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Exploring the Pathways of Females who Achieved the Highest Administrative Positions in Education

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**EXPLORING THE PATHWAYS OF FEMALES WHO ACHIEVED
THE HIGHEST ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS IN EDUCATION**

by

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M.S. Illinois State University
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my sons Tyler Michael Rawson, Ryne Jeffrey Rawson, and to my daughters Francesca Amy Rawson, and Calista Ann Rawson. You all are my heart and soul. Dream big, never give up, believe in yourselves, and know that you are loved. You all can accomplish anything you put your minds to. All four of you are my dreams come true. I love you more than I could ever say or write.

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NOMENCLATURE

ACE	American Council on Education
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AASCU	American Association of State Colleges and Universities
CAO	Chief Academic Officer
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CHRO	Chief Human Resources Officer
CITI	Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative
CPRS	Center for Policy Research and Strategy
FST	Feminist Standpoint Theory
HERS	Higher Education Resource Services
IHE	Institution of Higher Education
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NIH	National Institutes of Health
PDF	Portable Document Format
PTK	Phi Theta Kappa
R1	Research one institution
TIAA	Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America
VP	Vice President

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ABSTRACT

There has been a historically ongoing problem of the underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative positions in education in the United States of America and globally. The participants of this research study included a small mixed-race sample of 37 female university and college presidents of higher education and superintendents of school districts across the state. The study utilized a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design.

Based on an extensive literature review, a questionnaire was developed and sent to female community college presidents, university presidents and school superintendents in a Midwestern state that assessed their perceptions of the role played by factors identified in the current literature as having contributed or challenged the pathway to their current positions. The possible solutions to the low representation of women in the topmost educational administrative positions were also explored. Concurrently, female university and college presidents were invited to participate in a 60 minute follow up in-person interview in order to explore these issues more deeply. Nine presidents agreed to participate in the in-person interviews.

Findings indicated that the qualitative data aligned with the quantitative data in general terms. Future general recommendations for practice included similar studies conducted in other regional areas of the United States of America, and possibly abroad. This research could provide implications for institutions of higher education for insights into the underrepresentation of women in presidency roles, and potential benefits of impacting educational institutions and systems. Recommendations for females are

provided in this study which included learning from the pathways of presidents and

exploring possible solutions to the underrepresentation of women in these positions.

CHAPTER 1.   INTRODUCTION

Whether grandiose or minute, every spoken word and every action of human behavior communicates, as even nonverbal communication sends a message. Interestingly, the opposite is also true. The lack of actions, and lack of spoken words also communicate messages. Watzlawick, Bevin Bavelas, and Jackson (1967) stated, "it follows that no matter how one may try, one cannot *not* communicate" (p. 49). Historically, there has been an underrepresentation and, in some cases, a total absence of women who have achieved the highest administrative positions in politics, business, religion, higher education, medicine, and K-12 education, and other important professions in the United States of America and globally. The lack of women in these important positions could possibly communicate that women are not equal to men based on their gender. Morrison, White, Van Velsor, and the Center for Creative Leadership (1987) noted, "the statistics hold plenty of evidence that women have an easier, faster start on their career now than they did in the past. The problem is that getting women *into* corporations is not the same as moving them *up*" (p. 157).

Women still have a long way to go to achieve equal representations as leaders as men still have more authority and higher wages in America (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The lack of women in superior and influential positions in American public and private businesses and institutions could send a message to women, men, and children that women are not capable. In the current 21st century in America "the truth is, unfortunately,

the majority of women are not even in the game, let alone on the same field of play as

their male counterparts" professionally (Parsons, 2017, p. 3).

"Changes in the status of women are undoubtedly among the most important

social developments of the twentieth century" (Patai & Koertge, 2003, p. 1). However,

the shortage of females in the most prominent leadership positions in American politics,

corporations and higher education institutions reveals that although gender equity has

come a long way, there is still a need for more progress. In a landmark special *Wall Street*

Journal newspaper report in 1986, Hymowitz and Schellhardt introduced the world to the

term "glass ceiling" and defined it as women in the workforce having "the road to the

top... blocked by corporate tradition and prejudice" (p. 39). The *Wall Street Journal*

report was published over 30 years ago, yet it is still relevant today.

As far as women's rights have progressed over the past three decades, some

disparaging professional strongholds still remain today. These strongholds could possibly

communicate to females (and future generations of women) that the presidency,

superintendency, and other powerful educational administrative positions are not viable

options. "More than two centuries after the country's founding, a woman has yet to be

elected president of the United States" (Burden, Ono, & Yamada, 2017, p. 1073). Just

like one cannot *not* communicate, the United States of America has historically never had

a female president, which could communicate to women that the highest office is not

obtainable or available to them based on their gender. In America's historical 2016

presidential election, this issue was "given prime-time attention with former Secretary of

State Hillary Clinton's presidential run and with the Women's March the day after the

2017 Presidential Inauguration" (Parsons, 2017, p. 12). In her concession speech, Hillary

Clinton acknowledged the glass ceiling she had attempted so many times to crack. "Mrs. Clinton lamented the durability of the glass barrier she had been butting up against her whole life. 'We have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling,' she said, but some day someone will.'" (Stauffer Mason, 2017). Just as one cannot *not* communicate, the fact there has never been a female president of the United States of America also could communicate a powerful message to both men and women.

It is important to emphasize that the uppermost administrative positions of the presidency in higher education and the superintendency of school districts were the focus of this study. This study was focused specifically on the educational administration realm. The absence of women in the highest positions is also found in corporations across America. Few women in corporate America are in Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions. In 2014, women made up less than 10-percent of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies (Glass & Cook, 2016; Bolman & Deal, 2017; Stewart, Cooper, Stewart & Friedley, 2003). The problem of few females in the top positions in corporations across America is a salient issue. "More than half the companies did not have a single female officer. The story is similar in education" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 343).

Not only has there never been a female president of the United States of America, but there has also been historically an insufficiency of females in the highest educational administrative positions such as the presidency of colleges and universities, and in the superintendency of school districts. In comparison to men, women are predominantly represented as teachers in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and in universities and community colleges. However, upper administration is typically still dominated by white middle-aged males. Currently women outnumber men in higher

education enrollment figures across America. Yet women are scarcely represented, or in some cases absent, from senior administrative positions in American education institutions. As Buller (2015) noted, "higher education doesn't handle change particularly well" (p. xi). The underrepresentation of female university and college presidents and superintendents could communicate to women that the highest educational administrative positions are not an attainable option for them.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that currently more senior administrators are retiring and leaving these important positions at a faster rate than in the past. Higher education institutions are "experiencing the beginning of unprecedented faculty, staff and administrative turnover, without a clear sense of emergent replacements" (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002, p. 573). Thus, the deficiency of females in the highest educational administrative positions is becoming more of an urgent issue. However, the lack of female representation in senior positions at community colleges and universities in the United States is not a new issue; it has been ongoing. There is a strong history of numerous examples of the meagerness of female leadership in higher education over the past several years (Gillett-Karam 2001; Rhodes 2003; Madsen 2007(a); Glazer-Raymo 2008; Washington, 2010; Longman & Anderson 2011; Allen & Flood 2017-2018).

Many American people believe education is the key to success in the 21st century (Ma & Baum, 2016). Community colleges and universities serve an important role in higher education. According to Amey (1999), community colleges are significant higher education institutions where "virtually anyone can succeed, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or cultural capital" (p. 60). Community colleges are

significant realms that serve diverse populations of students. "Community colleges are positioned to play a critical role in the process of upward mobility in American society" (Shaw, Valdez, & Rhoads, 1999, p. 1). Community colleges and universities are higher education institutions that create welcoming environments for diverse populations of students. However, these same welcoming environments and upward mobility opportunities created for students are often not extended to females aspiring to the college and university presidencies.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem was the underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative positions in education in the United States. Specifically, the focus of this research was on female presidents of two-year and four-year higher education institutions. However, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that this study also explored the experiences of female superintendents in school districts. In addition, the challenges and supports to the pathways of women achieving topmost administrative positions in education were explored. Finally, solutions to these issues were addressed. In order to address these issues more comprehensively and objectively, the pathways to the female presidency and superintendency were explored via a quantitative questionnaire sent to all female presidents and superintendents to provide pillars of further insights. The underrepresentation of females in the top educational administrative positions is a substantial issue and there is a strong need to understand and study this problem in more depth. The Chapter two literature review provides a more detailed discussion on the problem.

Historically, a need for more females in the uppermost administrative positions in education has existed, and progress has been slow to address the issue. This research has provided an increased understanding of the paucity of females in the highest educational administrative positions. The nature of this study was a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation approach with an emphasis on the qualitative research. The specific research questions are as follows:

Primary question: How do females describe their pathways to the highest administrative positions in education?

The following secondary questions further define the direction of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study:

1) What challenges (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions?

2) What supports (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions?

3) What are possible solutions to the dearth of females in the highest administration positions in education in the United States?

The primary research question of this study explores the pathways to the highest administrative positions in education. The primary question was addressed via a quantitative questionnaire to all female presidents and female superintendents in the study with specific themes created through a literature review (See Appendix D and Appendix E). The researcher created two instruments based on a review of the literature and the questionnaires were given to female community college and university presidents as well as female superintendents within separate systems in a Midwestern state. The

questionnaires were created in Qualtrics and submitted via email from the researcher's

email account. The quantitative questionnaire addressed the primary question and all

three secondary questions and explored the impact of race and gender. The issue of race

is of importance because female minority presidents are a subset of the population and

have historically experienced significantly lower representation rates. This has been an

issue across the board, not only in higher education or in the top educational

administrative positions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the pathways of female administrators

currently holding the highest administrative positions within higher education and K-12

education systems. Women are slowly securing presidential positions at American

community colleges and universities (Webb, 2010). Over the last decade, although the

number of females in these top educational administrative positions have increased, the

progress of change has been slow. According to the 2017 American College President

Study by the American Council on Education (ACE), in 2011 men accounted for 74% of

the presidencies and women accounted for 26%, whereas in 2016, 70% of the American

college presidents were male and 30% of women were presidents. The 2017 ACE study

did not provide the compositions of faculty body populations as those are the populations

from which presidents emerge. However, the 2017 ACE study noted the following

information for the combination of male and female presidents, "Eighty-one percent of

presidents had experience as faculty members, up from 70 percent in 2011. Presidents

spent an average of 10 years in a faculty role" (p. 5).

The same is true for the slow advancement for women to the superintendent positions. "In fact, the underrepresentation of women in the position of superintendency is well known" (Brunner, 2000b, p. 9). Interestingly, over the past decade the numbers of women superintendents have not significantly improved. Many females experience challenging pathways to the community college and university presidency, and to the superintendency. The purpose of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation was to explore the pathways of female administrators who have reached the highest administrative positions in education. The concurrent triangulation of this study explored the experiences of the pathways of three sets of women: two-year college presidents, four-year university presidents, and K-12 superintendents in order to corroborate and/or dispute experiences and examine themes. The foremost focus of this study was on qualitative research of in-depth interviews with female university and college presidents. The quantitative research instrument of female superintendents and presidents served as a buttress to the qualitative component of this study. In addition, it is important to note that the quantitative instrument also contained some open-ended questions for further support.

All of the interviews were conducted in person, which is significant because the researcher could have much more easily interviewed the female presidents electronically. Interestingly, some executive assistants and presidents offered to participate in an Adobe Connect or Zoom interview. However, the researcher decided that for the sensitive information being shared an in-person interview was warranted. Interestingly, the interviews took place right before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in the United States of America, therefore this research study could be a good historical piece. The researcher

acknowledges that had the in-depth interviews instead taken place electronically, the interviews and overall research study would have been a completely different experience.

The study consisted of a quantitative instrument sent to all three data sets of women exploring the supports and challenges to their pathways based on a substantive literature review. In addition, qualitative interviews were conducted with both college and university female presidents to explore these issues more deeply.

Female participants were surveyed with a questionnaire created by the researcher to assess their perceptions of the role played by factors identified in the current literature as having contributed or challenged the pathway to their current positions. The female university and college presidents were invited to volunteer to participate in a one-hour in-person interview to explore answers more deeply.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is feminism and the feminist standpoint theory (FST). According to Schneir (1972) "feminism is one of the basic movements for human liberty" (p. xi). "Feminists are united by a belief that the unequal and inferior social status of women is unjust and needs to be changed" (Jagger, 1981, p. 5). Although there are various definitions of feminism, scholar bell hooks (1984) defined it this way:

> Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives (p. 26).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), "feminist research approaches center on and make problematic women's diverse situations" that often occur in workplace institutions (p. 27). Feminism involves advocating for women's rights, and action to eliminate any inequities based on sex or gender. Feminism suggests that women have a different way of viewing the world compared to their male counterparts. According to Kohl (1992), "feminism consists of viewing all aspects of experience—from economics and ideology, to culture politics, the media and the arts—from the perspective of how they affect women's lives" (p. 204). Interestingly, education and higher education have supported feminist perspectives. In particular, "institutions of higher learning responded with the greatest willingness to unlearn sexist biases and to revise previously false information" (hooks, 2010, p. 93).

Feminism and feminist theories have shaped critical thinking and social justice issues in education. According to hooks (2010), "feminist perspectives in the classroom affirmed the primacy of critical thinking, of linking education and social justice" (p. 93). As feminist scholarship developed, scholars began exploring standpoints more closely. "Scholars began to recognize differing perspectives or standpoints within feminist scholarship and to move away from essential approaches that describe women as similar to each other and different from men based on innate characteristics" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999, p. 27).

The theoretical perspective used to frame this study is the feminist standpoint theory (FST). "A feminist standpoint is a way of understanding the world, a point of view of social reality, that begins with, and is directly from, women's experiences" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 60). The feminist standpoint theory broadly focuses on women's

rights and gender inequities. More narrowly, the basis of feminist standpoint theory focuses on knowledge and the individual knower. "The basis of feminist standpoint theory is that all knowledge is dependent on the social and historical context of the individual knower" (Grogan & Cleaver Simmons, 2012, p. 32). Therefore, a female's standpoint affects her knowledge of the world based on the situation, such as her professional position. "An individual's standpoint influences her knowledge of the world and her standpoint is shaped by the economic and political situation in which she is situated (Grogan & Cleaver Simmons, 2012, p. 32). Thus, feminist standpoint theory (FST) acknowledges that a female's standpoint affects her knowledge of the world based on her professional position, which is also shaped by the economic and political situations which include gender and race.

"Feminist standpoint scholars encourage us to use women's experiences as a lens through which to examine society as a whole" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 58-59). Feminist standpoint theories can have a focus on a specific group of women. For example, past feminist standpoint theory studies have focused on work by or about specific groups of women such as lesbians, women of color and females with disabilities (Olesen, 2011). With the focus on specific groups of women, such as females who have reached the highest administrative educational positions, feminist literature tends to highlight male dominated situations and institutions. "The theme of domination prevails in the feminist literature as well, but the subject matter is often gender domination within a patriarchal society" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 28). "The bad news is that the world of work remains a world built mostly by men mostly for men" (Buckingham, 2009, p. 37).

Some important claims made by feminist standpoint theory scholars are:

1) Studies must originate from the experiences of marginalized group members (Buzzanell, Sterk, & Turner, 2004).

2) Diverse methods are used, and any methodology can be made or considered feminist (Deem, 2002; Moss, 2007).

3) Knowledge is socially and historically created; marginalized members have the ability to see dominant societal structures from an outsider within perspective that makes insightful contributions to knowledge that traditionally has represented only the dominant, white, male perspective (Buzzanell, Sterk, & Turner, 2004).

4) Gender as a basic organizing principle shapes the condition of people's lives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

5) Marginalized groups of people are influenced by their situation.

6) Researchers are encouraged to generate questions that arise from the lives and experiences of marginalized groups of people (Briggs, Coleman & Morrison, 2012, p. 33).

7) Research conducted is transformative (Creswell & Poth, 2018). FST is action-oriented, existing ultimately to make a positive impact on the lives of marginalized people as well as on society in general (Buzzanell, Sterk, & Turner, 2004).

Feminism and the feminist standpoint theory (FST) provides opportunities "to see the nuances and complexities previously invisible, or at least a little hazy, to us" (Gorski & Pothini, 2018, p. 20). This mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study uses a critical feminist approach. Using a critique "of who is best served by the way things are, it

becomes clear that educational administration is dominated by white, male, middle-class scholars who are in the business of defining knowledge in the field" (Briggs, Coleman & Morrison, 2012, p. 33). The epistemological considerations are what is known in relation to current theories and knowledge. Ontological considerations describe the reality or sense of being. The ontological feminist considerations for this study were that research is transformative, realities are constructed by the perceiver, and patriarchy and its many outcomes are questioned.

Research Questions and Definitions

One primary question and three secondary questions were guiding this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study. The primary question is: How do females describe their pathways to the highest administration positions in education?

The following secondary questions further the define direction of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study:

1) What challenges (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions?

2) What supports (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions?

3) What are possible solutions to the dearth of females in the highest administration positions in education in the United States?

Constitutive and operational definitions. Operational definitions are typically included in quantitative research and not necessarily included in qualitative research. Constitutive definitions explain the meaning of the word by simply using other words to describe more clearly what is meant (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). Since this was a

mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study containing both quantitative and qualitative components, it is appropriate to include operational definitions in this dissertation. Several qualitative research scholars have used operational definitions in their studies. Cohen, Huynh, Sebold, Harvey, Cory Neudorf, and Brown's (2014) qualitative study of conceptual and operational definitions for leaders in Canadian healthcare, concluded "it is important to understand the conceptual and operational definitions of the approach" in order to bolster further communication" (p. 9). For this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study, operational definitions could be used for exploring the years of experience, other background information of the participants, and common and divergent themes. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015), "operational definitions require that the researchers specify the actions or operations of necessary to measure or identify them" (p. 31). The constitutive definition approach is "to use what is often referred to as the *dictionary approach*" (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015, p. 30). For each of the definitions that have been provided, it should be mentioned that each variable was operationally defined by the questionnaire. A few of the terms were both operationally and constitutionally defined.

The following key terms in this research will be defined as:

President. Constitutive definition: The person identified as the president of the public four-year or two-year institution of higher education. A president was defined as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and responsible individual for all the operations of the institution. The presidential candidate was selected by the chancellor of the college and university system, and the board of directors. Any university or college president identified by the researcher through the system website from January 2020 through

February 2020. Interim status presidents were included. The researcher did not interview

past presidents (emeritus and/or retired female presidents), because the researcher was

interested in those currently holding the position.

Operational definition: The entire instrument measured the variables for

presidents. (See Appendix E).

Superintendent. Constitutive definition: An administrator over a number of

public schools and principals in a school district.

Operational definition: The entire instrument measured the variables for

superintendents (See Appendix D).

College. Constitutive definition: An educational institution that identifies as

community and technical college, a community college, or a technical college.

Operational definition: The questionnaire(s) included an open-ended question at

the beginning of the instrument for respondents to identify their Institute of Higher

Education (IHE) (i.e., as either *community college* or *university*).

University. Constitutive definition: An educational institution with a selective

admission process, with the completion of a high school degree, or transfer from another

academic institution. Generally, a government supported four-year college offering

bachelor's degrees (and possibly graduate degrees).

Operational definition: The questionnaire(s) included an open-ended question

at the beginning of the instrument for respondents to identify their IHE (i.e., as either

community college or *university*).

Challenges. Constitutive definition: This includes those factors identified by the

respondents from the researcher's qualitative interviews as impeding access to the

presidential office at higher education institutions, or the superintendency in school districts.

Operational definition: Questions 1 to 12 from the Questionnaire.

Supports. Constitutive definition: This includes those factors identified by the respondents from the researcher's qualitative interviews as factors that helped women succeed on their pathways to higher education presidency position, or the superintendency in school districts.

Operational definition: Questions 1 to 12 from the Questionnaire.

Race. Constitutive definition: A group of people connected by common descent or origin. In its widest sense the term includes all descendants from an original stock but may also be limited to a single line of descent or to the group as it exists at a particular period. A group of people who belonged to the same family and descended from a common ancestor; a house, family, kindred (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020).

Operational definition: Question 14 from the Questionnaire.

Gender. Constitutive definition: The state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes or traits associated with a particular sex or determined as a result of one's sex. Also: a (male or female) group characterized in this way (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020).

Operational definition: Question 13 from the Questionnaire.

Significance of the Study

The low representation of females in the highest administrative educational positions in the United States is a salient and significant issue. The history of the lack of

female representation in these senior positions in education has been an ongoing and

prevalent problem. For decades there has been a cogent documented history of the

shortfall of females in the most prominent leadership positions in education (Bornstein,

2007; Gillett-Karam, 2001; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Hough & Holland, 2011, Liu, 2007;

Longman & Anderson, 2011; Madsen, 2007(a); Rhodes, 2003). Currently, compared to

their male counterparts, the disproportional representation of females in the topmost

administrative leadership positions in community colleges and universities, and the

superintendency in the United States is still a relevant problem (Broido, Brown, Stygles,

& Bronkema, 2015; De-Frank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, & Wheatly, 2016; Gangone,

2016; Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard & Newman, 2017).

The paucity of women in the most senior positions in education is significant.

This mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study on the deficiency of females in the

highest educational administrative positions would contribute to both scholarship and

practice because "there is a limited amount of research available on the experiences of

women administrators in higher education" (Campbell, Mueller, & Souza, 2010, p. 20).

In addition, there are few mixed-methods concurrent triangulation studies that explore

and delve into the problem of the scarcity of females in the highest educational

administrative positions, specifically the presidency and superintendency.

This mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study could be filling a

hole in the literature for three main reasons. First, there are no singular studies within the

feminist theory framework that explore how females achieved their high administrative

positions (i.e., superintendents and IHE presidents). Secondly, no similar research studies

with the theoretical framework of feminist standpoint theory with in-depth explorations

of the supports and challenges women face to the superintendent and higher education president positions. Third, this research will help to fill the gap of the subject of female senior leadership, specifically in education. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) explained that:

> By making women's concrete experiences the "point of entry" for research and scholarship and by exposing the rich array of new knowledge contained within women's experiences, feminist standpoint scholars begin to fill in the gaps on the subject of women in different disciplines (p. 58).

This research is important because it provides a unique opportunity to gather instrumental information for other women considering embarking on similar pathways to achieve the highest educational administrative positions. This study could be applied to the local problem of the lack of females in the top administrative positions in education in highlighting the experiences of women in one Midwestern state. The results of this study potentially could be applied to solve the problem of a shortage of females in the highest educational administrative positions in the United States. This study is significant and salient because the results could provide the potential of professional application for females aspiring to the presidency and superintendency positions. This study also could be fertile ground for positive social change. The results of this study could aid in the improvement of the human and social conditions by promoting the worth, dignity and professional development of women, communities, organizations, educational institutions, and cultures. The results of this research could also be beneficial by potentially impacting educational systems.

Moreover, there is a shortage of research and current studies exploring the

pathways of women in achieving the topmost administrative positions in education in the

United States of America. In addition, there is not much research or current studies

exploring the specific challenges and supports to the female pathway to the presidency or

the female superintendent position. Few studies exist exploring solutions to the

disproportionally low number of women compared to men in these powerful roles.

Therefore, it is important to explore female pathways to the top educational

administrative positions. There is a gap in the literature with regard to the

underrepresentation of females in the highest educational administrative positions, and

more research is needed on this problem.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the boundaries of the study which include

challenging time constraints, events, and processes. The exploratory nature of this study

could be considered a strength because it matches the nature of the problem this research

is tackling, and that has not been studied abundantly. In fact, exploratory studies could be

the perfect fit if implemented correctly. However, this same strength has the possibility of

a "disadvantage of requiring extensive data collection as well as the time required for this

process" (Creswell, 2008, p. 561). The concurrent triangulation design of the study could

potentially be considered a limitation. According to Creswell (2008):

> One difficulty with this design is how to transform one form of data into the other
>
> form to integrate and compare databases. Moreover, even if integration is
>
> possible, inconsistent results may emerge, making it necessary to collect

additional data or revisit the collected databases to reconcile the differences (p.

558).

The limited timeframe of data collection may have limited the scope of this

research study. Results of this study were limited to the experiences and perceptions of

female community college and university presidents as well as female superintendents at

the time the data were collected from January 1, 2020 to February 29, 2020. In addition,

the limit of the one-hour timeframe for all the interviews could also be considered a

limitation. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted "some case studies may not have clean

beginning and ending points" (p. 102). However, the researcher in this study set clear and

practical boundaries for this research in order to avoid unclear starting and ending points.

The events and processes of the research study including the interviews could be

considered possible limitations of this study. Qualitative research can get messy at times

as the researcher has no control over how the interviews will exactly transpire, what the

participant might say, any events such as cancellations to the interviews or gatekeeping

the interviews. In addition, the processes of transcribing and analyzing data could get

difficult and be considered a limitation. However, the researcher in this study was

organized, planned ahead, and had extensive interviewing experience. The researcher

also utilized an electronic transcription service that used Artificial Intelligence (AI) to

generate a first draft of the audio recorded interviews with women presidents.

Finally, historically the rigor of qualitative interviews has been questioned and

criticized (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 102). However, in the last several decades more

rigorous qualitative studies have been published and this study will add to the literature.

In the past 30 years, qualitative research has gained recognition for more published

research and increased availability of referenced works (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Thomas, 2015; Yin, 2014).

Assumptions. The purpose of this study was to explore the pathways of females in the highest administrative positions in education. This study also explored the challenges and supports females encountered in their pathways to these distinguished educational administrative positions. Furthermore, this research explored possible solutions to the lack of sufficient numbers of females in the highest administrative positions in education. This study includes the following assumptions:

(a) The female presidents and superintendents in this study have obtained the highest administrative positions in education.

(b) Currently females are less likely than their male counterparts to become community college and university presidents, and superintendents.

(c) Females are highly capable of excelling in the higher education presidency and superintendent positions.

(d) Participants in this study will respond honestly and openly.

(e) Current female community college presidents, university presidents and superintendents may provide crucial information about their pathways, supports, and challenges that could be vital to future women aspiring to these highest administrative positions in education.

These assumptions were assumed to be true but not verified. Potential weaknesses of this study include the possibility that the above assumptions were not correct. The bounds of this study limit the assumptions, and potential weaknesses of the study.

Scope. The scope of this study was limited to the perceptions of current female presidents and superintendents at the time of the interviews. The timeframe defined for data collection may have limited the scope of the study. Results of the study were limited to perceptions of presiding female community college and university presidents in a Midwestern state from January 2020 to February 2020.

Delimitations. Delimitations are the boundaries of the study that indicate the study's narrowed scope (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 110). This study was delimited to a study of current female presidents at community colleges and universities, and current female superintendents belonging to different districts within the public-school system within a Midwestern state. The study was also delimited to participants who had been in the presidency role for a minimum of six months. Further, the delimitations of this study were the researcher's intention to focus only on a purposive convenient sample of female community college presidents, university presidents and superintendents within the one Midwestern state, as opposed to the entire United States of America.

The college presidents and community and/or technical colleges in this study were limited to public, not-for-profit two-year institutions located within the United States of America. Superintendents in this study were limited to the females who were members of a related educational organization. University presidents and universities in this study were limited to public, not-for-profit four-year institutions located within the United States of America.

According to Creswell (2008), delimitations expose the potential weakness of a study. A significant delimitation of this study was the ability to generalize results to the general population. It is also important to note that the various experiences and

perceptions of the pathways, supports and challenges to the highest educational administrative positions could be different for each participant. Geographic location was another limitation as the experiences and perceptions of presidents and superintendents from a Midwestern state may not generalize to other locations in the United States. The experiences and perceptions of the participants in this study are not representative of all female community college and university presidents, and superintendents in the United States of America. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized. However, this study was exploratory in determining emerging themes and commonalities.

Another limitation related to the methodology used was that the researcher did not have long hours available with each participant. By virtue of the community college and university presidency positions, accessibility was restricted. This lack of accessibility limited the researcher's ability to collect the data needed to address the research questions. Other limitations to consider involve small sample sizes, and the potential for questionnaire errors including a self-reporting bias.

Conclusions

In summary, the key point of this study is the problem of low representation of women in the highest educational administrative positions in the United States. Other significant aspects of the study included exploring the possible challenges and supports these women experienced along the pathways of their pathways. This study furthermore examined possible solutions to the problem of the underrepresentation of women in these prominent top administrative positions in education. The data resulting from this study were triangulated through exploring experiences of pathways to the female presidency in higher education and the superintendency. A quantitative questionnaire was sent to

female college and university presidents and superintendents, and qualitative interviews were conducted with female presidents of higher education institutions in a Midwestern state.

The remaining sections of the literature review, research method, findings and discussion will address the problem of the shortfall of females in the topmost administrative positions in education, including the challenges and supports to their pathways. In addition, suggestions for possible solutions to the problem of the sparse number of women in these prominent positions in education will be explored for future generations of women who aspire to achieving the role of the presidency in higher education and the superintendency in school districts.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review focuses on the underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative positions in education, the challenges and supports to these positions, and possible solutions to the problem. It is also important to note that there is an extreme underrepresentation of female minorities in the highest administrative positions in education. The content of this literature review includes books, textbooks, peer reviewed journal articles, newspaper articles, and information from accredited websites.

The review is focused on the problem of the need for more females in the highest administrative positions in education and the study's research questions. The literature review is organized according to the following components: Introduction, Theoretical Framework, and Conclusions. In addition, some landmark studies as part of the theoretical framework have been identified. Finally, although there is a deficiency of quantitative studies on the shortage of female community college and university presidents, the researcher has selected two quantitative studies to be included.

The strategy used for searching the literature was to use a community college and university library search engines to first find peer reviewed journal articles (dating from 2000 to 2019) and books (dating from 1958 to 2019). Often the results of these searches led to finding more articles, books, textbooks, newspapers, and websites through sources mentioned and reviewing reference lists. The review of related research and literature is directly related to the problem of the scantiness of females in the highest administrative positions in education, the research questions, and objectives of this study.

This review of related research and literature includes comparisons and contradictions of different points of view of different research outcomes on the sparse

representation of women in the highest educational administrative positions. It also

highlights the relationship of this study to previous empirical research that has come

before it.

Introduction

The infrequency of female representation in senior positions at community

colleges and universities, and in superintendencies in the United States has been an

ongoing issue. There is a documented history of numerous examples of the shortage of

female leadership in education over many years (Gillett-Karam 2001; Glazer-Raymo

2008; Longman & Anderson, 2011; Madsen 2007(a); Rhodes 2003; Allred, Maxwell, &

Skrla, 2017; Allen & Flood, 2017-2018; Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Cejda,

2008; Gosmire, Morrison, Van Olsdel, 2010; McCabe, 2001). Although there are more

female presidents of colleges and universities now than ever before, and although more

females are in the superintendent role now as well, the number is disproportionate

compared to their male counterparts and it is still a problem (Broido, Brown, Stygles, &

Bronkema, 2015; De-Frank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, & Wheatly, 2016; Redmond,

Gutke, Galligan, Howard, & Newman, 2017; Allred, Maxwell, & Skrla, 2017; Bañuelos,

2008; Björk, 2000, Glass, 2000; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Kelsey, Allen, Coke, & Ballard,

2014; Keller, 1999). Interestingly, although females generally outnumber males in

enrollment at community colleges and four-year universities, mainly white males

continue to outnumber females in the presidency at these institutions. In a landmark

study, VanDerLinden (2004) noted, "the representation of women in top administrative

positions is still not proportionate to their representation in the classroom, nor in the

community college ranks" (p. 13).

A lack of diversity and gender equity in the presidency in higher education and superintendency sends a negative message to female students and potential females aspiring to these prominent positions. The fact that there is a male president at a community college or university, or a male superintendent possibly sends a message to women that they are not worthy or capable of those prominent positions. "One benefit of greater diversity on senior leadership teams is the decision making that is more widely representative and less likely to reflect groupthink" (Longman & Anderson, 2016, p. 34). Thus, the low representation of women in the highest administrative positions in education essentially affects decisions that impact all students.

In the interest of equitable employment for all applicants, and equitable education for all students, the disproportionally low representation of females in the highest administrative positions in education is a salient topic that needs to be exigently addressed. The focus of this literature review is on the history of the uncommonness of female community college and university presidents, the history of the scarcity of female superintendents, the challenges women in the highest educational administrative positions might face, the supports women might experience in achieving the highest educational administrative positions, and some possible solutions to the problem. This literature review contains summaries of literatures that help define the most important aspects of this study and substantiates the rationale for the theoretical framework of the study.

Theoretical Framework

With a focus on the transformation of marginalized groups (such as women), the feminist theoretical framework seeks to improve the lives of women. Feminist standpoint

theory (FST) is grounded in advancing women's sociological positions. According to

Brooks (2007):

> Building knowledge from women's actual or concrete life experiences is acutely
>
> important, feminist standpoint scholars argue, if we hope to repair the historical
>
> trend of women's misrepresentation and exclusion from the dominant knowledge
>
> cannons. And only by making women's concrete life experiences the primary
>
> source of our investigations can we succeed in constructing knowledge that
>
> accurately reflects and represents women (p. 56).

Standpoint theory is the culmination of a body of scholarship exploring how one's

position in society shapes perceptions about society in general, and of specific individuals

(Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor II, 2013; Litwin & Hallstein, 2007; Wood, 2005; Orbe

1998). A personal point of view can play a strong role in shaping perceptions within a

culture. According to Adler, Rosenfeld, and Proctor II (2013), "unless one has been

disadvantaged, it can be difficult to imagine how the world might look to someone who

has been treated badly because of race, ethnicity, gender, biological sex, sexual

orientation, or socioeconomic class" (p. 119). Standpoint theory and the feminist

standpoint theory are most commonly applied to the difference between the perspectives

of privileged social groups and people who have less power (Kinefuchi & Orbe, 2008;

Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor II, 2021; Orbe 1998) and this includes the perspectives of

women (Dougherty, 2001; Buzzanell, Remke, Meisenbach, Liu, Bowers, & Conn, 2017;

Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor II, 2021; Orbe 1998).

This study takes a feminist approach with a theoretical framework focused on the

Feminist standpoint theory (FST). Glazer-Raymo (2008) advocated, "for more attention

to structural barriers that exclude categories of women who have been traditionally underrepresented" (p. 23). Currently however, there are no clear-cut solutions or answers to this problem.

This mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study on the lack of females in the highest administrative positions in education would contribute to both scholarship and practice because "there is a limited amount of research available on the experiences of women administrators" in education (Campbell, Mueller, & Souza, 2010, p. 20). By putting a positive emphasis on the topic and focusing on providing crucial information for future females to the superintendent and president of higher education institution positions, important information can be shared. The research questions of how successful women in the highest administrative positions in education described their pathways, and descriptions of challenges and obstacles they experienced could provide valuable information for women seeking to advance their careers to senior leadership positions in higher education.

There seemed to be a clear and comprehensive indication of agreement in the literature and a common theme in the literature that female leadership in highest administrative positions in education warranted separate study and understanding. "A different kind of problem is the relative absence of women in senior educational or academic positions" (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012, p. 191). Thus, the issue of the lack of females in senior leadership positions in higher education is often viewed as "a different kind of problem" because there is no clear indication of the root of the problem and not one clear resolution. Glazer-Raymo (2008) suggested "women leaders offer different ways of looking at the academy and interpreting the external, social, political,

and economic environment" (p. 24). Additionally, Longman and Anderson (2011) claimed "the motivators that can cause individuals to consider or pursue more senior leadership appear to be somewhat different for women than for men" (p. 440).

Similarly, Gillett-Karam (2001) claimed "for all our beliefs that women are competent leaders, we are still a phenomenon that warrants separate study and understanding" (p. 168). These scholars seemed to see women as unique individuals and the near absence of female leadership in highest administrative positions in education as a unique problem.

There also seemed to be a clear and comprehensive indication in the literature that there is disagreement as to what is the best possible solution(s) to the paucity of females in the highest administrative positions in education. Some scholars focused on female leadership initiatives as a solution, whereas others stated changes in the overall institution were needed in order to address the low number of females in the highest educational administrative positions.

DeFrank-Cole et al. (2016) suggested female-only initiatives and interventions are needed as a solution to the problem of the deficiency of women in senior leadership positions in education. While there are numerous female leadership training opportunities, "a common methodology is a leadership institute for women such as the HERS Institutes of the Women's Leadership Forum at Harvard" (DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, & Wheatly, 2016, p. 27). These female leadership initiatives focused impact and effectiveness on individual female participants. DeFrank-Cole et al. (2016) noted the results from their female-focused leadership initiative wielded a positive impact and women participants consistently rated "their effectiveness on a number of skills

significantly higher/improved at the completion of their training than on their initial self-assessment" (p. 29). While these female leadership training initiatives provide unique opportunities for women, the overall outcome was focused on individual participants. Therefore, overall change within the individual's institution was generally not achieved. Shepherd (2017) noted these leadership efforts were "to 'fix' the women" when instead she suggested change interventions should be sought out "to 'fix' the organization" (p. 86).

Shepherd (2017) noted "a mix of change interventions may be required that also seek to 'fix' the organization, i.e., in terms of systemic and organizational changes" (p. 86). In contrast to individual female leadership initiatives, some scholars seemed to advocate for solutions to take place at the institutional level rather than with individual females. VanDerLinden (2004) stated that for females the "success or lack of success in an administrative position can be affected beyond one's individual control" (p. 17). Therefore, some scholars instead viewed the low representation of females in the highest administrative positions in education as more of a systemic issue with the institution instead of an individual problem. An institutional shift in female community college presidency, the female university presidency, and/or in the female superintendency could have significant positive overall effects. VanDerLinden (2004) offered unique suggestions for interventions and initiatives such as prominent leaders reviewing policies and practices that helped or hindered female leadership, an institutional assessment or audit, and an annual status report because "an institution's treatment of women is an important indicator of its health and vitality" (p. 17). However, other scholars have stated instead that recruitment efforts need to be changed in order for women to gain more

access to the highest administrative positions in education. Shepherd (2017) suggested

"more importantly, perhaps, the micro-politics and cultural assumptions that underpin

these practices and procedures--for example, in relation to recruitment and selection--also

need to be acknowledged and addressed" (p. 86).

Eddy (2008) noted that more attention needed "to be paid to supporting women in

climbing the career ladder and in thinking of expanded conceptions of leadership" (p.

64). In fact, some women decide to quit work rather than trying to climb the corporate

ladder to no success. These women either intentionally or unintentionally "jump off the

man-made ladder" (Buckingham, 2009, p. 38). There is a need for more inquiry into the

lack of females in the highest administrative leadership positions in education.

Interestingly, Valdata (2006) noted that for women in the highest administrative

positions in education, "stress and controversy are an inescapable part of the job" (p. 28).

Scholars have also documented that for minority women in these highest administrative

positions in education, the negative aspects of the job can be compounded. According to

Valdata (2006), minority women in the highest administrative positions in education most

often face situations where "the inevitable skirmishes can take on a whole new

dimension" (p. 28). Thus, it is important to explore and examine the experiences of the

pathways of female presidents and superintendents in education. Experts noted that

particularly a minority female president in higher education or a minority female

superintendent had "the capacity to bring change to the look of leadership in their

institutions, but even more importantly to influence the look of other organizations in the

future" (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 134). Scholars have noted that women in the highest

educational administrative positions in education have much to offer in their leadership.

Female leaders in the highest administrative position in education "provided concrete examples, valuable advice, words of caution and processes by which leadership effectiveness might be enhanced" (Rhodes, 2003, p. 48).

Another reason why underrepresented female college and university presidents, and superintendents warranted a recommended course of research is there is not a great amount of research on these specific issues. Madsen (2007a) suggested "research on high level women leaders in higher education is limited;" and "there are only a few pieces currently published in the area of developing leadership as they relate to women university presidents" (p. 116). Thus, more research is needed on female leadership in the highest administrative positions in education. "Research is needed on women in top management roles" (Madsen, 2007a, p. 99). In fact, research on the disproportionate number of women compared to men in the highest administration positions in education could be considered sparse. Madsen (2007b) noted "research on high level women leaders in higher education is rare" (p. 198). In addition, the research on the rarity of female superintendents could also be considered sparse. Blount (1998) stated:

Few women currently serve as American school superintendents, an odd phenomenon since education and teaching have long been known as "women's work."

While this simple assertion echoes through discussions, forums, journals, and reports, seldom is substantiation offered beyond anecdotal evidence or data based on statistical studies of sampled populations that in some cases do not accurately depict the number of women (p. 171).

Based on a review of the literature, several potential themes and perceptions will

be explored including the history of the scantiness of female community college and

university presidents, the history of the shortage of female superintendents, human

capital, competency, leadership training, glass ceiling, sexism, the good old boys'

network and culture, gender stereotyping, mentorship, encouragement, institutional fit,

geographic mobility, and personal and professional balance.

The historical underrepresentation of female presidents in higher education.

There is continuity in the literature over time documenting the underrepresentation of

female college and university presidents. History has shown there has been little change

and that white males have generally held the presidency positions at community colleges

and universities in the United States and globally.

Although there have been some improvements in more women in the presidency

roles in higher education over the past few decades, according to Buller (2015), "any

truly transformational change requires a great deal of time" (p. 9). The numbers of female

university and college presidents have slowly increased over the years. Glazer-Raymo

(2008) noted women continued "to be a largely untapped resource, at least in the upper

echelons of administration and policy making" (p. 22). However, despite the relatively

low number of female presidents in higher education, some female scholars saw a light at

the end of the tunnel. "Although many of us would bemoan the small number of female

presidents in the 1980's, we looked to a future that would have more well-prepared

women than men leaders" (Gillett-Karam, 2001, p.168). In contrast to Gillett-Karam's

bright hope for the future of female leaders in higher education, more recently the 2017

American College President Study by the American Council on Education (ACE), noted

that over the past 20 years, the number of female college and university presidents has

risen from roughly 21% to 30%.

Female presidents at community colleges and universities in the United States

between the 1980's and the 2000's increased in small numbers compared to their male

counterparts. The increase in female presidents in higher education seemed to move at a

crawling pace over the next few decades. Rhodes (2003) noted "in 1991 a nationwide

survey of college presidents conducted by the American Association of Community

Colleges (AACC) indicated that 11% were women, and by 2001 women had captured

27.8%" (p. 47), and Jackson and Harris (2007) noted there simply were "few women

administrators in colleges and universities in the United States" (p. 121). Employment in

the community college and university president position has been inequitable in terms of

gender. According to VanDerLinden (2004), "women were most often found on the

organizational periphery" (p. 2).

In the early 2000s, less than one third of all community college presidents were

women in the United States. Documented growth of women in presidential leadership

from 1986 to 2006 showed that while "the proportion of presidencies held by women had

more than doubled during those two decades, from 10% to 23%, the pace had slowed and

female presidencies were still concentrated in community colleges (29% contrasted with

23% of college and university presidencies nationally)" (Longman & Anderson, 2011, p.

423). Interestingly, "although a small number of women were presidents and academic

vice presidents, women were more likely to be found in positions of librarians, human

resources managers, minority affairs administrators, and financial aid officers"

(VanDerLinden, 2004, p. 2). Even scanter in higher education were minority female

presidents. "Few African American females hold the position of college president" (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 119).

Over the last decade, males continued to outnumber females in higher education presidencies. The American Council on Education (ACE) reported that "of 2148 presidents responding to a 2007 survey, women accounted for less than one-fourth of all presidents (23%), with minority women making up only 4 percent of the total" (Glazer-Raymo, 2008, p. 22). De-Frank-Cole et al. (2016) noted "it is abundantly clear that fewer women than men make it to the senior-most leadership positions at colleges and universities" and "the number of female college and university presidents hovers around 26%" (p. 26).

Most recently, according to the American College President Study 2017, "the percentage of college presidents who were women increased four percentage points, from 26 percent in 2011 to 30 percent in 2016" (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017, p. 7). Therefore, although women have been making progress in gaining access to the presidency, there is still a disassociation with the strong female representation of students attending higher education institutions, and the weak representation of women in the presidency of these same institutions. Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard, & Newman (2017) noted, women have "represented the majority of undergraduate students for the past 35 years" and "it is reasonable to question why their representation diminishes at each step of the academic leadership ladder" (p. 333).

Another important consideration is that if and when a woman is appointed to the community college or university presidency, she is often the first. "The first woman

president at any institution is under constant scrutiny by both internal and external audiences, especially at the beginning of her tenure" (Bornstein, 2007, p. 21).

Since there is an underrepresentation of women in top administrative leadership positions in education, there are few in-depth studies of the specific pathways of successful female community college and university presidents. According to Madsen (2007b):

> the literature continuously mentions the lack of women leaders in high-level positions and presents general strategies needed to make progress in this area; yet, few research studies have focused on the deep exploration and investigation of the backgrounds and experiences of successful women leaders (p. 183).

As of 2011, gender inequity continued in the community college and university presidency despite more female students than males attending most of these institutions. "Gender equity continues to be elusive in many sectors of U. S. society, despite a majority of women now participating in the labor force and more women than men attending college" (Longman & Anderson, 2011, p. 422). In 2015, "significant changes had "taken place in the context of higher education, including women surpassing men's enrollment at bachelors, masters, and doctoral levels" (Broido, Brown, Stygles, & Bronkema, 2015, p. 595-596). However, females in the presidency in higher education did not match this pace and were represented in less than half of these institutions.

Employment in the community college and university president position is currently inequitable in terms of gender, with less than one third of all community college presidents being women (Rhodes, 2003). There is significant and long documented history of the insufficiency of female leadership in higher education. Unfortunately, the

deficit of female senior leadership in community colleges and universities in the United States is still a current and salient problem that has continued for the last several decades (Broido, Brown, Stygles, & Bronkema, 2015; De-Frank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, & Wheatly, 2016; Gangone 2016; Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard, & Newman, 2017; Bornstein, 2007; Gillett-Karam, 2001; Glazer-Raymo 2008; Hough & Holland, 2011, Liu, 2007; Longman & Anderson, 2011; Madsen, 2007(a); Rhodes, 2003; Leatherwood & Williams, 2008).

In a landmark study, VanDerLinden (2004) noted, "the representation of women in top administrative positions is still not proportionate to their representation in the classroom, nor in the community college ranks" (p. 13). Interestingly, although currently women mostly outnumber males in enrollment in higher education institutions, males continue to significantly outnumber females in the presidency. Read and Kehm (2016) found that "in recent years, a rise in the total number of women undergraduates has led to the argument that higher education has become a 'feminised' arena" (p. 815). However, women are not represented in senior leadership positions in higher education institutions, which include the community college presidency. Since more women than ever before are now attending higher education institutions, it is also important to consider that this will result in a strong female alumni base. "It doesn't take actuarial tables to realize women at many colleges will be the majority of institutions' alumni base in ensuing decades" (Glazer-Raymo, 2008, p. 24). Thus, it is concerning that even though women have significant and strong enrollment in higher education institutions in the United States, females are not represented in the senior leadership positions such as the presidency of these colleges and universities.

Viniar (2006) noted, "filling 'the leadership gap' has reached a crisis point for community colleges nationwide" (p. 24). As more and more college and university presidents retire, the need to fill this important position increases. However, it could be that women face unique challenges to the pathway of the presidency in higher education. According to the landmark study of DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, and Wheatly (2016), in higher education there is a "disconnect between the number of women who *could* become presidents and the number of women who *do* become presidents" and "women need to see themselves in other women who take on positions of leadership" (p. 26).

In addition, "between 1977 and 2009 the percentage of female new doctoral recipients from American universities increased from 24.8 to 46.8" (Ehrenberg, Jakubson, Martin, Main & Eisenberg, 2012, p. 9). Thus, there are many women who have the potential, education, and experience to become a president at a higher education institution, but there are barriers standing in the way. Another consideration is the gender pay gap between male and female presidents in higher education. "The gender pay gap persists within the broader context of university presidents" (Blevins, Sauerwald, Hoobler & Robertson, 2019, p. 611). Males have historically earned more money than females holding the same position. The current gender pay gap in female presidents in higher education is something to consider and explore. The Blevins et al. (2019) study "supports previous gender studies that focus primarily on the negative effect that gender bias has on women's compensation relative to men" (p. 611).

There are not many quantitative studies on the disproportional number of female presidents in institutions of higher education. However, according to Caton (2007),

"findings suggest that some women presidents in four-year and above institutions indicated that gender negatively impacted their leadership abilities, professional relationships, and personal characteristics" (p. 17). Therefore, other challenges women may experience in attaining a higher education presidency could be sexism and discrimination, although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact challenges. In the other quantitative study, Ballenger (2010) found what she called invisible barriers to women leaders in higher education which included a "lack of mentors, the good old boy network, gender inequalities, and slower career paths" (p. 15).

Another challenge for women who aspire to the presidency in higher education is the likelihood that they would be placed in a two-year institution instead of a four-year institution. Although there is an overall underrepresentation of women in the presidency in higher education at both colleges and universities, female presidents "are much more likely to be found at two-year schools" (Rhodes, 2003, p. 47).

The historical underrepresentation of female superintendents. There is ample evidence of the dearth of female superintendents in K-12 education. The progress for females to advance to the superintendent position has been historically low and slow. For example, Glass (1987) noted:

> Women…are quietly making history by taking their places as top level leaders in the educational institutions of this country…In spite of the fact that progress has been made over recent years, there are still some glaring inequities which cry out for remedy…less than 1 percent of school superintendents are female (p. 18).

The history of a lack of women in superintendent positions has existed for a long time. In the year 2000, a decennial study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) stated that 13.2% of the superintendents in the United States were females (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Wesson & Marshall, 2012; Allred, Maxwell, & Skrla, 2017). Currently, the statistics are not much better. AASA's most recent report stated that approximately 25% of superintendents are women in the United States of America (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011; Allred, Maxwell, & Skrla, 2017).

In American schools, women constitute the great majority of teachers and a growing percent of middle managers, yet in 2010 they accounted for slightly less than a quarter of school superintendents (Kowalski et al. 2011; Bolman & Deal 2017). The senior leadership is not representative of the population as a whole. Women in the superintendent role may have to experience gender bias and different cultural and professional norms compared to their male counterparts. According to Björk (2000):

> Over the past several decades, research on women and gender in educational administration has illuminated how culture and professional norms have created masculine myths of the existence of the one best way of leading and have perpetuated expectations and gender bias in the superintendency (p. 14).

Once they reach the superintendency, women face challenges that men most often do not. According to one scholar, "women superintendents reported they were aware of their gender from the time they got dressed for work in the morning" (Bañuelos, 2008, p. 28). Female superintendents have faced challenges with communication. Women superintendents planned "more carefully how to communicate and have their decisions

made" (Bañuelos, 2008, p. 29). Women superintendents who experienced gender

stereotyping "ignored the comments and kept their feelings to themselves" (Bañuelos,

2008, p. 29).

This research will fill a gap in the literature on the underrepresentation of female

superintendents.

Challenges to pathways of females in the highest administrative positions in

education. Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard, & Newman (2017) suggested that

challenges "to female leadership are often contested in the literature with diverse

perceptions" (p. 332). Thus, there is not one magic bullet, or one main challenge keeping

women from the community college and university presidency, and superintendency

positions. In addition, many scholars not only have diverse perceptions but conflicting

opinions on what exactly is keeping mainly males instead of females in the highest

administration positions in education. In her landmark study, Rhodes (2003) described

challenges to women in higher education administration as:

> Self-esteem issues, the need for self-improvement for women administrators who
>
> desire promotions, lack of women's exposure to challenges and constituencies
>
> outside the academic arena, the challenge of balancing family and careers, the
>
> lack of mentors to assist in a rise to the top, lack of available networks of
>
> influence, and a remoteness from activities that develop a strong understanding of
>
> the mission or vision of the college (p. 48).

It appears the underrepresentation of female leadership in the highest

administration positions in education is not only apparent in the United States, but it is an

international issue as well. Thus, "irrespective of industry or country, there are still fewer

women than men in senior leadership positions" in education (Redmond, Gutke,

Galligan, Howard, & Newman, 2017, p. 332).

There are many challenges for women to overcome to reach the college and

university presidency, and superintendency positions in education. As it was stated

earlier, and what is important to keep in mind, is that interestingly, there is not one magic

bullet or one main challenge keeping women from the highest administration positions in

education. The literature on the challenges for women in highest leadership and

administration positions in education is murky, confusing, and sometimes even

contradictory. Bornstein (2007) noted, the first female president or superintendent "at any

institution is under constant scrutiny by both internal and external audiences, especially at

the beginning of her tenure" (p. 21). Thus, perhaps pressure and implicit and explicit

scrutiny are challenges for women to the presidency and superintendency positions in

education.

Because higher education presumes academics will devote all of their energy to

work, women who cross the boundaries between work and family responsibilities are

expected to "pay the toll" by concealing the time spent on family role performance to

avoid being thought of as less dedicated or competent in the workplace (Wheat & Hill,

2016; Morley, 2013).

Some possible themes of challenges could include issues such as human capital,

competency, leadership training, the glass ceiling, sexism, the good old boys' network

and culture, and gender stereotyping.

    Human capital. Human capital can be defined as leadership and administrative acumen (Woollen, 2016). Human capital is an important professional development that is needed to advance to the next level of administrative positions in education. Educational institutions invest in human capital in employees for many reasons but also because the return of investment exceeds the cost of the position (Goldin, 2014). Overall, investment in human capital can be not only good for the educational institution and employee, but for the overall society as a whole as well. Some scholars have postulated the significance of human capital because the investment in people benefits a given society (Sweetland, 1996).

    VanDerLinden (2004) was one of the few scholars who explored the theme of human capital as the culprit for challenges for women to the presidency in higher education because they had "less education, training, and commitment to their jobs than do men" (p. 3). Some scholars contend that "women have traditionally received less preparation for such achievement and have been described as having less human capital than men" (Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard & Newman, 2017, p. 334). VanDerLinden's (2004) landmark study contradicts Redmond et al. (2017) as she found few "significant differences between men and women administrators in terms of their educational level, external and internal professional development activities, and mentoring activities" (VanDerLinden, 2004, p. 13).

    Some scholars, however, may argue that human capital in terms of professional development is a challenge keeping women from the highest administration positions in education. Shepherd (2017) suggested that it "is not in itself an adequate explanation for their continued underrepresentation at the top of higher education" (p. 86). It is also

important to remember that the implementation of such training programs could possibly

"offer narrow solutions to far broader problems" (Valdés, 1996, p. 29).

Competency. Another possible challenge to females achieving success in the

highest administration positions in education surround issues of competency. Some

scholars claim competency in the highest administration positions in education involves

instructional leadership, collaboration and problem-solving skills, relationship

development, fairness, trustworthiness, and transparency (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge,

2015; Breton, 2014). Other scholars envisage competency as simply a lack of confidence

(McGee, 2010). Competency can be defined as required skills, knowledge, qualifications,

and capacities. Scholars have defined competency skills as a part of a repertoire each

woman developed and valued in their previous work of teaching or administrative

experiences (Palladino, Grady, Haar, & Perry, 2007). However, some scholars assert

competency also includes self-discipline, confidence, skill, and humor (McCabe, 2001).

Another way to look at competency is through the lens of accumulated

knowledge, skills, and leadership through multiple positions held along the way

(Woollen, 2016). However, women must have the human capital opportunities to advance

to the highest administration positions in education. Female administrators credited their

college or university course work, professional organizations, and/or their understanding

of the political structure as it related to the position for strengthening their leadership

skills (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Challenges to the community college female presidency, university presidency

and superintendency included "stereotypical attitudes toward women" and beliefs that

women were "not as competent as men" (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 121). Due to these

negative attitudes, Eddy (2008) suggested, "women should consciously reflect on their

career pathway" (p.63). Another school of thought and possible theme to challenges

keeping females from the most senior leadership and administration positions in

education could be women were not paying enough attention to their own careers.

      However, it is important to consider that women were paying acute attention to

their own careers and purposely delaying their own advancement for a number of

different reasons. In fact, some scholars have noted that in order for women to

communicate and move forward in their educational administration careers, it is essential

to recognize the limitations of their own understandings and experiences (Douglas, Lane-

Bonds, & Freeman, 2017). For instance, some scholars found that women will delay

entry into administration in order to be 'super-prepared' before applying, and they enter

with greater professional preparation (McGee, 2010; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Spencer &

Kochan, 2000). Thus, women could be waiting to be exorbitantly prepared before

applying for administration positions in education and not any less ambitious than their

male counterparts. Another consideration is the impact on women's progression was in

terms of the time it took to progress and advance to the next level and the emotional toll it

took on them during the progression (Oikelome, 2017). Shepherd (2017) found "female

academic managers are no less ambitious or likely to apply for a more senior

management role than are their male counterparts" (86).

Leadership training. The lack of leadership training could also be a possible theme and perception from the literature. Leadership training can be defined as a variety of activities such as: graduate education programs, professional associations, and formalized leadership training (Horn, 2018; Vaughn & Weisman, 2003). Leadership training has also been defined in the literature as trainings offered by associations or centers in an effort to prepare leaders to assume presidential positions, which is important because there is a need to purposefully prepare senior education administrators (Horn, 2018; Madsen, Longman, & Daniels, 2012).

Leadership training is essential to succeeding in the highest administrative positions in education. "All educational leaders must embrace and model the practice of lifelong learning" (Augustine-Shaw, 2013, p. 19). However, women are not always offered or given leadership training which is a challenge to the advancement to the highest administration positions in education. Leadership training often involves participation in state and national organizations that provide opportunities to expand knowledge, skills, influence, and recognition (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). If women are not participating in leadership training, they could also be missing out on networking opportunities to advance their careers to the highest administrative positions in education.

Scholars have noted the profundity of the networking component of leadership training. Networking can be a resource that provided opportunities for administrators in education to expand their knowledge, increase their sphere of influence, and collaborate with likeminded colleagues (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

The challenge of women not participating in leadership training is missed opportunities because women can conceive and conceptualize new career possibilities

that lead them to participate in leadership development programs and eventually pursuing leadership positions (Woollen, 2016).

Glass ceiling. Another possible challenge keeping women from achieving the highest educational administrative positions could be the glass ceiling. In fact, the inability of women to shatter the glass ceiling to the upper ranks of leadership in higher education is a commonly noted roadblock (Washington, 2010; Allen & Flood 2017-2018; Stewart, Cooper, Stewart, & Friedley, 2003). With the glass ceiling effect, even though women work hard to succeed they eventually hit an invisible but hard "glass ceiling" where promotion stops or stands still. Johnson (2016) defined the glass ceiling as "a long-standing metaphor for the intangible systemic barriers that prevent women from obtaining senior-level positions" (p. 6). In education, scholars have noted that senior leadership is dominated by males while teaching is dominated by females (Wyland, 2016; Blount, 1998; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 1996).

Jackson and Harris (2007) suggested the glass ceiling effect could "be observed at every rung of the academic career ladder" and "the glass ceiling representation of barriers is responsible for women's inability to climb the higher rungs of academic success" (p. 121). Similarly, Eddy (2008) suggested for women "the sticky floors and glass ceilings in colleges provide resistance along the career pathway" (p. 64). Likewise, scholars have found the underrepresentation of women in top administrative positions in education as a glass ceiling, a sticky floor, a concrete wall, or a glass cliff (Wyland, 2016).The glass ceiling is an invisible and powerful barrier for women to advance in powerful positions. Goshgarian (2015) acknowledged, "the fact that we (still) live in a male-dominated society is like an elephant in the room that everyone pretends not to notice" (p. 270).

Individual experiences of female administrators in education reflect the glass

ceiling effect. Recently one female president described, "I didn't so much see glass

ceilings, as I saw the brick wall of the boys' club" (Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard

& Newman, 2017, p. 335). A female president in higher education recalled experiencing

a glass elevator that provided "an easier transition for men into senior leadership

positions than women, even though the number of women who have penetrated the 'glass

ceiling' has increased" (Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard & Newman, 2017, p. 343).

Many women have paid their dues, even a premium, for a chance at a top

position, only to find a glass ceiling between them and their goal. Scholars have found

that currently women still lag behind men in relation to opportunities to advance to senior

leadership positions in the academy (Wheat & Hill, 2016; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011).

The glass ceiling is not simply a challenge for an individual, based on the person's

inability to handle a higher-level job. Rather the glass ceiling applies to women as a

group who are kept from advancing higher *because they are women"* (Morrison et al.,

1987). However, some scholars note that there may be a price to pay for women

succeeding at breaking the glass ceiling. In terms of opportunities there is a glass ceiling

and we also say if you break the glass ceiling, make sure that the shards of glass don't kill

you (Oikelome, 2017).

Sexism. Scholars have found that women still experience the consequences of

gender discrimination in their personal and professional lives despite persistent

affirmative action and legal initiatives (Wheat & Hill, 2016; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011).

Modern sexism categorizes women into a group based merely on gender. "Each of us is a

unique individual, yet throughout history people have come up with systems to classify

and categorize us into groups" (Barron, 1998, p. 1). One way to categorize people is through sexism, and sexism is often recognized in the literature as a challenge to females aiming to achieve the highest educational administrative positions. According to Goshgarian (2015):

> This should remind us that the relationship between the sexes is not only about difference, but it is about power. The long-standing expectation that women will serve and care for others is not unrelated to their positions as the 'second sex' (p. 270).

Sexism involves discrimination and domination. Sexism can be defined as consisting "of a belief in the inherent superiority of one sex and the resulting discrimination against the other sex" (Kohl, 1992, p. 156). Scholars described sexism as challenges to progression in advancement in top educational administration positions stemming from identity structures such as gender (Oikelome, 2017).

Vettering-Braggin, Elliston, & English (1981) acknowledge that "it is easy to think of discrimination as something other people do and to call for them to change their attitudes. It is harder to recognize and change one's own beliefs" (p. 2). Subtle sexism in the form of keeping qualified female applicants out of the interview pool could also be a challenge for females, and especially minority females seeking the community college and university presidency, and superintendency.

The theme of subtle sexism compared to explicit sexism was a theme in the literature. Once scholar noted that in terms of sexism, though there were a few blatant bias acts, most of the acts were subtle or concealed (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). Scholars have noted the challenge of sexism in higher education administration. Women

could experience "the existence of modern sexism in higher education employment

contexts" (Broido, Brown, Styles & Bronkema, 2015, p. 621). Scholars have also noted

the challenge of sexism in the pathway to the superintendency. Women often have to

confront and overcome unique challenges to senior administration positions in education

that are different from men. Women often face scrutiny men don't. They are told to smile

more, their appearances are critiqued, and they can face harsh treatment when they assert

their authority (Superville, 2017).

Subtle sexism could also be seen as a form of internal exclusion. Scholars have

stated that this internal exclusion could include situations where female leaders are

formally included in the decision-making processes but also where they find their voices

were not taken seriously and believe they were not treated with equal respect (Young

2002; Biesta 2010).

Subtle or modern sexism can also manifest in the form of alternative blindness.

Alternative blindness is the failure to recognize the possibility of more options than those

given at any moment (Dobelli 2013; Buller 2015). Jackson and Harris (2007) suggested

an "effective gate-keeping technique is the argument that qualified women and minorities

are not available for hiring" (p. 121). Similarly, perhaps the problem is that males are

promoting "policies that benefit themselves and their allies" while keeping females out of

actually moving into the hired highest positions (Hursh, 2016, p. 104). Broido et al.

(2015) suggested, "understanding how women at all levels perceive and react to the

institution's gendered climate is critical to understanding their ability to survive in higher

education" (p. 596).

Good old boys' network and culture. There has been a history of a good old boys' culture in the highest administration positions in K-12 education and in higher education. Scholars have noted that historically, women have been marginalized within the organizational structure of the institution (Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017; Cejda, 2008). The good old boys' network and culture could be defined as a solid barrier to advancement because it filters out those who the network members believe can lead and those who they believe should not be allowed to lead (Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017; Chin, Lott, Rice, & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007). Other scholars have defined the good old boys' network and culture as networking mostly through an invisible network of sponsorship whereby older professionals groom younger versions of themselves for leadership positions (McGee, 2010; Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000).

This network and culture results in significant challenges for the advancement of women to senior administration in education. The good old boys' network and culture can have the ramification of filtering out those who the network members believe can lead, such as men, and those who they believe should not be allowed to lead, such as women (Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017; Chin, Lott, Rice, & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007). The good old boys' network can considerably impact leadership in education by stonewalling women's advancement within the organization as future leaders and maintaining the status quo by historically hiring males into leadership positions (Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017).

Scholars have also acknowledged that the good old boys' network and culture has created a burden for women regarding aspects of organizational structure and culture, lack of mentorship or sponsorship, lack of exposure to various areas and opportunities to

acquire essential skills, and the tendency of governing boards to serve as gatekeepers

choosing candidates that mirror themselves (Oikelome, 2017; Moore-Brown, 2005;

Jackson & Harris, 2007; Madsen, 2006, Turner, 2007; Eddy, 2003).

The good old boys' network and culture keeps women out of their group and from

advancing to the highest administration positions in education. Scholars have described

the good old boys' organizational impediments, which may include age and

discrimination, lack of administrative support, and ignoring skills that are often strengths

of female leaders (Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017). Other scholars describe the

good old boys' network and culture as a way to keep women marginalized within the

organizational structure of the institution (Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017; Cejda,

2008).

In higher education and K-12 education in the United States, the good old boys'

network has historically created a male-dominated image of leadership. In order to

advance to the highest administration position in education, the literature has mentioned

that females need to change or adapt their leadership styles. To compensate, females

reported consciously adopting masculine leadership traits such as decisiveness, appearing

tougher, talking less, and putting relational distance between themselves and the staff

(Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). Other scholars have noted that the challenges for

females aspiring to the highest educational administrative positions are huge and difficult

to change. "In order to affect culture, the conversation must happen in bigger venues than

among the women themselves" (Bañuelos, 2008, p. 30).

Gender stereotyping. For more than 30 years females in the highest

administrative positions in education experienced gender stereotyping (Connell, Cobia, &

Hodge, 2015; Bañuelos, 2008; Björk, 2000; Brunner, 2000; Goffney & Edmonson, 2012;

Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989). Because women

are not usually observed in the more powerful leadership positions in education, cultures

generally will not consider options of electing or appointing a woman to a position that

has always been filled by men (Dana, & Bourisaw, 2006; Connell, Cobia, & Hodge,

2015).

Gender stereotyping has been recognized by both men and women in K-12

education and in higher education with differing opinions. Redmond et al. (2017) noted

"there is still a serious gender imbalance among senior leaders in higher education" p.

348). However, Longman and Anderson (2011) remind us "higher education has ample

opportunity to move toward greater gender diversity in the presidency" (p. 424). Gender

stereotyping is not only prevalent in higher education, but at the superintendency as well.

Female superintendents "perceived that they had to explain things more fully to their

boards to get support than they believed men did" (Bañuelos, 2008, p. 29). Female

superintendents in the workplace also reported experiencing "inappropriate jokes or

negative comments about the female gender" (Bañuelos, 2008, p. 29). These women

reported "references to their gender were often a part of conversations of their colleagues,

the board and the public" (Bañuelos, 2008, p. 29).

Males and females recognized that gender bias existed and negatively impacted

women (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015; Newton, 2006). Aspiring women were

encouraged to actively seek such leadership opportunities and put themselves forth for

various initiatives and opportunities, rather than spend time "waiting in the wings" to be

discovered (Oikelome, 2017). Perceptions indicated that gender *does* matter in regard to

women's leadership styles, views concerning the influence of gender on their leadership, and gender role spillover of their family roles into their professional roles (Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Gender stereotypes may be involved when women's preparedness and qualifications are being considered for leadership positions. These conceptions of leadership devalue leadership of women by comparing them to masculine stereotypes. Further, women are often criticized for attempting to embrace those stereotypes or faulted for not adopting or being willing to accept those standards, thus forcing them into a double bind (Woollen, 2016; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007; Chliwniak, 1997).

Gender stereotyping can guide women to non-leadership roles that limit their opportunities to show their ability to lead (Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017; Harris, Ballenger, Hicks-Townes, Carr, & Alford, 2004). Due to traditional gender socialization women choose to spend their non-working time with family rather than on work-related issues, while men have been socialized to aspire to be a leader at work and provide for their families (Kelsey, Allen, Coke, & Ballard, 2014; Glass, 2000).

Gender stereotyping existed at the individual or institutional level and surfaced as blatant or concealed acts (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Supports to pathways of females in the highest administrative positions in education. Some supports to the female presidency in higher education and to the superintendency include mentorship, encouragement, institutional fit, geographic mobility, and personal and professional balance. The shortage of females in the highest administration positions in education is an important issue because these women can be "responsive change agents guiding the future agendas" of education and in meeting new

leadership challenges (Gillett-Karam, 2001, p. 170). As these responsive change agents, women have the power to make a difference in the future of education through senior leadership roles.

