leadership. Therefore, women tend to work better behind the scenes (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Society perceives men as a better fit for leadership roles in part because the paths to these roles were for men, which then confirm the belief that men are better leaders than their female counterparts (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

### **Women's Lack of Access to Networks and Sponsors**

Informal networks can shape careers and regulate access to employment by channeling the flow of information and references. Networks can also promote influence and develop reputations. The advice, support, and protection provided within a network are important and can increase the likelihood of speed of promotion (Townsend & Twombly, 2006). Therefore, the composition of an informal network can open doors to opportunities for leadership. From this, women can have the ability to recognize and identify the structure and characteristics of credible leaders within a mentoring system.

In situations where men dominate women in positions of power, there is a tendency for creating a small pool of high-status contacts of the same sex. Such a mix creates less powerful networks characterized with only a few high-status men (Lester,



2008). A quality and powerful network should include people of different statuses and include both genders. Women have pointed out that the lack of access to influential colleagues with whom to create powerful networks is a major obstacle for promotion (Green, 2008; Pyke, 2013). In addition, networking relationships comprised of only women tend to have less effect than network connections with men (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Women whose mentors are men are more likely to receive a promotion than are women whose mentors are women (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

In general, men are powerful and can support high-status development opportunities for their male subordinates. Promotion of these male subordinates occurs as a result of the networks they have created with their male counterparts. In contrast, women's networks result in fewer opportunities for leadership and therefore have a reduced potential for promotion to leadership positions. These networks have a reduced effect by culminating in less recognition and support than male networks (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Women and men also use their networks differently. Whereas men's networks consist mostly of men and tend to be multipurpose, women's networks tend to develop functionally. The purpose of women's networks is to obtain access to men who may prove instrumental in their progress and create friendships; they are usually social support networks (Lord & Brown, 2004). Men in men's networks focus on resources, whereas networks for women tend to be at a personal level (Billing, 2011). The differences between women's and men's networks may also come from reservations among women of engaging in the instrumental activities that are necessary to build strong networks.

Women fear that these activities are not instrumental and are not genuinely displayed (Lord & Brown, 2004).

### **Women Leaders' Heightened Visibility**

Some women rise into leadership positions, despite the challenges, structural barriers, and cultural stereotypes that continue to shape their development and management experience. In particular, female CEOs have provided leadership that reduces firms' risk profile (Elsaid & Ursel, 2011; Sandberg, 2013; Thiruvadi & Huang, 2011). As women move up the hierarchy, they have become more visible and appear to be more in control compared to earlier time (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). Women have become more visible in their leadership positions. Such visibility has culminated from the evolving and enabling environment for the success of women in leadership positions (Jennings & Brush, 2013). With further analysis of women's new ability to lead despite the significant challenges, women may become more risk averse, more detail oriented, less prone to micromanagement, and in tune with their broader goal as leader (Weyer, 2007).

Cultural attitudes toward women in authority are the core instigator of problems with women leaders. Women struggle to fit in the masculine world of influence because many people are not ready for women leaders, and thus leaders exclude women from information, which results in their contributions having less value. Other women leaders strive to create a perfect balance between their feminine qualities and their leadership qualities. Leaders must shift their attitudes and behaviors toward women leading in executive-level positions. Yet, women must also adapt by increasing their visibility to

lead and exhibiting the self-determination to rise to the top (Sandler, 2014). For example, women do not self-promote as often as men in the workplace and are more modest in their achievements than males (Budworth & Mann, 2010). Although each leader may focus on self-preservation and self-image, increased visibility and identity contradictions can be a specific trigger for women in leadership positions (Billing, 2011). Additionally, women who have the ability to exhibit courage in leadership and overcome the self-defeating thoughts and structural biases of the workplace find themselves in a position to lead, grow, and become effective leaders (Treasurer, Adelman, & Cohn, 2013).

### **The Advancement of Women**

Women possess skill sets that often help them to move into leadership roles with more ease than men. For example, intuition, which is the ability to pick up on patterns and questions with sensitivity and then use that information to make decisions about future patterns with action, is innate to women (Gianni, 2001). It is difficult to measure intuition in the workplace quantitatively, but it has led to women having the ability to see the big picture of the organization and create visions for the organization to bring change to fruition. Women are able to make the appropriate connections, notice patterns, make analogies, and react to a situation based on that data (Gianni, 2001). Leaders of community colleges who recognize this ability in women should examine women as leaders and allow them to be a part of educational reform within the institution. Women establish credibility in these institutions by leading with commitment and by being visionaries and paradigm shift creators. Women as leaders must develop skills to form teams within their organizations and learn to develop and share vision, insights, and ideas

(Jones & Palmer, 2011; Morley, 2013). Open discussion and respect for the values and input of others must become standard (Gillian, 2001).

Community colleges are gendered organizations, with women occupying 29% of presidency positions of community colleges. The reasons women have risen to the highest level vary, but there are examples of women achieving high-level positions. In one study, six women shared how they became presidents of a community college by breaking down the gender stereotypes and the power structure and raising consciousness about women in leadership roles. While these women moved into presidency positions with a collaborative, open, and participatory style, they still faced a male-centered, hierarchical structure as they led others in the institutions. Several of the factors the women had to consider were their family lives, perceptions of being tough, handling situations like a male would, and breaking away from behaviors typically considered more female such as relying on relationships (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

In the information age, women have the ability to make a difference and instigate change in community colleges. Women who have the skills and abilities necessary, brought on by the need for brainpower and muscle power, have a unique opportunity to assist with the communication needs and the organizational needs within community colleges. Those more accustomed to a hierarchical structure, who are often men, will find it more difficult to remain flexible in rapidly changing organizations. Women, who have not traditionally benefited from a more industrial-age type of organization where the prevalence was on win-lose situations, guarding information, and a hostile environment,

have no natural affinity toward this type of organization and will be ready to manage and lead in a new way (Evan, 2001).

Several women have achieved the presidency rank through professorships. Gillet-Karam (2001) described how one president was a professor before seeking the role of president within a community college. Her role as a president involved managing a system based on tasks, knowledge of people, and knowledge of the goals and the outcomes of the college, which was different from her role as a professor who sought deeper meaning in all things. Gillet-Karam noted that the role of women will continue to change and that more women will be presidents of community colleges in the 21st century.

Women have achieved community college presidency positions through their ability to show care and concern, which is different from the path that men take. Joyce Tsunoda, the chancellor of the University of Hawaii's Community College system, is a Japanese American woman and the first Asian American woman to head a multicampus system. She balances her professional and personal life by fulfilling her commitment and obligation to herself. Her guiding framework of the L's is leading, listening, liking, learning, letting go, and the language of the lullaby (Gillet-Karam, 2001). Geraldine Evans, a pioneering leader and advocate for educational opportunity and access, served as the first female chancellor for the Minnesota Community College system. She went on to serve as state executive director for the Illinois Community College system and the chancellor of the San Jose Evergreen Community College system (University of Minnesota, 2013). Evans believed in the Chinese saying that women carry the world on

their backs. She used this imagery to imagine a world where women community college leaders change the future through their consensus management and caring processes (Gillet-Karam, 2001).

The late Gwendolyn Stephenson, president of Hillsborough Community College in Tampa and Sandra Sarantos-Giannini, vice president of education at Valencia Community College in Orlando, both ascended to the community college presidency. They obtained their positions while trying to develop a better understanding of the trends of leadership faced by women as they sought executive-level roles. Stephenson believed that women leaders in community colleges needed to understand the demographics of the workforce in terms of staffing, students, and funding for success in the role. Sarantos-Giannini shared the ideals of Evans, as she thought women needed to act as change agents guiding the higher education landscape as the new leadership challenge became apparent for women (Gillett-Karam, 2001).

Cathryn Addy, president of Tunix Community College in Connecticut, and Ruth Mercedes Smith of Highland Community College in Illinois, are two women who rose to the community college leadership ranks through academia. Those positions, serve as a launching point for some women who ascend to the presidency. Finally, Anne Mulder, interim president for Grand Rapids Community College, had several roles in academics prior to taking the interim role. Jeanne Guthrie, president of Northern Virginia Community College, looked forward to her time back in the classroom after her presidency (Gillet-Karam, 2001).

As seen from the examples provided, women have the ability to become a part of the community college in leadership positions. Community college leaders require the ability to communicate, be flexible, and be adaptable to change. Women who show care and concern in their leadership abilities are ready for the role based upon the need to do more with fewer resources and tightened budgets. In some cases, women are not pursuing the presidency role in particular (Santovec, 2010).

Brent Cedja conducted a study with women who had 48.5 years of combined chief academic officer experience, 59 years of full-time faculty experience, and 141 years of educational experience. In the study, women held 42% of chief academic officer positions and 53% of chief student officer positions in community colleges, yet only 28% of women were leading community colleges, which was a 1% decline from the year before the study (Santovec, 2010). The six women he talked with cited some personal reasons why they did not seek a senior leadership role and others stated they did not want the pressure of the presidency from a fund-raising, budgetary, and legislative constraint viewpoint. All the women agreed that they could do the job of a president, but the personal choice of what worked best for them was at the forefront of their decision of not pursuing the role. The best question is how leaders of the community college system make the role attractive for those who possess the appropriate skill set to lead a college and who may desire the opportunity to lead a community college. As more baby boomers retire, it will be important to identify how to garner interest in leadership roles so that students are able to benefit from the educators who are the heart and soul of many community colleges and who are women (Santovec, 2010).

### **Gap in the Literature**

The narrowing pipeline for women to occupy executive-level positions and above in community colleges is an opportunity to address. More research is necessary for women to understand how they can overcome the barriers to occupying these high-level positions. Specifically, the problem is the gender inequality in career mobility opportunities for women to occupy positions of vice president and above in community colleges in Southern California. Women have the ability to reach tenure at the faculty level on par with their male counterparts but the same is not true for executive-level positions. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to investigate the actions women can take to overcome the barriers to reach these positions that could reverse this trend effectively. The preceding information encapsulated both research questions that served as the basis for the study and provided insight to help with the problem.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

A number of wide-ranging factors prevent or demotivate women from seeking the top leadership positions in community colleges. With time, numerous women have been able to rise above the ranks and become effective leaders in their institutions, yet contemporary society is witnessing an increase in the number of women who wish to fulfill roles that are more traditional (Thomson et al., 2008). These women have chosen to give a higher regard to their family than to their need for professional success. Different programs that encourage women to seek leadership positions can counter all the other factors impeding the equal treatment of women in the workplace. The best question is what can change about the role of president to convince women that they have a place



in this role and are wanted to lead a community college. As more baby boomers retire, the question to answer is how to provide more training and help to women who desire the ability to lead community colleges.

Based on an understanding of the literature developed in Chapter 2, I now provide groundwork for the next chapter. Chapter 3 includes a description of the research method used to conduct the study. The chapter includes an exploration of the qualitative case study and the problem statement. I justify the choice to conduct a qualitative case study and explain why other approaches such as the phenomenological, narrative research, ethnographic research, or grounded theory designs were not the most preferred methods and designs for the study. Chapter 3 also includes my role as the researcher collecting the data through the interview process. Finally, participant selection and the protection and choices about data collection conclude the chapter.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In this qualitative study, I investigated how women who desire to assume leadership positions in U.S. community colleges can overcome barriers in reaching executive-level positions. The representation of women in high level positions in the California community college system is disproportionate to that of men (Eddy, 2012). Community colleges have provided women more professional opportunities than other institutional types (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Women occupy presidential positions (Townsend & Twombly, 2007), yet they have not achieved the same equity with men in terms of rank, salary, and tenure in executive positions (Burress & Zucca, 2004), yet they have achieved full-time and part-time faculty opportunities. Further, the rate at which women have risen to executive positions has slowed in the 21st century (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). According to the White House Project (2009), women account for only 23% of university presidents. Furthermore, the rate at which women have risen to executive positions has slowed since 2006 (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

The California regions of San Bernardino and Los Angeles County include several community colleges. The total enrollment in the community colleges in these regions is over 120,000, students (CITE). The average faculty to student ratio is 1:27 (CITE). The colleges have more than 1,200 full-time faculty and 3,700 part-time faculty (Inland Empire Business Journal, 2008). It is important to note the student enrollment and faculty representation in this geographic area because positions will be vacated in executive level roles over the next 10 years. These demographics represent a potential

pool of individuals who may be qualified to fill these executive roles should they have aspirations to have a career in education. The chapter contains a discussion of my research design and rationale, role as an observer and participant in the study, and ethical issues. I also discuss my methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. The chapter closes with a summary of the main points.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

I used a case study design for this research study. A researcher using this design can learn about a phenomenon by studying participants' behavior and setting at an in-depth level (Silverman, 2013). According to Yin (2014), Empirical inquiry examines a current experience within its real-life framework, particularly when the boundaries between the experience and the framework are not clear to the researcher. The research questions helped me to learn more about the challenges and obstacles the participants encountered in their executive roles. Case study researchers examine and investigate the natural setting of participants to see how they act within their environment (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the goal during the face-to face interview was to discover insights and learn about the roles the women occupied to facilitate answering the research questions.