In education, "indeed the non-inclusive reality of collegial structures is clearly indicated by the predominantly male-dominated nature of the management structures it has created" (O'Connor & White, 2011, p. 903). Therefore, supports for women on pathways to the highest educational administrative positions is clearly needed. Although there are challenges keeping women from the presidency in community colleges and universities, and keeping women from the superintendency, supports could help women navigate the male-dominated nature of management structures.

Despite challenges for women in the highest administration positions in education, supports could be a possible antidote. Supports could help combat contexts in higher education that make it "all too possible that a culture of sameness may prevail" (O'Connor and White, 2011, p. 915). In the superintendency, specifically calling out gender inequities in the position could be possible support. "For women to have equal access to the superintendent's positions, women must speak out and the culture of gender stereotypes must be broken" (Bañuelos, 2008, p. 30). Historically, even though a male-dominated culture has existed in the highest administration positions in education, supports to the female pathways could change the landscape.

Before going into administration, some women enjoy staying in the classroom longer while raising their children because schedules, hours, flexibility, and time commitment work in favor of their families (McGee, 2010). Age was a theme of women who began their administrative careers later in life (McGee, 2010). Early in their careers,

female administrators enrolled in graduate programs to qualify for additional

certifications and/or earn graduate degrees (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Mentorship. Mentorship is important because women administrators need support

and a sense of connection with others who understand the world in which they live"

(Tripses, 2004). There are many different definitions of mentorship in the literature.

Scholars define a mentor as someone who teaches, coaches, advises, trains, directs,

protects, sponsors, guides, and leads another individual or individuals (Munoz, Pankake,

Mills, & Simonsson, 2018; Augustine-Shaw & Funk, 2013; Brunner, 2000; Grogan,

1996; Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2010; Shakeshaft, 1989; Shapiro,

2004). Another definition of mentorship is building strong professional relationships

through trust, mutual respect, and commitment, similar educational philosophy and

physical proximity, and personal relationships such as family and friends (Gosmire,

Morrison, & Van Osdel, 2010). Mentorship has also been defined as a personal mosaic of

experts and guides that will cover each of the areas where women need specific

information and advice. This may be someone who is good at office politics, someone

who is a good time manager, and so on (McGee, 2010; Wellington & Spence 2001).

Glazer-Raymo (2008) suggested "gender inequities exist, that there is a paucity of

mentors to provide access to social and professional networks, and that a gap continues to

exist between policies and practices in workplace structures" (p. 23). Interestingly, there

is continuity in the literature over time noting the paucity of female mentors. "A lack of

female role models in leadership positions adds to the confusion in how to act or behave

as a female leader" (Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard & Newman, 2017, p. 335). This

highlights the significant impact mentorship can have for women in the highest administration leadership positions in education.

Even if there is a paucity of female mentorship in the highest administration positions in education, it does not necessarily diminish the significance of their need. According to Eddy (2008) "mentors have a critical role in the advancement of women in the community college" (p. 63). Thus, female mentorship may be a possible support to female presidents in higher education and to females in superintendent positions.

Mentorship supporting women administrators can be formal or informal. Alternative mentoring, which may be delivered in a variety of forms, emphasizes group interactions, and often fosters relationships and promotes professional development (Kamler, 2006).

Strategies of mentorship, seizing opportunities, leadership development, and understanding institutional fit were some of the essential approaches for women aspiring the role of president (Oikelome, 2017). Women express aspiration through preparation, which often follows from the suggestion and mentoring of a colleague, supervisor, or professor (Allred, Maxwell, & Skrla, 2017).

Encouragement. In contrast to other scholars, Jackson and Harris (2007) are among the few scholars to mention that importance of encouragement for women to advance to the highest administration position in education. Yet another challenge to the female presidency in higher education and the superintendency in K-12 could be the mere lack of encouragement for women in their education. Scholars have noted that encouragement and mentoring are crucial for the success of women in upper-level administration positions in education (Bynum, 2015).

Jackson and Harris (2007) suggested the lack of encouragement existed "even though women who earned doctorates are more likely than men to desire an academic career" (p. 122). Similarly, Eddy (2008) claimed "women do not perceive a college presidency as a career option" and "part of the reason women do not consider a presidency is because no one has encouraged them to seek such a level of leadership" (p. 64). The same is true for the superintendency. Scholars have noted the profound effect encouragement can have on female pathways to the highest administration positions in education. In order for the encouragement of women to be effective, "fundamental attitudes and personal relationships must also be affected if the improvement is to be lasting" (Vettering-Braggin, Elliston, & English, 1981, p. 3).

Encouragement and mentorship are important supports that could help women climb the career ladder quicker (McGee, 2010). Mentors provide valuable opportunities for the female administrators to expand their knowledge (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). In addition, encouragement could help females to take risks in their pathways to the presidency and superintendency. Aspiring women were encouraged to step into unfamiliar areas within the institution, volunteer for various services, serve on committees, and participate at conferences (Oikelome, 2017).

Institutional fit. An organization's status is a key mechanism for understanding the gender pay gap of presidents in higher education (Blevins, Sauerwald, Hoobler, & Robertson, 2019). Institutional fit could be an important support for female president in higher education. However, if a female president finds out the gender pay gap is significant compared to her male counterparts, her institution may not seem like a good

fit after all. One way to negate the gender gap from happening could be collaboration of institutions.

Another form of institutional support and fit could include networking opportunities for female presidents. Collaboration among institutions could extend to the development of networking opportunities for aspiring female leaders (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). Therefore, understanding and carefully considering institutional fit is an important consideration for females aspiring to the highest administrative positions in education. Women were intentional in selecting those institutions at which they were confident their authenticity would not suffer (Oikelome, 2017).

Leaders of institutions could focus on developing a culture that supports and encourages the mentoring of female administrators. Such a culture would include time for developing mentoring relationships, evaluation that rewards mentors, and an expectation that mentoring is desirable (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). The development of a supportive culture for female leaders could begin with graduate school programs. Leaders of institutions of higher education with programs that prepare women for careers in administration could investigate how they can provide opportunities for graduate students to find mentors in educational administration (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

Geographic mobility. Geographic mobility is the ability to relocate which may support career advancement opportunities. Geographic mobility is sometimes the only way to gain a new position in education. Historically, geographic mobility could be considered a challenge to women's advancement in senior educational positions. In the past, most women would not consider a job that would require them to move away from

their family (Eddy & Cox, 2008). However, geographic mobility can be an important

support to successful advancement for women.

Women have several considerations for geographic mobility which include

marriage, family, self-confidence, childcare issues, and living in a small district or

institution (McGee, 2010). Before making a geographic move, females may also have to

consider the comfort and importance of established relationships and the concept of only

moving for a spouse's job (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). However, family support

can assist in women relocating in order to advance their careers in senior leadership

careers in education. Scholars have noted that female presidents in higher education and

superintendents received support from their children and/or their spouses to continue

their education and to serve in executive leadership positions (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge,

2015).

Another support of geographic mobility is the consideration of technology to

advance females careers in education. As education leadership graduate programs

restructure instructional delivery models to include greater flexibility that accommodates

students in remote geographic locations and with limited flexibility in work hours,

females could access the graduate degrees and certifications required for advancement

(Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Personal and professional balance. "Apart from their homes, people spend more

time on the job than anywhere else. With that kind of personal stake, they want to be part

of something that matters and contribute to a greater good" (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p.

128). Work life imbalance could also be seen as a powerful and sometimes invisible

barrier or obstacle to women's success in senior leadership positions in higher education.

Unfortunately, for women in senior leadership positions in higher education, Redmond et al. (2017) suggested, "success resulted in a 'loss of independence, research time, health and well-being" (p. 340).

Similarly, Jackson and Harris (2007) noted that "a woman's 70-hour work week as an administrator may conflict with family responsibilities" and "other family responsibilities make it difficult for women to relocate" (p. 122). Interestingly, some scholars claim that various work and life demands are actually experienced differently by men and women. Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard, & Newman (2017) noted, "the increased time commitment and work pressure that a leadership promotion entails often affects a woman's career choices in a way that is not usually experienced by men" (p. 334). Thus, women aspiring a presidency position in higher education are often faced with difficult choices between their professional lives and personal lives. Therefore, Glazer-Raymo (2008) found it is important to note that "for women who seek appointments as presidents, chancellors, or trustees on college and university governing boards, the glass is less than half full" (p. 22).

It is important to recognize that personal and professional lives of women differ from the personal and professional lives of men. "When we allow others to be who they are, offering acceptance instead of judgement, we are reflecting back to that person the gift of their true Self" (Baron, 1998, p. 2-3). Acceptance for females and their differing needs for work life balance situation could be a possible way to help the problem of the underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative positions in education.

Personal anxieties exist about being both a wife/mother and a career woman (McGee, 2010). With limited time for career and family, career aspirations become a

lower priority than family responsibilities, and family commitments take on higher

importance than career advancement. (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Spencer & Kochan, 2000).

The burden of family responsibilities for women educational leaders such as

responsibilities related to housework, preparing meals, and child-care arrangements were

often viewed as female spouse responsibilities that were added on to female spouse

professional responsibilities (Wyland, 2016; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009).

 Solutions to the underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative

positions in education. Change can be difficult. In order for change to be successful in

increasing the number of females in the highest educational administrative positions, it

must be sustainable. Buller (2015) noted that change processes in education can

sometimes "mean missed opportunities and a resulting waste of resources" (p. xi).

Therefore, solutions to the dearth of females in the highest administration positions

should be handled carefully. "We have to give up our comfortable ways of thinking and

survive the buffeting involved in taking on unfamiliar ideas, skills, and values" (Joyce,

Weil, & Calhoun, 2015, p. 376).

 There are many benefits to female senior leadership. Women can be stabilizing

influences at educational institutions because they often use behavioral processes that are

similarly applicable to personal relationship dynamics. Women listen, process,

communicate, plan, follow through and reassess [which are] very similar steps when

building stable and strong relationships (Stewart, 2014).

 "If we want to lead change more strategically, we need better alternatives—

processes that really work with the type of organizational culture in higher education"

(Buller, 2015, p. 120). Possible solutions for the undersupply of female community

college and university presidents, and superintendents in the forms of interventions or

initiatives are also difficult to identify, define, and be fully agreed upon in the literature.

One possible solution to the deficit of females in the highest administration positions in

education would be to have more women represented in pools of applicants and hiring

committees. This could open up the opportunity for women who must "be hired by

boards of trustees" (Bañuelos, 2008, p. 29). It seems the literature has some continuity in

the themes of female mentors, female-only leadership initiatives or interventions, and

institutional interventions or initiatives as possible solutions for the deficiency of female

community college presidencies. However, there are sometimes differences of opinions

on various issues.

Female mentorship. Eddy (2008) suggested "as more examples of women

community college presidents become available, more women many intentionally aspire

to these positions rather than ending up in the top office by chance" (p.64), and DeFrank-

Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, and Wheatly, (2016) advocated that "women need to see

themselves in other women who take on positions of leadership" (p. 26).

Females mentoring other females could be a possible solution to the lack of

female community college and university presidents, and superintendents. One reason for

the lack of women in upper-level administration is the lack of mentoring whether formal

or informal (Bynum, 2015). Therefore, mentors could be a powerful solution to the

problem.

Some scholars have advocated that professional association personnel should

consider mentoring programs to assist female administrators in honing their leadership

skills. Additionally, professional organizations could provide the means for women to

find peer mentors and establish professional networks in addition to traditional,

hierarchical mentoring relationships (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

Gender inequities in education at the institutional level are often hidden and

difficult to change, and some experts have noted that female mentors could be part of the

solution. Madsen (2007a), suggested females in senior administration positions in her

study "spoke often and highly of the influence of school teachers and experiences in their

professional development. Outside of their immediate families, the most influential

individuals included female teachers" (p. 115). One possible solution to the deficiency of

females in the highest educational administrative positions could be women serving as

mentors to other women that includes teaching about their own pathways to success.

Positive mentoring relationships could be part of the solution to the shortage of

females in the highest administration positions in education. Several scholars have

mentioned that mentoring relationships will certainly increase the likelihood of academic

success no matter what the profession, but especially for women in advanced levels of

leadership (Bynum, 2015; Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007).

It is important to create the identification of a pool of influential mentors to

provide connections, opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills, encouragement,

and feedback on performance (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Female-only leadership training. In addition to mentorship, female-specific

training could be a solution, intervention, and/or initiative to the problem of the scarcity

of women in the highest administration positions in education. DeFrank-Cole et al.

(2016) noted that since "far less women versus men make it to the most senior leadership

positions in higher education, having more leadership training specifically for women

would encourage the most qualified women to reach their potential" (p. 26). Other

possible solutions pointed to female only leadership training initiatives and interventions.

Longman and Anderson (2011) noted "it should be recognized that models of leadership

as well as leadership development programs have historically been normed on male

assumptions about career trajectories" (p. 439). Thus, it would make sense in this regard

to have female specific leadership training as a means of promoting female leadership in

higher education. Therefore, female specific leadership interventions and/or initiatives

could be possible solutions to the paucity of females in the highest administration

positions in education.

DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, and Wheatly (2016) suggested that since it

is clear that far fewer women than men make it to the most senior leadership positions in

education, that having more leadership training specifically for women would encourage

the most qualified women to reach their potential (p. 26). Similarly, Eddy (2008) stated

that "opportunities for women to test the waters would aid in providing a chance for

women to acquire the requisite skills and experiences and provide a safety net for them as

they envision themselves in the presidential role" (p. 64). Providing women with

leadership opportunities could help them gain confidence to apply for more leadership

positions. In addition, having more females in higher educational leadership positions

could help "shift the way many people think about women as leaders" (DeFrank-Cole,

Latimer, Neidermeyer, & Wheatly, 2016, p. 26).

Not all scholars agree with this approach of individual female only leadership

training as a possible solution to the problem of underrepresented female presidents in

higher education. For example, Shepherd (2017) claimed "efforts to 'fix' the

women…are unlikely to be sufficient to achieve gender equality" (p. 86). In addition, self-reflection could be an alternative approach. According to Baron (1998), "self-understanding and acknowledgement can lead us to more appropriate and rewarding career choices" (p. 2).

While there are numerous female leadership training opportunities, "a common methodology is a leadership institute for women such as the HERS Institutes of the Women's Leadership Forum at Harvard" (DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, & Wheatly, 2016, p. 27). These female leadership initiatives focus on effectiveness for individual participants. While these leadership-training initiatives for women are opportunities that can be effective for individual participants, overall change within the individual's institution is generally not achieved.

Another way that female only leadership could support advancement to the highest administrative positions in education was by women helping women. Augustine-Shaw (2013) stated that "superintendent mentoring programs may help new administrators bridge the gap between what they enter in their new leadership position knowing, and what they need to know in order to grow while on the job" (p. 19).

Participation in leadership development and participating in a formal leadership development program was the impetus for applying for top positions, networking, and opportunities to engage with others who are considering a top position, plus participation in leadership programs was invariably linked to mentorship (Oikelome, 2017).

Institutional changes. "Systemic improvement is indeed possible if only policies and strategies are designed in smart and sustainable ways" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 3). Another possible solution to the problem of the exiguous number of females in the

highest educational administrative positions is a change in the overall institution.

Morrison et al. (1987) stated that "change takes time—decades—and the kind of change

we view as necessary involves change in institutions, change in attitudes, and change in

behavior" (p. 158). VanDerLinden (2004) suggested the solution should be more centered

on the institution where "institutional leaders and decision-makers should review existing

policies and practices that may either help or hinder women" and create "an institutional

assessment or audit" of female leadership (p. 17). For women, sometimes the "genius of

the system resides in the fact that although the cards are clearly stacked against them"

they are led to believe they have been given every opportunity to succeed (Valdés, 1998,

p. 18). VanDerLinden (2004) was one of the few scholars to offer some specific changes

institutions could enact to work to achieve more gender equity.

Specifically, VanDerLinden (2004) suggested higher education institutions

"should prepare an annual status report on women that includes efforts to attract and

support women leaders" (p. 18). Change is often difficult and slow in educational

institutions. Historically, education in the United States has been a loosely coupled

system, which can account for the fact that innovation spread so sluggishly" (Marion &

Gonzales 2014; Mort 1958). In order to break barriers keeping women from the

community college presidency, Glazer-Raymo (2008) suggested that experts could "call

for more attention to structural barriers that exclude categories of women who have been

traditionally underrepresented" (p. 23). Similar to the lines of thinking with Glazer-

Raymo, Longman and Anderson (2011), suggested "institutional policies should be

reviewed to ensure that assumed stereotypes do not perpetuate old norms" (p. 439).

Institutional changes may require some awareness of institutional sexism. Kohl

(1992) noted that "institutionalized sexism manifests itself in laws, rules, and behavior on the basis of sex" (p. 156). Educational systems and institutions may not be aware that institutionalized sexism is taking place. In addition, if leaders in the highest educational institutions and systems are aware of any institutionalized sexism, they may not know how to fix the problem. Institutionalized sexism "can occur in many different institutional settings, such as in government, corporations, schools and universities, or churches (Kohl, 1992, p. 156).

Other scholars posited that women in powerful positions in higher education had the ability to help other women achieve success in these institutions. Longman and Anderson (2011) noted that "presidential leadership is key in recognizing that importance of creating an institutional ethos that is passionate about identifying and preparing more women for senior leadership" (p. 440). Similarly, Shepherd (2017) suggested that "talented and ambitious women may be disadvantaged by a number of structural factors associated with the recruitment and selection process for senior posts, including lack of external career capital, conservatism and homosociability" (p. 86).

Women opening doors for more opportunities for other women in higher education leadership also emerged as a theme. Eddy (2008) stated "whether via push or pull, institutions should be thinking of how to better open the doors to the community college presidency for more individuals" (p. 64). Similarly, Longman and Anderson (2011) claimed "those in leadership now—as well as those concerned about developing gifted women for future leadership—need to be spotting potential and opening doors of opportunity for these talented individuals" (p. 440).

Amey, VanDerLinden and Brown (2002) suggested creating more diverse pools of applicants for powerful administrative positions in education. They argue much work is needed in order to generate "diverse candidate pools for senior positions, in preparing younger generations of administrators with the skills and experiences that assist in promotion, and in promoting equity for the most senior positions" (p. 587).

The language used in recruitment messages for superintendent searches influenced the hiring of males over females (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015; Newton, 2006). Female voices are diminished because they are not part of the leadership (Wyland, 2016). Women's influences on policy changes, decisions, and practice in the field is limited (Wyland, 2016; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). It is essential that boards of trustees, institutional search committees, and search firms consider broader pools of candidates who can help diversify the position and include those candidates who possess desirable and legitimate qualifications (Woollen, 2016). Women have much to contribute to the leadership of educational institutions; their talents and abilities should be utilized to the fullest (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). Some guidance for women and people of color would be to pay attention to those search firms that are successful not just in recruiting but in facilitating searchers that actually choose a woman or a person of color as the hire (McDade, Dowdall, Polonio, & Hamos, 2017).

Now that a literature-based description of the potential themes and perceptions have been explored, the research method will be reviewed.

Research method. This study has used a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research method. Originally, this research began as a qualitative interview project of female community college presidents. However, after feedback from the dissertation

committee, the researcher expanded the research method to include a quantitative questionnaire of female superintendents and female college and university presidents in a Midwestern state. The researcher could not find an instrument that aligned with the focus of the study. Therefore, the researcher created an instrument from scratch based on a review of the literature. In the quantitative components of this research, challenges and supports to the female pathways to the highest administration positions were explored. Questions addressing issues of race and gender were included in the study in order to avoid any bias from the researcher.

Based on feedback from the dissertation committee, the qualitative research method expanded from a focus on community college presidents' qualitative interviews approach, to include university presidents as well. In the qualitative component, challenges and supports to the female pathways to the community college and university presidency positions were explored more deeply through in person one-hour interviews. The interviews were conducted at the presidents' institutions in the presidential suite, office, and/or conference room. The qualitative component was expanded to a phenomenology of female university and college presidents.

Phenomenological data analysis. As an important reminder, in phenomenological analysis, "researchers keep their subjectivity in reserve throughout the study" (Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015, p. 13). This act was named in 1931 as the "epoché" process" (Husserl, 1967; Kockelmans, 1967). (See page 92 for the researcher's epoché). The researchers ask co-researcher participants about their experiences with the aim to seek answers for research questions. It is important for the researcher to "encourage the co-researchers to be open and share rich data about their own experiences" (Yüksel &

Yildirm, 2015, p. 13). According to Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003), it is important for

the researcher to put the co-researcher participants at ease by facilitating the flow of

communication and identifying cues.

   Research methodology applied to the data analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998)

noted that "analyzing data for process is not a separate aspect of analysis" (p. 167).

Therefore, it is important to consider that there was a constant reciprocal relationship

between the data collection and the data analysis during the qualitative component of this

research study. The researcher began the analysis of data after the first interview in order

to start identifying patterns and aid in the subsequent data collection (Strauss & Corbin,

1998). Data analysis for "qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive"

(Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 29). Data analysis is a process of making meanings,

therefore there is not one single way correct way to approach qualitative research.

Esterberg (2002) noted that the activities qualitative researchers "engage in throughout

the data analysis process are not mechanical ones" (p. 168). Instead, data analysis is a

creative intellectual process. The data analysis process as the practice of making sense of

one's findings in qualitative data analysis is artful (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

   Within qualitative research, themes "are broad units of information that consist of

several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 328). In

this qualitative component of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study,

the themes emerged from the coding process during data analysis and the codes emerged

from labeling small categories of aggregated text. A theme "is the form of capturing the

phenomenon one tries to understand" and "the experience of focus, of meaning of point"

(van Manen, 2006, p.87). There are four criteria that capture the phenomenological

qualities of the experience of themes emerging lived meanings in life according to van

Manen (2006): the needfulness or desire to make sense, the sense we are able to make of

something, the openness to something, and the process of insightful invention, discovery,

and disclosure.

According to Stake (1995), "there is no particular moment when data analysis

begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as final

compilations. Analysis essentially means taking something apart" (p. 71). Therefore, in

this qualitative component of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study

that not only means understanding the pathways and experiences of females achieving the

highest administrative positions in education, but also identifying, creating, and defining

the patterns that materialized from that meaning making process. Qualitative data

analysis gives meanings to impressions ultimately creating new impressions. Stake

(1995) explained that the new impressions are taken apart and given new meanings. "Not

beginning, middle, and end, not those parts but the parts that are important to us" (Stake,

1995, p. 71). It is this qualitative data analysis process that creates a narrative telling the

story of the pathways, experiences and perceptions of the females who have achieved the

highest administrative positions in education.

The researcher adapted Esterberg's (2002) data analysis methodology of getting

intimate with data, immersing oneself in the data, and loading up one's memory with all

of the data. The researcher adapted and followed the coding procedures and data analysis

described by Esterberg (2002) and Creswell (2014) for the qualitative component of this

mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research. According to Esterberg (2002), open

coding involves the process of working intensively with one's data "line by line,

identifying themes and categories that seem of interest" (p. 158). The researcher allowed

the codes to emerge during this process. "The traditional approach in the social sciences

is to allow the codes to emerge during the data analysis" (Creswell, 2014, p. 199). Once

the researcher meticulously reviewed all of the interview transcript data through the

process of open coding, the researcher examined the codes for recurring themes.

According to Esterberg (2002), once researchers "have done open coding for awhile,

some recurring themes should begin to emerge" (p. 159).

Some strengths of mixed-methods concurrent triangulation studies include the

ability to deeply explore and describe complex phenomena, authentically explicating

"insiders" perspectives, data are often collected in natural settings as opposed to artificial,

idiographic causation can be documented, and the ability for cross-case analysis (Briggs,

Coleman, & Morrison, 2012).

The goal of mixed-methods research is to use different data collection research

methods to glean substantial understandings from the study. "Triangulation is a

measurement technique often used by surveyors to locate an object in space by relying on

two known points in order to 'triangulate' on an unknown fixed point in that same space"

(Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 75). Social scientists have used the concept of

triangulation to validate the veracity of research methods. Triangulation involves gaining

different perspectives from data to glean wider perspectives on a topic and increase the

rigor of social science research.

In contrast to some positive views of triangulation research, other scholars pointed

out that triangulation has flaws to consider. "Triangulation can, however, pose problems.

It requires a strategy and an appreciation of the debate among influential authors about how triangulation is used (Williamson, 2005, p. 7).

The use of differing methodologies other than mixed-methods concurrent triangulation investigating the outcomes would not work for desired outcomes of this study. As it was noted earlier, the research started out as an exploratory qualitative case study involving interviews with female community college presidents in a Midwestern state. However, the dissertation committee made several recommendations to this study which include a quantitative questionnaire, expanding research to include female university presidents and female superintendents. These recommendations were in addition to the qualitative interviews of female community college presidents in a Midwestern state, so the scope of this research study changed significantly.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this literature review focused on the history the underrepresentation of female superintendents and presidents in higher education, the themes of challenges for women to advance to presidency in higher education and the superintendency, the themes of supports for women to advance to presidency in higher education and the superintendency, and possible solutions to the problem. This summary "ties together the main threads revealed in the literature reviewed and presents a composite picture of what is—and what is not—known to thought to date" (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015, p. 53).

To summarize and tie this literature review together, it should be noted that the insufficiency of females in the highest administration positions is a narrow topic with limited literature. In addition, there is a gap in the literature exploring the pathways of females in the highest administration positions with possible challenges and supports

along the way. In particular, there is limited documentation of successful community

college and university presidents, and superintendents. Ironically, the shortage of female

presidents in higher education, and female superintendents in K-12 education, have

resulted in few in-depth studies of successful females in the highest administration

positions.

Education is important. "Education reflects and shapes our very ways of making

sense of who we are and the world in which we live" (Kumashiro, 2012, p. 35). It is

important to explore the scarcity of female administrators in the highest administrative

positions because "the success or failure of an educational system gets placed on the

shoulders of the most visible of individuals in the educational landscape" (Kumashiro,

2012, p. 35).

The literature suggests several courses of action to take to try to solve the problem

of the void of female community college and university presidents, and superintendents.

Again, there is no magic bullet, one main solution or one magic answer to the problem.

To complicate matters, the world is currently more fast-paced and ever changing than

ever before where "human values and aspirations have changed radically and rapidly,

even within the last few generations" (Banaji & Greenwald, 2016, p. 19). Some past

studies have discussed the problem and possible causes of the sparsity of females in the

highest administration positions in education. Other past studies have focused on possible

solutions to the problem. However, few studies have explored the challenges and

supports to the pathways of females in the highest administration positions in education

which could provide a guide for future women aspiring to these positions.

The review of literature revealed the infrequency of American female college and

university presidents, and superintendents. The review of literature also revealed

challenges and supports to the female pathways of these positions with gender and race as

considerations. In addition, the review of literature also explored some possible solutions

to the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the highest administration

positions in education.

CHAPTER 3.   RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

The focus of this research study was the underrepresentation of women in the highest administration positions in education. This study utilized a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design that included in-depth interviews with female college and university presidents in a Midwestern state. Additionally, a concurrent quantitative component took place with a questionnaire sent out to female superintendents and college and university presidents. The intent of mixing both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study was to increase the impartiality, veracity, and integrity of the results. Another strength of using both quantitative and qualitative research was the bolstering of the overall rigor and punctiliousness of the study. For this study, several requirements had to be satisfied for each one of the data collection phases. These are outlined below:

Requirements for the qualitative leg of the study.

I.   Female university and community college presidents were invited to volunteer to participate in a one-hour interview to explore the underrepresentation of female presidents in higher education in more depth.

II.   The researcher traveled to the female presidents' institutions.

III. Interviews took place in person and were audio recorded.

IV.   Challenges and supports to female pathways to the presidency positions in higher education were explored.

V.   Issues of gender and race were explored through questions in each interview in order to avoid researcher bias.

VI. Female superintendents and university presidents were added to the literature review and research.

Requirements for the quantitative leg of the study.

I. A questionnaire was created by the researcher based on a review of the current literature and themes that emerged.

II. The questionnaire was then emailed individually to each female community college and university president within an educational system in the Midwest.

III. The questionnaire was emailed to female superintendents belonging to a professional private nonprofit member service organization within a Midwestern state.

IV. Challenges and supports to female pathways to the highest administration positions were explored.

V. Issues of gender and race were explored in the questionnaire in order to avoid researcher bias.

VI. Female superintendents and university presidents were added to the literature review and research.

Research Questions

The following research questions were clarified as being gathered concurrently in a quantitative questionnaire sent to female presidents in higher education, and female superintendents. The research questions were explored more in-depth through one-hour qualitative interviews with female university and college presidents who volunteered to be interviewed. The questionnaire and interview questions, and context strategies connected directly to the objectives of this study. One primary question and three

secondary questions were guiding this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study.

The primary question was: How do females describe their pathways to the highest

administration positions in education?

The following secondary questions further the defined the direction of this mixed-

methods concurrent triangulation study:

1) What challenges (if any) did these females experience in achieving their

current positions?

2) What supports (if any) did these females experience in achieving their

current positions?

3) What are possible solutions to the dearth of females in the highest

administration positions in education in the United States?

Design of the Study

A mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research design was used for this

study. "Triangulation, in general, refers to the use of two methods to get at a singular data

set that answers a particular question" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 274). The mixed-

methods concurrent triangulation design consisted of qualitative one-hour interviews with

a mixed-race sample of female university and college presidents in a Midwestern state.

Concurrently, a quantitative questionnaire was sent electronically to female college

presidents and university presidents and female superintendents.

The questionnaire was designed first in a Word document and then in Qualtrics

and explored the supports and challenges to the pathways of females in the highest

administrative educational positions. The questionnaire included three open-ended

questions and also explored possible solutions to the underrepresentation of women in the

presidency and superintendency in higher education. The strategy for research collection

was concurrent with the qualitative in-depth interviews occurring at the same time that

the quantitative questionnaire was being completed and submitted. The collection of data

occurred at the same time. The researcher was intentional about sending out via email the

quantitative Qualtrics questionnaire to female college and university presidents because it

helped to generate participants for the in-person interviews. This allowed the researcher

to identify participants right away and to go through the processes of setting up

interviews. Simultaneously, the quantitative Qualtrics questionnaire was sent via email to

the female superintendents. Therefore, the female superintendents and female college and

university presidents were submitting data via Qualtrics at the same time that the

researcher was setting up and conducting in-person interviews with female presidents.

According to Creswell (2008), the strength of a mixed-methods concurrent

triangulation research design "is that it combines the advantages of each form of data;

that is, quantitative data provide for generalizability, whereas qualitative data offer

information about the context or setting" (p. 558). Another advantage of using a mixed-

methods concurrent triangulation research design is that it "enables a researcher to gather

information that uses the best features of both quantitative and qualitative data collection"

(Creswell, 2008, p. 558). The data for a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design

can be designed to be analyzed either separately or together. "The underlying rationale

for the use of the triangulation design is that the strengths of the two methods will

complement each other and offset each method's respective weaknesses" (Fraenkel,

Wallen & Hyun, 2015, p. 559).

The mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research design can also include an advocacy lens. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015) defined the advocacy lens within the concurrent triangulation design as occurring:

When the researcher's worldview implies that the purpose of the research is to advocate for the improved treatment of research participants in the world of research. Examples of worldviews that involve an advocacy lens would be feminist theory, race-based theories, and critical theory (p. 560).

The results of this research study could possibly have an advocacy lens for hiring more females in the highest educational administrative positions in the future as well as educational system changes. According to Allen and Flood (2017-2018), there is a "need for greater explorations by feminists or women advocacy groups whose focal point is women in higher education" (p. 22). Feminist standpoint theory scholars draw on women's experiences and aim "to apply that feminist standpoint toward bettering the condition of women and creating social change. Women's experiences not only point us to flaws in larger economic and political systems but also offer solutions to these flaws" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 60).

The theoretical perspective used to frame this study was the feminist standpoint theory (FST). The feminist standpoint theory centers on women's rights and gender inequities. Specifically, feminist standpoint theory postulates that all knowledge is dependent on the social and historical context of the individual knower, and therefore a woman's standpoint affects her knowledge of the world based on the situation she is in (Grogan & Cleaver Simmons, 2012).

Multiple forms of data collection and analysis were used for this study. Creswell (2008) described that the purpose of a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design is to "collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to understand the problem" (p. 557). There is justification in using both the quantitative and qualitative approaches to this research design. The quantitative design components and the qualitative components occurred concurrently. The qualitative in-person in-depth interviews of female presidents explored the women's perceptions of the challenges and supports to their pathways and possible solutions to the problem of the underrepresentation of females in the presidency. The qualitative interviews explored these issues more deeply than the quantitative questionnaire which also explored the same issues. The qualitative data provided themes among the participants and topics explored. The quantitative data provided numbers, percentages and ultimately tables representing analysis of the results. In addition, the quantitative questionnaire included some open-ended questions in order to allow participants to elaborate on their responses if they so desired.

Mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research methods have historically been used in multiple disciplines including medicine, social science, law, anthropology, business, political science, and psychology due to the specific focus of the case being the unit of analysis. With the diversity of disciplines using this approach, this study was justified in the mixed-methods concurrent triangulation approach as it was valuable to evaluation and practice.

The data collection for the quantitative component of this research occurred during the timeframe of January 2020 through February 2020 through the use of email

and Qualtrics. The data collection for qualitative components of interviews for this

research took place from January 2020 to February 2020. The data collection took place

at individual higher education institutions to which the researcher traveled. The

integration of the quantitative and qualitative approaches occurred between February

2020 and March 2020 with data analysis and interpretation from the results of the

questionnaire and themes found in the interviews.

Setting

The settings for the qualitative in-depth in-person interviews were the female

university or community college president's office or an executive conference room.

One quantitative questionnaire was sent via email from the researcher individually

to each female community college and university president with the president's last name

addressed in a customized message to each of the 14 participants. The other quantitative

questionnaire was sent in bulk blind copied email to the 55 female superintendents

belonging to a specific private nonprofit member service organization.

Participants

Qualitative research participants. The participants for the qualitative

component of this research study were a small population of nine female community

college and university presidents in a Midwestern state. The phenomenological

framework required an exploration of a group of individuals who have all experienced

the same phenomenon. This group of individuals is a relatively heterogeneous group

"that may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.

76). Therefore, the number of participants fits within Creswell and Poth's (2018)

recommendations for phenomenological studies.

Co-researchers. Moustakas (1994) described research participants as co-researchers "because the essence of the phenomena is derived from participants' perceptions and experiences, regardless of the interpretation of the researcher. The participants' narratives of experiences provide the meaning of the phenomena" (Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015, p. 8).

Quantitative research participants. The participants for the quantitative component of this research study were a small population of 36 female college and university presidents and female superintendents in a Midwestern state.

Population. A population is a group of individuals who share similar characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this research study, two separate samples were drawn. For the quantitative components, all female community college and university presidents within a system in a Midwestern state were included. In addition, all female superintendents within a private nonprofit member service organization in a system in a Midwestern state were included.

For the qualitative components of this research, all female community college and university presidents within a system in a Midwestern state were included.

The target populations for this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study included all females who had achieved the community college and university presidency position within a system. The target population for this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study also included all females who had achieved the superintendency position and belonged to a private nonprofit member service organization in a Midwestern state.

Sample

The sample included qualitative interviews and the quantitative instrument.

Qualitative interviews. Both convenience sampling and purposive sampling were used for this research study. There were specific eligibility criteria for female community college and university participants in this study. In order to determine the public, not-for-profit, two-year community colleges and four-year universities, the researcher conducted several Internet searches. In addition, the researcher obtained a FY2020-FY2021 Legislative booklet from one participant that contained extensive information about all of the public colleges and universities located within the Midwestern state with the exception of the largest well-known university. The booklet listed over 30 university and community college campus locations with over 350,000 students, and nearly 40,000 degrees, certificates, and diplomas awarded each year.

Of all institutions of higher education identified in the state, the ones with a female president were selected. During this process two names were not gender specific. Therefore, the research did further electronic research to verify gender by photographs of the presidents. In this population, some women were two-year institution presidents, four-year presidents, or in some cases presidents of both or multiple institution locations. All of the individuals within a system were invited to be interviewed. In the end, 64.28% of this group accepted to be interviewed.

A purposeful sample was used based on the following criteria:

1) Female.

2) Currently sitting community college president or university in the Midwestern state.

3) At least three months of experience in the current president role in the Midwestern state.

4) Member of the higher education system in the Midwestern state.

5) Located within an eight-hour drive one way from the researcher's institution.

6) Recommendation of participants from other participants who had already expressed a willingness to be interviewed. Some participants offered to contact the other participants in the purposeful sample to see if they were willing to be interviewed. If the other participant(s) suggested a willingness to be interviewed, the participant would then electronically provide the other participant(s) assistant's information to the researcher to contact and schedule the interview or reach out to the female president again in another email.

7) Interim status participants in the presidency role during the timeframe of the conducted interviews were included.

Some members of the sample initially suggested some of the other female presidents to be interviewed by the researcher. In addition, some regular members of the sample also offered to assist the researcher in contacting all of the other female presidents of higher education located within the system. The final population of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study was a small sample size of female university and college presidents.

Quantitative instrument. Similar specific eligibility criteria were used for female superintendent participants. In order to determine female superintendents located

in the Midwestern state, upon the recommendation of the dissertation chair, the

researcher emailed a faculty member who worked for the same institution the researcher

was attending. The faculty member was also a superintendent. This email led to another

name that was given to the researcher with the contact information for a female who was

a leader in a private nonprofit member service organization. This leader worked with her

assistant to provide the researcher with approximately three different lists of female

superintendents during the years of 2019 and 2020. Depending on the time of the year,

the number of female participants fluctuated. In addition, the researcher conducted

several Internet searches to learn more about the female superintendent organization.

A purposeful sample was used based on the following criteria:

1) Female.

2) Currently sitting superintendent in the Midwestern state.

3) At least one month of experience in the current superintendent role in the
   Midwestern state.

4) Member of the superintendent organization in the Midwestern state.

The Qualitative Component

Some scholars argue that qualitative interviews are not real methodologies but

instead a purposeful choice of what to be studied, such as a person, a group of people, or

an event bounded by time and place (Eady & Moreau, 2015; Stake, 2005). While

quantitative scholars may question if the qualitative interview is even a methodology,

prominent scholars argue that the qualitative interview is indeed a methodology

consisting of its own theory and analysis of how inquiry should proceed (Eady &

Moreau, 2015; Yin, 2009; Creswell; 2013; Howe & Eisenhart, 1990).

The opinion of the researcher was that qualitative interviews were a valid methodology in which some salient information may not be obtained otherwise. The researcher's opinion aligns with a Briggs, Coleman, and Morrison (2012) statement that qualitative interviews can authentically explicate insider's perspectives (the emic viewpoint), enables an in-depth study of selected cases, and provides descriptions of complex phenomena in local contexts.

Interestingly, the legitimacy and quality of qualitative research has been debated in the literature (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). Interviews are just one of the multiple approaches within qualitative research. However, since there are sometimes conflicting views about qualitative research, it may be difficult for those not familiar with the approach to understand it.

Phenomenology. The methodological framework that was used for the qualitative qualitative component of this research study was phenomenology. The term phenomenology "is derived from the Greek word 'phainein', which means 'to appear', and it was first used by Immanuel Kant in 1764" (Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015, p. 2). Phenomenology involves studying a phenomenon experienced by several individuals. Phenomenology as a methodological framework is a process that seeks reality in individuals' narratives of their lived experiences of phenomenon (Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015; Cilesiz, 2009; Husserl, 2001; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology can be understood as the conscious knowledge associated with saying what someone perceived, sensed, and was known from that person's experience (Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is comprised of varying

philosophies including transcendental, existential, and hermeneutic theories (Yüksel &

Yildirm, 2015; Cilesiz, 2010). This research study used the transcendental

phenomenological framework that was originally developed by Edmond Husserl who

provided the foundation for phenomenology (Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015; Moustakas,

1994). Transcendental phenomenology can be understood as being able to go outside of

the experience, as if standing outside of ourselves to view the world (Langdridge, 2007;

Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015).

According to Moustakas (1994), within phenomenology the phenomenon being

studied is "what appears in the consciousness" (p. 26). The phenomenon that was

explored in this study was the perceptions of female university and college presidents of

their pathways, supports and challenges along the way, and possible solutions to the

underrepresentation of women in the presidency role in higher education.

Phenomenological research aims to understand the essence of the individuals' lived

experience of the phenomenon (Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015; Cilesiz, 2009).

Yüksel and Yildirm (2015) explained that "the general purpose of the

phenomenological study is to understand and describe a specific phenomenon in-depth

and reach at the essence of participants' lived experience of the phenomenon" (p. 3). For

this research study the phenomenon being explored is the lived experiences of the female

pathways to the presidency in higher education. In order to more fully understand the

structure of this phenomenological research, the key concepts of lived experience, epoché

and quintain have been presented.

The purpose of the phenomenology component of this research study was to

explore the lived experiences of how female presidents describe their pathways. The term

"lived experiences" is used in qualitative phenomenological studies to emphasize the importance of individual experiences of people as conscious human beings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenology study describes the common meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, which in this research study is the phenomenon of the female pathway to the presidency in higher education. In the qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher reduces the experiences into a single meaning or the "essence" of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Women in the presidency in higher education have been underrepresented in the role. The most recent American College President Study published in 2017, published by the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America (TIAA), American Council on Education (ACE), and the Center for Policy Research and Strategy (CPRS) stated that "while the proportion of women presidents has tripled since 1986 (the first year of this survey), the percentage of presidents who were women increased only 4 percent between 2011 and 2016, growing from 26 to 30 percent over that time period" (p. 19). Through a rich understanding of these women's lived experiences, the researcher hoped to learn about the pathways to the presidency, the challenges and supports along the way, and insights to possible solutions to the problem of the underrepresentation of women presidents in higher education.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) described that qualitative researchers "seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (p. 8). In addition, Esterberg (2002) stated that not only does qualitative research seek answers, but that qualitative researchers "try to understand the meanings of social events for those who are involved in them" (p. 3). Marshall and Rossman (1999) explained that a unique

strength of exploratory qualitative phenomenological research is that it assumes the value

of context and setting, and that "it searches for a deeper understanding of the participants'

lived experiences of the phenomenon" (p. 60). Therefore, qualitative research was

determined to be the most appropriate and applicable for this research study.

Lived experience. "Phenomenological research investigates the lived experience

of participants with a phenomenon" (Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015, p. 5). Scholars have noted

that the lived experience should be both a significant and meaningful experience, and that

phenomenological studies should begin and end with the lived experience (Yüksel &

Yildirm, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Creswell, 2014; Moustakas; 1994; van Manen,

2006).

Epoché. The role of the researcher in the data collection procedure was to be

objective and unbiased. The role of the researcher was to explore the data without

forming any biased opinions based on the results of the study. Epoché is the practice of

the researcher to put aside any biases related to or that may arise from the case or

phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) noted that "epoché is a Greek word meaning to refrain

from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of

perceiving things" (p. 33). Any preconceived or ingrained notions about the research

were removed in order to allow for new ideas and thoughts to emerge.

Research should be free of any biases. "Bias is strong dislike of a person, group of

people, thing, or category of things" (Kohl, 1992, p. 197). Research for any concurrent

triangulation research design should be objective and free of bias, and thus the researcher

should practice epoché at all times during the research process. "In the Epoché, the

everyday understandings, judgements, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are

revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide-open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). The focus of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research design was centered on epoché. "Strong objectivity asks us to take a critical look at the conceptual schemes, the frameworks, that *comprise* our social location" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 60).

Before collecting or analyzing data, the researcher had to take a look at her own personal and professional beliefs. "Our words flow from personal experiences, culture, history and backgrounds" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 308). Everything said and done was influenced by the researcher's experience of being a white middle-class female living in a Midwestern state in the United States of America. The researcher's words both spoken and written, flowed from her personal experiences, culture, history, and background.

The researcher acknowledged her bias, values, and experiences could have potentially affected a qualitative research study. However, it was the researcher's position that this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study came into fruition *because* of her initial bias. At the time of this study, the researcher was employed at a higher education institution where for approximately the past 50 years, the number of female presidents has been few and far between. Several decades ago, a relative of the researcher became the first female president hired in almost 30 years at a small private liberal arts college on the West coast of the United States.

The researcher acknowledged because she was female and interested in the advancement of women in higher education, she brought her own lens to the research topic. The researcher believed in equal rights for women and identified with a pro-female, pro-equal pay, and pro-equal opportunity bias. The researcher acknowledged her

own values and history of experiences she might have brought to not only this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study, but any qualitative research study she chose to explore. The researcher was aware her biases were naturally ingrained in her mind, being and filter of the world. However, the researcher consciously chose to be aware of her own biases and maintain them on her radar while she embarked on this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study. Finally, the researcher acknowledged that keeping her own biases on her awareness helped her to be cognizant about how these biases could have interfered in conducting an objective analysis of all the information she came into contact with as a result of this study.

Quitain. Qualitative research focuses on the quitain which is the object or phenomenon being studied (Stake, 2005). In this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study, the quitain was the disproportionate number of females in the highest administration positions in education. As opposed to generalizability, this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study focused on exploring the pathways of females who achieved the college and university presidency, and the superintendency of K-12 schools. This mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study also explored the phenomenon of challenges and supports to the pathways of these positions with race and gender as considerations. Finally, this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study explored possible solutions to the underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative positions in education.

The qualitative components of this research designed were justified because some salient data are difficult to quantify. In describing qualitative data, Brunner (2000b) stated:

Sometimes, data collected in the study of human behavior are too intangible for quantification. And yet they can be grasped. Intangible data, such as environment, atmosphere, and emotion contribute a different kind of insight into our behavior than does quantifiable data. We all know this (p. 3).

The qualitative components of this research allowed the researcher to explore and go into more breadth and depth with the research questions and interview questions. The qualitative research approach allows researchers to address the content of the area of study, account for the complexity of the issue or phenomenon, adapt the research to practical and ethical needs of the participants, and finally to create research that is congruent with theory (Eady & Moreau, 2015).

For the quantitative components of the questionnaire instrument, data were mainly collected through Qualtrics. Data analysis was supported by the Statistical Packet for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Procedures. The procedures for preparing and conducting interviews for the qualitative component of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study were adapted from the Creswell and Poth (2018) approach. In qualitative research, interviewing can be seen as a form of relationship between two individuals who come together to try to create meaning about a particular topic (Esterberg, 2002). The approach was focused on the data collection process. The Creswell and Poth (2018) approach for preparing and conducting research involved a sequence of steps "recognizing that this process is embedded within a larger sequence of research" (p. 165). The procedures for preparing and conducting interviews for the qualitative component of this mixed-methods

concurrent triangulation study were adapted from the Creswell and Poth (2018) approach

which included:

1) Determining the open-ended research questions.

2) Identifying interviewees based on sampling procedures (which in this instance was convenience sampling).

3) Distinguishing the type of interview based on mode and interactions (which is in this instance was the mixed-methods concurrent triangulation).

4) Collecting data using adequate recording procedures.

5) Designing and using an interview protocol to guide interactions.

6) Locating a distraction-free place for interviews.

7) Obtaining consent from the interviewee to participate.

8) As an interviewer, following good interview procedures.

9) Deciding the transcription logistics (p. 166).

There were several important aspects that were considered when undertaking

qualitative interviews of this caliber. Before the researcher could even begin coordinating

all of the participant interviews, the researcher needed to secure two separate audio-

recording devices. Through the researcher's workplace, the researcher had access to

borrow an expensive, top of the line audio recording device used for professional

podcasting. The researcher received training from a colleague on how to operate the

audio recording device. The researcher practiced using the device and performed test

recordings before the interviews took place and before each interview started. The

researcher read the accompanying user manual for the audio recorder on how to utilize,

care for and clean the device. It was important for the researcher to practice how to use

the device several times before the actual interviews took place due to the prominence of

the participants, the limited timeframe for the duration of the interviews, and the

possibility of sensitive information being shared.

It was also important for the researcher to get into the habit and routine of doing a

trial run to test the recording before the actual interviews took place in order to ensure

that there were no background noises, that neither the researcher nor the participant were

too close to the recording devices, and that the audio quality would be appropriate and

effective for later transcription of the interviews. Finally, the researcher needed to secure

a second audio recording device in the event that anything happened to the first device

during the interviews. The second audio recording device was the third generation of a

2018 iPad Pro.

Another important aspect that was considered was driving. The researcher needed

to secure a reliable vehicle to drive to the interview locations and made sure there was

plenty of gas in the vehicle. The researcher needed to take into consideration the number

of miles and any potential wear and tear that was put on the vehicle as a result of this

mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study. In advance of any travel, the

researcher needed to investigate and plan how far away each participant's location was

from the researcher's workplace location and make plans accordingly to make sure

enough time was allocated for driving and any emergencies that might come up. It was

also important that the researcher was respectful of the presidents' time. The researcher

arrived early before the designated time of each interview. If the researcher needed to

drive six to eight hours roundtrip for the interview location, the researcher needed to

consider the cost of, and arrangements for, overnight hotel accommodations, and
considerations for food and gas arrangements.

  Interviews. Participant interviews were semi-structured with seven open-ended
questions (See Appendix A). These were guiding interview questions with an open
expectation that there were naturally occurring follow up questions.

  The interview questions were previously included in the Institutional Review
Board process and the Request for Exempt Status was approved. The interviews took
approximately one hour each. The researcher scheduled an hour with each participant
which allowed for additional time to talk with the participant after asking the seven
questions, to ask any follow up questions and to talk more with the participant if needed.

  Two separate digital devices were used to record the interview. The interviews
were audio recorded on a professional audio recording device used for podcasting, which
was a 2016 Zoom H4n Pro Handy Recorder. In addition, a third generation 2018 iPad Pro
was used at the same time during the interviews as a back-up recording device. After
each interview concluded, the researcher electronically emailed a password protected
Portable Document Format (PDF) of the typed written copy of a transcription of the
interview to each female president for her review and approval. The password was
emailed to each president's executive assistant and the transcript was only emailed
directly to the presidents.

  Access. It is important to note that each of the participants for the interviews were
prominent professionals where access is often denied. The participants were extremely
busy individuals with demanding schedules. The researcher had an advantage in seeking
the interviews because of her professional workplace experience and current professional

position. Perhaps more importantly, the researcher had an advantage in securing these interviews because one willing participant had offered support and help. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted, "gaining access also means finding individuals who can provide access to the research site and facilitate the collection of data (p. 155).

To begin the interview process, and in order to secure the interviews, the researcher needed to electronically contact or meet with the current single willing participant who offered to initially contact all the other participants. The researcher needed to find out:

1) Did the willing participant contact each of the other participants to briefly explain the researcher's study?

2) Did the willing participant ask each of the other participants if they were willing and interested in participating in the researcher's interviews?

The researcher needed to meet with or electronically communicate with the willing participant to receive other participants' executive assistants contact information to schedule the interviews.

To schedule the interviews, the researcher needed to email most of the participants' executive assistants to schedule the interview during the day in the participant's office or another location the participant might prefer in order to feel comfortable. As the participant interviews were secured and scheduled, the researcher then needed to electronically send the Informed Consent (Appendix B) and the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) to each of the willing participants. Therefore, written consent was obtained prior to all of the interviews.

Rapport. Another aspect to consider was that it was crucial for the researcher to establish rapport with each of the willing participants. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), rapport not only involves making participants comfortable with the interview process, but "the building of rapport will differ depending on the type of qualitative approach being used and the participants sought" (p. 155-156).

Stewart & Cash Jr. (2011) defined rapport as "a process of establishing and sustaining a relationship between interviewer and interviewee by creating feelings of goodwill and trust" (p. 91). The researcher started to establish rapport by electronically sending the participants the interview questions no later than one week prior to the interview. This allowed each of the participants some time to carefully review each question and consider their responses prior to the interviews. Sending the questions electronically at least a week in advance also assisted the researcher to establish report with the participants because it provided time for the participants to conduct any needed research relating to their answers if needed.

In order to further establish rapport, the researcher offered to the presidents' executive assistants that she was willing to discuss any questions or comments the participants might have about the interview or the interview questions, and if they wanted to add or omit any questions before the interview took place. The researcher communicated to each participant that these would be exact questions of the interview, so that each participant could feel at ease and would know there would not be any surprise questions during the interview.

The researcher creating rapport with the interviewees was extremely important in order to ensure that the interviewees would provide information that was useful to the

researcher. In order for the interviews to be successful, it was vital that the researcher

created rapport with the interviewees so the participants would feel comfortable with

sharing information with the researcher that could be sensitive at times. Interviews were a

nice fit for the qualitative component of this research, as the researcher worked with the

female presidents (and their executive assistants) to make the interviews as easy and as

comfortable as possible.

The researcher made travel arrangements to interview each president where she

was comfortable in her own institution, office and/or conference room. In addition, the

researcher made the interview more of a conversation of storytelling so that the women

would feel comfortable sharing their experiences on the audio recordings. Spitzack &

Carter (1990) noted that "storytelling as a conversational paradigm in women's

communication serves to maintain horizontal power relationships such that closeness and

inclusiveness are insured" (p. 416). In addition, the researcher made small talk with each

participant while setting up the audio recorders and before the interviews began to build

rapport with the participant. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological

interviews often start with a social conversation in order to create a relaxing and trusting

atmosphere.

Finally, to ensure participants were comfortable with their recorded answers and

in order to continue establishing rapport, the researcher electronically emailed a typed

copy of a transcription of the interview that was password protected on a PDF document.

The password was emailed to each executive assistant, and only the presidents had access

to the transcripts.

Researcher's interviewing experience and training. The researcher had extensive interviewing experience so she was confident she could establish rapport with all of the interviewees. The researcher's past professional experience included previously hosting her own community affairs television program that was broadcast weekly on a prominent television network. On the television program, the researcher interviewed a variety of people including local and national political figures, local celebrities, and directors of local organizations.

In addition to the researcher's television interviewing experiences, in the past the researcher had been mentored in a year-long interview training experience with two female higher education administrators. The researcher had also taught a sophomore level interviewing course for several semesters at a Midwestern two-year higher education institution.

Finally, it should be noted that the researcher had recently completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative's (CITI) Basic Course, Social and Behavioral Research—Basic/Refresher, and the Social and Behavioral Research course. The researcher earned a Certificate of Completion from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research for successfully completing the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants."

All information about this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study was kept on a password protected computer, and a flash drive. Any paperwork associated with the qualitative case study was kept in a locked filing cabinet. All materials and recordings would be destroyed by three years after the publishing of this dissertation.

Interview environment. For all of the interviews with the exception of two, the researcher worked with the president's executive assistant to set up the interview dates and times, and directions if needed. In several instances, the executive assistants provided the researcher with a temporary special parking pass and/or parking space in order to make it easier for the researcher to navigate within the institution and in finding the president's office. All of the presidents also responded directly to the researcher's emails and two of the presidents set up the interviews directly with the researcher due to an assistant out of the office, or for good timing for the president due to travel requirements. Each president had an executive assistant and the ones that the researcher met were kind, professional and helpful.

Interview protocol. Creswell (2008) defines an interview protocol as a form designed by the researcher that contains "the questions to be asked, and space to take notes on the responses from the interviewee" (p. 641). The questions developed on the interview protocol for this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study (See Appendix A) were guiding questions.

The procedures for the interview left clear the notion that the questions the researcher developed were guiding questions with the open expectation that there were naturally occurring follow up questions resulting from the answers provided to the researcher from the participants. It is important to note the researcher did not circumscribe from the list provided in Appendix A.

Data triangulation in data collection. In qualitative research studies, multiple modes of data collection can be used. Qualitative research could include documents, archival records, interviews, observation, audiovisual materials, and physical artifacts.

One mode of qualitative data collection is interviews. (Creswell, 2007). Interviews were the primary source of data for this qualitative component of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study. "Documents and audiovisual materials are typically used to supplement interviews and observations" (Creswell, & Poth, 2018, p. 162). Through the qualitative inquiry process of building an in-depth understanding of the primary research question, this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study did not include other documents or artifacts except for the audio recordings, transcriptions and researcher's notes taken during the interviews for the qualitative component of this study.

For this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study, additional data sources were used. Before each interview, the researcher searched the system's website to review the information posted about each female college and university president in order to learn more about the willing participant and her institution. The researcher also briefly reviewed the website of each participant's institution prior to each interview in order to be respectful of the time limit and to avoid asking for any information that could be easily found on the institution's website or system's website.

The Quantitative Component

For the quantitative component of the study, the researcher designed, created, and implemented a new questionnaire instrument based on a current literature review of the underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative positions in education. Specifically, themes of challenges and supports to the pathways of female superintendents and presidents in higher education were explored. "A successful survey asks for only needed information and is easy and quick to complete" (Spaulding, 2014, p. 21). Approximately five different versions of the questionnaire were created in Word

documents before the final version was entered into Qualtrics in order to make the

questionnaire as easy and quick as possible for the participants to complete. Yin (2003)

noted that "reliance on theoretical concepts to guide the design and data collection"

remains one of the most important strategies for successful research (p. 3). The

questionnaire instrument was designed based on a recent and specific literature review of

the challenges and supports to the pathways of female superintendents and presidents in

higher education.

      The concepts measured by the questionnaire instrument were human capital,

competency, leadership training, the glass ceiling, sexism, the good old boys' network

and culture, gender stereotyping, mentorship, encouragement, institutional fit, geographic

mobility, and personal and professional balance. In addition, the questionnaire instrument

explored and measured challenges and supports to the female presidency in higher

education and the superintendency pathways. Finally, the questionnaire instrument

explored and measured possible solutions to the problem of the inadequate representation

of females in the highest administrative positions in education.

      Scores and responses were calculated in Qualtrics rating their meanings.

Processes for assessing reliability and validity of the instrument were not implemented as

the questionnaire instrument was intended to be a pillar of support to triangulate the

qualitative interviews. These questionnaires have been provided in Appendix D and

Appendix E.

      While this study did not have an instrument for the qualitative component, the

researcher used an interview protocol to ask the seven questions to the female university

and community college presidents. The interview protocol has been provided in

Appendix A.

Data Analysis

    Qualitative. For the phenomenological research of this study, the major data

gathering method was in-depth interviews with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018;

Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015). The focus of the in-depth phenomenological interview was to

describe the meaning of the phenomenon that several individuals share (Marshall &

Rossman, 1999, Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015). Some important components of qualitative

phenomenology research include phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation.

    Phenomenological reduction. "In phenomenological reduction, the task is to

describe the individual experiences through textural language" (Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015,

p. 7). In the qualitative component of this research study, phenomenological reduction

was part of the data analysis. According to Yüksel and Yildirm (2015), "in order to

describe the general features of the phenomenon, the researcher must eliminate all

elements that are not directly within conscious experience" (p. 7). Phenomenological

reduction was an important part of the data analysis of this research study. It was

important to eliminate unnecessary data. "During phenomenological reduction, the

researcher eliminates overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions" (Yüksel and

Yildirm, 2015, p.7). Therefore, phenomenological reduction can be viewed as a cleaning

up process of the raw data of the transcriptions of the in-depth interviews for this study.

    Imaginative variation. Following phenomenological reduction, the imaginative

variation process "depends purely on the researcher's imagination rather than empirical

data. The researcher drives structural themes through the imagination variation process"

(Yüksel & Yildirm, 2015, p. 12). According to Moustakas (1994), the role of imaginative

variation is "to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles or functions (p. 97-98).

For the qualitative component, after the participant's recorded interviews were transcribed, the researcher conducted a content analysis of the qualitative data in order to prepare and organize the data for analysis, reduce the data into themes through the process of coding and condensing the codes, and then finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For the qualitative analysis, the researcher initially explored using qualitative software programs such as MAXQDA, ATLAS.ti, NVivi, or HyperSEARCH, however none of these were sufficient for the researcher to deeply analyze the interviews. Each of the transcripts were typed in Word, single-spaced, and ranged in length from eight to 13 pages each. The researcher explored using paid transcription services to assist in the data analysis. The researcher used the paid monthly transcription service by Trint.com that initially transcribed the audio recordings using AI. It took the researcher approximately 12 to 14 hours to correct each initial transcript using the paid software. After each transcript was corrected, it was then exported into a Word file, saved on a password protected computer and proofread again by the researcher. Once the transcript was reviewed line by line by the researcher, the document was checked for spelling and grammatical errors, and corrected if any errors were found.

The process of member checking occurred next. The transcripts were then emailed to the female presidents in the form of password protected PDF documents

attached to a thank you email message. The researcher had previously mailed each

participant a handwritten thank you card after the interview, but felt it was important to

keep up the rapport with the participants and thank them again when attaching the

transcript for review and approval. The password for the PDF document transcript was

sent to each participants' executive assistant in order to ensure further privacy. Only the

participant received the transcripts, and only the executive assistants were emailed the

passwords. Each finalized transcript ranged in length from eight pages to 13 pages.

The researcher adapted Creswell's (2014) six steps of the phenomenological data

analysis process for the interviews of female presidents (p. 196-201). It is important to

mention that while these six steps are listed in chronological order, the phenomenological

data analysis process is actually "more interactive in practice; the various stages are

interrelated and not always visited in the order presented" (Creswell, 2014, p. 196). In

addition, there was an interplay with the steps as the process was more interactive in

practice; the various steps were interrelated and not always visited in the order presented

(Creswell, 2014).

Step 1. During this step, the researcher began to "organize and prepare the data

for analysis (Creswell, 2014, p. 197). In this step, the researcher's colleague helped with

the transferring of all of the audio interviews from the Zoom H4n Pro Handy Recorder to

the researcher's password protected computer laptop. Next, after researching several

different online transcription services, the researcher decided on Trint.com. The

researcher paid for and signed up for monthly transcription services through Trint.com.

Afterward, the researcher uploaded all of the audio taped interviews of female university

and college presidents to the Trint.com website.

The audio files were transcribed through the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), so the initial transcriptions were not entirely accurate. The researcher listened to each interview and corrected the initial transcription. The researcher played back the interviews at a slower speed in order to ensure that nothing was missed during the process of transcribing. Once the interview was entirely corrected, it was transferred into a Word document. The researcher then checked the transcript again in Word with the editor feature for any misspellings or grammatical errors. Although each interview was only an hour long, the transcription process for each interview was time intensive and took the researcher one to two days to fully correct and complete. Once each transcript was corrected, proofread and complete, the researcher emailed the transcript to the participant for review and approval.

Step 2. This step required the researcher to "read or look at all of the data" (Creswell, 2014, p. 197). The process of reading and looking at all of the data is in tune with Esterberg's (2002) thoughts that the researcher should be immerged in the data. Esterberg (2002) recommended that researchers immerse themselves in the data in order to become familiar and increasingly intimately familiar with what they gathered. The researcher hand-wrote notes in pencil the margins of the printed transcripts. The researcher also started writing memos in order to record general thoughts about the data during this step.

Step 3. The researcher started the process of "coding all the data. Coding is the process of organizing all the data" (Creswell, 2014, p. 197). The researcher adhered to Creswell's (2014) procedure of taking the text data gathered during the data collection and organizing the material into segments of sentences (or paragraphs) into categories, and then labeling those categories with a term based in the actual language of the

participant. The researcher also followed Creswell's (2014) suggestion of giving some

attention to the codes as following into the three categories of: codes on topics that

readers would expect to find, based on past literature and common sense, codes that are

surprising and that were not anticipated at the beginning of the study, and codes that are

unusual and that are, in and of themselves, of conceptual interest to readers.

     Step 4. In this step, the researcher uses "the coding process to generate a

description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis"

(Creswell, 2014, p. 199). The researcher generated codes for the descriptions during this

process which then, in turn, led to "generating a small number of *themes* or categories"

(Creswell, 2014, p. 199). Next, the researcher analyzed the generated themes in order to

design an overall description for the qualitative component of this mixed-methods

concurrent triangulation study. During this step, the researcher compared these themes

from the in-person interviews with the interview memos taken by the researcher in order

to ensure accuracy and clear representation.

     Step 5. In this step, the researcher considered "how the description and themes

will be *represented* in the qualitative narrative. The most popular approach is to use a

narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis" (Creswell, 2014, p. 200). During

this step, the researcher interweaved the themes into narrative passages in order to ensure

that the findings were a logical representation of the participants' responses. In the

researcher's approach to content analysis of the interviews of the qualitative data, the

researcher did not choose to include the use of tables to describe the process of the

theoretical frameworks on how the codes were reduced to themes (M. Coquyt, personal

communication, April 26, 2020). Instead, the researcher decided to use a combination of

a narrative process and the use of figures rather than the use of table format and that is how the researcher proceeded in this dissertation.

Step 6. "A final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation in qualitative research of the findings or results" (Creswell, 2014, p. 200). These interpretations could take many forms and be adapted for different types of research study designs. According to Creswell (2014), the interpretations "could be the researcher's personal interpretation, couched in the understanding that the inquirer brings to the study from a personal culture, history and experiences" (Creswell, 2014, p. 200). Epoché is the process by which we attempt to abstain from our presuppositions, those preconceived ideas we might have about the problem we are investigating and is sometimes referred to as bracketing (Langdridge, 2007). Therefore, the paradox is that the researcher's background was an influential part of the meaning-making process, while simultaneously the researcher's allegiance to the theoretical lens of the study and epoché were also influential parts of the meaning-making process. The researcher used a) bracketing (Langdridge, 2007) and b) intentionally not asking follow-up questions during the in-person interviews as primary ways in which to set aside any potential biases.

It is important to note that during the researcher's interpretation process, her own experiences being employed as a full-time tenured faculty and also serving in an administrative role of department chair informed her understandings and interpretations of the participants' narratives. It was important for the researcher to accurately communicate participants' perceptions of their experiences. Therefore, the researcher was intentional about having an acute focus on exactly what the participants were saying, their conclusions, and recommendations for the future. The themes emerged from this

qualitative component of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study came directly from the researcher's own awareness of the robust tension between her own biases and the participants' perceptions of their experiences. The researcher was aware of her own biases and held on to some potential follow-up questions that could have been asked during the in-person interviews. but could have brought into the conversation some personal biases. To some extent, it can be assumed that the researcher held onto her own biases, because she could have asked follow-up questions and perhaps her biases could have filtered in some of these follow-up questions in order to get to some specific point. However, the researcher did not ask too many follow-up questions, and instead focused on the main questions and let the participants narrate in any direction they wanted. The researcher did not want to bring any ideas to the participants, or filter any notions in any shape or form, and only asked the main questions and let them freely say what they wanted to say. Therefore, the researcher held onto some questions that may have been good follow-up questions, but that could also have been risky ground for allowing her biases an open access.

Qualitative data analysis. Data regarding the pathways to the presidency, challenges and supports to these pathways, and possible solutions to the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education were collected and analyzed.

Simultaneously, qualitative data via an open-ended question accompanying each one of the closed-ended questions were collected to more deeply explore how females described their pathways to the highest administrative positions in education. Data were collected and analyzed exploring the challenges and supports to these pathways.

Additionally, data were collected and analyzed about possible solutions to the problem of the low representation of females in the superintendency and presidency in higher education.

Validity. Creswell (2014) noted that validity does not carry the same connotations in qualitative research as it does in quantitative research; nor is it a companion of reliability (examining stability) or generalizability which was defined as the external validity of applying results to new settings, people, or samples. Validity in qualitative research involves checking for accuracy. "Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Finally, it should also be noted that validity is an important pillar of strength in qualitative research. According to Creswell (2014), "validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers" of the research (p. 201).

In order to enhance the researcher's ability to assess the accuracy of findings and also demonstrate to readers that accuracy, the researcher adopted six of Creswell's (2014) primary eight validity strategies. The researcher used multiple strategies in order to check for the accuracy of findings. The six adopted validity strategies include triangulation, member checking, using rich descriptions to convey findings, clarifying the bias the researcher brings to the study, presenting any discrepant information that runs counter to the themes, and spending prolonged time in the field (Creswell, 2014, p. 201-202).

Triangulation. It is important to consider that triangulation in qualitative research is different from triangulation in quantitative research. "Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies" (Guion, 2002, p. 1). For this study, the methodological framework that was used was a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation. According to Fusch, Fusch, & Ness (2018), "triangulating the data from a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques in a mixed-methods study" is called between method triangulation (p. 22-23). Through between method triangulation (also referred to as across method triangulation), themes are established. These themes are then converged through several sources of data or perspectives of participants, and this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the research study (Creswell 2014).