The case study design was appropriate for this study because it helped to uncover the reasons that limit women's career progression in the colleges in Southern California. Case study design requires multiple data sources. This was important for the study in order for me to understand the factors that hinder women's career mobility in the higher education institutions, so I used the journaling, theory triangulation and interviews to conduct the study. Such a process enabled me to compare the experiences of women

professionals in various colleges and positions and clarify their prospects in career mobility. Researchers who conduct case studies can better understand diverse viewpoints and obtain in-depth knowledge on the subject matter. If respondents share quantitative data in a case study, the method still allows the researcher to analyze the data and remain objective with the study Yin, 2014).

Even though I believe that a case study design was appropriate for this study, various challenges could arise with a case study approach using surveys or interviews. First, case studies can lack the appropriate content, depending on the honesty of the respondents. Second, case studies include bias, especially in interviews because researchers choose the respondents. Furthermore, biases arise because the respondents could skew the information to project a certain impression that can be misleading. Third, case studies can be problematic during the generalization stage, and researchers may find it difficult to determine links and pieces of evidence. Fourth, case studies involving numerous interviewees can generate volumes of documents, which can be demanding to analyze (Yin, 2014). Despite these potential weaknesses, the case study can withstand the extensive four tests typical of empirical research. The four tests include checking the internal validity, construct validity, external validity, and reliability of the research (Yin, 2014). Internal validity threats hamper the researcher from drawing correct conclusions from the data. External validity happens when incorrect conclusions are made from the sample data. Construct validity measures what is claims it will measure. The reliability of research happens when the assessment tool produces consistent results (Yin, 2014).

## **Research Questions**

I sought to answer two research questions in the case study. RQ 1: What are some of the barriers to upward mobility the participants encountered in their positions? RQ2: How have the participants overcome the perceived barriers to upward mobility in their positions?

## **Case Study Design**

I chose a case study design because I wanted to develop an in-depth description or analysis of a case. My case study was a multisite study. Case studies are conducted more often in psychology, law, political science, and medicine (Yin, 2014). The goal is to study an event, a program, or an activity of more than one individual by using interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts (Yin, 2014). The type of case study depends on the size of the case because a researcher collects multiple data sources (Yin, 2014). In this research, a multisite study was appropriate because participants were located at several community colleges dispersed in a particular geographic area.

The case study was the best fit because I could study the issue of women's lack of leadership roles in community colleges in their place of employment. Over a six week period, I was able to collect in-depth data through multiple sources such as interviews, observations, documents, and reports. I was able to observe their expressions, mannerisms, and gestures, which helped me, explore the topic that may have been uncomfortable to talk about in interviews. The interviews took place face to face with women from six community colleges. I thematically analyzed interview data, and notes

from the journals. Finally, I explained and reported the meaning of my data interpretation and analysis from the case.

There were several reasons for choosing the case study method. First, the case study was a fit for the problem Yin (2014) stressed the importance of researchers clarifying their research questions in order to align them with their objectives. Yin (2014) noted that researchers must have a clear understanding of respondents' behaviors. Yin also stressed the importance of researchers maintaining a focus on the key issues in the case study. I needed the ability to explore the many facets of the study and determine the rationale for adopting the case study design.

The second major reason for using a case study design in this research was the appropriateness of the design for this kind of study. The participants were women executives from selected Southern California higher education institutions. Because the study involved only a few women, I determined that a case study design was most appropriate for obtaining more insight about the factors for women's limited career mobility in U.S. community colleges.

The third major reason for the case study design in this study was what Yin (2014) described as the flexibility of integrating different research processes. With the case study design, I was able to examine the diverse views of the women leaders and relate them to the key objectives. The capacity of the case study to capture factors contributing to the women leaders' career mobility provided a rich cognitive map where I could propose solutions going forward.

The fourth major reason for adopting the case study design was the fit with the philosophical views (Yin, 2014) of the work in colleges, especially within Southern California. I gained an in-depth understanding of the philosophical paradigms of the participants.

The fifth and final major reason for adopting the case study design was the ability for me to be part of the solution to the career mobility problems facing women in Southern California colleges. Such an opportunity further empowered me to design the direction for the study and complete investigations accordingly. Therefore, the case study enabled me to fit into the situation. I had a better understanding of the design and philosophical experiences of the participants and was able to view the career mobility issues in a unique manner.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Among my key roles as the researcher was to be an objective catalyst from data collection through to data analysis. My role was to identify and understand the experiences of the participants through the interviews. My role as the researcher therefore extended to the objective collection of data to avoid compromising the findings. My experiences came in handy during preparation and execution of the entire study process so that the sequence and approach of data analysis was simplified. Eventually, I had the opportunity to review the implications in career mobility among women in Southern California colleges. My role as the researcher extended further to primary and secondary documentation of the information and data by using codes or styles that would not cause complications at a later stage.

During the process of qualitative data gathering, my role as the researcher and observer extended to avoiding any issues of ethics violations that could jeopardize the integrity of the research, including its admissibility by the university. My role was to behave ethically. My role as the researcher was to listen objectively as the participants in the interviews responded with their truth regarding the purpose of the study and any events that pertained to their experiences. My role was to identify the location of the interviews and to acquire permission from the female executives to interview them to conduct the study from the relevant community colleges in Southern California.

I contacted 19 women via phone or e-mail from the eight selected colleges to garner an appropriate sample size for the study and to inquire about their availability to participate in an interview after my study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) with approval number 03-28-16-0311503. I targeted the number of interviewees and stuck with the number of interviews, as the process of acquiring approval from individual colleges could be lengthy. I observed any behaviors that could affect the interpretation of the interview findings and documented those behaviors. As the observer, I clarified issues of importance and identified the most appropriate interviewees and the duration of each session. I described the procedure and paid attention to the visual clues, audio recordings, and body language of the respondents. By the end of the interview, I thanked each participant for taking part in the study.

While studying and analyzing the data, I kept in mind any biases that I might hold. I adhered to a clear sequence of steps and kept an awareness of any behaviors that could have deviated from the expectations of the study objectives. Therefore, during the



process of data collection, I documented every interview through the use of audio tapes to ensure accuracy. I kept a written journal to back up the process of audio recording, in case there was a problem. Multiple types of documentation demonstrate researchers' understanding of the research process and implications of gathering inaccurate evidence (Laureate Education, 2010).

## **Study Design**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I gathered evidence and looked for any issues that might add value to the research questions. I organized the interview items in a sequence that showed ideology flow and built the case study in an appropriate manner. The order of interview items is important to gather as much evidence from the respondents as possible and to be objective (Yin, 2014). My selection of the interviewees was important for directing the purpose of the study. As the community colleges were geographically dispersed, I made an appointment to meet with the participants face to face in advance to save time and to optimize resources. The questions were open ended and aligned with the central research questions that supported the entire study.

I began the participant selection process by reviewing the research questions to determine the most suitable participants to take part in the study. During the purposive sampling process, I made some judgments on the items and on suitable participants without showing bias or subjectivity. I selected the participants based upon their positions within their organization and because they had 5 or more years of experience in their position, which was the only identifying information I used to select the participants. The

area around the Southern Californian colleges had a dense concentration of colleges to select from for the study. The timing for the case study was also an important consideration for selecting participants. I considered when the participants were most likely to be available at work to increase their probability of participating in the study.

I adhered to Walden institutional guidelines during the interview, which included carrying out enough inquiries until data saturation occurred. The eight colleges with one to two women interviewees were sufficient to provide this qualification for sample size. In gauging whether the participants met the set criteria, I began the study by reviewing literature sources to determine in which areas women in community colleges face career mobility problems. I had the privilege of discussing the issues with women in community colleges to gain preliminary insight into the gaps in leadership and career mobility in the Southern California colleges. During this period, I was able to gauge the depth of problems and the reasons for the women's sluggish career mobility within community college leadership. Although limiting the number of interviews to a maximum of 20 does not lower the significance of the issues surrounding women's career mobility, it is noteworthy that the findings are useful for policy and operational changes where necessary. The sample size was flexible. If there is an indication that some vital feedback is not forthcoming in a study, then the processing and analysis of the findings would begin again to determine the issue (Saunders et al., 2012).

In determining the relationship between saturation and sample size, I justified the use of the sample size in this study even if potential respondents did not agree to participate or refuse to answer some questions. I also had some supplementary or back-up

colleges to sample if anyone withdrew their participation. There was a potential community college population of about 40 for the study. However, because of the geographical dispersion of the participants, I worked with neighboring institutions to achieve the required number of participants. A bigger sample size would have stretched the resources, extended the time for gathering information, and extended the duration of study.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation was important because it led the entire process of gathering data from the human respondents and other sources according to the case study framework. There are specific merits attached to the interview method of gathering evidence in a study. The face-to-face interviews sessions provided me opportunities to engage the respondents; hence, I noted all nonverbal communication throughout my interactions with them (Fiegen, 2010). Additionally, through my engagement with participants, I was able to gain immediate feedback and clarity of any ambiguous information. This approach develops from the dialogic nature of interviews when a researcher interacts with respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

I developed interview questions for the participant's responses. I used a written checklist to ensure I adhered to all stages of data gathering, including the right participants and information. In the recorded interviews, I used a list of interview questions to guide the conversation so that I could pay maximum attention to the research participants. The interview questions are also in Appendix A. The interview questions used to help drive the conversation were as follows.

## Interview Questions

1. What qualities do you attribute to your ability to reach your current position?
2. What influence did having a mentor during your career have on your current role?
3. Describe what your work–life balance looks like and how you achieve it?
4. What are your top three suggestions for other women who desire executive-level roles in community colleges?
5. What are some reasons you personally see as to why women do not occupy more executive-level positions in the community college?
6. What kind of preparation is provided to women who seek an executive-level role within your college?
7. How important is geographic mobility for women who want to occupy an executive-level position within the community college?
8. What would you say are the most important leadership characteristics to possess to be considered for an executive-level role in the community college?
9. What barriers did you see and how did you overcome them to achieve your current position?
10. What types of stereotypes did you face as you ascended to your role?
11. How often is succession planning conducted within the college to identify top talent to fill the next executive role? What are some of the criteria to determine a likely candidate?

12. How important is having the role of faculty or another academician role when trying to promote to an executive-level position and why?

13. What are some of the differences you see in terms of women leading the college versus some of your male counterparts?

### **Procedures for Pilot Study**

Due to the limited number of responses, I was not able to conduct a pilot study before the study. However, I did seek IRB approval and received permission from the university to conduct a pilot study. I provided the interviewees consent forms to be sure they were willing to take part. Additionally, I explained the purpose of the research to the participants in advance to gain their maximum cooperation. For the face-to-face interviews, I ensured the environment was comfortable so that the respondents were able to provide me their full attention and not experience distractions during the process. My obligation was to gather, record, and present the findings in the most accurate manner.