The challenge with between method triangulation is that the inherent flaws of one method can impact the data. However, Fusch, Fusch, & Ness (2018) noted that when between method triangulation accounts for flaws and deficiencies, the best of both can overcome the weaknesses of each and that ultimately the goal is an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (p. 23).

The researcher gathered the nine transcripts of interviews where participants were consistently asked the same exact questions from an interview guide/protocol in establishing connections between the themes and the quantitative findings in order to ensure triangulation. The researcher followed the same processes for data analysis and establishing themes in order to ensure triangulation.

Member checking. Member checking can be a validity strategy that researchers actively incorporate into their research. It can also be used as a way for the researcher to

check their findings with the participants in the research to ensure the findings are accurate. Creswell (2008) defined member checking as "a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (p. 267). It is also important with member checking to make sure the participants deem the final report from the researcher is accurate.

Creswell (2014) stated that an important step in member checking involved "taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to the participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate" (p. 201). Typically, member checking does not mean providing the participants with the raw data of transcriptions of interviews. Member checking does not necessarily "mean taking back the raw transcripts to check for accuracy" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Member checking was used with the entire qualitative data set. In each interview, the researcher communicated to the participant that once all interviews were completed, the researcher would provide a transcript of the interview to the participant for review and approval before any information would be used for data analysis.

Rich descriptions. Rich and thick descriptions can "transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). According to Creswell (2014), when researchers provide detailed descriptions of settings and/or offer many perspectives of a theme, the results become more realistic and richer, which in turn can add to the validity of the findings. For interview studies, rich data descriptions generally require verbatim transcripts, not just notes (Maxwell, 2005).

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, exact detailed descriptions of the interview settings cannot be revealed. However, in a general sense the interviews took

place in the president's office, executive conference room, or a combination of both. Oftentimes, the executive conference room would be attached to the president's office.

It is important to gain a sense about the environment where the interviews took place (M. Coquyt, personal communication, April 2020). For the interviews that took place in executive conference rooms, the participant and researcher sat in large leather comfortable chairs. For the interviews that took place in the participants' offices, the interviews most often took place at a round table placed in front of the participants' large desk. For the interviews that took place at the combination of an executive conference room and participants' office the interview took place at a large oval table with comfortable tall leather swivel chairs. All three settings were comprised of spaces that were large executive rooms. In all three settings, there were large windows and natural light that spilled into the rooms. The participants' offices were often located on the middle or top floor of the institutions within an executive suite where the executive assistant also had a desk.

Clarifying bias. It is important to clarify the bias the researcher brings to the research study. It is the researcher's intent that the epoché section of this study "creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate with the readers" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). See page 92 for the researcher's epoché. The researcher acknowledged that the interpretation of the findings of this research study were shaped by the researcher's background, gender, culture, and socioeconomic status. However, to counter that issue, the triangulation design of this study, particularly the incorporation of two quantitative data sets as well as the intentional efforts to keep the researcher's epoché throughout the researcher process were in place to bring integrity, objectivity and avoid bias. The bias

was controlled to the extent that the researcher asked questions of more individuals through different methodologies.

Discrepant information. Although most of the information in the qualitative component of this study described the case for establishing themes, it is important to acknowledge contrary information as real life is composed of various different perspectives. Therefore, "by presenting contradictory evidence, the account becomes more realistic and valid" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). In the methodology of this research study, in order to account for this recommendation to increase validity, a triangulation design was used with three data sets of qualitative in-depth data from female university and college presidents of higher education institutions, quantitative data from female university and college presidents, and quantitative data from female superintendents. These three different perspectives of the research questions sometimes contained discrepant information, however, as Creswell (2014) noted, that aids in making the data more valid and realistic.

Prolonged time. Spending prolonged time in the field allows the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied and establishes more credibility for the findings of the research. "The more experience that a researcher has with participants in their settings, the more accurate or valid will be the findings" (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). In order to account for this, the researcher was intentional about arriving to the interviews with the presidents early and taking account of the overall institution and interview space. In addition, the researcher scheduled one-hour long interviews with individuals of limited access and time. The researcher was intentional about establishing professional rapport with the participants with small talk before and

after the interviews and also allowing time at the end of the interviews for participants to add any additional information that they might wish.

Reliability. Reliability in qualitative research is different from reliability in quantitative research in that qualitative reliability checks for accuracy in procedures. "Qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). The researcher consulted with a published qualitative expert to ensure accuracy in procedures and also reviewed literature in qualitative reliability. The researcher was intentional about being consistent and accurate in the qualitative procedures and data analysis.

Quantitative data analysis. The researcher adopted Wolcott's (1994) general data analysis strategy which involves highlighting certain information found in descriptions, identifying patterned regularities, contextualizing the data with the framework of the literature, and displaying findings in tables, charts, diagrams, and figures; comparing cases; and/or comparing with a standard case (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Descriptive statistics describe the data (Winter, 2018). For the quantitative component of the study, mostly descriptive statistics were used. "The major advantage of descriptive statistics is that they permit researchers to describe the information contained in many, many scores with just a few indices such as the mean and the median" (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015, p. 187).

The quantitative data were reported as scores and displayed in tables. The researcher decided for the analysis of what was challenging, it is the middle point of the scale: anything higher than a 5.5 is a support and anything 5.5 or lower is a challenge. However, it is also important to differentiate from mild challenges (4-5 range) to an

intense challenge (closer to 0-1). For supports it is also important to differentiate from a

mild support (5-6) and a significant support (closer to 9-10). The challenges cannot be all

lumped together, nor can the supports be all lumped together. There are various levels of

differentiation.

For the quantitative component, a detailed invitation letter embedded in the email

to participants was sent along with the attachment of the informed consent (See Appendix

F for a sample invitation letter). The link to the Qualtrics questionnaire was also

embedded in the email to female superintendents and presidents in higher education. The

participants were given several weeks to complete the questionnaire and a second

reminder email was sent to all female superintendents. The researcher also sent out

second reminder emails and requests for interviews to the female university and college

presidents that did not initially provide contact information for interviews at the end of

the questionnaire.

The systems used for keeping track of data and emerging understandings included

using Qualtrics to administer the questionnaires, analyzing data in Excel spreadsheets and

a Statistical Packet for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software package and keeping all

information stored on a password protected computer.

Raw data from the quantitative questionnaire are available in tables and

appendixes of this study. Data were comprised of variables human capital, competency,

leadership training, the glass ceiling, sexism, the good old boys' network and culture,

gender stereotyping, mentorship, encouragement, institutional fit, geographic mobility,

and personal and professional balance. Other data variables included challenges and

supports to the pathways of females in the highest administrative positions in education.

In addition, another data variable included possible solutions to the shortage of females in these positions.

     Ethical considerations. Ethical issues and measures for the protection of participant's rights for this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study were carefully considered and implemented. "For the protection of participants, it is essential that researchers mask participant names as soon as possible to avoid inclusion to identifiable information" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 182). The researcher was careful to eliminate or mask participants' names, higher education institutions where the participants worked, the name of the state where the higher education institution was located, and any other identifiable information in any publishing associated with this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study. The researcher designated any potential identifying information with the XXX mark.

Conclusion

     This chapter of Methodology provided a detailed overview of the methods that would be used to conduct this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study. This study explored the challenges and supports to the pathways of females in the highest administrative positions in education.

     Through interviews with unique access to female college and university presidents, this study could provide an "insider" in-depth understanding of the pathways of females in the highest administrative positions in education. The chapter included a restatement of the purpose of the study, and research questions. This chapter described the research design including the important ethical consideration of epoché. In addition,

sampling procedures, data analysis procedures, and limitations were also included in this

chapter. The next chapter four will present the results of this research study.

CHAPTER 4.   FINDINGS

The focus of this study was to explore issues related to the underrepresentation of women in the highest educational administrative positions in education in the United States of America. Specifically, this study examined the challenges and supports to the female pathways to these positions, as well as issues of race and gender. In addition, possible solutions to the low representation of women in these highest administrative positions in education were explored. This research study used the strategy of a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation of qualitative in-depth interviews with female college and university presidents in a Midwestern state and a quantitative questionnaire. Data were collected from female college and university presidents, and female K-12 superintendents in a Midwestern state.

According to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015), "when instrument data and criterion data are collected the same time, and the results are compared, this is an attempt by researchers to obtain evidence of concurrent validity" (p. 153). The researcher established the strategy of concurrent validity of a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation by creating a questionnaire based on an extensive literature review. The same quantitative questionnaire was sent to female superintendents and female university and college presidents. During the same time, the researcher conducted qualitative interviews with both university and college presidents for the third data set of participants.

Thirty-seven participants—both female presidents and K-12 superintendents—completed the questionnaire. The sample for the quantitative questionnaire was composed of eight presidents and 27 superintendents. This sample also included

presidents who led more than one institution which could include both, a two-year and

four-year institution (which are significantly different entities). The sample also included

presidents who led up to four different locations of the same overall umbrella institutions

in varying geographical areas of the state. Some of the institutions led by this sample of

presidents also considered online education as a separate campus.

Presidents

Ten presidents participated in this study. Of the ten president participants, nine

presidents agreed to be interviewed and eight responded to the questionnaire. (See Table

1).

Table 1

Participant Data

President	Interview	Questionnaire Responses
1	X	X
2	X	X
3	X	X
4	X	X
5	X	X
6	X	
7	X	X
8	X	X
9	X	
10		X

Amongst the eight participating presidents, two-year and four-year institutions

were represented. Generally speaking, presidents in higher education have doctoral

degrees. The ages of the presidents ranged from age 42 to over 60 years of age.

Presidents reported having between none to three children. Presidents described their

professional background in higher education through an open-ended question, and their

accumulated experience ranged from an undisclosed number of years to 38 years of

experience. Some of the presidents' professional backgrounds came from areas other than higher education. Collectively, the varied experiences of these females included professional backgrounds in the military, accounting, K-12 education, transportation, financial consulting, adult education and high school completion, supervisions in the service industry, law, manufacturing, corporate training, medical research, financial planning, and professional opportunities that included travel and living in other parts of the United States of America and abroad.

The presidents' professional backgrounds in higher education included the following roles: tutor, student employee, laboratory technician, graduate teaching assistant, adjunct faculty, scholarship fellowship trainee, faculty, program director, systems office director, work in the chancellor's office, center director, residence hall positions, career planning and placement positions, distance and online learning positions, continuing education positions, admissions and enrollment positions, accreditation and institutional research roles, student affairs roles, interim dean, assistant dean, dean, interim associate vice-chancellor, interim and acting vice-president, vice-president, vice-chancellor, senior vice-president, chief academic officer, provost and president. All presidents self-identified as female. The presidents represented a mixed-race pool of applicants. Other demographic information is described in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2

Marital Status and Race of Presidents

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Marital Status		
Divorced	0	0.0	0.0
Married	8	100	100
Single	0	100	100
	Race		
Non-White	2	25	25
White	6	75	75

The female presidents had varying graduate degrees in terms of educational

background. Other important considerations were the number of students and faculty

that presidents in higher education were responsible for as these could have been

translated into significantly different experiences in the presidency. (See Table 3).

Table 3

Student and Faculty Population of Presidents

Size	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Student Population		
< 5,000	2	22.2	22.2
5,000 – 10,000	5	55.6	77.8
>10,000	2	22.2	100
	Faculty Population		
< 300	3	37.5	37.5
> 301	5	62.5	100

Superintendents

Twenty-seven superintendents composed this sample. Their educational

background ranged from masters' degrees to doctorate degrees, and their ages ranged

from 38 to 69 years of age. Superintendents reported having between none to six

children. Superintendents described their professional background in education through

an open-ended question, and their accumulated experience oscillate between an

undisclosed number of years to over 30 years of experience. Nearly all superintendents

reported previous professional positions in the area of education, with the exception of

one participant who reported professional experience in the service industry. For

example, Superintendent 19 described her pathway as approximately 11 years of

experience as an elementary teacher, three years of experience in a curriculum

coordinator role, 14 years of experience as an elementary school principal, and another

four years of experience as a superintendent. All superintendents self-identified as female

and represented a mixed-race pool of participants. See Table 4 below.

Other demographic information is described in Tables 4 through 7.

Table 4

Marital Status and Race of Superintendents

Variable	Frequency		Percent	Cumulative Percent
		Marital Status		
Divorced	3		11.1	11.1
Married	21		77.8	88.9
Single	3		11.1	100
		Race		
Non-White	4		14.8	14.8
White	23		85.2	100

The superintendents had various levels of degrees in higher education. (See

Table 5).

Table 5

Educational Background of Superintendents

Education	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Master's Degree	9	33.3	33.3
Doctoral Degree	18	66.7	100

Other crucial considerations included the number of students and faculty that superintendents in K-12 education were responsible for as these could have been translated into significantly different experiences in the superintendency role as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Student and Faculty Population of Superintendents

Size	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Student Population		
< 1,000	11	40.8	40.8
1,000 – 2,000	6	22.2	63.0
2,000 – 3,000	5	18.5	81.5
> 3,001	5	18.5	100
	Teacher Population		
< 500	20	74.1	74.1
500 – 1,000	1	3.7	77.8
1,000 – 1,500	1	3.7	81.5
> 1,501	3	11.1	92.6
NA	2	7.4	100

All female superintendents reported working in a school district as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Institutional Identity of Superintendents

Size	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
School District	27	100	100

Primary Research Question: How do Females Describe Their Pathways to the Highest Administrative Positions in Education?

Presidents – qualitative data. Interviews were used to gather data for the qualitative component of this study. All nine interviews were conducted in person at the presidents' institutions of higher education. The researcher used the interview protocol

(See Appendix A) as a way to launch the interviewing process. The interview protocol ensured researcher objectivity and avoided bias by asking the presidents the exact same questions in the exact same order. Very few follow up questions were asked by the researcher. The goal of the interview was to delve deeply into the participants' responses and glean insights into the lived experiences of their pathways.

All of the presidents were provided the questions ahead of the interview via email. The interview protocol included seven open-ended questions that were clear and concise. If needed, the researcher used probes to get the participants to elaborate on some of their answers. Some follow up questions and probes that the researcher used included:

1) I think you already touched on that.

2) Probably the overview, and then more specifically to your more recent positions.

3) That segues into my next question…

4) You can say on or off the record, or not at all if you are not comfortable.

5) Would you mind elaborating on that?

The researcher was intentional about practicing active listening skills during the interviews and allowing the female presidents to do most of the talking.

Every president spoke openly, calmly, professionally, and kindly as they shared their experiences. All of the presidents provided detailed accounts of their professional pathways to the presidency, at times sharing sensitive and confidential information with the researcher. There were times when the researcher turned off the recording devices in order for a president to share information "off the record" and this information was kept confidential by the researcher and not included on the typed transcripts of the interviews.

The researcher did not do anything with the private information shared and kept it confidential. The presidents appeared to have a comfort level with the researcher and demonstrated they believed the stories they shared needed to be told.

Every participant approached the interview questions and any probes or follow up questions in their own unique way based on their professional background, education, and experiences. Some presidents shared intimate details of their personal lives, while others shared their professional experiences only. This chapter is an analysis of the data gleaned from each participant's individual interview.

After meeting with a handshake and introduction, each president offered the researcher a refreshment before the interviews began. The presidents were confident, warm, professional, helpful, and respectful of the researcher in dual roles of a graduate student and faculty member. While the presidents in this research study are highly accomplished with a strong sense of self, they also expressed interest and support for the research topic. Some presidents asked for the researcher to share the results of this study and other presidents mentioned they looked forward to reading the dissertation. Based on the information gleaned from the interviews, it was clear that each president had a strong commitment to their organizations, sometimes at the sacrifice of their own personal time. Several of the female presidents interviewed wore clothing representing their college or university. The presidents are extremely busy individuals with packed calendars, and demanding jobs, and yet they made time for the researcher to interview them. In one case, the president met with the researcher outside of normal business hours.

The presidents had comfortable and professional offices or executive conference rooms, or in some cases a combination of both where the interviews took place. Every

space had large windows and artifacts representing the individual institutions. The presidents seemed to enjoy meeting with the researcher and sharing their past experiences with several referring to the time as a nice break in their schedules. After the interviews concluded, many of the presidents offered to assist the researcher with any other information needed, and several mentioned that it had been a pleasure to participate in the research study.

The presidents had varying degrees and professional experiences. The presidents represented four-year and two-year institutions. Seven of the women were in their first presidencies, and two were in their second presidencies. It was important to the researcher and to some presidents that their identities or any identifying information of the state, system, or institutions be concealed in this research study due to the sensitive nature of some of the information being shared. Therefore, the participants' names have been withheld and have been given pseudonyms of Presidents 1-9. In addition, any identifying information has been concealed with the marking of "XXX" in strategic places within this chapter.

Table 8 represents some of the characteristics of the presidents who were interviewed.

Table 8

Participants Years in Current Position and Institution Size

President	# Years President	Institution Size
1	2	>10,000
2	5	>5,000
3	1	<5,000
4	3	>5,000
5	6	<5,000
6	5	>10,000
7	3	>5,000
8	<1	<5,000
9	3	>10,000

For the primary research question of how females describe their pathways to the highest administrative positions in education, there were two themes: The nontraditional pathway and the traditional pathway. For Theme #1: The nontraditional pathway, there were three categories: 1) a previous career, 2) a break in the pathway, and 3) different entry point or skipping steps. For Theme #2: The traditional pathway, there were two categories: 1) different titles but same positions, and 2) smooth and direct pathway. A brief description of each overarching traditional pathway and nontraditional pathway theme has been provided here, followed by an analysis of each category (See Figure 1 for a visualization of the themes).

Figure 1. Themes of Pathways to the Presidency: Traditional and Nontraditional
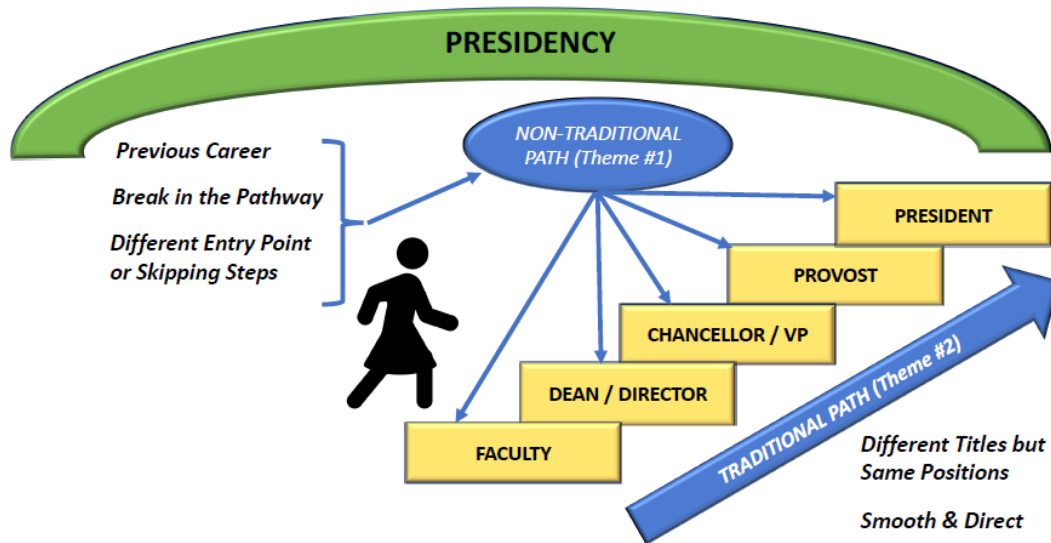
Figure 1. The nontraditional pathway at some point flows into the traditional pathway

The nontraditional pathway: Slightly over half of the presidents described their pathways as nontraditional. The nontraditional pathway is described as a different route of advancement to the presidency role in higher education. Presidents described their pathways as unique, different, unconventional, and nontraditional.

The nontraditional pathway could mean that the president may have worked in higher education after having another one or more careers in a field other than education. The nontraditional pathway might also mean that there was a break in the pathway where the president did not stay on the path and explored other career opportunities. Another route to the nontraditional pathway included the president that had skipped some of the typical traditional chronological steps to the presidency or entered the pathway at a different entry point other than the faculty role.

At some point, the nontraditional pathway flows into the traditional pathway: It is important to note that even though presidents may have had a

nontraditional start, a break, leapfrogged position(s), and/or entered the pathway in a position other than faculty, all of these nontraditional pathways eventually flowed into the traditional pathway in order to achieve the presidency position. Although it is not unheard of for a candidate to get hired straight into the presidency without the longevity of prior higher education experience, those situations are most often anomalies (McLeod, 2015). In addition, it is often uncommon to reach the presidency position without having previously worked as vice-president, vice-chancellor, or provost.

The traditional pathway: The traditional pathway to the female presidency in higher education is a set of typical hierarchical steps of advancement in positions. It could be viewed as a progression of scaffolded steps in advanced positions that eventually reach the presidency. For both two-year and four-year institutions, these steps of advancement are typically the same order of progression. It is important to consider that the next level of advancement may vary depending on the institution and that there are sometimes multiple positions at the same level of the hierarchy.

However, in general, the chronological advancement of positions in higher education include: faculty to dean or director, a dean or director, a vice-president or vice-chancellor position, provost, and then president position. In the author's experience, it is also commonplace for vice-presidents to advance into the presidency directly. These levels of advancement have historically created a traditional pathway to the presidency regardless of whether the candidate is male or female. These positions could also include interim roles, assistant roles, and associate roles. Below is a more in-depth analysis of each of these two themes.

Identified theme #1: The nontraditional pathway. Slightly over half of the presidents interviewed described their pathways as nontraditional, or unique, or as a different pathway to the presidency. The presidents described their pathways as nontraditional due to the following reasons: a nontraditional launch of their careers in higher education due to a previous career in the private sector, taking a break from their pathways in higher education to pursue work in a private sector, or not following the traditional pathway sequence and skipping one or more positions along the hierarchal sequence of promotions to positions.

Category 1: A previous career. President 5 noted, "I didn't take a very traditional route to this position…So, I have taken a really nontraditional path to this role." President 5 had worked in the private sector in a male dominated field prior to starting her career in higher education, "I would say my pathway is going to be very nontraditional…yes, kind of nontraditional." In describing her pathway to the presidency President 7 stated:

> _When I look at my journey, actually I'll back up a bit. I have an undergraduate degree in human biology, a Master's degree in management. And prior to getting the Master's degree, I was an Army Officer. I went through ROTC when I was an undergraduate student and was commissioned as an Officer in transportation in the United States Army. So, I went on active duty for three years and I managed the equivalent of longshoreman. So basically, military stevedores, we loaded and unloaded ships. And so, we would fly to a port, and either offload or load military cargo onto a civilian ship. And then it would go on its way, and then we would leave the port and go back to our place in XXX._

President 7 worked in two different and male dominated private sectors prior to starting her pathway in higher education. President 8 described her pathway beginning with work in the private sector for a decade, _"Before that, I spent ten years working in cancer research at the University of XXX. So, that was a different pathway. Before that, I had a K-12 license in art education and theater."_

Of the presidents with unconventional pathways, many described unique and fascinating first careers that were much shorter-lived careers than their pathways to the presidency. These careers included private sector jobs with an emphasis on microbiology in a sales environment, a manufacturing career, corporate training with engineers, a lawyer, a certified public accountant, advising small business owners, creating a startup company with partners that eventually was given capital from a major brokerage in the Midwest, joining the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), commissioned Army officer, military stevedores, military managers of longshoremen, sales positions with an emphasis on microbiology, cancer researchers, and truck supervisors.

Some of the female presidents had unique experiences before and/or along their higher education pathways. These experiences included invitations to European countries to do webinars, an invitation by a presidential candidate to go to Asia, an invitation to apply for a deputy assistant secretary position by a former president of the United States, working on projects for an American multinational corporation and an Asian multinational manufacturer, on a program out of an European country, in automotive manufacturing, and in male dominated industries, having K-12 licenses, scholarship/fellowship trainees, and in law and financial consulting.

Category 2: A break in the pathway. Some presidents shared that at different times in their careers, there was a break to get off the pathway to the presidency. This break could include working in the private sector for a time, a different sector of education, time to travel, a geographical move, or for personal reasons. For example, President 1 explained, "*So I stayed as the vice-president for about a couple of years. And*

then I moved and traveled around the country as I had indicated I would to myself and

my husband."

President 8 took some breaks on her pathway to pursue opportunities that were

related to higher education:

> *I joined the XXX system as a faculty member, I was at XXX. And started building a reputation, basically in online learning and some other things, and ended up being a system office director for instructional technology for a time. I was a XXX fellow. So, on my art education side, I have sort of a double doctorate, art education and instructional systems and technology. So, this kind of dual thing with technology and then art. I had a Fulbright to XXX to work on distance learning and things like that. So, at some point, I was ready to make that next leap, and move into administration.*

President 6 described the break in her pathway that was initially difficult but

ended up being a blessing in disguise:

> *Well, I was laid off once. So, I guess that you would call that a challenge. I was in XXX right at the time when XXX was going through a major downturn, and so there were lots of changes in the higher education landscape. Although now they're doing really well. But...and actually, that was when I made the transition from university to community college. I was working at a state institution at the time, and I was an assistant vice-president at a newly created assistant vice-president position. And after three years, when the economics of the state started to change, so I got laid off. But actually, I think that that was a big blessing for me because it had me really looking at lots of opportunities.*

Category 3: Entering the pathway at a different step or skipping steps. Some

presidents entered their pathways at steps other than the faculty entry point, or they may

have not had a significant amount of time and experience in a tenured faculty position

before starting their pathways to the presidency. Some presidents may have had only

adjunct teaching experience, or little teaching experience.

President 3 stated, "*I didn't have a very traditional route to this position*" in

describing her pathway because she entered the pathway at a different entry point and

skipped a step near the bottom of the pathway:

So, I myself am a community college graduate. In fact, I am a graduate of this institution. I am a first-generation college student. I came to the college for criminal justice. I came here to go into criminal justice and ended up getting a communications undergraduate major in advertising and public relations.

President 3 described how this nontraditional route caused her some challenges due to the "*perception about what types of experiences we value in a pathway.*"

President 5 described how she skipped a step near the top of the pathway and explained, "*And so that's how I…yes. I think it's a lot about fit and timing and everything.*" She also stated, "*I don't know how unique that is. I think it's different, especially my path.*"

Presidents 1 and 9 had degrees other than a doctorate which could be viewed as skipping the initial step to enter the pathway by some faculty. President 9 mentioned this could sometimes be a *"credibility issue."*

Identified theme #2: The traditional pathway. Nearly half of the presidents interviewed described their pathways as traditional, smooth, direct, quick, or inferred that their pathways were fairly typical. This traditional pathway generally included higher education positions such as faculty and getting promoted to a dean position, to vice-chancellor or vice-president, to possibly a provost role and then ultimately the college or university presidency. As would be expected, the women who spent their entire careers in education had the most traditional pathways to the presidency position (See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the traditional pathway to the presidency in higher education).

Category 1: Different titles same positions. Different institutions often have different titles for similar positions. For example, a vice-chancellor position at a four-year institution might have the same job description as a vice-president at a two-year

institution. President 6 described her traditional pathway to the presidency as the

following:

> *My titles were: I was a resident director, I was an area director, then I was a hall director again, then I was a director of judicial affairs, then an assistant dean of students, then an associate assistant vice-president, then a vice-president, president, president.*

In thinking about her pathway, President 1 explained, "*I arrived at my current*

position through progressively responsible roles that started many years ago in higher

education." President 4 described the titles of her pathway of her positions leading to the

presidency, "*And I became a dean, and an interim V.P., moved to another institution,*

became a vice-president. It's funny, the path. That's my path. So, it's a pretty typical

path."

Category 2: Smooth and direct. President 2 stated, "*I actually think of my*

pathway as fairly smooth, direct, and quick. I mean from the time I stepped into the

interim dean position it was eight years until I became president." As President 4

reflected on her pathway, it was also an eight-year time span from the time she moved up

the ranks on her pathway:

> *But I knew right away that I wanted to be a V.P. So, I started looking again much more, much more quickly than I would have ever intended to. So, then I was a V.P. from...for about four years, and that's about it. So, I became a dean and...my gosh, this is hard. I became a dean in 2008 and I became a president in 2016.*

Presidents – quantitative data. A summary of presidents' professional sequence of their concrete positions included: Faculty, assistant dean, dean, system office, various other roles in the institution vice-president, provost, and president. The professional backgrounds ranged from non-disclosed to vice-president or provost. Presidents had backgrounds in education, leadership, communication, art, instructional technology, and psychology.

While most presidents described their pathways as traditional through faculty, dean, vice-president, or provost and then the presidency, some reported additional professional experience in an area other than education. Of the disclosed pathways, 56% came from the educational background side of the spectrum while 44% of the female presidents came from backgrounds other than higher education.

Superintendents – quantitative data. The superintendents' paths paralleled the presidents' paths and a summary of superintendents' professional sequence of their concrete positions included: teacher, special education educator, curriculum coordinator, special education assistant, assistant teacher, social studies teacher for grades 8-12, math teacher, English teacher, English and mathematics high school teacher, administration, chemical health education counselor, high school counselor, educational leadership position in grades 7-12, educational leadership position in grades 7-12 combined with superintendent position, director, director of alternative learning programs, multiple roles, director of special education, principal, elementary principal, middle school and high school assistant principal, high school principal, K-12 principal, principal of an international school on an island located in the western north pacific ocean, principal of alternative high school and recovery school, assistant superintendent, chief of staff,

curriculum director and superintendent, superintendent of two school districts,

superintendent of schools, and superintendent. The professional backgrounds ranged

from non-disclosed to president. A summary of superintendents' professional sequence of

their concrete positions included: teacher, daycare and preschool teacher, elementary

teacher, special education.

While most of them described their pathways as traditional in the above roles,

only one superintendent noted previous experience in a professional field other than

education. Of the disclosed pathways, 96% came from the educational background side

of the spectrum while 4% of the female superintendents came from professional

backgrounds in a field other than education.

Integrating qualitative and quantitative data. The main piece of the mixed-

methods concurrent triangulation for this research study was the qualitative components.

The quantitative component was added to increase the objectivity of the study.

Qualitative data from the questionnaire was treated as quantitative data for the purpose of

summarizing the data into percentages. For the qualitative in-depth interviews, four of the

nine presidents, or 44% described their pathways as traditional, whereas in the

quantitative questionnaire 56% of the female president respondents claimed their

experience came from traditional educational backgrounds.

However, the connection between the qualitative in-depth interviews with female

presidents in higher education contrast more significantly with the quantitative female

superintendent questionnaires in that 44% of the female presidents reported having

traditional pathways to the presidency, whereas 96% of female superintendents reported

taking more traditional pathways to the superintendency.

Secondary question 1: What challenges (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions?

  Presidents – qualitative data. For secondary research question 1 of what challenges (if any) did these females experience in their current positions, four phenomenological themes of challenges were identified from the in-depth interviews with college and university presidents in achieving their current positions. All nine participants interviewed described several significant challenges in their pathways to achieve their presidency. President 1 explained, "there have been challenges along the way to discourage me from taking the next step, but eventually it did happen." These four themes of challenges included: the first, sexism, geographic mobility, and internal candidacy. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of the themes of challenges to the female presidency pathway.

Figure 2. Challenges of the Female Presidency
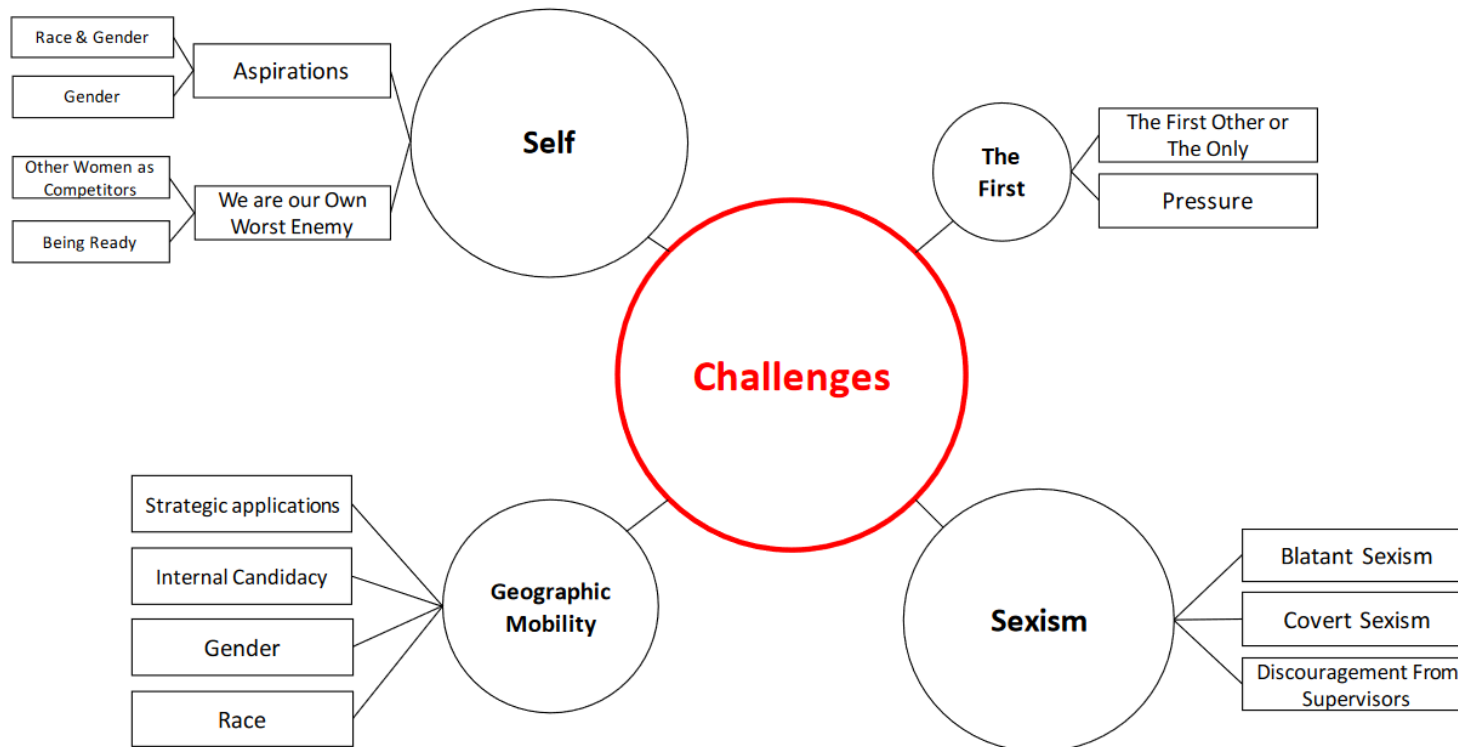
Figure 2. The size of the circles coordinates with the degree of challenges to the female presidency in higher education.