I sent out e-mail invitations for participating in the pilot study via an interview questionnaire to increase turnaround times and to keep the schedule with the main study. However, potential participants did not respond in a timely manner, which limited the amount of time remaining for the research study. The pilot study was essential for organizational reasons and for ensuring I addressed any potential problem in time (Saunders et al., 2012). I conducted the interviews with no issues or concerns, although the pilot study was not successful.

### **Procedure for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The interview guide was the primary instrument for collecting data. Data collection took place at the site among the eight selected community colleges. I used a voice recorder to collect the data. The interviews took at most 1 hour and 30 minutes. I also used a notepad to record any observations not recordable in audio format.

### **Interview Administration, Follow-up, and Data Collection Approaches**

The sample consisted of 12 respondents taking part in the interviews. First, I selected eight community colleges to take part in the study, with the assumption that the outcomes would be representative of the rest of the Southern California community colleges. Second, I selected women who held positions of vice president or above from the eight colleges to participate in the interview process. Third, I vetted each of the participants to ensure she had at least 5 years' experience to ensure she would have sufficient experiences at work, would understand the organization's dynamics, and should have faced at least one opportunity to move up the career ladder.

After completing the face-to-face interview, I thanked the participants for their time and the information shared. Additionally, participants who shared their e-mail received an exit and a note of appreciation at the bottom of the invitation to participate. I informed participants that additional communication might be necessary when interpreting the data if any clarification was necessary. In that case, I would follow up via a telephone call or e-mail if the data were incomplete or unclear. In this study, the goal was to collect different types of information, including published documents, articles, journals, audio recordings, observations of the interviewee's behavior, and other physical

evidence (Saunders et al., 2012). Due to the wish to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, no one shared other documents.

The data collection instruments were sufficient, because each covered potential weaknesses or gaps, which was helpful in addressing the research questions. To organize data, I used NVivo software, which provided some advantages. Using the software to code data for the qualitative study provided the ability to store large amounts of data. I was able to compile articles, books, and resources and used the software program to store the data. NVivo can assist researchers in keeping track of external links and books that the researchers may need. I used NVivo to organize information and quickly categorize it without sifting through large stacks of paper which helped me to analyze data line by line to interpret their meaning.

I wrote notes during the interview and transcribed the evidence so that the respondents' quotes were accurate. I kept several pages of written notes in conjunction with the 1-hour audio interviews to address the research questions. I was careful to compile all the information to bring out the context of the community colleges and the plight of women's career mobility. Note taking covers any information gaps that arise from other instruments (Patton, 2002). I reviewed my notes from observations I made about the behavior of the participants to ensure accuracy in the analysis of their body language, tone, or gestures based upon the essence of what the participants stated.

### **Data Analysis**

As the study was largely qualitative, I adopted an inductive method of analysis. Furthermore, I analyzed all the interview results to provide direction for remedial action

whereby the college leaders can support women's career mobility. I analysed the interviews under thematic responses. Researchers streamline the literature review to address study objectives (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). I created reports regarding the sources and nodes to help provide a snapshot of the information on one page or more using NVivo. I used coding and matrix coding queries to deepen the analysis. For example, I compared themes across demographic data or participant groups. I created models using mapping to make connections between a topic in the research and the respondents. Lastly, I used folders to organize the data by category. The search folders feature further allows for the easy reference of a particular topic within folders to minimize time spent trying to retrieve information (Patton, 2002).

The interview analysis procedure was elaborate. The first step was for me to be conversant with the data I needed to understand the content of the interviews with the interviewees and document them appropriately. This step also required me to assess the quality of the data because it could be volumes of information with no value added to the study. At this stage, I was able to appreciate different challenges experienced during the data collection process.

The second step in the interview analysis was focused analysis. At this stage, I reviewed the purpose of the study and assessed the key research questions by noting them down again because they had the potential of changing the course of the data all the way to the findings. I reorganized the interview data according to the research questions. Additionally, I narrowed the individual interview respondents into groups from the same institutions.



The third step in the interview analysis involved categorizing the interview information. Unlike in the other methods where researchers assign numerical codes, the interview analysis involved the thematic conceptualization of ideas or phrasal queues that I could identify in the individual responses. I also organized the themes into recognizable patterns to try to understand them in clearer contexts. This step was time consuming but necessary. I looked for other subthemes to emerge during this stage (Folkestad, 2008).

The fourth stage was to note the patterns and link them within the categories and between the themes and subthemes. Depending on my requirements at this stage, the patterns within the category illustrated the interviewees' responses that were similar or dissimilar, which was helpful at the conclusion stage. I also observed the larger categories of information that probably shared connections and observed the value of information and their importance to the research questions. This relationship showed me whether two or more issues were consistent. The fifth stage of interpreting the themes and categories was to unify the findings. I began by listing the main themes highlighted in the previous stage, and I considered the key takeaway themes and lessons from the interview, which made the synthesis process simpler and enabled the categories to merge and provide information that was previously not apparent.

I created reports regarding the sources and nodes to help provide a snapshot of the information on one page or more using the NVivo software. I used coding and matrix coding queries to deepen the analysis. For example, I compared themes across demographic data or participant groups. I created models using mapping to make connections between a topic in the research and the respondents. Lastly, I created folders

to allow for easy organization of the data by category. The search folders feature allowed for easy reference of a particular topic within the folders to minimize time spent trying to retrieve information (Patton, 2002). Using these techniques helped me to identify any discrepant cases within the research so that I reviewed and analysed the data regarding the interview to tie the data back to the research questions.

### **Ethical Issues of Trustworthiness**

I considered various ethical issues of trustworthiness in my study. First, I achieved credibility in the findings with internal validity by triangulating the data in the literature review, coupled with the recorded observations of the participants. I achieved internal validity by ensuring data saturation according to the depth and rigor of questions posed in the interviews. I also ensured internal validity by presenting the study findings for peer review so that my peers could check any issues.

Second, I achieved transferability with regard to external validity by outlining the specific stages and strategies I adopted during the final study process. I outlined each process and its justification, as well as selection of the interview participants. In this case, I included only women participants in the interviews because the study scope indicated their plight in career mobility in community colleges in Southern California. Once I validated the participants for the study, the outcomes will be transferable to future peer research.

Third, I achieved issues of dependability of the study findings regarding the qualitative counterpart to reliability by note taking of the entire process of the research. During every chapter of the study, I kept notes and comments on my progress in a

journal. This process served as a backup for any decision regarding the study. I also triangulated the interviews with the literature and observations to provide qualitative dependability to the study finding.

Fourth, I achieved issues of intra- and intercoder reliability as applicable. I adopted in-depth interviews as part of the primary data collection strategies. Therefore, I achieved intracoder reliability when different interview respondents from the same community college mentioned a common factor as affecting their career mobility toward the top leadership positions.

I achieved confirmability within my research study by keeping track of my data in a journal. The journal entries served as a check and balance for decisions I made regarding the study, how I approached my methodology, data collection, and the themes that I discovered during the process. I was mindful to ensure my data reflected a detailed analysis of my process to ensure the validity of the study. I documented my experiences by staying aware of my own feelings and biases and of how those experiences could affect the research process.

I followed ethical procedures to conduct this study. First, I sought permission to carry out the study by filing the IRB application form with the university. This form included the necessary details about the nature of study, types of data I would collect, when processes would begin, and any relevant ethical limitations. The IRB application form included a request to access various community colleges where the women participants worked. Second, the IRB forms provided clarification regarding the human subjects involved in this study and precautions taken to ensure the participants would

have no health or life-threatening ailments, hence, they could provide the approval to carry out the study. I sought the prior permission of the individual respondents to record their feedback from the interview process. The ethical treatment of the audio material was coding the feedback so that the participants could maintain their wish of anonymity.

I observed ethical concerns from the participants associated with the data collection processes because they wanted to ensure that the information they shared would not raise any ethics violations. Therefore, I handled their feedback discreetly and utilized data only from respondents who consented to take part in the study. I did not coerce any respondents to take part in the study. I did not have to replace any participants, as none of them withdrew from the study.

The purpose of the interviews was to obtain the participants' descriptions and perceptions of their experiences reaching executive-level positions and the barriers they faced along the way. I sent an invitation to each participant to inform her that the individual interviews would last from 30 to 60 minutes. Each participant signed an informed consent form, and I informed the participants of the purpose and objectives of the study so they could make an informed decision about their participation. I assured the participants of the anonymity of the study and that the final report would not include any identifying information. My goal was to make sure they felt comfortable with the process and how I would represent them in the study. Therefore, we met in an environment comfortable to them, such as their office, a conference room, or a mutually agreed upon venue outside of the office when their schedule did not permit a face-to-face interaction at their community college.

I maintained the respondents' confidentiality when analyzing the data. In addition to maintaining an anonymous coding system, I took into consideration any other concerns from the respondents that they felt would compromise their identity and jeopardize career mobility at the respective institutions. Next, I ensured integrity in the storage of the data and the archival data because these could have contained confidential materials. Therefore, I destroyed any extraneous materials and sources to prevent them landing in intrusive hands. I also ensured I cited information appropriately to avoid any conflicts of interest with the authors.

### **Summary**

This chapter included a summary of the methodology used to study the career mobility factors affecting women in community colleges in Southern California. The chapter also included a discussion of the study design and its appropriateness for a study on women's career mobility. I indicated my role as the researcher included acting as an observer-participant. The chapter included a discussion on avoiding biases, ethical issues, or conflicts and their potential to taint the credibility of the study findings. This chapter included a description of the participant selection process that included the population, selection criteria, and steps followed to identify them. The chapter included the instrumentation used to collect data, including their adequacy for the study. I included a discussion on the instrumentation for published material used in this study, especially the literature sources, including validity and the context of application of the study. I reviewed the instrumentation I developed to ensure its sufficiency to address the research objectives. This chapter included the process for IRB approvals, selection of participants,

data management, and the triangulated data analysis method. The chapter also included a discussion of issues of trustworthiness based on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, I presented the ethical procedures observed while conducting this study. Chapter 4 will include a presentation of the findings and a discussion of the findings related to the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the gap that exists in knowledge of how women who have succeeded in attaining positions of vice president and above in community colleges are able to attain those positions. The purpose of this chapter is to report the study findings and results. The chapter includes an overview of my study setting, participant demographics, and data collection analysis procedures. I also present evidence of trustworthiness and key study results. Using data that I collected, I was able to answer my two research questions to my satisfaction. The first research question was as follows: How have the participants overcome perceived barriers to upward mobility in their positions? The second research question was the following: How have participants overcome perceived barriers to upward mobility in their positions?

### **Pilot Study**

Due to the time sensitive nature of the study and financial constraints, a pilot study was not conducted. There were 19 potential participants to select from in the geographic area of the study; however I was unable to contact six of them to participate in the study. I was able to contact 13 of the remaining potential participants and 12 agreed to conduct interviews for the study. Based on this low response rate, I opted not to conduct a pilot study. Having a minimum of 12 participants was essential to conduct the study in order to ensure I had enough participants to meet data saturation.

### **Setting**

The setting for 10 of the participants was consistent, as the interviews took place in their workplace offices. Two of the interviews were held at other locations as a

convenience to the participant. Based upon my observations, the environments were comfortable for the participants and I reminded them that they could speak openly and candidly. One interview took place in a restaurant, as the participant offered to meet me at a place that was halfway from both of our locations. She was in the area for an event supporting her spouse and wished to speak in a more relaxed environment. She was reflective and spoke at length during her interview regarding her experiences. One participant was an interim vice president and was waiting for a decision on her role on the day of the interview. In addition, she was scheduled to go on vacation the day of our interview. Yet, I found her forthcoming and not rushed in her answers and responded as if she already had the permanent position. Two interviews took place during a session break, and the interviewees appeared to be at ease and willing to spend additional time during the interview process. One interview took place at the home of the participant's mother, as the distance to meet her was quite far and that location was close to the researcher's workplace. The participant was assisting her mother with a home project, yet once she sat down to interview, she engaged with me and focused on the interview questions. Each of the 12 interviews took place according to my plans. I do not believe that the environmental and other factors I have described interfered with my research results.

### **Demographics**

The participants were all women aged 38 years to 60 and older. One participant was under 40 and the remaining 11 were middle-aged. The women were affiliated, at the time of the study, with eight Southern California community colleges. Each participant



earned an income of over \$100,000 per year as they were all vice presidents ( $n = 11$ ) or presidents ( $n = 1$ ). Ten participants were married, and one was engaged to be married. Eleven participants had children. Six participants held doctoral degrees; the remaining participants had completed postgraduate work in at least one area of specialization. The participants each had a minimum of 5 years' experience working in the Southern California community college system, with some participants having more than 30 years' experience. All participants had held other positions in the community college system, as either a dean or another administrative position, before ascending to their current role.

### **Data Collection**

After receiving approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board in 2016, I sent e-mail invitations to 17 potential participants, and 12 indicated that they wanted to participate in the case study. Seven participants responded affirmatively after one email while five participants responded affirmatively after several contacts via e-mail. After the participants indicated their interest in the study, I sent them an informed consent form to explain key study details, including the voluntary nature of study participation. All the prospective participants agreed to move forward with the study and to participate in an interview within 2 weeks of responding to the invitation. During this process, several participants had additional questions that I answered. I arranged to meet participants for the interview when it was convenient for them in their preferred setting.

I used a Sony voice recorder to conduct the interviews. I also kept a journal nearby to record any notes regarding facial expressions or other body language. I asked each participant for permission to record the interview so that I could spend my time

paying attention to the participant. In each instance, the participant agreed to the recording. Recording the interview allowed me to engage more actively with the participants because I could ask follow-up questions, restate comments from participants for understanding, listen critically, and provide eye contact with the participants. The quality of the interview is dependent upon the interviewer. I utilized the general interview guide approach which allowed me to explore, probe and ask follow up questions. The conversational style of the interview allowed for systematic data collection for all 12 interviews (Patton, 2002).

When setting up interview appointments, I informed participants that the time commitment for the interview would be a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of 1 hour. The shortest interview was 38 minutes, and the longest interview was 1 hour and 30 minutes. I was able to obtain all information necessary from the participants in one interview session. I did not deem further interview dates to be necessary to collect information.

I had planned to write notes during the interview so that I could quote respondents' responses accurately. The intention was to keep 10-15 pages of written notes for each interview to address the research questions (Patton, 2002). However, after the first interview, I recognized that taking notes might distract participants and keep me from paying full attention during interviews. Thus, that plan was abandoned and instead, a voice recorder was used to capture interview responses. Janesick (2011) recommends that interviewers be prepared to yield a minimum of 1 hour tape for five to six interview questions. Her first suggestion was to have a digital tape recorder, a backup recorder and

a journal for field notes during the interview. Having the recorder enabled me to focus on the behavior of the participants. I was able to monitor their ensure body language, tone, or gestures by giving them my complete attention. As originally planned, I was unable to obtain any other data from participants such as articles, published documents, or journals that could provide more information regarding the research questions. The inability to not collect other data did not interfere with the interviews. In fact, the participants appeared to answer with candor which helped me to answer the research questions. No unusual circumstances occurred during the data collection process.

### **Data Analysis**

I used an inductive method for analyzing data. I accomplished the objective to analyze the interview results which could help to provide direction for community colleges to support women's career mobility. I analyzed the interviews thematically. I created reports regarding the sources and nodes to help provide a snapshot of the information on one page or more using the NVivo software. I used coding and matrix coding queries to deepen my analysis. For example, I compared themes across participant groups. I used mapping to make connections between interview responses and participants. I used folders for easy organization of data by category. Using this type of folder system allows researchers to easily reference a particular theme and minimize time spent trying to retrieve information (Patton, 2002).

The interview analysis procedure for the qualitative interview process involved a high level of detail. The first step was to understand and be conversant with the data transcribed (Folkestad, 2008). It was imperative that I understand the content of the

interviews and document it in its entirety. I also assessed the quality of the data because there were over 180 pages of data transcribed from the 12 interviews. Garnering information that adds value to answering research questions is paramount to extracting and deciphering data for a study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I appreciated the different challenges experienced during the data collection process as they were difficult yet interesting.

The next step in the interview analysis was focused analysis (Folkestad, 2008). At that point, I reviewed the purpose of the study and assessed the key research questions by noting them down again, because they had potential of changing the course of the data through the findings. As necessary, I reorganized the interview data according to the research questions. I was able to narrow the individual interview respondents and select several participants from the same institutions and within the same geographic area.

I categorized the interview information into themes. Unlike other methods where researchers assign numerical codes, the interview analysis followed thematic conceptualizations or ideas or phrasal queues that I was able to identify, along with the individual responses. I organized the themes into recognizable patterns to help to comprehend them easier. This third step was time consuming but necessary. I looked for other subthemes emerging during this stage of the analysis.

I noted the patterns and linked them within the categories and between the themes and subthemes, which aided in determining whether the patterns from the interviewees' responses were similar or dissimilar at this stage of the analysis. I observed the larger categories of information that were linked and noted the participant's responses that

added value to the researcher questions. Doing so showed me whether two or more issues were consistent. The interpretation of the themes and categories helped to unify the findings. This step began by listing the main themes highlighted in the previous stage. With so much data, I pondered the key themes from the interview and developed three key themes for each research question. This made the synthesis process simpler, and I was able to merge the categories and provide information that was previously not apparent.

I created reports regarding the sources and nodes to help provide a snapshot of the information on one page or more using the NVivo software. I used coding and matrix coding queries to deepen my analysis. For example, I compared themes across demographic data or participant groups. I created models using mapping to make connections between a topic in the research and the respondents. Lastly, I created folders to allow for easy organization of the data by category. I used all these techniques to identify whether any discrepant cases existed within the research, so that I could review and analyze the interview data to tie them back to the research questions.

### **Discrepant Cases**

Responses from study participants did not result in any noteworthy discrepant cases. The participants reviewed their interview transcripts and provided corrections. Of the 12 participants interviewed, two provided minor transcript clarifications. The participant transcript reviews resulted in an accurate presentation of their perspective.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

I achieved credibility of the findings by ensuring the participants had an opportunity to review the interview findings and my recorded observations of the participants. I achieved internal validity by ensuring the questions helped to meet the saturation requirements based on the depth and rigor of questions posed in the interviews. I also achieved internal validity by checking my own biases with regard to the study. I kept an open mind and made no judgments based upon what I heard from the participants.

### **Transferability**

I achieved transferability in the case study because I validated only women participants in the interviews to determine the plight in career mobility among women in the community colleges in Southern California. I used face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method with the participants to capture their experiences and document their responses. The sample size of 12 participants limited the transferability of the study results to an entire population. Yet, as noted at the conclusion of the study, the outcomes in this study will be transferable to future research.

### **Dependability**

I achieved dependability of the study findings by taking notes of the facial expressions or body language not captured in the audio portion of the interviews. During the process, I kept notes and comments on the progress of the interviews. This process with the journal served as a backup as I reviewed my notes during the transcription

process. I adopted the triangulation method during the analysis of the interviews to promote dependability further. Journaling, conducting the interviews and theory triangulation as I observed the participants all assisted in understanding the study's findings as well in keeping with the limited budget and time frame that I had to consider. These triangulation methods were practical for the case study and helped me to thoroughly analyze the research question answers from the participants.

### **Confirmability**

I achieved confirmability within my research study by keeping track of any occurrences within the journal that I could not capture during the audio portion of the data collection. The journal entries served as a check and balance after review of the data collection and the themes that were discovered during the process. I ensured my data reflected a detailed analysis of my process to ensure the validity of the study. I remained aware of my own feelings and biases and how those experiences could affect the research process.

### **Study Results**

The analysis of data from the responses to the case study interview questions revealed three themes for each research question. I present the themes for each research question, along with excerpts from the interviews. The three themes for the first research question are communication, mentorship and persevering despite male domination in leadership positions. The themes for the second research question were character, hard work toward goals, and preparation and communication. If at least six of the 12

participants mentioned an area, I created a theme. Table 1 shows the themes described for each research question.

Table 1

*Thematic Categories for Women in Executive-Level Positions in Community College*

Research Question 1	Research Question 2
Communication	Enthusiasm, character, hard work
Mentorship	Good communication to grow
Perseverance despite male domination	Preparation based on present need

**Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 was as follows: What are some of the barriers to upward mobility the participants encountered in their positions?

**Theme 1: Communicating with others at work.** This theme revolves around the importance of good communication skills for effectiveness in the workplace. Women must be willing to discuss areas that are difficult, even if it means their potential alienation in the workplace. It was observed that women are not pointing out discrimination, which is a lack of communication. They recognized and identified that communication was one of the essential keys to rise to leadership or executive positions. Based upon participants' responses, I inferred that men control leadership positions. Kingsley (2013) mentioned male domination occurs within top-level positions. Vice President 1 (VP1) stated, "Along with communication, a lack of ego is a necessity for rising to executive-level positions."

Che and Fauziah (2015) asserted that communication behavior involves an activity where an individual has opportunities to search for and receive information



through existing communication channels. That means the participation or a relationship with the social system in which the employee or executive is part of is a necessity, and the communication demonstrated by the leaders should encourage good communication behavior. Communication can even in active information searching, innovation and leadership, and empowering a community. When changes occur due to the empowerment provided through good communication, the people not moving forward in position can grow to executive or leadership positions in conventional societies, and it would perhaps be comparatively faster in liberal societies. Empowerment is helps to change individuals or society. VP1 stated,

Listening is crucial for communication, as listeners can grow faster than others to leadership positions. Listening makes a person capable of thinking about what was heard and making a decision thereafter regarding what was heard.

Appropriate thinking will also help in making a decision.

Leaders' decisions affect the community they lead and thus decide the course of social relations.

According to Vice President 4 (VP4), women need to have patience regarding upward mobility and listen:

If a person can come into to you and tell you all the things that you are doing wrong and blah blah and if you don't personalize it, if you just will stop and listen and hear what they are saying, you may be able to solve the problem. It is necessary to listen to the words of other people without personalizing them. This will make people think well about the leader. Hence, resilience is necessary, and

people trust a person with communication capabilities as the one with leadership qualities.

**Theme 2: Mentorship.** Having a mentor was crucial for most of the interviewees and has a link with communication. Almost all the interviewees had more than one mentor and identified a formal or important mentor in their career mobility. During her journalist career, VP1 had a professor who advised her to teach:

Despite having a journalism degree, my career opportunities were limited. The mentor helped me to identify an alternate career path. Although others saw my ability as a tutor, they did not identify my skills as a teacher. Had I not heeded to that advice from the mentor, it could have turned into an obstacle for my growth as a leader. Later, I selected another mentor and opted for a career in education. The mentor believed that I would be in a leadership position in the future. However, there are other obstacles, like promoting from dean to VP [vice president]. I applied for some VP positions in other colleges and all of them preferred a person already working as a VP. I finally received that position in the college I am working for as the management decided to pick up an insider.

The experience of Vice President 2 (VP2) was different, as she had no mentor, but she wished to have one and more: “I was from a poor background and perseverance and hard work helped me to reach the VP position as a leader. I had some people who motivated me but I never had a mentor.”

Rosser (2012) suggested that women seek mentoring in the early stages, as well as in later stages, of their career. Based on the responses of VP1 and VP2, the presence of a

mentor can help individuals decide the nature of their profession, as well as their ability to progress in their career. VP1's mentor advised and supported her in every possible context, but VP2 did not have the opportunity to receive support from a mentor. A buffer was available to VP1, but was not available to VP2. The lack of a mentor could be one reason women do not advance to leadership positions. However, VP2 recognized the importance of a mentor in a women's career and had mentored other deans after she became a vice president.

Vice President 3 (VP3) found a mentor, which her parents advised her to do in her career. By following the advice of her parents, she communicated well with the former vice president when she joined the college as an assistant professor. VP3 mentioned having a mentor when she changed colleges and differentiated between formal and informal mentors.