Identified theme #1: The first. For seven of the nine female presidents, this was their first presidency. Coincidentally, the two presidents who were in their second presidency both served their first presidencies within the same system located in a metropolitan area in another state. Two of the presidents were the first and only female president of the institution if the previous historical mergers of institutions were not considered. Several female presidents explained that they experienced pressure or negative circumstances in being the first and/or only female in their positions. In addition, race added another layer to the challenge.

Category 1: The first other or the only. President 1 described one of her previous challenges of her vice-president position on her pathway, "*So, I was the first person in it, and the first female in it, and the first person of color in it.*" One president described some challenges for female presidents in within her own system:

> *Now, some of my colleagues who are coming into the system and into presidencies where there hasn't been a woman, or they're the first openly gay person or whatever, which is in our system as well. I think it's been a little adjustment for some folks to have that.*

President 4 commented, that for her next step to the presidency she was careful to consider:

> *Will I have the support as a female president? Will I have colleagues as a female president? I know myself. I need support and I need networks. I didn't want to be the only. Because I knew that that would not be a long-term solution for me. So, I paid attention to that.*

In reflecting on her own experiences of being the first or the only along her pathway, President 5 stated:

> *Whether people just wanted me to be the example…or the role model…or the only person on the search committee…just all of the above. And race played into it…even when there was a selection between a white female and a black female. Sometimes that just happens. And then sometimes, for the wrong reasons, people pick you because you are. And they feel a need to fill that gap. It may or may not be looking at competency, or ability to do what they want you to do. It's unfortunate.*

President 6 explained her professional experiences of being the only on her

pathway, and in particular the only woman:

> *Now, there are a couple times I've been places where, as a female, there's a whole bunch of leaders, and I look around the room and I'm one of the, or the only female in the room.*

However, she also grappled with being the first or only due to not only her

gender, but also her race, *"But, here in XXX, I tend to also be one of the only people of*

color in the room. So again, not sure is it my gender or my race?"

President 6 also noted:

> *Yeah. Well, I mean I…I joke when I first got here, and people…I would be introduced to people, and they're like "This is the new president of XXX." And they'd go, 'Oh!' And I never knew what the 'Oh!' was." She went on to say, "Was it because I was a woman? Is it because I was black? Is it because they thought I was young? Or is it just because they didn't know the last person left? I don't really know. But oftentimes I really feel it had to do with race.*

Category 2: Pressure. President 7 tried to describe the pressure of being "the

first" female president, and if "the first" female president was not successful, how that

could have an impact on the second female president:

> *I mean, the campus already had a woman president previously. She was here for X months, so not a successful presidency. And when I first got here, I was out at some social thing in the community, and I sat at a table of elderly folks. And one of them said to me, "Oh….you don't want to be like XXX!" So…I recognize the importance of women in leadership. And the impact that has on others. Being a first at an institution, you have even greater responsibility for that. And greater…different expectations, I think.*

President 5 also tried to describe the pressure of working as one of the only or one

of the very few females to perform in not only her current presidency, but in previous

positions. She said:

*I have always been surrounded by males, even when I was teaching. I taught
XXX. And the XXX that I ran was automotive manufacturing. And so really male
dominated field and not even...and majority dominated. That's the environment I
was in. And I think that women...certainly for me as a woman in that field, I
constantly had to prove myself.*

President 5 also stated:

*But I didn't mind doing that. I used to go out and do corporate training, around a
table like this with engineers. And when I first walk in, they don't know what
they're going to get, they're underestimating me. And I used to think...and my joke
was, OK, I can't wait to break when they all follow me to the coffee machine.*

President 7 explained there she felt like the first female president because the first

female president of her institution served two decades ago and left abruptly. She

explained there was even pressure in *"being the second. And following somebody who is*

here in the '80s who wasn't successful, I think there's still additional responsibility on you

to be successful."

Identified theme #2: Sexism. For the theme of sexism, there were three categories

which included overt sexism, covert sexism, and discouragement from supervisors.

Category 1: Overt sexism. President 7 described how sexism was a type of

mentality in higher education. She said:

*And I have to say, let me just talk about another thing that kind of is a challenge
as well. So, in my previous institution, my boss was a female, so female
chancellor. I was a female provost. Our C.F.O. was a female, our advancement
person were females, and our dean of students was a female. So almost entirely a
female cabinet. And, of course, what were the rumblings out there? There are too
many women leading this institution. And, you know, you think of that, and you
think well, for how many years were there too many men leading our institutions?*

President 1 explained how:

There was a faculty member at my prior institution who absolutely hated that I was a female and the president of that institution. And pushed back on me every single day that I was president at that institution. It was absolutely horrible. And made it known in my search that he did not want a female president because that college already had a male while he was there as a faculty member and he wanted to keep it that way.

President 2 described how easy it was to see blatant sexism in American politics

aimed at women in politics:

It's easier to see in other arenas, like for me, it's a lot easier to see it when I watch how people talk about the women who were running for president. You know the kinds of comments that are made, the way that appearance becomes a focus of the conversation rather than competence, the reservations that are voiced about whether they are strong enough to manage the demands of the highest office. They're often described as shrill or in other terms that are very uncomplimentary.

President 2 described how sexism is embedded in American culture:

And so even if those things aren't directed at you personally, it's just a barometer for the extent to which they exist in our larger culture and a reminder that that's the environment in which we're trying to lead. And, I have had situations where on social media, for example, where people are angry about a decision I've made and what they end up doing is posting hateful comments about the way I look or things that have nothing to do with the decision or my leadership but are all about denigrating me as a woman. And so, I think that those things are embedded in our culture. And even when you try to rise above them or look beyond them, that, you know, they're sort of constantly at work and you have to figure out ways to negotiate them.

President 1 described how sexism and racism affected some of her colleagues in

the presidency:

There are certain communities that still don't respect women in these leadership roles, make no mistake about it. And when you add that, when you add race to that, it becomes even more difficult to persist in those communities.

She explained that racism exists "*right here in XXX. There are areas where presidents of*

color still have many challenges because of their race."

President 3 stated:

And so, part of it is some of our communities are still very male dominated, male leadership committees and things that I'm on. And if I spoke up, or asked…even just ask questions, which is what we do in higher ed. We ask for more, you know, we don't just take things at surface value, we ask for questions or data. That I was the difficult committee member, I was this or that. And I would notice that other people would challenge, and nothing would happen. And that's just been the things that I've gone through, not only in this role, but just as a woman in my career.

President 4 explained her interviewing experiences along her pathway *"I didn't get a presidency, someone said they were not ready for a woman. Another one they said…'Well, you know, they had a really bad experience with a woman.'"* In addition, in speaking of the overall interviewing process for her next step in advancing her career in higher education, President 4 said:

I also think from a gender perspective, when you decide you're going to put yourself out there, and apply for jobs like this, whether it's V.P. or President, there is very clear advice given to women, that is not given to men. So, I remember interviewing for positions saying "Well, how big should my earrings be? And I should just wear a dark suit? Is that too loud? Should I have nail polish on?" I mean, there's...so you really do have to pay a lot of attention to your external appearance, beyond what's just professional. And I found that very frustrating. But I did it. You know, you...you play the game.

President 4 also stated:

But it is interesting to go through the process, knowing that you have to pay attention to those things, which really shouldn't be important at all. What should be important is the skills and commitment that you bring to the position.

President 6 described one of her colleague's struggles with sexism:

Her campus was ready to have a female president...but her community wasn't ready. And so, when she would go into, you know, places where all the leaders are, they were all men. And they didn't really have the same kind of respect for her.

President 7 explained her experience:

And another challenge that I had when I was teaching, and I was in...my department was XXX. So, XXX, XXX and XXX were all one large department and it was a male dominated area. And I had a department chair who was, I would say, definitely sexist. And I don't think he wanted to see me advancing, nor did he want to see any woman advancing. And in that case, you know, the reporting lines were more in XXX...the chair was pretty much...I mean, they could make or break you. At that point, there wasn't a dean position at the university where I was. It was the provost and then the department chair. So, it was a really heavy-handed department chair role.

President 8 explained how sexism is embedded in American culture. She stated:

And I mean, we're experiencing that in our own country right now nationally. It's...are women ever going to break into the presidency of the country? I don't know. Every other country has done it. Until we can actually pinpoint exactly what's going on there, I don't think we'll ever really completely pinpoint and solve it even for higher education.

Category 2: Covert sexism. President 2 reflected on her past and current

experiences with sexism:

For me, they've been very subtle, but very real. In fact, I think that's part of what makes them so challenging is that they're so subtle. But they're very real, and it is sort of a...I typically describe them as kind of a constant drip, drip, drip that over time...it can erode your self-confidence and your effectiveness. I think there is still a bias about whether women have what it takes to be effective leaders, and you know, you can see it.

President 3 explained her experiences:

And part of it was just the different perception we have about women who make hard decisions. So, if we move too swiftly...you know, so I think of the word like, the B word and others that come to mind. So, men who make decisions are doing what's best for the institution. Women who make decisions or cause a ruckus in a meeting, are difficult.

In reflecting on her past experiences, President 5 stated she knew she had to prove

herself. She stated, *"I think just my whole career's being so male dominated, it hasn't*

bothered me. But I know that initially people are wondering. And you have to just show

your competence."

President 9 talked about her experiences:

And there's even times now when things come up on campus, and people are critical. You know, some people, of course, not everyone. But you don't want to hear things like, "Oh, she only hires women" or, you know, maybe critical of a particular decision. I'll think, "Hmmm. I wonder if you would be so critical if I were a male?" There's just...that's always, I think, kind of an undercurrent.

President 9 later explained:

And it's hard to pinpoint whether...you know whether... It's just a feeling you get sometimes about certain kinds of criticisms. You know, obviously there's other things which yeah, people they have questions about, that's fair. But there's some things that seem that way.

President 9 also explained her experience, *"I mean, certainly had times when it has been really overt about gender. And someone questioning my confidence, or someone patronizing me."* She later said:

I've been harassed. I've been treated as if I was not equal, or worthy... But I mean, to have those experiences of people dismissing your ideas. And then someone else popping up the next day and saying, "Hey, I have this idea." Huh? Yeah.

Category 3: Discouragement from superiors. President 1 described how the male president at one of her previous institutions presented a roadblock on her pathway:

In fact, the president similarly said something to me at my first job at the university. He discouraged me. He discouraged me from getting my doctorate degree because he said: "You don't need that degree in the field you have, and it's really a waste of your time." And said the same thing to my colleague, who was my boss at the time, and we became friends, that she shouldn't get hers either.

President 3 described how she was discouraged from a female superior. She reflected, *"I had a person tell me once that I'd be lucky if I could start looking at her job when I had 15 more years of experience. It's just things like that, constant belittling and things."*

President 7 explained how along her pathway into administration her superior discouraged her:

> *And I had a provost at that time, who actually early into that XX portion of it, I was probably in year two, he said to me, "You know, you're really doing the work of a dean. You should be a dean." But the comment that he made after that was, "But you're never going to be a dean under this chancellor." So, this is the provost telling me this. And it was discouraging, that you know, he felt, or at least he was saying that he felt, I should have that kind of a title. But yet, he didn't seem willing to go up, and make a case for it. He just kind of excused…"Oh, that chancellor would never allow that."*

Identified theme #3: Geographic mobility. Another challenge for the female presidents was geographic mobility. Geographic mobility, or relocating to another part of the country, or within the same state in order to support career advancement opportunities, impacted all of the women presidents interviewed, but in different ways. Sometimes the challenges were not difficult to overcome such as applying to one institution for the presidency, or as an internal candidate. More difficult challenges included family considerations, race, gender, and community type in terms of rural, suburban, or metropolitan areas.

Category 1: Strategic applications. The majority of the female presidents reported that they needed to move to a different state within the United States of America in order to advance in their careers in higher education. While this is not a unique experience to higher education, the majority of the presidents noted that they were strategic about where and when to apply for their next level of advancement. Some reasons for strategic applications for advancement included family and spousal impacts that went into their decision making for the moves to new geographical locations in order to advance their careers.

President 5 was not initially sure if she wanted to move from the state where she had spent over half of her career in education. She felt comfortable with the state, she was familiar with the laws affecting education, and she knew her system. The next move to advance required her to move to a completely different geographical location and climate within the United States. President 5 described, *"And...so for me to go to XXX was a little bit of a shock for me. But they were very kind."*

President 4 had to move to six different geographic locations within a fairly short amount of time with her children and spouse in order to ultimately end up in the presidency. She mentioned that she was strategic about looking at higher education systems, institutions, and overall communities. She explained, "*I really had to be strategic about where I wanted to apply…there weren't many opportunities."* She stated, *"I think my gender absolutely dictated where I applied. And I mentioned that I really was careful about...I want this to work. So, I really tried to take a look at communities, and look at institutions, and systems."*

President 4 explained that she and her spouse and children did not want to continue to move around the country:

> *We wanted to find a place where we could stay. But we had to make the decision, are we going to make the move to make this happen? And I am fairly confident that had I stayed exactly where I was, I would not be in this position.*

President 2 explained the thought process of leaving a community where she had lived for a significant time in order to advance her career to a vice-president/provost/vice-chancellor position:

> *If I was going to uproot my husband and myself and leave the place I had been for seventeen years, and move to a new community, I felt like I'd want six years or so to establish myself and be able to accomplish things before the president turned over, and then I'd be in a situation of deciding what to do.*

The presidents interviewed reported having to be strategic in considering the geographic location of their next step in advancement based on not only a lack of opportunities and family considerations, but also considerations of their gender or race.

Category 2: Internal candidacy. The flipside of not having geographic mobility and instead applying internally for advancement also posed challenges for female presidents. President 3 stated, *"Yeah so it's been an interesting path, but I always say that it's just a different perspective, certainly within the same institution."* She explained that being an internal candidate was challenging because:

> *You're bringing XX years of relationships sure, that's the positive side of it. You're also bringing XX years of speculation, and decisions that people maybe didn't like. And just a lot of history and baggage. So, while people knew what they were getting with me, that can be a good thing. And I had a tremendous amount of support. There are certainly people who take their opportunity to take shots at you, and that's wherever you try to apply for a job. Academia is an environment where people are not filtered. They do not have trouble saying really, very hurtful things.*

In addition, President 3 mentioned:

> *People are going to criticize nearly everything you do, even if they have a lot of respect for you. But you have to be able to figure that out. But I think when you're internal, and you do have relationships, it hurts in a different way because people are really unfiltered with me.*

President 3 explained another unique challenge of the internal candidacy, *"I didn't have a honeymoon period like a new president coming into another institution would."*

President 7 also experienced challenges with being an internal candidate on her pathway of advancement to the presidency. She acknowledged:

> *Another challenge would be when you are promoted within your own institution, and I was there XX years. Sometimes it's more difficult to get that next job because people know you. And so...in a lot of times, that's good that they know you. But it can also be bad that they know you because they think that they know everything about you. And when you're applying and interviewing for a position, you have to go to that interview process as if nobody knows you. Because what*

you have to remember is that they're not working with you every single day. So, they have assumptions about what they know about you. But you've got to really build the case as to why, you know, what experiences you have that would qualify you for that position.

Category 3: Gender. For President 1, she felt she had to move to a different geographical location in order to advance on her pathway. She discovered that not only were there few advancement opportunities for females at her own institution, but gender discrimination was also a common theme in the particular state where she was living at the time. In speaking about the number of female presidents in higher education in that state at that time she explained:

It was very political. I believe there were three women at the time out of 28 at the time out of community colleges in XXX. I believe there may only be one female president now in XXX and the rest are males.

President 1 also explained:

On the other side of it, it has always been a fear of, especially for I would say, a female in higher education, that you won't be accepted. And clearly now I still believe that it is a barrier in some respects because there are places in the United States where I would never apply to be a president. See?

President 6 explained that during her interviewing process she would consider the issue of gender: "So, I would look…has there ever been a female president?" Not only would President 6 research the gender history of previous presidents of higher education institutions when she was in the interviewing process, but there were other aspects to consider:

I've been in a couple of places where I interviewed with the board and the first thing I did was to look to see how many women were on the board because it's very indicative of the community, and who's the chair, and how is this going to go?

Category 4: Race. In terms of race, some female presidents described how they strategized about applying for advancement opportunities and had to consider racism and safety concerns.

President 5 explained how earlier in her career she declined an offer because of her race:

> *And I was afraid because it was a long ride, gas was going up back then, and the community was not very diverse. And so, he even went so far as to call me down for lunch with the president of the NAACP and a black pastor. So, because they had offered me the position, I was their number one candidate…but I was…I just…wouldn't accept.*

President 1 described how she was especially careful and strategic about where she applied for her advancement opportunities because of her race:

> *So, the field is not totally open to presidents of color, whether you're male or female, depending on where you are geographically. Does it discourage some people from applying? It doesn't, but it did discourage me. I always look at the environment in which I'm coming into and race provides that lens. So, it's almost a second check if you will, or a necessary check of the environment that I have to explore, not only for myself, but for my family as to whether that is a safe environment for me.*

Identified theme #4: Self. The fourth identified theme of challenges was the self which included the two categories. The first category was *aspirations* with the subcategories of *race and gender*, and *gender*. The second category was *we are our own worst enemy with* the subcategories of *other women as competitors* and *being ready*.

Category 1: Aspirations. Several women indicated they may not have initially considered advancing on their pathways because the presidency was not their first aspiration. President 4 explained how initially while she was teaching, she did not want to go into administration, *"although I had said for many, many years I never wanted to be a*

president. Why would anyone want to do that? I didn't even want to be a dean, never

mind the president."

President 3 stated, *"I didn't even aspire to be a college president. I would have*

been an advisor for the rest of my life and been completely happy."

President 4 explained her experiences, *" I did my graduate work there, and got*

my Master's, and then was hired on the faculty there for several years. And started

teaching, and just really fell in love with teaching, and thought that I would always do

that."

President 8 stated, *"I never thought I would take a presidency."* She later went on

to explain:

> *I don't think you wake up in a high school class and say, "Oh, I want to be a president of a college or university." I don't think that happens. You know, I think it's kind of that natural progression of really deciding what it is you...if...what you really want out of that kind of life. Because being in higher education is a very different world than being in corporate America. Very different. Or being in other kinds of workforce areas. And it does take a certain kind of mindset.*

Other presidents explained that they did not aspire because they did not think it

was a possibility due to race and/or gender.

The subcategory of *race and gender* fell under the *aspirations* category for the

first identified theme of the *self*. For some female presidents of color, both race and

gender

influenced their aspirations for the presidency in higher education. President 1 explained:

> *I have to say that wasn't my first aspiration, because I got a little discouraged when I went to a conference and found out that the statistics show that presidents of color represented ten percent of all the presidents in community colleges, less that ten percent. And when you add gender on top of that, the chances of becoming a president for me in my mind wasn't there. So, I never actually took the steps to get here to my point.*

President 5 explained how the presidency was not one of her initial considerations for her career until she was in graduate school. She stated:

I came into the presidency in my XXs. I asked about my age. I asked about being a female. I asked about being African American. And so, I had to research those things. And then I found out, that the world was open for me to consider that. Now, I still thought I had an intermediary move between that, right. Because I was still in school and hadn't had those offers that I talked about. But I really had to look at it. And I had all these other people telling me that...this is what I was going to do. Even though, I never thought that. And I'm the kind of person that, I just didn't have it as a goal. All my steps weren't planned.

The subcategory of *gender* fell under the *aspirations* category for the first identified theme of the *self*. For some of the presidents, gender was a challenge that resulted in roadblocks on their pathways due to advancement. President 1 stated that her gender negatively influenced her aspirations to achieve the presidency, "And the challenge was that I just never thought it would be something that I could get. I knew I couldn't get the opportunity. Most of the presidents were men in those roles."

President 4 explained that gender influenced her aspirations:

And I think as a gender, we do tend to not always see ourselves in roles like this because we're part of society. And when you think of a college president, there is an image that comes to mind and it's not typically a woman, certainly not a woman of color. It's typically a white male. So, I think we feed into that. And as a young girl growing up, even from a privileged family, I really just never saw myself doing that.

According to President 1:

Like I said my thought about being a president was controlled by my gender of not doing it. I think my success of becoming a president is proud of being in my gender, and I really never focused on it at the point I got the job. But it was brought to my attention when I got Twitter or Facebook messages from people in this community stating how proud they were that I was a female president. I never thought of the perception of my accepting the role.

Category 2: We are our own worst enemy. Because there has been an underrepresentation of women in the presidency in higher education, President 1 stated she felt a responsibility to pay it forward and lift other women up. *"I believe that sometimes if we don't do that, we're our own worst enemy."* President 1 explained that female presidents sometimes miss out on opportunities to connect with other women and navigate the presidency because they were guarded. In talking about missed female connections:

> *Many times, we tend to be guarded because we're females and we don't jump out unless we know the circumstances of jumping out. And I don't care what role you're in, you are guarded because you don't know how you're going to be taken or received. And that is just another layer of uncertainty we face as female presidents or any other role that you serve today or in the past.*

President 9 mentioned something similar:

> *I do think sometimes as women we can, because of that idea like I've got to be as perfect as I can, and I can't really make mistakes and all that, that we don't open ourselves up so easily to finding the mentors.*

The subcategory of *other women as competition* fell under the *we are our own worst enemy* category for the first identified theme of the self. President 3 explained that as she advanced on her pathway to the presidency, other women were part of her challenges:

> *Until my very last job, so maybe the last XX years in higher ed., I felt very targeted by other women. So, I felt like other women were threatened. I had bosses that were men that were really fantastic. And I had bosses who were women who were not fantastic. And I felt very...I felt like the only people who were less likely to support me, the least likely to support me, within the institution were women.*

President 3 talked some of some of the comments she would get from other women, the microaggressions and what she came to realize:

But, you know, a lot of comments about I had to cut my hair. I'd get that. I would...certain dress styles and expectations of dress. A lot of that kind of stuff, some of that microaggression about being a certain type of woman…So if you're going to be a woman, you're going to have to fit into this box of leadership. Stop asking about people's feelings so much.

President 7 described her experience, *"You know, if you're not liked by another woman, then they're going to say, well...(mumble)…"*

President 3 came to realize the scarcity of positions for women in upper administration created competition amongst women. *"But what I realized when I did research and really looked at the numbers, is it's so ingrained in us because leadership positions have not been and are still not available to women."* She explained:

That we get this competition factor because we know, when you look at a president's cabinet, or you look at X number of presidencies within our system...even if it's never stated out loud, we know, that there's only a certain percentage of those that will be given to women. So, from day one, if we want a job, we see other women as competition. Even if we don't think we do. It's just ingrained in us because for decades and generations, if all five positions, one was going to go to a woman.

President 3 elaborated:

So, if you think about it, you have five colleagues in your division, but you probably are in a division with multiple other divisions that all would report to one dean. Maybe you have five deans, four of them are men, or two and two, or whatever. So, you're already looking at other women as a competition. Because you know that there's no way, they're going to give every leadership position to a woman, IF we even get the five percent that we deserve.

In addition, President 3 stated:

But, you know, if you look around the nation, we met the college president from XXX a woman. She's the only woman in the private college sector. So, if you're a vice-president at a private college, or a dean in a private college, and you aspire to be a president, you automatically see every woman there as competition because there may only be one spot for a woman.

The subcategory of *being ready* fell under the *we are our own worst enemy* category for the first identified theme of the *self*. Several female presidents discussed the

idea of being ready or not ready to move up the pathway to the presidency. President 4

explained that depending on the position, there can be a magic number of years it is

expected to have served before advancing to the next level in administration in higher

education:

> *I think particularly at the level of dean and vice-president, there is typically a sense for, what that number should be. And I don't know that anyone agrees on it, but I've been on a number of searches, many searches. And there is a constant conversation about, "Well, is he or she ready?" You know, meaning, they haven't been there long enough. Or "if they really want to move, they would have done it by now." So, I don't think anybody ever talks about a number, but I do think it's important.*

President 5 was initially not sure if she should advance to the next step in her

pathway:

> *But the search firm called me, and they said, you have been nominated for XXX. And I said, I don't know…And so I said, "I'm not really ready for that." And they said, "Why don't you get your resumé ready?" And they wanted to set up another follow up meeting. Once they read my resumé and had a conversation about whether I was ready or not. And then we talked.*

President 6 talked about how women do not apply for jobs in higher education

because they think they have to complete all of the steps on the pathway in order to be

ready for the next level of advancement in administration. She explained, "*In some cases,*

although I think it's changing, we take ourselves out of the equation. Like we don't apply

for those jobs. We don't put ourselves in that position."

At one point in her career, President 1 was hesitant to take the next step to

advance, "*And I was a little bit apprehensive at first and asked a lot of questions and had*

to be convinced that this was a good move for me."

President 8 explained that women tend think that everything has to be perfect before they advance to the next level, however the situation is different for men. She stated:

> *I think that women in any of these roles tend to do this, and when I have been mentoring women in higher ed. as they're expanding their careers, it comes up over and over and over again that women tend to want to have everything perfect, know that they have met every single requirement of the position. All of that before they make the next leap. When I'm mentoring men, they'll have one or two of the five things that someone thinks they need, and they're willing to take that risk. And it's okay to take the risk. And so, I really try to get the women to understand. Look, it is OK to do that. You will learn some things along the way. That's OK. And understand that this is how your male character counterparts are getting ahead.*

President 8 also explained:

> *Yes, there's some male privilege. Absolutely. But mostly it's that...it's our own internal attitude, I think that has kind of really been difficult for many women in higher ed. to get over." She later stated, "I undermined myself many times thinking that way, and so on. And then I finally learned to open all the doors. And you don't have to step through. You just open all the doors and decide where you want to go.*

Presidents - quantitative data. Amongst presidents, these were the four factors identified as challenging.

Table 9

Identified Challenges by Presidents

Category	Mean	Standard Dev.
Glass Ceiling	5.13	1.05
Sexism	4.75	1.64
Good Old Boys' Network & Culture	3.75	1.39
Gender Stereotyping	4.50	1.22

Note that the first factor: the glass ceiling and the second factor: sexism had a mean of over four and were identified as the most challenging of them all (See pages 42-54 for more detailed descriptions of all of the factor categories of challenges). Additional

information can be found on the questionnaire instrument in Appendix D and Appendix E

as the instrument lists all of the factors and provides a brief description of each one of

them. The standard deviation for sexism was 1.64 which means had scores of close to

seven for sexism. The standard deviation for sexism is the highest which speaks for the

highest level of scores within these factors. For a few of the presidents, sexism was the

highest of them all. Women presidents' standard deviations were close to one which

means they align more closely to each other than the superintendents. The glass ceiling

was the main challenge faced by presidents.

Superintendents – quantitative data. Amongst superintendents, these same four

factors were identified as challenging.

Table 10

Identified Challenges by Superintendents

Challenge	Mean	Standard Dev.
Glass Ceiling	4.57	2.57
Sexism	4.29	2.39
Good Old Boys' Network & Culture	4.33	2.44
Gender Stereotyping	4.86	2.38

Note that all factors had a mean of 4, and the second factor: Gender stereotyping

was identified as the most challenging of them all (See pages 42-54 for more detailed

descriptions of all of the factor categories of challenges). Additional information can be

found on the questionnaire instrument in Appendix D and Appendix E as the instrument

lists all of the factors and provides a brief description of each one of them. The standard

deviation for superintendents is twice as much as the presidents, which means their

opinions were more diverse. They did not tend to agree too much. Gender stereotyping

was the main challenge faced by superintendents.

Integrating qualitative and quantitative data. The connection of the primary

qualitative interviews and the secondary quantitative findings was that the prevailing

themes all connected to some form of sexism. The four categories of the quantitative

findings of glass ceiling, sexism, the good old boys' network and culture, and gender

stereotyping all have the common denominator of some shape or form of sexism. The

qualitative in-depth interviews align with these same findings as sexism was one of the

largest themes discovered.

In addition, the qualitative theme's categories of overt sexism, covert sexism, and

discouragement from supervisors relates to the quantitative findings of glass ceiling,

sexism, the good old boys' network and culture, and gender stereotyping.

Secondary question 2: What supports (if any) did these females experience in

achieving their current positions?

The secondary question 2 was composed of four phenomenological themes for the

supports that were identified from the in-depth interviews with university and college

presidents' pathways. All nine participants interviewed described supports in their

journeys to the presidency. For example, President 4 explained, "You know, I've had

tremendous support from people around me." President 9 remarked, "Yeah. So, when I

think about my career, it was clear at various points that I had people who provided that

spark for me."

The four themes of supports included: Self, connections and networks, education

and training, and geographic mobility. See Figure 3 for a visual representation of the

themes of challenges to the female presidency pathway.

Figure 3. Supports to the Female Presidency
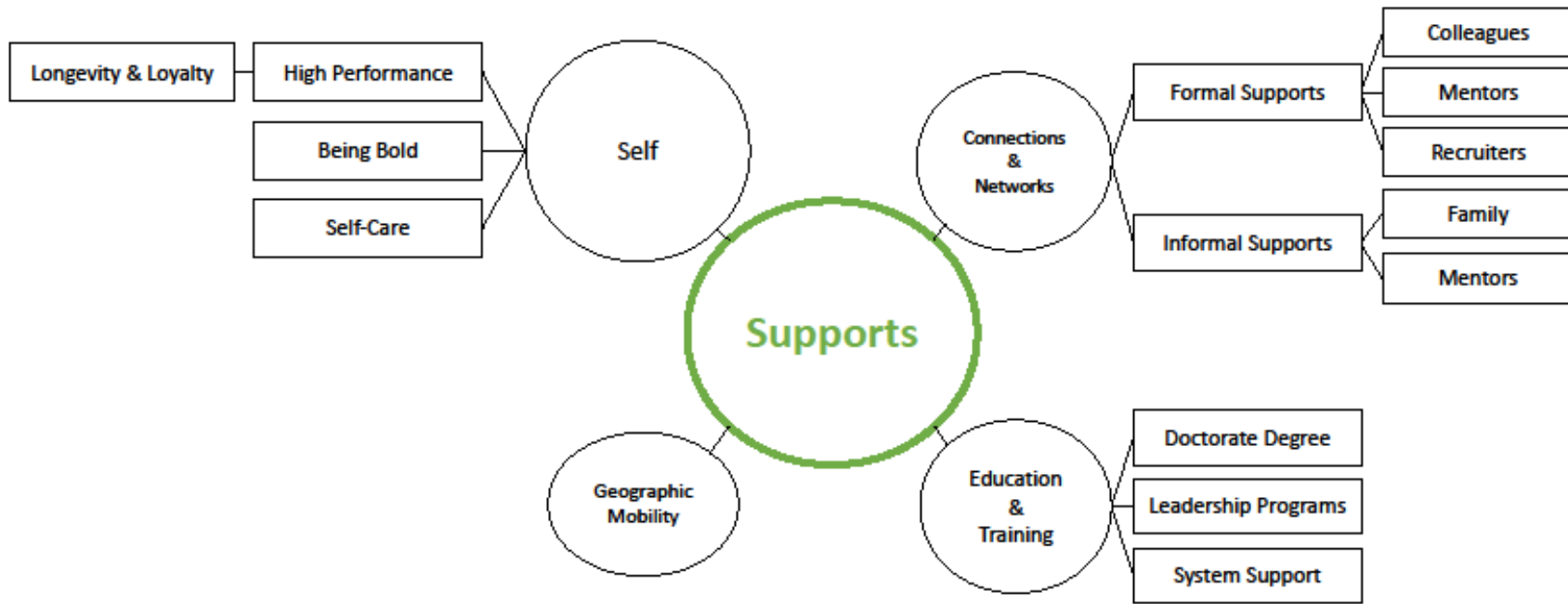
Figure 3. The size of the circles coordinates with the degree of supports to the female presidency in higher education.

Presidents – qualitative data. For the secondary research question of what supports (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions, there were four themes: self, connections and networks, education and training, and geographic mobility.

Identified theme #1: Self. The first identified support theme was the Self. All of the presidents were high performers, high achievers, and hard workers. A sense of self was a theme of support. This sense of self advanced them on their pathways to the presidency. For example, President 3 described an important part of her pathway, "getting strong enough in who I am as a person that I know I add value to an organization was a really critical piece." She also added, "But being really strong in that core of who...what you're willing to sacrifice, no matter what at the end of the day, what's most important to you. For me, that's relationships, and mentoring, and connecting with people." The subcategories of the theme of the self were high performance, being bold and self-care.

Category 1: High performance. High performance for the presidents meant working hard, working long hours, work life balance, being bold, and self-care. Longevity and loyalty to higher education was also a common subtheme of the category of high performance.

President 1 described her sense of self and high performance about some of the positions she held early in her career in higher education: *"So, every job I got at that university, I got because of my performance."* President 1 also mentioned how overcoming some of her challenges of advancing to the next step on her pathway was a support and demonstrated a strong sense of self, *"And I believe I'm a stronger person as*

a result of having gone through that, because it demonstrates resilience, grit and

overcoming challenges that have come your way."

President 3 stated, *"I think achiever is one of my biggest strengths. And so, I've*

always wanted to do what's best for our students in the institution and produce a lot. So, I

can get a lot done."

The subcategory of *longevity and loyalty* fell under category one *high*

performance category for the first identified theme of the *self*. Within the category of

high performance, there was a significant subcategory of longevity and loyalty. For

example, although President 1 never revealed an exact number of years of her experience

in higher education, the longevity of her experience was part of her pathway. President 1

described her loyalty to one institution in particular, "I was in a job where I'd been for

seven years and would probably have gone to another vice-president's job if I had left that

institution." President 1 stated that she advanced at one particular institution "and stayed

there for several iterations."

President 2 mentioned she was a faculty member for over a decade and had

worked in the same system for over a quarter of a century, *"So I have worked in higher*

education for my entire career, which at this point is about almost 40 years, actually."

President 3 described how she had been working at the same institution for over

two decades. In addition, she explained, *"So, I've worked with and built partnerships and*

relationships with our X other campuses for 16 years."