VP4 had a couple of mentors in her career and noted her first mentor taught her whatever she wanted to learn. VP4 said the following about her mentor:

She was my absolute mentor for a vice president and how you act as a president, how you act with people, how you react to people, how you handle yourself with people, even down to how you dress. I always wear a pin on a jacket because she always wore a pin. And she told me one time, just having a pin, a lapel pin, dresses up anything. And so, and she was the one who taught me anything that happens that you even think remotely will come back to me, tell me first.

Vice President 5 (VP5) mentioned that she had several mentors and that most of them were her bosses, although some were not:

I am able to maintain work–life balance, but I learnt from my mentors that it is better to decide on attending the board meeting as a dean than going to my kids' softball game. Mentorship is important, and it is necessary to find someone who is a role model and connects with you as a person.

Participant 6 spoke about the importance of goal setting, as well as not creating or removing obstacles during her career. She was a president of one of the larger community colleges.

My leadership qualities developed during my childhood scout days, but the person who influenced me regarding goal setting and working with ease is someone who I accept indirectly as a mentor. A mentor will set goals for the person and guide him or her towards upward mobility with as much ease as possible. I acted like a mentor for a woman who was finding reasons for not having a doctorate. I mentored her and encouraged her to pursue a doctorate and she started her upward mobility in her career. There are few women in top positions like presidents, chancellors, and deans, but still their number is considerable. When women work without any feelings like avoiding confrontation with men and receive suggestions from seniors who act as mentors, they don't find any discrimination in their career, as my experience reveals. However, it is necessary to have bright eyes, skills, excitement, and enthusiasm to encourage seniors to act as mentors for anybody, irrespective of gender. The necessary intelligence mixed with enthusiasm is the quality that mentors see in their juniors that makes them move to leadership positions with little support and advice from mentors. (Participant 6)

Vice President 7 (VP7) agreed that mentors affected her career, and she tried to do the same for the people who worked for her. She explains that mentoring is necessary for succession planning:

I wanna give those tools, the same that have been given to me. I wanna pass those down, so I would say that it's not only my responsibility to do things for this college but to help develop my staff. Succession planning is a big thing, I would . . . you know, it's a big thing. . . . I'm young, I'm fairly young, but you know, you never know when I might leave here or something could happen.

Metzger et al. (2013) express similar sentiments: "The mentoring in academia is an integral component in retaining junior faculty members, reducing work load stress, and encouraging long term growth and success" (p. 1).

Vice President 8 (VP8) learned a lot from her mentor about how to work and manage things:

In the school district, I worked for a superintendent, and she was hearing impaired and so I nev . . . she, she could hear but she was profoundly, you know, hard of hearing, and so I learned a lot just because she had grown up with that and I observed her, and she was a phenomenal leader. She gave me a lot of encouragement to finish my master's at the time and she gave me a break, you know, by hiring me . . . as her assistant and that kind and then my next job, I worked in the Central Valley, also for another superintendent of a K-12 school.

**Theme 3: Persevering despite male domination in the workplace.** Leadership positions involve more decision making than other jobs, and more decisions make work

more difficult for a leader. Oladimeji (2013) noted that women generally display transformational forms of leadership, and men generally display more transactional forms of leadership. Direct reports are more likely to describe their women leaders as having a transformational style. Thus, women have a different entry point into leadership or executive-level positions and must be cognizant of that framework in the workplace. Vice President 9 (VP9) noted the community college is a hard place to break through male domination in the majority leadership positions in teaching and administrative ranks. The male club is not as powerful now as in the past, but it women will experience resistance when they seek upward mobility in executive-level positions.

I was looking back in history and I would've said that the old boys' group is the, you know, old boys' club is definitely deterrent. Something that I've had to fight my entire life. I don't think that exists as much anymore. It certainly is still there, but not to that degree it was. At our college, I would tell you that we recently hired out four new VPs. They are all women. (VP9)

VP9's response indicated that an obstacle exists for women's upward mobility, but the women who work hard are able to overcome that obstacle.

At the present time, according to VP9, women managers are encouraging more women to climb the ladder to reach executive-level positions. Four participants clearly stated that their college managers recruited women VPs more than men VPs. VP1 explained, "It is necessary to find out which part we are good at." She changed to teaching as a professor from journalism, as she was advised, and found herself promoted into leadership positions. It is possible for women to find a place for themselves in the

leadership ranks after they have decided what their career path will be, despite male domination in executive roles.

### **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 was as follows: How have the participants overcome the perceived barriers to upward mobility in their positions? The three themes identified during the interviews that helped the women overcome the perceived barriers to upward mobility were character and enthusiasm with hard work, communication, and preparation for leadership positions based on present need.

**Theme 1: Enthusiasm, character, and hard work.** The participants revealed that their enthusiasm and hard work helped them reach the leadership positions they held. Bailey (2011) mentioned Sarah Raymond, who in 1874 became the superintendent of the Bloomington, Indiana, city schools. Her appointment gained historical significance, as she was the first female public city school superintendent in the United States. Raymond, while leading an educational organization, believed a quality education included character development. V9 stated the following:

Commitment to my work is part of my character. I live in Orange County and we moved to Northern California, and I see my husband on weekends, but I work here at the college during the weekdays. I try to understand the culture of the organization and be human while working. Working this way will earn respect and paves the way for upward mobility. Barriers? I don't ever see barriers. I just feel like you go for it. And I always wanted these people to believe that things happen for a reason. So along the way, if you don't try, you won't. You have to

be acceptable of failure, and if you look at any person who's had successes in their lives, they have had tremendous failures. So, be bold. Go for it. Don't be afraid to dust yourself off. You're gonna learn what to do, what not to do.

Vice President 10 (VP10) said that interpersonal skills and dispute resolution allowed her to reach a leadership position:

I made a transition and I left the company, this private company, and went to California State University Chancellor's Office, so I worked as a management personnel specialist, supporting human resources for the Chancellor's Office HR [Human Resources] function. (VP10)

Hard work means not only working with more stress, but also working to the point of specializing in a division. VP10 gained experience in human resources while working for a chancellor and changed to another educational organization that had a new post for human resources, which consisted of investigating grievances; hearing complaints; and establishing, writing, and developing policy. Additionally, she had responsibility for the civil service system, which made her a specialist in all aspects of human resources. Thus, the specialization of her quality of work made her different from her colleagues and paved the way to her current leadership position. VP10 shared some information regarding her work and life:

I focus as much on life as I do on work. For example, even though I focused on some specialization in work, I also recognize the responsibility of raising kids and shall not compromise with the work if my kids were ill. I maintain a healthy body and an agile mind so I can do quality work. Women need to identify with what



they really want to do and how to do it in the organization. If a woman wants to be in a leadership position in her career, she should meet the community to engage in the business of the organization. It is necessary to maintain relationships as part of the job and it should be a trait of the person to grow in the career.

VP10 further stated,

Developing relationships. It would be necessary to do work in matter that has utility value to the receiver; the end user, or management. It doesn't mean that it is compulsory to choose a woman for HR to move up in the career, but the important point is to understand the dynamics of the job. If a woman can understand the dynamics of administration, she could opt for that job but specialization in a particular area is necessary to climb up to the management position. The important thing that matters for a leadership position in any organization is to run operations well. A leader needs to know what components are necessary to run an operation and how to run it.

In line with the words of VP10, Vice President 11 (VP11) discussed the reason she came to the office on a vacation day and talked about being attentive to people's needs. Hence, one important character trait needed to reach a leadership position is keeping the door open as much as possible. VP11 stated, "When students come in, either I can kind of address problems. So I like to do that sometimes just to get a feel of what some of the issues are. Emphasizing character again, VP10 maintained,

With no defensive stand, being open with students and staff will solve many issues and help in becoming a much more emphatic leader. Listening needs to be part of the ways and means of attaining leadership and being responsive instead of reactive.

Chin (2011) contended that theories of leadership are typically neutral or absent with regard to gender. Chin noted a leader is a leader, regardless of gender or despite gender differences. The women leaders surveyed also noted that women are more interpersonal, selfless, and concerned with others and have the advantage of person orientation over task orientation, despite the presence of gender discrimination. Leadership position achievement depends on character rather than discrimination and the maintenance of character, style, openness, organization, and enthusiasm in the workplace.

**Theme 2: Being a good communicator to grow.** Communication has an impact on upward mobility. Palmer, Hoffmann-Longtin, Walvoord, and Dankoski (2013) contended leaders, or those on the growth path as leaders, should not take things personally. Women should be assertive in their communication, have a sense of organization, build strong and positive relationships, and encourage an open and welcoming environment. VP11 noted she was assertive in her communication:

It is about accountability and outcomes that decide the quality of communication a leader has. Being a good communicator, a leader needs to learn to be accountable for everything related to work, and that helps in maintaining quality in one's work.

Almost all participants spoke on the importance of succession planning. VP11 stated,

It is necessary to prove through work that the individual is qualified to grow to an executive level. A person of VP level has to deal with bond programs, capital bond improvement, deal with local politicians as well as advocates in the college. All of the above-mentioned activities need good communication and openness as traits in a leader's personality, and women need to exhibit them, as the discrimination marginalizes them. Good communication will only be possible when a woman likes her work at present. Other people can come and slide and you can't get mad about that. That's just the world, the way it is, but just be prepared, you know. Take it seriously, and you know, if your president asked you to do something, do something, do it, you know. If it's ethical, do it. If it's not, let the person know. Keep your president or your VP abreast of things and let them know what's going to hit them. So you know, I just, I think president, if I could tell anyone, I don't care what color they are or gender, be present as much as you can, sometime you can't like it now, let go or now have a few days off.

VP11 explained the communication maintained at work and its importance as a leader. The statement "keep your president or your VP abreast of things" refers to the fact that leadership must maintain communication.

**Theme 3: Preparation based on present need.** Regarding preparation, VP11 and Vice President 12 (VP12) mentioned preparation. Zoroja and Bach (2016) noted that transparency in work through right communication increases productivity. Preparation is one of the primary components women in particular need to reach a leadership position. VP11 stated,

We have an administrative leadership program as well as a deans' academy to help deans. We also plan to start a presidents' academy. Even though someone may not have the leadership qualities, they can be honed and enhanced for both men and women. The presence of comparatively more men in such programs indicates one reason for fewer women in executive positions.

I want to go to the presidents' academy as a preparation for my next-level position. My preparation provided me growth opportunities, despite my dislike for the new schedule. I am also in a doctorate program and I am learning from other leaders. However, at this juncture, I am thinking about staying in my current leadership position for a long time, and I am thinking twice about being promoted as president from VP, as the average tenure of past VPs was far better than that of presidents. My district is practical and offers training programs for the next level. I am attending the training as preparation for my leadership position. Practical application of what was learned is part of preparation, although I do not want to move geographically out of the area, as I prefer to be VP or president at the present location. (VP11)

VP12 responded,

Transparency is important, which can help in the ascent to a leadership position. Communication with peers and management makes a person different from others and makes a leader when the peers and management understand that she takes responsibility. Even when a person takes responsibility and can't communicate, it would be an obstacle in upward mobility and that trait is present in most women

who fail to reach leadership positions. Preparation also involves those in leadership positions meeting in regular intervals with an agenda for discussion and brainstorming for solutions for the problems faced by them at work. VP-level women need to meet regularly for brainstorming sessions to search for solutions for the problems faced by women leaders, which is important preparation.

### **Summary**

This qualitative case study research design explored the experiences of women who ascended to positions of vice president or above in Southern California community colleges. The study included two primary research questions to uncover the barriers women faced and to reveal how they overcame those barriers to reach their current positions. From the responses to 13 interview questions provided to the participants, three themes emerged per research question. The focus of the interview questions was on how the participants overcame the barriers and their recommendations to help other women overcome the barriers to advancement. The themes of communication, mentorship, and preserving despite male domination in the workplace framed the discussion for some of the barriers women experienced during their ascension to executive levels. The themes of enthusiasm, character, and hard work; good communication to grow; and preparation per the present need were themes that emerged for participants to overcome the barriers to upward mobility in community colleges. Chapter 5 will include a summary of the key findings, as well an interpretation of the findings. Limitations of the qualitative case study, recommendations for other women who want to achieve executive-level positions

in community colleges, and implications for positive social change will conclude the discussion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative case study, I investigated the gap in knowledge that exists regarding how women who have succeeded in attaining positions of vice-president and above in community colleges were able to attain those positions. The primary data collection method was face-to-face interviews, journaling and data triangulation. My local problem concerned the disproportionate number of women in executive-level positions in the California community college system compared to men. From a macro level, 43% of administrators in California community colleges in the highly placed positions of chancellor, vice chancellor, president, and vice president are women (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). Thus, my purposes in conducting this study were to determine why women are not represented in greater numbers in executive level positions and gain a better understanding of how women can overcome obstacles to reach these executive-level positions.

I interviewed 12 women leaders from various California community colleges for this case study. The participants were from a pool of 19 women leaders at eight community colleges in the Southern California region. I deemed a qualitative approach to be suitable because the study entailed learning more about a phenomenon based upon an in-depth view of the participant's behavior and the setting involved. Qualitative research in management, business, and leadership includes an opportunity to build upon theory. The researcher can relate the theory to develop a better understanding of processes, people's interactions with one another, and learn methods to lead individuals during change (Patton, 2002). A qualitative approach was suitable for finding helpful ways to

increase employee engagement because it provided me with the opportunity to study the participants in their work setting. I also had the opportunity to learn about their experiences with their corresponding community college.

Chapter 5 includes my key findings with each research question and recommendations for useful action for the future and further research for aspiring female leaders, administrators, and community college presidents. I also discuss the implications of my research for positive social change through empirical theory. I discuss the implications of social change for practice and conclude the chapter with final thoughts.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

#### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 was as follows: What are some of the barriers to upward mobility the participants encountered in their positions? Participants highlighted several barriers they faced as they moved into executive-level positions in their community colleges. Some of the women did not like to refer to the obstacles as barriers while others did not categorize the obstacles as barriers at all. The participants spoke of their experiences and recognized that they did face challenges as they ascended to their current roles. The key themes regarding the perceived barriers the participants faced as they moved into executive-level positions were communication, mentorship, and perseverance despite male domination.

**Communication.** The study consisted of 11 Vice-presidents. At least six of the vice presidents discussed communication as an important component to overcome barriers in their rise to an executive-level position. Communication provided



transparency in a high-level role and helped others to understand their decisions. Based on my experiences with the women, communication can result in active information sharing and empowered individuals who complete their work effectively. Communication also involved listening, as many participants spoke of the importance of listening first when they initially occupied an executive role. Several mentioned that the importance of listening increased as they sought to understand the department or area they were responsible for leading.

With their skills and abilities necessary, women have a unique opportunity to assist with the communication and organizational needs within community colleges. Yet, women still struggle with cultural proscriptions against their assumption of leadership positions. For example, female leaders are not expected to self-promote or communicate their accomplishments, in contrast to male leaders (Budworth & Mann, 2010). A few of the vice presidents spoke about how, when they assessed job applicants, they noticed that women would speak of team accomplishments and men would speak of personal accomplishments. Participants who were vice presidents noted that it is acceptable to say the word “I” when referring to results but that women perceive saying “I” different from men. Some of the participants had to come to their own conclusion that saying “I” was acceptable when referring to their accomplishments. This sentiment, expressed by several of the vice presidents, revealed that they thought it was also an important component when seeking to promote other individuals to an executive-level role. Organizational leaders may need to improve their attitudes and behaviors toward female leaders in executive-level positions. At the same time, women must increase their

visibility in leadership and exhibit more self-determination to rise to the top (Sandler, 2014), which may mean speaking up and not being afraid to let others know what they have achieved. Many of the participants also thought it may also mean exhibiting the courage to disagree with a process or to have the confidence to share an idea that could help an institution serve its students better. The vice presidents mentioned that the heart of their work was how to help improve the lives of students, which sometimes involved taking risks and communicating unpopular positions within their institutions. Sometimes that meant championing a program that was not received well by the faculty, or making a decision that did not involve the participation of others because it needed to remain confidential.

**Mentorship.** Mentorship was a prevalent theme in participant interviews. All participants discussed how influential a mentor was for their career trajectory. This was the case whether participants had a formal mentor or an informal mentor. A few participants felt that someone in their career mentored them although they did not use the mentor title. Participants reported that they often worked with individuals who displayed many leadership characteristics and were able to learn how to lead by watching this person. Several of the participants remarked that they learned valuable lessons about how to interact with others, the importance of confidentiality, how to carry themselves professionally in meetings, and how to dress and communicate, among other things.

One of the challenges that some women face is the lack of a mentor to help them navigate the professional landscape (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004). Women typically do not seek a mentor or they feel that a mentor was not available to them in their career. Many

individuals who advance in their careers have had some form of mentoring experience (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004). But, according to researchers (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004), some women are slow to seek out mentors because they are often not comfortable asking for help or they have limited access to mentors.

Based upon my findings, women should seek mentorship. This is an important endeavor because it is difficult for employers to recognize the needs of employees if they do not reveal that information. Organizational leaders should help women identify early on where their leadership interests lie. In doing so, they can seek mentors to help cultivate their talents.

The theory of upward mobility posits when positions become available they should be filled with qualified individuals. Perhaps organizational leaders in community colleges could adapt the tenets of upward mobility to fill the gap in positions that will be created because of retirements. They can use the components of the human capital theory and the labor segmentation theory, to help determine how to increase the number of women who have access to executive-level positions. According to the human capital theory, the earnings potential for women in executive-level roles depends upon their skills and knowledge in the workplace. When a woman acquires proper education and job training, her human capital factor improves, which places her in the highly skilled category. The higher the level of skill, the more valuable she becomes, and compensation is commensurate with the skill level. Therefore, her human capital directly increases future earning potential to occupy an executive-level role and enhances her career path (Pindus et al., 1995).

According to the labor segmentation theory, the market does have opportunities available. The market has primary and secondary segments and jobs. Primary jobs are ideally more attractive, as they offer higher compensation, more job security, and greater career advancement prospects. Conversely, secondary jobs are less stable, opportunities for advancement are not as prevalent, and compensation is substantially less. While the opportunity for upward mobility may appear limited because of the confined selection of primary jobs, women still have the ability to occupy executive-level roles considered a primary job for women who meet the skill level of the role (Pindus et al., 1995).

Mentorship offers benefits within organizations in many ways in conjunction with considering the theory of upward mobility and specifically the human capital and labor segmentation theories. In organizations where mentoring takes place, it helps to cultivate professionalism and instill loyalty among employees (Hakim, 2006). While women with a mentor have an opportunity to learn that can aid in future career growth, mentoring is also a powerful resource that offers opportunities for both personal and professional growth (Clarke, 2011; Hall, 2012). While the development of mentoring programs has increased based upon organizations recognizing the value of the programs, women still have less access to mentoring opportunities compared to men, which renders them incapable of fully exploiting the advantages of mentorship programs (Hall, 2012).

Although more women are pursuing executive-level positions within organizations (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007) and their representation in the workplace has increased, there is still a need for gender equality in the workplace (Catalyst, 2014; Lips, 2013; Vanderbroeck, 2010). Therefore, women need someone to motivate and provide

them the tools to help them rise to executive-level positions. Intentional mentorship has the ability to meet this need and can help women move through the ranks. Even after women have advanced up the career ladder, they often face more obstacles than their male counterparts (Hall, 2012). Therefore, mentorship should be an ongoing process throughout one's career. Many of the participants stated that they mentored others because they recognized the benefit of having a mentor in their own career and wanted to give back to others the way their mentors gave to them.

Several of the participants spoke about the good ole boys network, which alluded to the exclusivity the women felt as executives and their feeling of not having an equitable seat at the table with their male counterparts. The participants spoke of not receiving invitations to golf meetings or other outings where those invited often discuss organizational decisions or strategies informally. The participants also spoke of how the chancellors of the community college district did not treat them the same as their male colleagues, which was more evident at the president level than in the vice president role. The participants commented that they did not feel a part of the larger executive team, and at some point, they would have to accept that to perform in their roles effectively. The feeling expressed was operating in a silo and making decisions that could lead to a contract not being renewed. Yet, the president was willing to take those chances as she assessed her integrity, what she thought was best for the students, her own career path, and her next steps.

Women find it difficult to become the best in their jobs in light of the many high-level jobs dominated by men. Furthermore, women lag behind in creating and using

networks (Groysberg & Connolly, 2013). If women are able to make the proper connections informally with policy makers, it could potentially culminate into advancement opportunities in the workplace (Phelan et al., 2008). For example, women who occupied corporate senior positions reported on the absence of informal networks with their male peers (Bird, 2011). Additionally, women tend to believe that there is little room for growth opportunities in developing informal networks with men. Mentoring is one way women can gain increased access to the informal networks men have excluded them from in organizations. Mentoring can also become a precept to change the trend of women not occupying executive-level roles in community colleges.

Most of the participants did not indicate a preference for a female or male mentor. In fact, several noted that they had very capable and effective male mentors who guided them in their career. One vice president noted that communication between her mentor and herself helped her with the upward mobility she experienced in the community college. Mentors reiterated to the participants the importance of succession planning and recommended that mentees highlighted their achievements in their resume so that leadership would consider them for executive-level positions. Mentors also noted the need to select a mentor who served as a role model and had a good connection with the mentee. Mentoring must hinge on the existence of an engaged relationship between the mentor and the protégé.

Some organizational leaders have championed mentoring as a critical component in advancing the careers of new faculty and women in academia. Thus, it is necessary to continue to investigate the role of mentoring in higher education to help provide some

insights to promote more women in executive-level positions, as well as encourage more dialogue and exploration on the topic (Simon, Perry, & Roll, 2008). One of the main obstacles limiting women when they try to climb the career ladder is the access to care and mentoring that is less efficient compared to their male colleagues.

As a result of the limited experience of mentoring, women face difficulties and obstacles in advancing up the career ladder in the workplace. Research thus far has already confirmed the career obstacles women face in their upward mobility as compared to their male colleagues. Based on the conceptual framework of the upward mobility theory, the basis for the opportunity for mobility is an organization's structure and how often positions open up to make room for the promotion of those who desire the positions. Organizational leaders consider several factors when promoting individuals to higher ranks; including education, ability, and work experience (Pindus et al., 1995).

More important, women must possess the self-efficacy necessary to promote to executive-level positions. Self-efficacy is important for women aspiring to executive-level roles because women who desire upward mobility and possess high self-efficacy may experience enhanced performance improvement, higher levels of emotional well-being, and increased job satisfaction (Petridou et al., 2014). Self-efficacy was important to understand in the context of this study because it is different from confidence, as it has an effect on the actions a woman who desires an executive-level role might take. With the support of mentoring, women can overcome many barriers to their career advancement goals. Mentoring is essentially a powerful tool for professional development and can help to overcome obstacles (Caldwell et al., 2008).

**Perseverance despite male domination.** Fortitude to keep going despite obstacles placed in one's way was a key theme participants discussed. Participants came from disadvantaged backgrounds and had to work hard to reach their current roles. Even in the midst of their desire to show they were equal to their male counterparts, they often endured sexist comments from male colleagues regarding their gender that did not relate to their executive role. Women in executive-level roles who face overt and covert discrimination can secure a mentor to act as a buffer to prevent this from happening (Bower, Hums, & Keedy, 2006), which helps women seeking growth in leadership positions to circumvent social and cultural barriers to advance in the organization. In the face of adversity, the participants smiled, remained professional, and continued to focus on the organizational goals because doing anything else would not represent them well.