President 5 discussed the longevity of her career, *"And this is my first Presidency,*

but I have now served in higher education for 30 years in three states."

President 6 reflected on her career:

> *You know, I think it depends. There are certain days that, you know, certain parts of my experience become very germane, and then other times maybe not as much. I think overall, since I've been in higher education for...oh my gosh...going on 30 years, it...I feel like I've been there enough.*

President 7 explained, *"...and actually had spent the bulk of my higher education career at the University of XXX. I started out as an adjunct instructor, and 21 years later I was the provost and searching for a presidency."*

Category 2: Being bold. President 4 talked about being bold and seeking opportunities for advancement along her pathway. In some of her previous positions leading up to the presidency, she did not spend the typical amount of time. She explained, *"I would have normally spent more time in those positions. But, you know, opportunities just come up and you got to grab them."*

President 1 discussed how she was bold in taking the next step on her pathway:

> *And I told him, I was a little bit bold at the time, if you can believe that. Bolder than I am now. And I told the President, I said, "I'm not sure I want this job, I need to think about it." And he said: "What!?" He said: "What do you mean you don't want this job?" I said, "Like I said, I don't want the job. I'll let you know tomorrow if I'll take it." So, the next day I walked up to him and I said, "I think I'll explore it."*

President 7 was bold in her career:

> *I think the theme in my higher education career was if someone asks me to take on an interim position, I always said yes. Because I...and whether it was stretching me or not, it always was a stretch, I felt. But that's how I got my first job. I was actually a month out from completing my dissertation, and the provost at that time...and I'm just teaching. I'm teaching. I'm not anything other than I'm teaching full-time...but my dissertation was on quality in online distance education. And he knew that I was focused on distance education in my dissertation. So, he called me into his office, and he said, 'Well, we have a retirement in distance...the director is retiring. Would you step up and take that position on an interim appointment for a year?' And I thought, 'I'm just finishing my dissertation on quality in online distance education. This is a hot topic. I could get published here. I could do some really cool stuff.' And then I'm thinking I'm in*

XXX, XXX. And at that time, my husband's position took us there. We had two small kids and I'm thinking, "OK, I'm going to college to be...because I want to be an administrator. This was educational administration. That's what I want to do. So, if I said 'No' now, I don't know when the next opportunity is going to come." So, I said "Yes." And that "Yes" led to the next opportunity, and the next one, and the next one. And had I not said "Yes" then, I probably would not be sitting right here across the table from you in this position. So, it was getting opportunities, and then saying "yes" to them and...and then, of course, you know, you need to do a good job with it. You can't just get the job and then not perform well.

Category 3: Self-care. The self-care for the presidents included work life balance.

President 3 described how family life helped to balance out her professional life. She

said:

And I also do a lot with balance. You know, I do a lot with my...I still have kids. I have a X grader, in fact. So that's really out of the norm to have a president who still has children. But that also balances...it forces me to have balance because I'm not willing to be a crappy mom either. And so, it forces me to leave and go home, and go to a hockey game or do whatever I'm going to do with my kids tonight. That forces me to drop this and get engaged with that.

President 8 explained the importance of self-care:

So, you don't have to be alone in this job, and I don't think it's healthy if you are. I think you have to be also a human being and make certain that you're practicing some self-care, whatever that may be, mental health, physical health. I mean, we do a lot of...in this job there's a lot of social eating, which is just difficult...I've heard that people in the clergy also experience the same thing. It's a lot of social eating and that's just part of being human. But you have to spend some time in the gym, too.

President 3 also mentioned that exercise was part of her self-care, *"And then*

exercise, of course. I get up really, really early to exercise. So that's my 'me time' to

process through things so that you can bring your best self...and dump all the garbage."

Identified theme #2: Connections and networks. Connections and networks

whether formal or informal were a common theme of support for the presidents. Formal

connections and networks could be colleagues, mentors, and recruiters. For example,

President 5 stated, *"And there's a lot of people like that in my life. That over the years,*

that I'll call, pretty much from everywhere I've been, and throughout my career."

Informal connections and networks included family and mentors. In another example,

President 9 commented, *"So, it always seems like I've been lucky that at some point, at a*

seminal point in my life, someone says to me, 'I think you can. And I think you should.'

And that's always been just a little push I needed to try to make it."

    Category 1: Formal supports. The category of formal supports included

colleagues, mentors, and recruiters.

    The subcategory of *colleagues* fell under category one of *formal supports* for the

second identified theme of *connections and networks*. President 2 mentioned that other

presidents were supports for her, *"The male presidents are extremely supportive. Don't*

get me wrong, but there is something about being surrounded by women colleagues.

That's also very supportive. And so, I really appreciated that." President 2 also stated

that other colleagues, advocates in the community and other women were some of her

other supports, *"I do have very supportive colleagues and other leaders in this*

community who are great advocates. And so, you know, you lean on them. You lean on

other women and commiserate sometimes, and you affirm with each other."

    President 5 explained the importance of the support of other female presidents,

"And just sit around with a bunch of other female presidents and talk. You got to have

that. You've got to be able to get away from this job." She also stated, *"You're always on.*

And so, to go away, go to another state…with other female presidents it's a real…relief.

Right?"

President 1 described how some of her former colleagues became her friends that

she still keeps in contact with even though many years have passed since they worked

together:

> *We stayed connected over the years and having someone to bounce off ideas before you make moves. I think women do that more than men. We consult with each other. We stay in contact. We're still in contact today after all those years of our first working together. When we moved to XXX, I met another friend, another female who was my colleague and at some point, my boss in XXX. And we stayed friends to this day. And just bouncing ideas and thoughts and just talking about our struggles and figuring out ways to navigate the politics of these types of roles. And be aware of things, kind of like your red flag list of what could come your way and think about a strategy as to how you're going to mitigate those circumstances.*

President 1 also stated:

> *So, I would say I've always connected to someone. The same thing happened in XXX. I'm going to, I will see a friend not too long from now, who I met there and still connected with over time. Same thing happens, I did the same thing at XXX campus presidents and stayed connected. Same thing in XXX, met some awesome female presidents that we're still in contact today. It's almost as if you don't lose the connection of the colleagues. So, I can't say that I would designate them as mentors as much as I would say we were colleagues. And regardless of our role, we knew we had a common struggle. And for that it wasn't about race at all. It was all about camaraderie of our gender and being able to connect with a common experience.*

President 6 discussed how she got together with a group of women for dinner that

has now turned into an informal support for her:

> *And that was almost six years ago, and we still get together. And now our group started off with five women, there's 13 of us now. And it is all black women with doctoral degrees who lead an educational institution. So, there are principals, assistant superintendents, superintendents, and presidents and vice-presidents.*

President 7 explained how seeing other colleagues advance was a support for her:

> *I think the other support that I've already mentioned, too, was having...seeing other women, provosts move to presidencies or chancellor positions. And getting, you know, having them say to me, 'you know what, you can do this job.' So that was extremely supportive.*

President 9 commented on her experience serving on a board which led to some

connections and networks:

> *That was just a marvelous educational experience, but it also gave me that opportunity to build some networks. And to have people who were engaged with higher education in a different way say, "Hey, we think you would be a good administrator and you should try this pathway."*

The subcategory of *mentors* fell under category one of *formal supports* for the

second identified theme of *connections and networks*. Mentors were formal supports for

the presidents. Mentors were both male and female. Mentors were superiors and other

colleagues of the presidents. For example, President 9 indicated that a formal mentor was

important to her pathway. In particular a female mentor that she met through the Higher

Education Resources Services leadership program was helpful, *"The person who became*

my mentor when I went to HERS and encouraged me there." President 4 discussed

having a male mentor who encouraged her to apply for a vice-president position. That

same male mentor encouraged President 8 to take some leadership training to explore

advancing to a college or university president position. President 6 talked about the

significant impact that a male mentor had on her pathway:

> *And I've been very fortunate because I've had mentors who, as I like to say, saw in me what I didn't see in myself...I'm kind of that stereotypic person. If you think of your career, if you're going to be an assistant director, then you're a director, then you're an assistant dean, then you're a dean. You have to, like, stair step your way up. And at the time, I was an assistant dean, and our dean wasn't going anywhere soon. And I was like, "Well, I'll just wait until he retires." And then my vice chancellor said to me "Here's a job you should apply for." And it was an assistant vice president. I'm like, "Whoa, I'm an assistant dean. You don't go from assistant dean to assistant vice president, like you don't do that." And he's like, "Says who?" He said, "XXX, just forget the title." He goes, "Look at the job description. Look at what they're asking for. And look at what you've done, and what you can do." And so, we did that. I was like, "Oh, yeah, I could do that. I've done that." And he's like, "So stop looking at the title." But without him saying that to me...in a way it was like I got to like...act like the boys, right. Because I think that's kind of how men think. As women, we think, OK, you're going to*

> *go...although, you know, there's some women who don't think like that. But at least that's how I thought. And it took him to say "Tsh, like, really?"...So that was the big piece of advice that I got from him. That was very helpful.*

President 3 described what it was like for her to be mentored by another female:

> *When our previous president started, she came from XXX, and she started...she called me into her office, within three weeks of being here. She called me in, and I thought what I have I done wrong? She had just started. And she called me in, and she said, "Have you ever had a professional mentor?" And I said, "Yeah, I have." And she said, "Have you ever had a female mentor?" And I said, "No, I haven't had a female mentor." And she said, "Well, I would love to be that for you." And from that point, just really navigating...I mean she saw, you know, she was here for seven years, she saw that she wanted me to be the next college president, or at least have the best shot at it possible. And she designed her entire tenure here to make sure that I had every opportunity to do everything I could, to get ready. I didn't think I was ready. And I didn't think...I didn't really even see what she was doing for a long time, I just thought she was a really nice and kind soul. But she had a plan the whole time, and it wasn't until later that she kind of said that plan.*

President 5 explained how a former president was one of her mentors:

> *But there were other people in XXX as well, including the president…that just taught me political lessons. I can remember her calling me in her office one time and scolded me. And then when she walked me to her door, and say, "Give me a hug?" And then I was like, "Okay." I'd just go home like a puppy, right. And so, you just take all of those lessons and you learn from them. I always said the lessons she taught me was she gave me so much work, I thought she was trying to destroy me. But what she was really doing was teaching me, because the workload hasn't gotten any lighter since, right. Especially if you're like me, and you're driven, and you're out there doing stuff.*

President 4 stressed the importance of mentors in support of her pathway. She

stated:

> *And then professionally, I just got really lucky that I had tremendous mentors along the way. That these people who punctuate my career, that I think, if that person had not helped me see myself in a different way. Or had not helped me realize there is a door I probably should walk through; I would not be doing what I'm doing. So, mentorship was huge. I'm really lucky.*

The subcategory of *recruiters* fell under category one of *formal supports* for the second identified theme of *connections and networks*. President 5 explained the significance of the support of recruiters along her pathway, *"And interestingly enough, every one of those steps, and really throughout my career, where I've been successful in making a transition and getting the job, I was more or less recruited."*

President 1 stated, *"I stayed there for X years prior and while I was there, the recruiter from XXX kept contacting me and asking me to leave that job."* She also talked about the support from a recruiter later in her career:

> *And I felt that it was not the right time to do that. I owed a longer commitment than XX, and I owed my words to the chancellor when I took the job. So, when she decided to leave, I thought, all bets are off. And I could explore other opportunities. So, this time when the recruiter called, I listened. And then the rest is history.*

President 8 explained the importance of mentors along the pathway to her presidency, *"But really, when I was more into those leadership administrative roles, I was fortunate to have great mentors, male and female."*

Category 2: Informal supports. Informal support could be family, friends, and unofficial mentors. President 5 explained the importance of informal supports:

> *I'll explain this after I say it but live your life 360 degrees. OK. The most important thing about these jobs, because they're rigorous and they're difficult, is that you have a full life with family, friends, mentors, people that you can talk to. People that are going to love you unconditionally. Because you're going to make difficult decisions. And because you make difficult decisions, you know, you're not going to have everybody like you. And I think that's for men and women, I think. But women wear it a little more because of our empathetic nature. And you're never, never going to be able to tell people maybe some of the information you had, as to why you made the decision. You just have to take the judgment for it. So, you're going to need those supports.*

The subcategory of *family* fell under category two of *informal supports* for the second identified theme of *connections and networks*. President 1 described how her family supported her next step in advancement along her pathway:

> *I believe that all opportunities are family based. So, I had a conversation with my husband to see if that was something that he would be interested in supporting me with. And he said that I should take advantage of whatever opportunities came my way. So, I started exploring the opportunity, and the rest is history.*

President 2 also stated that her spouse's support was an integral part of her pathway. She said that he is her biggest fan and *"he moved to XXX with me for my career and, you know, was completely supportive. So, he's definitely on the list of supports."* President 4 explained how her family was a support:

> *I've had a very supportive family, both my nuclear family and extended family, just super supportive of my work and career growth. And you know that juggling being a mom and a wife and having ambition. You know, I've had tremendous support from people around me. My husband and children were willing to move many, many times, which I still think about whether that makes any sense. But they did, you know.*

President 7 explained the importance of her family as support:

> *I would say having a spouse who supported me was extremely critical as I was working on my doctorate. He would take the kids and go to McDonald's Playland and, you know, really take over some of the workload of being a parent at times when I needed to have that focus specifically for the dissertation was critical.*

President 8 discussed the support of her family and friends:

> *Having a helpful and supportive family is really important. My wife is very supportive of what I'm doing. So, you know, we've been through some things, distance, times when…were living, you know, miles apart. Having support of people like that all around, all the time is really quite wonderful. Good friends, and as I said, good friends in the system, too, who experienced the same thing, and we can kind of commiserate. I still have many friends around the country that I would never hesitate to call because if I needed some advice or help or just a chance to kind of...let some things roll off my back when I need to talk to someone about that. And they're everywhere. So that's a really wonderful thing.*

President 9 spoke about her family support:

> *Certainly, I have to say, I have a marvelous spouse. And, you know, he also had a career, and he was a lawyer, and then a judge. But he's always been, "You know, your career is important, too." And we share parenting. We share household duties. And now, actually, I have to say, he does everything pretty much. It's lucky if...I feel bad when I come home most nights at seven or eight o'clock, I haven't seen him all day and he's got dinner ready. So, it's great...but really, it's important. Again, I don't know how people do it if they don't have the support of their partner...so you having someone at home who is a supporter that you can have as a sounding board is also really important.*

The subcategory of *mentors* fell under category two of *informal supports* for the second identified theme of *connections and networks*. President 5 talked about how another woman was never officially her mentor, but she was an extremely supportive informal mentor along her pathway:

> *And she said, you can be a President one day. And she just kind of took me under her arms. And I can remember going to AACC once, and she was telling me who all the big players were. She wanted me to go to receptions with her. And she told me things like, "OK, we can read...go into this room." And she says, "And I'm going to go separate ways and I want you to work the room, then I'll evaluate you when we leave." And she wanted to see how I would get to know people, and connect, and know who all the big players were, and things like that.*

President 6 reflected on the impact one of her mentors had on her pathway:

> *And I had another mentor who, you know, threw this job announcement in my face...she knew that I would want to get back to the Midwest. And she goes, "You should apply for this job." I'm like, "Umm...I've only been here XXX as a vice-president. Uh. No." And her line was "Let them tell you No. Don't tell yourself No." And I actually didn't apply. I was like, "Yeah, whatever." And then they had a failed search, and that job came up again. And she put it back in my face. She's like, "Uh, there you go." And...I got that job... So again, people see you what you don't see in yourself.*

President 8 explained the importance of informal mentorship:

> *That's just a little bit different than mentorship. I guess its mentorship of a different kind. It's looking for those teachers and mentors and know wave point wave finders and folks who can guide you on the path. And it could be a six-year-old, you know, it could be anyone to tell you you're thinking about this. But really, here's what's going on. That kind of a thing.*

    Identified theme #3: Education and training. Earning advanced degrees were

another support for the presidents' pathways. President 5 talked about how education was

an important support for her:

> *And then I started, because you have to have 18 credits to continue your certification, your provisional state teaching certification. I started my Master's degree. And then by the time you do 18 credits, you might as well finish it.*

    President 7 also discussed the support of her education on her pathway, *"And*

that's when I decided I needed the Master's degree so I could teach at the collegiate

level."

    Category 1: Doctorate degree. The doctorate degree served as a form of

support and advancement for most of the presidents. For example, President 2 described

her decision to further her education to advance her career:

> *But it was at that point in my career that I decided I wanted to get my doctoral degree because...my aspiration was to be a vice-president for XXX. So, I did earn my doctorate in counseling and student affairs from XXX, and it was in my doctoral program that I fell in love with research and also had the opportunity to teach some classes and realized I loved teaching. And so rather than using my doctorate to pursue the vice-president of XXX position, I made what felt like a kind of a career shift at the time and became a faculty member.*

President 4 discussed how earning her doctorate provided her some opportunities along

her pathway:

> *I finally got back into teaching, and it happened to be the community college, and I fell in love with community mission. And then I decided to go back and get my doctorate…and somehow just pursuing that, I think, opened some doors.*

President 5 stated:

> *And when I arrived in XXX, the chancellor told me there was very few people in the system office that didn't have a doctorate. So, he told me I was going back to school. And he ultimately picked where he wanted me to go back to school…And so I had started my doctorate. And by the time I completed it, two weeks after I completed, I got a call from the U.S. Department of Education. And President*

XXX had just been reelected and they wanted me to be a candidate for deputy assistant secretary.

President 7 explained the importance of her doctorate degree:

And as you know, in higher education, it's always beneficial to have that doctorate degree. So, I determined that I was going to get a doctorate in educational administration. And did that through the University of XXX, took three years to do it, worked full-time and had two small children at the same time. So, you know, just a lot of work to be able to do that. But knowing that I needed that degree as well if I wanted to advance to the next level.

Category 2: Leadership programs. President 5 explained that a geographical move for advancement also provided her with new leadership program opportunities to experience, *"I got exposed to the American Association of Community Colleges. When I was in XXX, I could never go. And I got exposed to some thought leaders."*

President 7 described the impact of leadership training for the advancement on her pathway. She talked about how a male mentor recommended a leadership training program to her:

And the next person that came in was extremely supportive. And actually, one of the things that he did it was to encourage me to become part of the, it's called Becoming a Provost Academy…is what it is through the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. And you have to be sponsored by your institution to be able to do this. But it's a program that exists to help people, you know, think about that next step up. And so, having that kind of support to be able to do that was something that, you know, you really had to think about. Well, what are my gaps? So, I have this array of experiences, and a provost should have, you know, another set of experiences. And so, I have some of those, but I don't have all of them. And where are the gaps that I need to fill, in order to be qualified to take on that provost position? And so that program was probably one of the best things that I was able to do.

President 7 later explained:

Yeah, I think, again, working for…his name was XXX, was probably one of the most supportive environments that I had. And he and I actually have been in touch ever since then… And just, you know, recognizing the importance of somebody that can be your mentor. And who can help to open up doors for you,

by providing opportunities like the Becoming a Provost Academy. That was a critical step.

President 8 and President 9 both mentioned the formal leadership program HERS (Higher Education Resource Services). President 8 also listed ACE (American Council on Education) and the XXX leadership programs for support.

Category 3: System support. For some presidents, leadership programs provided by their institutions' systems provided substantial support.

In addition to earning her Ph.D., some formal supports for President 3 were an executive leadership program and an executive coach. President 7 stated that a geographical move provided her the options for opportunities for an executive mentorship program:

> *And I would say moving into the presidency position, XXX does it right. They have a mentorship program, so I was...and it's optional. You don't have to say that you'll have a mentor. But I had XXX, who was the president of XXX. And it was just nice to be able to have somebody that you could call up and...or email and say, can we schedule a time to talk? I've got some weird things happening on my campus and I just need to understand this a little better from someone who'd been in the system.*

President 7 also described the option of system support with an executive coach:

> *And then you had the opportunity to have a coach, that was actually there in the job of coaching...And again, it was somebody who I could...you know, when things were getting just kind of crazy, I could say "I've got these really crazy things happening. And I just need someone to talk to." And help work through some of the things that you were challenged with. But in addition to that, the assessments are something that I think about pretty regularly in my decision making... And so that type of supportive environment that XXX has for its new presidents, or at least did when I came in, has really benefited me. And it's helped me to, I think, be successful in the role.*

President 9 acknowledged the support from her system:

> *And it's great that I'm in a system and we're in this XXX area where the presidents meet together every month. And so, I can have a person like XXX who I can call*

up on the phone and talk to about a decision I might be struggling with that I can't talk to about it with anyone else.

Identified theme #4: Geographic mobility. The presidents considered the impact of geographic mobility in order to advance on their pathways and their families were a support. President 1 mentioned moving to four different states and the support of her spouse. President 2 described the decision she faced in leaving an institution and community where she had longevity but would need to move in order to advance. She said:

> *I filled that position on an acting basis and...again, when it was done, I found myself thinking, I don't know if I want to go back to be a dean. I want to go forward in some way. I want to continue challenging myself. And so, this is a decision I think faces a lot of people in higher ed administration. I didn't see a pathway forward at XXX, at least not right then. And so, it seemed to me that if I wanted to continue to progress, I would need to change institutions. So, I'd been at XXX for 17 years at that point. And for a lot of those 17 years, I thought I would retire in XXX. But it just reached that point where it seemed obvious to me that if I wanted to continue to move up, I was going to have to be willing to relocate.*

President 5 explained how moving to a different state really helped to launch her career, *"Yeah, XXX opened the world of higher ed. to me… And XXX was doing such innovative things in the community college world, everybody, you know, was XXX, XXX, XXX. Kind of like how they talk about Tennessee now."*

President 9 touched on moving to another state in order to advance to the next step of her academic career:

> *So, it was a really great experience, very broadening, and I was there for four and a half years. And...you know, someone who was there who is from XXX, knew XXX said 'XXX's looking for a provost. And I really think you should apply. I just think it'd be a great fit for you' So I applied, and I got that job.*

Presidents – quantitative data. Amongst presidents, these were the eight factors identified as supporting (See Table 11).

Table 11

Supports of Presidents

Supports	Mean	Standard Dev.
Human Capital	9.33	1.89
Competency	10.50	0.71
Leadership Training	9.75	1.39
Mentorship	9.25	2.86
Encouragement	10.88	0.33
Institutional Fit	9.88	1.62
Geographic Mobility	9.38	2.06
Personal & Prof. Balance	8.63	3.31

Note that both fifth factor: Encouragement and the second factor: Competency had a mean value of over 10 and were identified as the most supporting of them all (See pages 55-63 for more detailed descriptions of all the factor categories of supports). Additional information can be found on the questionnaire instrument in Appendix D and Appendix E as the instrument lists all of the factors and provides a brief description of each one of them.

Amongst superintendents, these same eight factors were identified as supporting.

Table 12

Supports of Superintendents

Supports	Mean	Standard Dev.
Human Capital	8.76	2.27
Competency	10.33	0.64
Leadership Training	9.43	2.15
Mentorship	8.76	3.05
Encouragement	8.95	2.30
Institutional Fit	8.81	2.74
Geographic Mobility	5.65	3.28
Personal & Prof. Balance	6.48	2.99

Note that the second factor: Competency had a mean value of over 10 and was identified as the most supporting of them all (See pages 55-63 for more detailed descriptions of all the factor categories of supports). Additional information can be found on the questionnaire instrument in Appendix D and Appendix E as the instrument lists all of the factors and provides a brief description of each one of them.

Open-ended quantitative questionnaire. A single open-ended question was formulated to these participants: What do you think are possible solutions to the lack of females in the position you hold? This qualitative data was not incorporated into the overall content analysis that resulted from the in-person interviews but served the purpose of highlighting some of the main findings of quotes that would support the themes that resulted from the main qualitative data analysis.

Integrating qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative interviews regarding supports to the female president pathway in higher education resulted in Identified Theme #1: The Self, which could be connected to the quantitative questionnaire data of the support of Competency, which had the highest mean and was identified as the highest support.

Competency has been defined as leadership, collaboration, problem solving, fairness, trustworthiness, and the accumulated knowledge and skills gained from previous positions (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015; Woollen, 2016). Thus, competency could connect with the Identified Theme #1: The Self which is defined similarly with the encompassing Category 1: High performance. The category of high performance could

include leadership, collaboration, problem solving, fairness, trustworthiness, and

accumulated knowledge and skills.

Secondary Question 3: What are Possible Solutions to the Dearth of Females in the

Highest Administration Positions in the United States?

       Presidents – qualitative data. See Figure 4 for a representation of the themes of

possible solutions to the underrepresentation of women in the presidency in higher

education. There were identified themes that emerged for possible solutions to the

underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative positions in education. These

themes included: Commitment from the Top, Mentoring, Looking at Leadership

Differently, and Getting More Women into Positions.

       The possible solutions are presented in Figure 4. As with pieces of a puzzle, most

problems may not always have a simple answer. Although each piece of the puzzle could

assist in improving the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the highest

administrative positions in education, it is the combination of the pieces of the puzzle that

might bring an ultimate solution. See Figure 4 for a visual representation of possible

solutions to the underrepresentation of females in the highest administration positions in

education.

Figure 4. Themes of Possible Solutions to the Underrepresentation of Female Presidents in Higher Education

Figure 4. This represents the key solutions to the underrepresentation of women in the higher education presidency. Just like most puzzles, all the pieces are needed, and the solution is often complicated.

     Identified theme #1: Commitment from the top. President 4 said, "I think there are conversations that have to happen at the system level, at the board of trustees' level." President 8 and President 6 also said that more involvement and commitment was needed from higher authorities. Similar to President 4, President 8 stated:

> *I think it really does have to come from the boards and hiring entities and so on that are picking those leaders. And because it isn't that women aren't qualified, they certainly are in many cases because of that whole internal "I'm not good enough things, so therefore I will overachieve." Many of these women are very qualified, maybe overqualified for some things.*

     President 6 stated change needed to happen from the top, *"I would say that for former chancellor, even our current chancellor, I think was just very deliberate."*

According to President 2, more diversity in the presidency role was influenced by

the chancellor of higher education systems. She said:

> *And I think there's really one reason for that, and that is that our previous chancellor, XXX, and our current chancellor, XXX have prioritized hiring women and professionals of color into the presidency. I mean, I know for a fact that if a search committee put forth finalists that did not include racial and ethnic diversity and didn't include gender diversity, he would fail the search. And to me, it's that level of commitment that makes a difference.*

President 2 also explained:

> *And I saw that commitment from him, and I saw the way...I mean, when he became chancellor, virtually all of the presidents in our system were white men. And by the time he left, six years later, there was gender balance and an incredible racial and ethnic diversity compared to the national average. And so, I think it requires commitment from the very top. And it requires more than just words but action. And I think if you demonstrate that you're committed, you will achieve results.*

> *Category 1: Systemic support.* In speaking about how her system was supportive,

President 8 said:

> *And I think that's why we're trying to do a little bit more deliberate work, in connecting with new people coming in. Even to the point of connecting with candidates for presidencies and just offering to chat about the system or whatever. I can't influence the search process, but if a person has questions and wants to reach out, I'm happy to do that. So that's coming from the Chancellor saying, "Hey, I encourage you to reach out, and you know, just welcome folks. Especially if you have some kind of connection, or if you just want to say hello, I'm here." Boy, that's powerful. And that's a great model for the rest of us to say this is how you welcome anybody, everybody into these roles. I think XXX is doing something right here. I think we're... I see it as a great beginning.*

President 4 stated:

> *I also think using XXX as an example for very deliberately valuing diversity in all of its forms, is...will have to be done nationally if we want to change the gender inequities. But certainly, the racial and ethnic inequities. The good news is I think some of the same strategies work to help to narrow those gaps collectively. So, I do think it has to be systems...the systems. And I've really spent most of my career and systems, not all, but most. I think systems have to make very specific intentional efforts to say we really need to fix this gender inequity problem. And I think that's not what happens most of the time. You know, I just, don't.*

President 8 explained that system support was crucial:

> *I think that we have people now in place in our XXX system who are working on that very thing, and you can see it. We have many more women in presidencies in our system, especially many more women and men of color in our system. And that's pretty exciting to see. That is changing the way we are able to work with our students, because that's also the changing demographic. And I love it. I think it's just a wonderful thing. Our students are thriving in that environment. We can do more. Absolutely. But at least we have some kind of a start. And we have people at the top who understand this. And are making those deliberate efforts to change the hiring pool to be much more diverse, and much more welcoming for women, and anyone else who has never had a chance at the leadership position.*

Category 2: Retention. President 2 reflected on the importance of retention once

women achieve the presidency in higher education:

> *I mean, it takes that leadership, I think, from very top. And then, of course, you have to think about retention, because changing the statistics isn't just about who you recruit and hire, but it's about creating the environment where people succeed and then want to stay…So, possible solutions are commitment from the top. And, putting action behind that commitment, and then really thinking about how to retain and support in this case, women, once they are hired into the presidency.*

President 4 also mentioned retention as an important component to solving the problem:

> *I think giving thought to that, and once we have women in leadership positions to make sure that they have the support once they're there. We spend a lot of time talking about how you get to the leadership position that you seek in this case, the presidency. I've seen a lot of women not...men too...but a lot of women not succeed. Because it's hard. I mean, it's hard. It's hard to do it in a resource limited environment. It's hard to do it in...around the national conversation that's happening and will continue to happen. And it's hard to do it when you feel kind of alone and out there. So, I love it. And we need people to stay in these roles. So, I think attention has to be given how to keep them there. XXX has done a really good job with that, you know. So, we have mentors once we become presidents. I was given an executive coach. And I always felt so supported. That I knew, and I was told, you are not doing this alone. But I know other colleagues in other states that were not given that. And I think that is counterproductive to this effort. You know, we certainly do not want to see women fail in these positions.*

President 6 mentioned than an important component of retention was creating

networks and connections:

I would also encourage folks to create allies, right? To get to know other women and men in leadership. To figure out...One of the things that just hurts my heart, oftentimes when you read like in the Chronicle of Higher Education or Inside Higher Ed. or whatever, and I'll be honest, whenever it's a person of color or a woman, and they get fired or something really traumatic happens. And sometimes I wonder, particularly when it happens for stuff that could have been avoided, you're like, who was talking to them? Who was helping them, who was supporting them? Who was like in their ear, going, you know, watch this? Be careful about those landmines. Because there are going to be tough days. And you've got to have those people that you really trust their judgment, men, and women.

Identified theme #2: Mentorship and training. Both formal and informal

mentorship emerged as a theme for a part of the possible solution to the

underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative positions in education. In

addition, encouragement was important.

Category 1: Formal mentorship programs. Formal mentorship programs were

mentioned a possible solution to the underrepresentation of female university and college

presidents. According to President 4:

I think clear, deliberate mentorship programs are very important. My mentorship program...My mentors just were happenstance. People who really care about people, and I happened to be in their path, right. I mean, so it was never...I was never part of a formal mentorship program. But I think if we are to change this issue, formal mentorship, or at least, allowing people to make...or encouraging those connections could be a very powerful force in changing that dearth.

President 6 was a mentor to a few mentees:

There are presidencies all over this country. And I have a woman that I'm mentoring right now who wants to be a president…and I've said to her, figure out…when you go get a presidency, don't just jump at the first presidency because you're excited. It might be in a community that doesn't work for you and your family. It might...the mission of the school might not really align with what you do.

President 9 stressed that formal leadership and mentorship programs were part of the

answer:

I think some of the leadership development programs have come along, are really useful because I know I have served as a mentor now to a couple of women who are in a leadership development program, which is for us, we belong to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities AASCU. And so, they have one, which is for women and people of color. And it's...it just I think, gives people that support that they need. That's a yearlong program, they get a mentor president, but they also meet together. I think four times a year for like three days at a time. And really get a lot of background about how different parts of the university works. So, like this year, my mentee, she came to visit and shadowed me for a couple of days. But she said, "I'm not really strong on finance. What do I need to know about finance? Or I haven't done any fundraising." So then, I made sure that we visited with the CFO and talked about how we think about budgeting, and how we're looking ahead for financial planning. And what are some good resources for her to use. And I think those kinds of things are really important.

Category 2: Encouragement. Another possible solution to the underrepresentation of females presidents in institutions of higher education was encouragement. President 7 stated:

And so, encouraging some of your younger faculty in particular to take on first that department chair responsibility. And then thinking about, OK, what, you know, non-supervisory types of things can you do? Can you be in a leadership role in the accreditation process on your campus? Because that prepares you for things. Can you be on a planning committee for building a new building? Can you, you know, just any number of types of committee assignments that can help you get some more broad experience so that you're not simply focused in your academic discipline.