Women continue to struggle with the assumed identity of leaders and how they view their capacities as leaders. Leadership in most cultures takes on male characteristics such as decisiveness, assertiveness, and independence. However, general views of women are as friendly, altruistic, and caring, and therefore lacking the male qualities to succeed in leadership positions (Phelan et al., 2008). The characteristics more closely associated to women are also critical leadership traits. One participant discussed how her frustrations led her to determine that one day she was not going to make decisions when she came into the office. She was tired of making decisions and just wanted to work. She had to cope with the fact that others were adjusting to a change in the vice president's role at the time. She spoke of how the difficulty of making decisions brought on more work and responsibility. Nevertheless, she persevered through her feelings that day. She



made the decisions required because she knew her lack of decision making would affect the current and future state of her department.

Culture defines the role of individuals in society. In many cultures, women assume second position after men. Although many women possess leadership potential, many societies perceive women as lacking the necessary skills to be effective leaders. The mismatch in the skills and qualities of women results in fewer opportunities for them to obtain executive-level roles (Green, 2008). One vice president explained that, despite the obstacles described, she worked with some phenomenal people. The leadership at her job allowed her to earn the certifications that is necessary for upward mobility and that are useful for candidates who desire high-level positions.

Women are experiencing a heightened sense of visibility, despite male domination in executive roles. Despite the challenges, structural barriers, and cultural stereotypes that continue to shape their development and management experience, women are occupying more leadership roles. A firm's risk profile lessens as a result of female CEOs' leadership (Elsaid & Ursel, 2011; Sandberg, 2013; Thiruvadi & Huang, 2011). Women are more visible and have more control now than in the past (Ibarra et al., 2013). The visibility of women in leadership positions is noticeably different. The visibility has evolved so that women can experience success in leadership positions (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

The vice presidents had to demonstrate a certain level of self-efficacy to persevere above the social, cultural, and gender barriers faced in community colleges. S. R. Madsen (2012) asserted that women must believe they are capable of holding executive-level

positions in institutions and not place limits on what they are capable of achieving. Male-dominated work environments where men dominate the decision-making process negatively affect the self-efficacy of women, even though they may have had the same depth of experience as male leaders. Women who garner in-depth experience improve their self-efficacy because experience creates confidence in the ability to complete a task appropriately. However, women might struggle with low self-efficacy when their experience is limited to observing a few women in leadership positions. Women might question their ability to lead when they have not encountered other women who have been successful in positions they aspire to occupy (S. R. Madsen, 2012).

### **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 was as follows: How have the participants overcome the perceived barriers to upward mobility in their positions? Participants earnestly contemplated the barriers they faced during their career. Several felt conflicted by their experiences, as evidenced by their body language, facial expressions, and voice tones. Yet, they were optimistic that they did overcome challenges to reach the executive level. Many of them spoke with a sense of exhilaration on having reached their current role with the opportunity to help, mentor, and encourage other women who seek executive-level roles. The themes captured during the interviews on overcoming perceived barriers were enthusiasm, character, and hard work; good communication to grow; and preparation as per the present need.

**Enthusiasm, character, and hard work.** The executives recalled the importance of being cognizant about their enthusiasm, character, and the work they performed.

Henderson, Hunter, and Hildreth (2010) contended that the problems faced by women in the development of their career are due to gender differences. Gender differences may affect patterns of employment, rank, and personal experiences and may even result in oppression. Women may also depend on institutional hiring practices as well as tenure and promotion processes to reach an executive level. Women face an uphill battle in occupying roles traditionally characterized by male leadership. Women must focus on their capabilities and search for authentic ways of leading in an executive role, despite living within a culture that favors male leadership (Piterman, 2008).

Adopting authentic leadership is a path women can take as they lead in organizations. This model of leadership is successful, despite the obstacles women face in organizations. The professional identity of women who assume leadership positions is a central tenet to this model. Authentic women leaders with a deep sense of understanding of authentic leadership are clear about their values and beliefs and therefore are able to advance themselves to executive positions over time (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The participants understood that the characteristics that helped them reach their current role were important to maintain and continue to exhibit as they reached higher level roles.

Genuineness is a key factor for success in leadership positions. Self-authenticity is a critical element of successful leaders, and the absence of this element can prohibit successful leadership accomplishments. The presence of self-authenticity positively affects a professional's identity. Women can develop self-authenticity and have the ability to realize their potential. Thus, the most potent leadership approach that they can

employ is authentic leadership. However, women have yet to appreciate the effectiveness of this approach in softening their success in leadership (Piterman, 2008).

One vice president stated she advanced to a vice president position with the right mix of commitment, character, and enthusiasm. However, when the opportunity arose for her to hire for an administrative role, she chose the opposite. After repeated questioning, she admitted that when she had the choice to choose between hiring a man or a woman of equal stature, she chose the man for the position. Her reason was that it would be easy for him in the role from an administration, finances, and budgeting perspective. This served as an example of women leaders who implicitly and subliminally perpetuate the same injustices they were victim to as they aspired for high-level roles.

**Communication to grow.** This theme was prevalent in both areas as participants talked about communication as a tool for effectiveness in the organization. Conversely, communication was also a necessary component to overcoming barriers for growth into executive-level positions. Regarding productive communication, women should be assertive in their communication to refine their leadership skills. According to Dankoski, Hoffman-Longtin, Walvoord, and Palmer (2013), leaders on a growth path should not take things personally. Rather, they should stay organized, build positive relationships and welcoming environments, and prove the adversaries wrong when and if necessary.

Dankoski et al. (2013) further conveyed the importance of women being assertive in their communication and noted they should have a mind-set of accepting opportunities that fit their plan. The women leaders shared several similar lessons. One vice president discussed accountability and outcomes that decide the quality of communication a leader

demonstrates. Good communication skills are necessary for leaders who also take accountability for their decisions and produce quality work. When there was no formal training for the leader, accountability with good communication skills was crucial for growth into a leadership position.

Participants noted the importance of their communication skills affecting the collective bargaining process. Moreover, they recognized the significance of the words they spoke, as employees listened to how they communicated with them as they worked to build trust internally. The participants also noted the ability to communicate any needs they had from a work–life balance standpoint. Several participants had children and families, which meant they would have to communicate any changes, concerns, and so forth to ensure they were capable of achieving their work–life balance. Some of the participants were successful with this effort, and others admitted they faced opposition with meeting this objective and worked long hours, worked in the car, and worked early in the morning to meet deadlines. Work life challenges served as a dilemma for women in balancing their work and life or even mustering the courage to discuss it for fear of the stigma of not being able to do it all. Women in colleges are susceptible to placing their traditional roles ahead of their professional goals (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007), thus potentially creating a gap in the number of women qualified to occupy higher level roles. The fact that the percentage of female public and private institution board members is less than 30% (Association of Governing Boards, as cited in Betts & Suárez, 2011) is discouraging to women as they seek to climb the professional ladder. Furthermore, women represent only 11.8% of tenured or tenure-track faculty in engineering (Gibbons,

2008). According to research conducted by Ward (2008), law, medicine, and engineering are male-dominated disciplines in higher education. Thus, the number of women in the pipeline for these fields needs to increase, so that women have the opportunity to realize their potential in both male dominated fields and positions of higher education.

Women who use the family-friendly practices of their organization combined with promotion practices and diversity practices can find success in reaching upper-level leadership positions (Levine, 2010). Community colleges have a diverse population. They have many women faculty members, and a bureaucratic structure that offers the prospect to promote more women into executive-level positions. Women build coalitions, include others in decision making, and connect with their employees through relational leadership (Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999), which requires proficient communication skills.

**Preparation based on present need.** Preparation for a current role or future executive-level role was the culmination of what the participants realized was important, coupled with enthusiasm, hard work, and communication. No easy path was accessible to ensure they felt prepared for the situations they may encounter. Yet, seeking preparation was necessary through mentoring as an important facet of achieving their roles. Preparation through attending deans' academies or shadowing those in a role they wished to achieve was relevant, as they sought to earn the respect of faculty they lead. Preparation through observing other leaders' communication styles was fundamental as they worked to gain the political skill and knowledge for their next role. Preparation to understand how to reject a promotion should the opportunity arise for a participant who felt it was not the right career move at that time was essential, so that participants did not

sabotage future opportunities. Preparation on how to handle a situation was vital, because participants often had to decide whether a geographic move would be the right decision for their career.

The ability of women to fill executive-level positions based on the present need depends on the preparation they receive to occupy the position, their own self-efficacy, and the vacancy-driven model. Although current research related to self-efficacy of school leaders is lacking (Petridou et al., 2014), women who desire upward mobility into executive-level positions and possess high self-efficacy may experience enhanced performance improvement, higher levels of emotional well-being, and increased job satisfaction (Petridou et al., 2014). Preparation helps women to develop this sphere of confidence so they can attain an executive level role. Equally important is the size and structure of job openings to help women experience upward mobility and executive-level roles. An opening happens when either a job opens up or an employee leaves the current position (Pindus et al., 1995).

As retirements continue to occur in community colleges and as leaders of higher education institutions develop their succession planning of key roles, shifts in the job market, individuals' desires to change careers, and understanding the theory of upward mobility can aid in the planning to fill significant positions. Women who have a unique adeptness with the right preparation can fill these executive-level roles. The foundation of mobility is an individual's opportunities, characteristics, resources, time, and access to new jobs available (Mandel, 2013).

Although women may plan and manage their careers and the leadership style they adopt different from men, this does not have to affect their career progression (Cody & Spiller, 2013; Manfredi, 2010; Vinkenburg et al., 2011). Because women have impressive leadership skills that correlate with organizational factors such as retaining talent, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and profitability, their career progress should be full of optimism (Zenger & Folkman, 2012).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations arose from executing the study. As the focus of the study was two counties within Southern California community college regions, the outcomes from this empirical activity were not generalizable to all community college populations in other areas of the country. The participant pool was a limitation because the participants' experiences may not be the same as the experiences of other women in community colleges and because peers or other executives within the community college system did not confirm them. Many of the participants had limited time to spend in an interview; thus, the constraint of time became a limitation, as they often limited their responses in the interest of completing the interview.

The decision to conduct a qualitative study was a limitation that affected the study, as gathering information was time consuming and time sensitive and required extensive travel during peak hours of work. I scheduled the interviews during my working hours for the most part, and I spent a considerable amount of time out of the office to accommodate the interviews of the participants. Several participants rescheduled interview times and dates, which sometimes conflicted with already scheduled



interviews. The time spent gathering data exceeded expectations and therefore delayed data analysis.

As a participant in the research, I was cognitive of bias in my observations and final analysis. I was aware of my bias as a college administrator of a private college for the past 11 years. My goal was to focus on each participant's experience. I ensured my own thoughts and biases did not come up during the interviews, and many of the women felt at ease while speaking with the assurance of confidentiality. The confidence they experienced during the process led them to provide information that might be impactful to other women aspiring toward executive-level roles.

The nature and in-depth methodology of qualitative research limited the capacity of the research. Given that the qualitative methodology did not involve formulating statistical data, analyzing the data was time consuming. The limited number of participants was a result of controlling financial costs. Although the sample size may have appeared small relative to the percentage of higher education administrators within community college systems, data saturation occurred by the fourth interview. The women answered the questions openly, candidly, and without influence, and spoke of their experiences as they elevated to executive-level roles.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for Useful Action in the Future**

The recommendations of this study are appropriate to consider for current and future chancellors, executive boards, and executive search committees for community colleges, as well as women aspiring occupying executive-level roles in community

colleges. The research provided more clarity on the barriers women face as they attempt to ascend to executive-level roles in the community college. Equally important is the discovery of how the women worked to overcome the barriers to reach their current roles. Each woman has a unique story from her own experience, yet collectively their experiences regarding their journey to occupy higher level roles were similar. The goal of the study was to raise awareness to provide opportunities for women to reach executive-level roles. Therefore, three recommendations apply to every named entity and one recommendation for action applies to women seeking an executive role in a community college.

The first recommendation is for a formalized process that extends beyond mentorship, which is sponsorship. Sponsorship is different from mentorship because sponsors have a vested interest in the mentees they are assisting with their career aspirations. Sponsors act as champions for their mentees so that they are able to reach the next level in their career. Mentees receive potential sponsorship with career advancement, coaching to learn new skills, and future challenging stretch assignments. The psychosocial support enriches mentees through motivation and approval from their mentors through acceptance and confirmation of the mentees and helping them recognize value in them. Additionally, mentees receive counseling and friendship from mentors (Goodyear, 2006). Unlike a mentor–mentee relationship where perhaps a connection between both parties develops ad hoc, not often, and very informally, sponsorship entails a sponsor working diligently to help the mentee with specific goals and emotional support, which is often a missing element in a mentor–mentee relationship.

The second recommendation for action is a formalized mentorship program that assists women who aspire to executive-level roles to identify with and shadow a male mentor in the role they wish to reach in the community college. Specifically identifying male mentors is important because society has created limits for women relating to expectations for actions and behaviors. Within these confines, mediocrity of women is permissible with regard to leadership positions. Societal mentality is one of the core impediments of the development of women's leadership capabilities (Thomson et al., 2008). Further complicating this problem is that, compared to their male counterparts, aspiring female executives have less social support for learning from credible leaders. People learn new roles in identifying role models, experiment with temporary identities, and evaluate experiences against internal and external standards (Stead & Elliott, 2009). But a lack of a significant number of women in leadership positions means that women have few role models whose styles are in line and consistent with their self-concept (Jackson, 2001). When factoring race and other types of diversity in women into the equation, the extent of limited role models becomes apparent. There exists a bias that things are easier for men because that they have many role models to follow (Garza & Eddy, 2008). The lack of adequate role models has compelled women to develop their own unique approaches to leadership. These approaches, however, are often inadequate given that no one has tried them. Lack of role models thereby undermines the quality leadership that women can practice (Green, 2008). The interactive and interpersonal aspects of mentoring work entail helping women explore aspects of their career identity that will enable them to have an authentic approach to leadership. As such, mentoring is

one of the potent ways that women can gain the requisite skills to develop authentic leadership, which is a potent model for success. All the groups named herein could support a mentorship program whereby women observe male mentors to help them overcome many of the aforementioned obstacles in their career journey.

The third recommendation is to develop a formalized mentoring program that women could access at the inception of a new position. This would give them exposure to colleagues who influence decision making while developing their skills. Women often underestimate the power of networking and how it could enhance their career goals. Although they may have less access to mentoring opportunities than men and are not capable of fully using the advantages of mentorship programs (Hall, 2012), organization leaders can take the initiative to develop opportunities for women to network more often. Work mixers that place talented women who have potential for upward mobility with a buddy they can learn from and exposing them to executives within the organization are ways to create an open space and dialogue for women. Mentoring offers benefits for the individuals mentored in terms of developing a profession and improving a career (Isaac et al., 2009). Thus, mentors gain access to protected resources and networks that help them to realize long-term success in their career. The vice presidents each recalled special mentors who guided them along the way, but no one mentioned a formalized mentoring program that helped them gain access to a mentor.

The last recommendation specific to women who wish to achieve executive-level positions is for women to take the initiative to self-promote their skills, abilities, and accomplishments within their organization. Women must gain confidence and learn to

highlight their achievements. Several of the vice presidents talked about the inability for women to say the word “I” in reference to accomplishments at work. Rather, they used the word “team,” and doing so often downplayed the function they sustained in a specific policy or decision that was favorable for the organization. There is no stigma associated with confidently discussing successful performance, and women who confidently discuss successful performance are likely willing to give credit to others who may have contributed to a successful strategy at work. Women who discuss successful performance with confidence are increasing their visibility to lead and exhibiting determination to rise to the top, which is often difficult for women (Sandler, 2014). The increased visibility can pay dividends for women in leadership positions, as that will signal to the decision makers that the women have the courage to overcome their own limiting thoughts about what they can achieve and thus land a position of trust in an executive-level role.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There are eight recommendations for further research to extend the study. The first is to conduct a quantitative study on how many hours’ women in academic professions generally state they need to manage family obligations alongside work. Family and work obligations were a recurring conflict that vice presidents needed to manage as they ascended to executive levels. Sampling women who are deans or directors could provide new information for women interested in moving beyond these roles so they have a better understanding of an executive-level role prior to seeking one.

Research on the self-efficacy of school leaders is lacking. Therefore, the second recommendation is to conduct a phenomenological study to understand how women in

community colleges view their ability to influence their life events. An in-depth understanding of how women view themselves can open more dialogue on their desire, or lack thereof, to climb the career ladder to reach executive-level positions. This study could take place in a specific geographic area or with various levels of women in positions such as deans, directors, vice presidents, presidents, and full-time faculty. Such a study may reveal patterns or relationships of meaning that would help more women forecast their ability for success in an executive-level role.

The third recommendation is a replication of this study across geographic regions and within both private and public 4-year academic institutions versus community colleges to provide additional insight into the challenges women overcome to achieve executive-level positions. Interviewing women deans, directors, vice presidents, and presidents within the 4-year institutions and exploring their experiences over a period of time could lead to more women pursuing executive-level roles.

The fourth recommendation is to conduct research on the influence of male mentors versus female mentors from other industries to determine how impactful this relationship is for women's career trajectory. The study could provide more clarity to help women determine whether a male or female mentor would best suit them in their professional pursuits. As the underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics continues (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), the fifth recommendation is to replicate this study within STEM fields to perhaps close the gap in executive-level roles in these fields. The participant pool may be lacking, but interviewing women in executive-level positions in these areas regarding the barriers they

faced and the ways they overcame them could be helpful for changing precedent in these fields.

As women work in several fields dominated by men, the sixth recommendation is to conduct future research in fields such as construction, business, and faith-based organizations on women who have attained the highest rank to uncover strategies to assist other women reach those levels. Women owned 7% of businesses in the field of construction in 2013 (American Express Open, 2013), and only 9% of construction employees in 2010 were female (U.S. Bureau of Labor, as cited in McGovern, 2014). Further, only 10% of U.S. religious organizations employ a female senior pastor. Although there is a pipeline of educated and experienced women in the U.S. workforce, something is limiting their ability to ascend to top leadership (Diehl, 2016). Women do own businesses and work in construction and they lead in religious institutions. As research is lacking on women who have reached executive-level ranks in these fields, additional research could be helpful to women who wish to hold these roles.

As relatively few women are reaching the executive ranks in large corporations (Catalyst, 2014; McKinsey, 2013), the seventh recommendation is to conduct additional research regarding women who have ascended to executive-level roles in large organizations to extend this study. Such research could uncover strategies to overcome the barriers faced as a minority who has reached the level dominated by men. Law and academic medicine are two additional male-dominated fields. Thus, the eighth recommendation is to conduct additional research on the perspectives of decision makers regarding why this is the case, as the feedback obtained on how to create opportunities

for women in these fields could be an extension of the study. Women are present in these sectors in the workforce, yet they remain underrepresented in executive-level ranks.

Future research using this study could help reverse the trend.

## **Implications**

### **Social Change**

The goal of this research study was to have a positive influence on the ways people view women from a leadership perspective. Perceptions of women may determine their ability in achieving executive-level roles. Leaders of community colleges have generally supported women in their professional endeavors. Yet, women still lag behind men in attaining executive-level positions within the institutions. Therefore, the study purpose to explore gender disparities in these highly placed roles within community colleges was paramount, as this disparity exists in other male-dominated industries.

Male dominance, both numerical and cultural, creates barriers for women who feel they cannot achieve executive-level roles if they do not adapt to the behaviors expected of them within organizations. Leaders often misinterpret and do not value women's personality traits of care, concern, and compassion in organizations, although researchers have indicated that women possess many of the traits and characteristics that lead organizations to success. Therefore, it was imperative that I not only facilitate thoughtful discussion on the views of women from a leadership perspective, but influence and help stimulate a call to action for change on a societal, cultural, gender, and economic level to mitigate the barriers that encumber the ability of women to reach their highest potential as desired.



### **Empirical Theory and Practice**

The focus of the study was on the theories of upward mobility and self-efficacy as the conceptual framework. Women who have a healthy mix of self-efficacy and who desire upward mobility into executive-level positions generally feel as though they can achieve success, feel emotionally balanced, and feel happier in their work. Their mobility depends on what happens when a position opens, on opportunities that are available because of certain skills and abilities, on the demand of the labor market, and on how time affects their career. Yet, their opportunities to reach executive-level positions continue to be limited. The labor market remains sharply segregated by sex, and women are concentrated into certain types of jobs, which are mostly staff and support jobs that offer little opportunity for getting to the top. Women remain locked out of jobs in the business mainstream, which is the route CEOs and presidents take. When women can get a line job, it is not likely to be in a crucial part of the business or the type of job that can help them excel to leadership positions. From 2010 to 2012, the number of women CEOs from the Fortune lists increased, but women's labor force participation rate decreased from 52.4% to 49.6% between 1995 and 2012 globally (Johns, 2013).

Therefore, future practitioners and scholars may find it worthwhile to link upward mobility theory and self-efficacy theory with role incongruity theory, which researchers use to explore the challenges women face in male-dominated leadership positions. Expounding upon the research presented in this study can potentially help fill the gaps created by the inclination to underestimate and alienate qualified women for executive-level roles. According to role incongruity theory, women not represented fairly in

organizations experience a social barrier, and the burdens of the position make it difficult for them to achieve success in corporate leadership positions (Glass & Cook, 2016). Researchers have determined that the male-dominated leadership in organizations creates anxiety for women who want to occupy these positions because of the expectation by others that they think male and act male. These cultural barriers about the characteristics it takes to lead skew women's self-confidence and self-worth ability to reach executive-level positions. Women, in turn, devalue their contributions, feel inferior, and do not seek mentorship and guidance on how to overcome those barriers. Therefore, the problem persists, and the lack of female representation in highly placed positions continues. A better understanding of the drivers that have women experiencing a minority status in leadership roles and feeling like outsiders in colleague groups with male counterparts is essential. Organizational leaders should use the research presented in this study to create intervention programs using the recommendations contained therein as a call to action to develop systemic change to evolve the future of women in executive-level positions.

### **Conclusion**

The 12 participants in this case study overcame many barriers to reach the executive-level positions they held in the community college system. They openly shared their experiences and the ways they beat the odds to occupy male-dominated roles. They reflected on the joys they experienced and the triumphs in becoming the first in their roles from a family achievement level or within their own college. They told of how they faced gender discrimination as executives as they worked beside their male counterparts, and they each wanted to help other women, mentor them, and provide opportunities

through training and coaching to reach highly placed positions. They each helped to clarify the purpose of this study, which was to investigate the actions women have taken to overcome barriers to reach executive-level roles. They recognized that they must be a part of the solution as well as other educators, scholars, and practitioners. Community college leaders, administrators, business leaders, and organizational leaders should determine how to close the gap within an infrastructure that disenfranchises women based upon gender differences. Women have the talent and the ability and want to serve in executive-level roles. Adopting some of the recommendations in this study may serve to influence societal change so that women have the prospect of experiencing gender equality in executive ranks.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What qualities do you attribute to your ability to reach your current position?
2. What influence did having a mentor during your career have on your current role?
3. Describe what your work–life balance looks like and how you achieve it?
4. What are your top three suggestions for other women who desire executive-level roles in community colleges?
5. What are some reasons you personally see as to why women do not occupy more executive-level positions in the community college?
6. What kind of preparation is provided to women who seek an executive-level role within your college?
7. How important is geographic mobility for women who want to occupy an executive-level position within the community college?
8. What would you say are the most important leadership characteristics to possess to be considered for an executive-level role in the community college?
9. What barriers did you see and how did you overcome them to achieve your current position?
10. What types of stereotypes did you face as you ascended to your role?
11. How often is succession planning conducted within the college to identify top talent to fill the next executive role? What are some of the criteria to determine a likely candidate?

12. How important is having the role of faculty or another academician role when trying to promote to an executive-level position and why?

13. What are some of the differences you see in terms of women leading the college versus some of your male counterparts?