President 9 talked about encouraging and validating women to apply for the presidency in higher education:

When people look at job postings, if men...I forget exactly what it is...if men think they meet half the qualifications, they'll apply. But women won't, unless they feel they meet all the qualifications. And so, if you look at postings for things like provost or presidents, there's always this long laundry list of things that they want you to be able to do. And the chance that there's any super person who could have had every single one of those experiences and have every single one of those competencies is one in a billion probably, but maybe another experienced president. But that keeps women from even applying for jobs. Because that tendency to think, "Well, if I don't meet all the qualifications, then I'm not ready." And, as I say, that somehow, for some reason, if you're a male and you think, "Well, I might as well give it a try. I'll go for it." Which I think is also why it's

*been important to have those people who have validated from the outside "I think
you're ready. Just try. Just apply."*

Category 3: Informal mentorship. President 7 stated:

*So again, it's looking for others that you can...I guess, if nothing else think about
and reflect on, and not necessarily model after, but recognize that others have
done it before. And you're not alone with it. And being willing to step out and take
that chance.*

President 9 explained:

*And then I just think...looking...connecting to mentors…And, you know, not to be
afraid to form those relationships, to find people that you can talk to who will give
you good advice and help you along the way. And to just yeah, I think just giving
it a try and building your confidence that way.*

Category 4: Doctoral programs. Doctoral programs in higher education were

identified as part of mentorship and training as solutions to the underrepresentation of

women in the university and college presidency. President 4 thought doctoral programs

are part of the answer:

*I think that we have to create mentorship opportunities. I think programs--
doctoral pathways into higher education is absolutely helping this. I believe that.
I believe that more and more women are going into those programs. It's certainly
what I did, right? Kind of nontraditional programs where you can have your life,
but also engage in very rigorous and practical doctoral study, I think is
increasing the pool of women. There was a time when you would search for a
presidency, and there were no women in the pool. The pool has changed. And I
think a lot of that is our doctoral programs.*

President 5 mentioned how her doctoral program was influential for her pathway

to the presidency:

*Actually, I'll never forget, in my doctoral program, I had a behavioral
psychologist as one of my teachers, Dr. XXX. And our final was to write three
research questions, no six. I'm sorry, that we wanted to ask ourselves. And he
couldn't tell us how long they would be, but to fully answer the questions. OK, so
one of my questions was...and, you know, I came into the Presidency in my XXs. I
asked about my age. I asked about being a female. I asked about being African
American. And so, I had to research those things. And then I found out, that the
world was open for me to consider that. Now, I still thought I had an intermediary*

> *move between that, right. Because I was still in school and hadn't had those offers that I talked about. But I really had to look at it.*

President 6 also thought earning a doctorate was important:

> *Get a doctorate. I mean, granted, there are many people who are successful presidents without doctorates, I'm not saying that. But if that in most cases is the preferred qualifications for a presidency, then you need to have those, right. So, you don't want there to be any...anyone questioning kind of...your readiness for it.*

Identified theme #3: Looking at leadership differently. President 8 stated, "It really does have to do with changing attitudes and changing the way we think about leadership and who can lead." President 6 discussed a possible solution to the underrepresentation of female presidents in higher education involving a different view of leadership. She explained that perhaps a way of looking at leadership differently could mean more nontraditional routes to the presidency in higher education institutions:

> *But I think, really, we have to think differently. And even though I'm not a huge fan of it, but I get it, how in higher education you're seeing a lot of political people or businesspeople getting jobs as presidents. And on one hand...aside from the nepotism and the favoritism stuff. But I do think colleges and universities are looking at skill sets. Not necessarily if somebody had gone up the stair steps, if you will...So again, my point is I think that we really need to be thinking about leadership differently.*

> *Category 1: Creating cultures more accepting of female leadership.* President 7 noted how her system created a culture in the search process:

> *Yeah, XXX has done a really good job in their search processes for presidents as well. I think they're very intentional about getting a diverse pool of candidates and getting the best candidates. I mean, that there's more diversity in our presidencies.*

The subcategory of *being bold* fell under category one of *creating cultures more accepting of female leadership* for the third identified theme of *looking at leadership differently*. President 9 said:

> *Be bold. And take risks and go ahead and ask for assignments. And apply for*
> *those positions even if you don't think that you meet all of the qualifications. And*
> *take a few risks. That you probably do have...you have qualifications, and you will*
> *learn something from the process, even if it doesn't happen for you on the first*
> *time.*

President 6 stated:

> *So, some of it you know, women just need to kind of step up and go, "Yeah, I could*
> *do that," And not think that Oh, I have to take these stair steps necessarily, or I*
> *need to be here for so many years.*

President 5 also stated that bold moves were needed to solve the problem of the

underrepresentation of women in the college and university presidency. Her answer was

twofold, looking at leadership differently from a systemic level and the woman's

individual level:

> *I think the biggest thing that has to happen, I think XXX...and I would contribute*
> *this...this is one of the things I know our prior chancellor came under a lot of fire.*
> *But he started something with hiring women and minorities in these roles, that*
> *has changed even how people are looking in at XXX right now, okay? And it's*
> *going to take bold moves like that, and women really understanding that they've*
> *got a special skill set to do these jobs.*

President 7 stressed the importance of women being bold:

> *Get outside of your comfort zone. And think about what you can do to get*
> *experiences that would help you to be qualified for the position. Say yes to things,*
> *even though you might say, well, that's not exactly what I was thinking I was*
> *going to do this next year. Say yes, take chances, and seek out mentors would be a*
> *critical piece.*

President 8 talked about how men will have some qualifications of the next

position, while women often feel they have to have all of the qualifications. She

explained how she now is a mentor for women to be bold and take risks:

> *So, I really always try to kind of push that. And again, I've been fortunate to have*
> *other women in powerful positions, especially in our system, who have done the*
> *same thing. They've made those leaps early on. Just go ahead, I'm going to give it*
> *a try. And, you know, what's the worst thing that can happen? I don't get the job.*
> *OK. That's OK. You have to have that kind of mindset. I think so many of women*

that I had been mentoring and early on it's all: "But I could fail." Well, it's not a failure. It maybe this just isn't the fit. It's OK, you know. But it is overcoming that internal voice, I think is a part of the difficulty for women moving into any kind of leadership position.

The subcategory of *recruiting* fell under category one of *creating cultures more accepting of female leadership* for the third identified theme of *looking at leadership differently*. Recruiting came up as a subtheme of Category 1: Creating cultures that accept female leadership. President 7 talked about:

I see the need for both men and women who are in leadership positions like mine, to do a better job of recruiting. A better job of mentoring individuals who aspire to those positions, or even if they're not aspiring, to identify people that you see who could have some potential and some promise. And to start just planting that seed and say, "You know what, this might be a good opportunity for you to gain some experience here in doing X, Y, Z thing." And then they get that experience, they get some confidence behind them, and then it might lead to the next thing.

President 6 stated:

I also think that going back to a traditional way is that search firms and search committees need start to look at leadership very differently. So, you could have a female who does a lot of work on committees or whatever, but somebody is looking for, "Were you the leader of that committee?" Right. But not recognizing that maybe as a member of a particular committee, you actually did more work and have more responsibilities than the leader. And so, it's really getting not only women, but people who are on search committees and search firms to look at people very differently.

The subcategory of *creating space to talk about sexism* fell under category one of *creating cultures more accepting of female leadership* for the third identified theme of *looking at leadership differently*. President 2 described:

I have a middle school student, XXX, who emailed me to ask if she could shadow me. She's going to shadow me one day, all day long at work, because she's passionately interested in opportunities for women. And she wants to know what it's like to be a woman university president. And she... I don't know, she's 14 years old and she gets that...sexism is still at work. And so, I think trying to create a space where younger women can talk about these things and strategize and lean on one another. And I think that's part of it too.

President 6 stressed the importance of having conversations with both young

women and young men:

> *I just had a meeting with our three student organizations on our campus. You know, student senate, and P.T.K., program board, those are the three big leaders on campus. Well, two of the three of them are young women. And so how do you mentor them? But also, to you know, the young man in our group. For him to also not be intimidated, he can hold his own. And he doesn't like feel, out of place in a room full of women leaders. And he's OK with that, you know. And so, I think it's both.*

President 6 also expressed that it is important to mentor other women interested in

the presidency about sexism, especially in communities where women are not respected:

> *So, to really understand. Now, if you're the kind of person you're a fighter. "I'm going to knock down those walls!" Then more power to you sister. But if you know that you're not that kind of person, or you don't have the supports, you know. So, that's what I mean do your homework.*

> *Category 2: All female leadership teams more normalized.* President 7 recalled

one of her previous institutions where she was part of an executive cabinet comprised of

all females. She stated she would get comments about too many women leading the

institution. President 7 questioned for how long too many men had been leading

institutions, *"And there still are. So, I mean, it's that type of mentality that there is out*

there, even from other women sometimes that can be detrimental."

President 6 stated:

> *But I think that people around the system, I mean, you now have president XXX of XXX. The first...I mean, like, how old is the University of XXX? Right. And you have the first female president there at the University of XXX. So, I think of all the University of XXX presidents and chancellors, I think a majority of them are women now at XXX. I mean, you have to be intentional.*

President 7 also mentioned the significance of the first female president at the

University of XXX:

>*But there's so much that we can do. I mean, right now, I think the statistic is about 30 percent across the nation are women in presidential positions in higher ed. ... And the XXX is doing even better because what, four of their five now are women. And so that's excellent. But we've got a long way to go.*

According to President 6:

>*But it just happened. My entire cabinet is all women. Yeah. It's just like we looked around the room one day were like, "Oh yeah." It was actually last year, was it last year? We were walking around because we're planning some of this construction and we're walking through the hallway after a cabinet meeting. And one of our staff members was like, "Oh, my gosh. You guys are all women!" And we were like, oh, my gosh, we are. But that's...and then what does that say, like for young women coming up? Actually, young men even coming up…*

President 9 explained:

>*I think...it's kind of interesting because I have a lot of, maybe just getting more women, because I have a lot of female vice-presidents. In fact, and I think there's a bit of a gender issue at play right on a campus, where I have heard people comment: "Well, all she does is hire women." And I think, "Wow, for so many years, there's been administrations that are completely men. But nobody was saying, "Well, all he does is hire men." So, my provost, my CFO, my vice-president for advancement, and my CHRO are all women. And you know...Who knows? Right? We all have our implicit bias. It's not like I feel I was specifically seeking out women. But I also hear them say they were attracted to apply for the position because there was a female president. So, they're getting experiences that, they could become presidents one day if they decide to.*

Identified theme #4: Getting more women in positions. President 7 talked about how it was important to get more women into the positions leading up to the presidency in higher education, "And, you know, obviously in higher ed., you need to move into administrative positions in order to become a president." President 9 discussed, "So I do think that's the other thing, is just getting more women in positions means we'll get more women in positions."

President 6 stated that thinking differently about leadership could help to get more women into upper-level positions in academia:

And so, I think that....so I am answering a question in the sense of how we get more women...is...Let's say and I'm making this up, a woman ran a major Fortune 500 company. I wouldn't necessarily say "No, she shouldn't be president of a university because she never ran a university or college before." Here's an example XXX. If I'm not mistaken, XXX came from a CEO of YWCA. Right? And now she's the president of XXXs right? And everything I've heard; she's doing a really good job. Right? And so just thinking sometimes outside the box. But my hope is then that whoever the person is has an understanding and respect for the industry and for our sector.

President 2 discussed the importance of the consideration of more internal

candidates for getting more women into the presidency:

So, when I was hired to be president here, there was kind of an understanding that presidents in our system generally did not come from within the institution. They came from the outside. But since I was hired, XXX at XXX was their provost and then became president. XXX was provost and then became president. There are probably several other examples, too. And I think that is one of the things, to answer the question about possible solutions to support women. Because you can't just declare a goal of having women be presidents if there aren't any women who've had the experiences to get there. Right?

President 7 also explained that it can be daunting to leave an institution where she

was an internal candidate for many years:

I think my biggest concern with applying for a position outside of the institution that I was in after having been there for 21 years was, oh my goodness, my experience is within one institution. And...but yet I had seen others, that had done something similar, that they had been at one institution for many years. And then they went on to be a president elsewhere, and to do that successfully.

Category 1: Paying it forward. President 7 talked about the importance of paying

it forward:

You know, without having individuals who you can look to who have gone on before you, and they've figured this thing out. It can be sometimes daunting to say whether or not you're going to be able to be successful in that.

President 6 discussed that it was important for current female presidents to mentor

the next generation of women interested in the presidency role, *"And mentor others to*

come through." President 1 stressed the importance of paying it forward, *"And equally*

important, lift other people up, especially female emerging leaders who can learn from

you, and pay it forward, so to speak." President 7 spoke about encouraging other women:

> *But just encouraging that type of broad experience that will prepare somebody who is now thinking about, well, what might that next step be? Whether it's a dean position or an assistant dean or an associate vice-presidential position, it's gaining those campus wide experiences that would help with that, or even some system type of experience as well.*

President 9 discussed her volunteer work in paying it forward:

> *And like that, I make it a point to volunteer to be a mentor in these leadership development programs. And I usually do get assigned to a female mentee. And so hopefully I have given them some skills and confidence to go ahead and apply for those next level positions.*

> *Category 2: Hard work.* Hard work was also identified as part of getting more

women into positions as a possible solution to the underrepresentation of women in the

IHE presidency. President 6 explained the importance of hard work:

> *I mean...I guess what I'm trying to say is it shouldn't be that you got the job because somebody put you there. You got the job because you know your stuff. Right. You...like I said, it goes back to you...people can't question. Right?*

The subcategory of *prove yourself* fell under category two of *hard work* for the

fourth identified theme of *getting more women into positions*. President 1 stated:

> *Well, I think the solution is that we continue to do great jobs. And let the world see that we are the same level of competence, if not greater, in my eyes, that's a little biased. We always have had to prove ourselves from the beginning of our entry into what we call the man's world. Right? So that does not change. And we are always trying to perform higher than our male counterparts. So, walk the walk. Talk the talk.*

President 6 explained the importance of hard work:

> *And this is...it's maybe cliché, or maybe it's not true, but I'm just a believer. Until we become normal...like it becomes obvious for people to see females as presidents, you've got to be better than. As a female president, you have to know your stuff. Because you don't ever want them to say, "Oh, well, she got it because she's a female. Or she got it because she's a woman of color or whatever" And so*

*you have to know...it doesn't mean you have to be perfect because Lord knows I'm
not perfect. And so, what I always advocate for folks is to be better than.*

President 9 stated:

*I probably have that typical female thing, which is you got to be more prepared,
more ready, you can't slip. You know, if I make a mistake, that might be forgiven
if I were a male, but not as a female. So, I think it's always there. Certainly, it had
some impact on me… it did play in my career that idea of, "OK. I have to drive
harder. I've got to work longer. I've got to be more prepared and on top of it. And
I can't make mistakes." And that's it, that's just been part of it.*

The subcategory of *support from men* fell under category two of *hard work* for the

fourth identified theme of *getting more women into positions*.

President 7 stressed the need for support from not just women, but from men as

well:

*Again, the thing that helped me, it wasn't necessarily another woman that said,
"I'd like you to serve as my Associate Vice-Chancellor." It was a man and having
individuals across higher education who support women in leadership is a critical
piece.*

Open-ended quantitative questionnaire. Below are the recommendations

provided by presidents and superintendents via the questionnaire. They are provided to

highlight the diversity of responses and are not organized in any thematical way.

However, many align to the themes that were generated in secondary research question 3.

Presidents. Six participants wrote in answers to the open-ended question of

possible solutions to the lack of women in their current positions. The participants'

answers were:

- *Create more deliberate opportunities for women at the dean and associate
  VP level.*

- *Truthfully, the jobs to get to president are much more challenging than
  being president. We need to nurture women leaders and help them to see
  that they can balance their life demands in these positions.*

- *Continue to encourage and support women in professional development opportunities.*

- *Within our system, I don't think there is a lack of females.*

- *The females who are in these roles are the trail blazers and the examples. Female presidents are showing their ability to succeed and lead stronger and be more effective in these roles. I believe the examples we set now will increase female presidents across the country.*

- *Resiliency.*

Superintendents. On the questionnaire, 20 participants wrote in responses for possible solutions to the underrepresentation of females in the highest administrative positions in education. The participants' answers were:

- *Both men and women in the position need to tap females on the shoulder and encourage them to advance their careers. I am a great example of that strategy. Many men and women told me I should advance my leadership and I listened and have since followed their advice.*

- *Flexible work environments. I am fortunate to hold a part time position as superintendent, allowing me to maintain some balance in my home life.*

- *Females in the position demonstrating high levels of leadership, engaging in communities and with students and staff, mentoring others, more females leading Supt. searches (this is a big one).*

- *We need to allow females to do what they want, if they do not want to be a Supt., we should support them in that decision also. Maybe not many females want this stressful job!!!!*

- *There are very few females who ascend to the highest levels in education and can withstand the old boys club without becoming invisible.*
- *We need to increase opportunities for women to grow in leadership. Support groups of female and male leaders are helpful.*

- *Leaders encouraging females to apply for positions.*

- *Beliefs - breaking down the concept that "men lead" - when people close their eyes, they picture a man in positions of power, not women. We need to spend time analyzing that.*

- *Being a superintendent is an extremely challenging career full of problems to solve and people to mentor and teach. I do not think I will last more than a few years. I have female colleagues who have left the position due to turbulent school boards. The life of a female superintendent is much shorter than a male.*

- *I think we will see more acceptance as more females enter Superintendency, which is slowing beginning to happen. I think as leaders, it is up to us to encourage others to enter the profession - regardless of gender - when we see qualities that will make good leaders and Superintendents, and support and mentor those individuals along the way.*

- *The world has a complex about wondering about capabilities of women in making decisions about commonly "male" issues like purchasing a fleet of vehicles, working on construction management contracts, understanding the crown on a football field, proper care of a new track, snow removal and whether to purchase a Kubota or John Deere skid steer. As women, we need to as I say, "Show that we know."*

- *Possibly more discussions, more support offered. It's a challenge. I'm older than many superintendents because I chose to stay home for 14 years raising five children before going back into education. People are working longer, and I think we may see more women in these positions as men retire or don't stay as long in these roles.*

- *Mentoring, addressing school board members' bias.*

- *There are way more than when I started?*

- *About 75 percent of the teaching ranks are women, but only about 25 percent of the administrators are female. Female teachers see what I have to deal with and work through and they don't want any part of it. As long as that situation continues, the percentage disparity will stay.*

- *Realistic expectations of the position, women building women professionally into the profession, more professional development provided by women role models.*

- *This cannot just be an issue that is resolved by female leaders. This is an issue for ALL leaders - male and female. We need to be cognizant of the language we use when we describe females who are demonstrating leadership qualities. We need to be models for how we regard females who are competent and qualified. 16% of superintendents in XXX are women. We need to study the hurdles and barriers and assist women in understanding those. Teaching students in school K-12 about bias, real bias, is key. Having real conversations about beliefs and bias....we all*

have them even if we think we don't. Females in perceived male roles is tough and it is not an easy journey. Female support groups for leaders would be great too. I'm one female in a group of 16 men in my region. A female superintendent was just hired this year, I've reached out to her to meet and connect with one another.

- *Hopefully as the older males retire, women will be perceived as strong replacement candidates. I think the trend is starting.*

- *Gender discrimination and glass ceiling. My dissertation was very similar to yours. Good old boys club is hard to break into.*

- *I don't know.*

Integrating qualitative and quantitative data. For the most part, the qualitative interview data aligned with the data from the participant responses to the open-ended questions of the quantitative questionnaire. In terms of the presidents, for example, the first response on the open-ended question was suggesting the creation of more deliberate opportunities for women along the traditional pathway to the presidency in higher education such as in the dean and vice-president roles. The second response on the questionnaire discussed nurturing women leaders in the jobs on the pathway to the presidency. Both of these pieces of quantitative data aligned well with the fourth identified theme in the qualitative data of "getting more women in positions" and is visually represented by one of the pieces of the puzzle. The third response on the questionnaire stated encouragement and support for women in professional development opportunities. For the presidents, the quantitative data aligned well with the qualitative themes of mentoring and commitment from the top. The responses on the questionnaire of resiliency and female trailblazers aligned well to the theme of looking at leadership differently and getting more women into positions in the qualitative data. In essence, the quantitative data for secondary research question 3 related to all four qualitative themes.

The only response that contradicted was the statement that the participant did not believe there was an issue of a lack of females in her system. This response was from a single participant. This quantitative piece was in contrast with all of the qualitative themes of the solutions.

For the superintendents, responses were only written in for the secondary research question 3 solutions to the underrepresentation of females in the highest educational administrative positions. The quantitative data from the responses related to mentoring, encouragement and sexism aligned to all four qualitative interview themes of mentoring, commitment from the top, looking at leadership differently, and getting more women into positions. There was one quantitative response that contrasted to the qualitative data stating that there were way more female superintendents than when she started, and another response that simply answered, *"I don't know."*

Conclusion

In summary, this study explored the primary research question and secondary questions with three data sets. These data sets included female presidents of higher education who participated in a quantitative questionnaire, female superintendents who participated in the quantitative questionnaire, and female presidents who volunteered for in-person in-depth interviews. The mixed-method concurrent triangulation was the chosen method used in order to ensure the researcher's objectivity, to explore the research questions from different angles, and to support the findings. In the final forthcoming chapter five the discussion, interpretations of findings of connected to the literature, and reflections on the greater meanings of the findings of this study will be provided. Limitations, delimitations, and recommendations will also be presented.

CHAPTER 5.   DISCUSSION

This final chapter will begin with a discussion of findings. An interpretation of the findings in relation to the larger body of academic literature will also be provided. This chapter will present conclusions based on the results and will offer potential recommendations for practice. In addition, recommendations for future research and limitations of the study will be addressed. The chapter will conclude with some final thoughts from the researcher.

Summary of the Study

This study sought to understand and explore the journeys of women who reached the highest administrative positions in education. The study emerged from the researcher's first graduate course in her Doctorate in educational leadership program. Through a class assignment, the researcher had the opportunity to begin investigating the pathways of female community college presidents. Specifically, the researcher was interested in enhancing her topic by examining any challenges and supports that impacted female community college presidents achieving their positions. It was during this time that the researcher first learned about the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education in the United States. Through further research and study, the researcher discovered a substantial need and void in the literature regarding not only the underrepresentation of women presidents in higher education, but also practical solutions to the problem.

This study developed from the researcher's own professional experiences working in higher education for the past 21 years, from a myriad of experiences over the past several years at the institution where the researcher is employed, and from that initial

graduate class assignment that sparked the researcher's interest in the topic. In order to strengthen the study and provide for researcher objectivity, this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research study was expanded from specifically focusing on qualitative interviews with female presidents of two-year higher education institutions to including female presidents of four-year institutions and a quantitative questionnaire created by the researcher assessing three data sets. This change was recommended by the researcher's committee aimed at better understanding the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education, and in order to provide a buttress to the qualitative component. It was imperative for the researcher to maintain objectivity throughout every leg of this study so that the essence of women's pathways to the highest administrative positions in education could be accurately reported.

The literature review was expanded to include female superintendents in K-12 schools and the quantitative questionnaire was sent to female presidents in a higher education system as well as female superintendents in a Midwestern state. Therefore, this study evolved into a mixed-methods concurrent triangulation design.

There is a significant gap in the literature on the specific pathways of women who have achieved the highest administrative positions in education in terms of challenges, supports, and possible solutions to the problem. Quantitative studies on this topic are nearly nonexistent, and qualitative studies that include in-person interviews with over five female presidents in higher education are sparse. Therefore, this research study filled a void in the academic literature.

Research questions. The underrepresentation of women in the top administrative positions in education is a complex issue. It is a problem for which there is no clear simple solution. This research study focused on exploring the pathways of women in the presidency and superintendency to report the challenges faced and the supports received by participants. In addition, this study explored possible solutions to the underrepresentation of females in these positions. In order to study this phenomenon, the following research questions were addressed:

Primary research question: How do females describe their pathways to the highest administrative positions in education?

Secondary research questions:

1) What challenges (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions?

2) What supports (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions?

3) What are possible solutions to the dearth of females in the highest administrative positions in education in the United States?

Theoretical framework. Feminist standpoint theory (FST) was the theoretical framework utilized in this study, and as Brooks (2007) explained, it has the goal of granting authentic expression and representation to the lived experiences of women. The feminist standpoint theory "requires us to place women at the center of the research process: Women's concrete experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 56).

Feminist standpoint theory scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1990) stated that the feminist standpoint requires that when making knowledge claims about women, we must always remember that it is women's "concrete experience" that provides the ultimate "criterion for credibility" of these knowledge claims (p. 209).

Using the feminist standpoint theory as the theoretical framework for this study included the researcher's ability to report the women's experiences as it was reported by them to the researcher. It is important to emphasize that the researcher is not "translating" or "interpreting" their narratives, but instead reporting them as they were told to the researcher. The women who participated in this study have had salient professional experiences from which to learn. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), the feminist standpoint theory emphasizes "the need to begin with women's lives, *as they themselves experience them*, in order to achieve an accurate and authentic understanding of what life is like for women today (p. 56).

However, it is also important that what the researcher has learned from this research is not analyzed in isolation. By definition, learning implies behavioral change. The researcher has been personally and professionally changed by this study through the process of these women sharing their narratives. It is the researcher's hope that the readers of this study will also be changed and moved to action to improve the current situation of the underrepresentation of females in the highest educational positions.

Although the presidents shared fascinating and unique experiences related to their journeys, there were some striking and salient similarities in their narratives. The feminist standpoint theory framework allowed the researcher to see the world through their eyes keeping in mind their concrete experiences and social realities. This, in turn, facilitated

the researcher's learning about the barriers and opportunities faced by these women in

their pathways to the highest administrative positions in education and the changes

needed in order to more strategically support the women that come after them. According

to hooks (1984), professional gender equality has been moving in a positive direction

providing women with the empowerment, strength, and ability to advance further in their

careers. It is the researcher's hope that this study helps to shine a light on the issues

related to the specific challenges and supports women in the highest administrative

positions have encountered. It is also the researcher's hope that this crucial information

will be instrumental for future women aspiring to the presidency or superintendency

positions in education.

The purpose of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study was to explore

the pathways of female administrators who have achieved the highest administrative

positions within higher education and K-12 education systems. The concurrent

triangulation of this study explored the pathway experiences of three sets of women: two-

year college presidents, four-year university presidents, and K-12 superintendents in

order to examine themes, and to substantiate the connections and dissentions of

experiences.

Overview of the sample, data collection and analysis. The sample for this study

included a total of 37 participants comprised of ten female presidents of higher education

institutions and 27 female superintendents. The qualitative interviews and the quantitative

instrument data were collected concurrently.

Qualitative data. For the qualitative component of this research study the

participants were nine female university and college presidents in a Midwestern state.

This leg of the study used a phenomenological framework in order to explore a group of individuals who have all experienced the same phenomenon of holding the presidency in higher education.

The qualitative data consisted of in person interviews and open-ended questions (See Appendix A for the list of interview questions that the researcher formulated). The researcher took memos during the interviews, which were stored in a locked filing cabinet. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using a monthly transcription service by Trint.com. Once the transcriptions were completed, the documents were converted into Word documents. A member check strategy was used by the researcher in order to strengthen the validity of the results in the qualitative research leg of this study. The Word documents were proofread again before being converted into a password protected PDF document emailed directly to each president for a member check. The password to the PDF protected document was emailed separately to each president's executive assistant. As each president responded back to the researcher via email with written approval for the PDF protected document, the researcher stored the document on her password protected computer.

Open-ended questions also accompanied each one of the closed-ended questions on the quantitative instrument. The open-ended questions were included on the questionnaire for a deeper exploration of how females described their own pathways to the highest administrative positions in education.

Quantitative data. For the quantitative component of this research study the participants were a small population of 36 female college and university presidents and female superintendents in a Midwestern state.

The data collection and data analysis for the quantitative leg of the study focused on the pathways to the presidency in higher education and the superintendency, challenges and supports to these pathways, and possible solutions to the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education. Systems were put in place for keeping track of data and emerging understandings which included using Qualtrics to administer the questionnaires, using Excel spreadsheets and the Statistical Packet for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software package to analyze all data, and keeping all information stored on a password protected computer.

Discussion of Findings

Primary research question: How do females describe their pathways to the highest administrative positions in education? As a disclaimer the figures in this chapter (Figures 1-4) are replicated in their entirety from Chapter four for the convenience of the reader. For this reason, the figure numbers will remain constant.
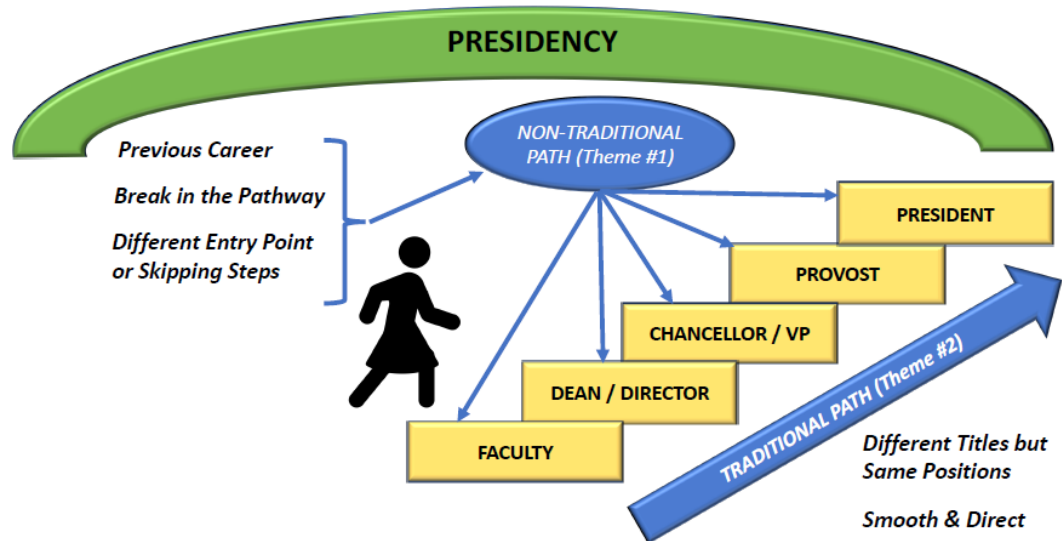
Figure 1. The nontraditional pathway at some point flows into the traditional pathway

Discussion based on the data. Data showed that the specific pathways women

took varied by individual presidents and superintendents. However, there was a meaningful common thread in all the women's journeys. Even for the presidents who described their pathways as nontraditional, their pathways at some point fell in line with a traditional pathway. The data showed both the nontraditional path and the traditional path were how the women in this study achieved the highest educational administrative positions in education.

The quantitative data for the presidents in this study for the primary research question aligned with the qualitative data. The majority (56%) of presidents reported that their pathways were traditional. There was also a strong alignment of the quantitative data for superintendents (96%) describing their pathways as traditional.

The traditional pathway to the presidency in higher education for this study is defined as a hierarchal sequential series of promotions beginning with a faculty position and progressing to a dean/director, chancellor/vice-president, provost, and then president. Although some presidents may have skipped some of these positions along their own individual journeys, the series of advancement in the traditional pathway is fairly typical regardless of gender.

The nontraditional pathway to the presidency in higher education for this study is defined as anything other than the traditional pathway. For this study, the nontraditional pathway often meant working in one or more previous careers, taking a break in the pathway, and/or having a different entry point or skipping steps (such as not working as faculty and instead getting hired as a dean).

The answer to the primary research question for this study is significantly complex because it asks how women describe their experiences in reaching the highest

administrative positions in education. There is quite a bit of information to discuss in

describing these experiences. Some additional salient points to consider relate to the non-

traditional pathway as well as the sequential steps of advancing positions required of the

traditional pathway in general. In order to answer the primary research question of how

females describe their pathways to the highest administrative positions in education, it is

important to note that each of the participants were unique individuals and no two paths

to the presidency were exactly the same. The common connection, however, was the

presidency at an institution of higher education (IHE).

There were two major themes regarding the female pathways to the presidency:

the nontraditional path and the traditional path. This discussion will begin in reverse

order starting with Theme #2 in order to expand on each pathway, to keep the reader well

organized, and to describe each pathway in relation to the data. Theme #2: the traditional

path was comprised of two categories: a) different titles but same positions, and b)

smooth and direct. Theme #1: the nontraditional path consisted of three categories: a) a

previous career, b) a break in the pathway, and c) different entry point or skipping steps.

The traditional path. The strongest theme of the qualitative president interviews

was Theme #2: the traditional pathway. The traditional pathway was defined as a stair

stepping of higher education positions usually beginning with achieving the status of

faculty at an institution of higher education. In order to achieve a full-time tenured

faculty position at a university or college, adjunct and/or part-time teaching work may

first be required. In order to achieve a faculty position at a four-year university,

publications in peer reviewed journals and/or writing a book could be required

qualifications to be considered for hire. A publication requirement would most likely be

part of the tenured process at four-year research one (R1) IHEs. Full-time tenured faculty

may have graduate teaching assistants and would be required to teach a few courses each

semester with release time or released credit equivalents in order to publish successfully.

A doctorate degree would most likely be needed to earn a full-time faculty position at a

four-year university, although having a masters' degree could garner part-time work.

In order to achieve a tenured position at a two-year college, masters' degrees or

certifications in certain professional fields would be the minimum requirements, and

doctorate degrees are increasingly the preferred status for tenured positions. Although

there is not as much emphasis on publications at two-year higher education institutions as

compared to four-year schools, it is encouraged. There is a strong focus on pedagogy at

two-year institutions as well as four-year institutions that prioritize research or teaching.

At both four-year and two-year higher education institutions there could be

opportunities for full-time and part-time faculty to self-elect or be elected to the position

of chair of a department or division. This is often a voluntary rotating position that

involves still teaching with release time or released credit equivalents in order to do the

administrative duties of the role. The chair position at a two-year institution could have

fewer responsibilities than at a four-year IHE and may not supervise faculty. The chair

position at a four-year IHE may be the equivalent of a dean position at a two-year IHE.

The next position of advancement would be a dean/director position which is

important to note requires a search process and 100% administrative position. The dean

position at a four-year higher education institution, and the director and dean position at a

two-year higher education institution, are filled through national searches and it

represents a significant change from the faculty position. If the higher education

institutions are unionized, the dean and/or director position would most likely be a

different union from a faculty union. Some of the duties of the dean position could

include attending meetings and networking with administration, leading committees,

hiring adjunct and part-time faculty, supervising faculty and staff and department

schedules, resolving faculty conflicts, observing faculty teaching, overseeing department

program reviews and accreditation, resolving student issues and more.

The next hierarchical advancement position on the traditional pathway would be a

vice-president (VP) or chancellor position. At four-year institutions, this position could

be called either a vice-president or chancellor, and at two-year institutions it would most

likely be called a vice-president. This position is often the last position before achieving

the presidency if there is not a provost role at the institution. The vice-president and/or

chancellor job is an important and prominent administrative position often responsible for

managing and overseeing either academic affairs or student life. In addition, the VP

and/or chancellor most likely serves on the executive cabinet, making crucial decisions

for the overall higher education institution. The position could be responsible for both

areas if it is a smaller higher education institution. The vice-president and/or chancellor

role most often requires a doctorate degree, but not always. In addition, the VP and/or

chancellor position may have duties of a president but on a smaller scale such as

attending public events, fundraising, campus wide experiences and more.

The final advancement position before reaching the presidency is the provost

position. It is important to note that not all colleges and universities have the provost

position. The provost position reports directly to the president and most likely serves on

the executive cabinet depending on the institution. The provost position can fill in for the

president and manages and oversees both academic affairs, student life, and the campus as a whole. The provost position has more responsibilities than a VP and/or chancellor which most likely includes fundraising, attending public events, campus wide experiences and more. In the author's experience, the next sequential step in advancement after the provost is the university or college presidency.

For Theme #2: the traditional path, the findings of the presidents who described traditional pathways resulted in two main categories: a) different titles but same positions, and b) smooth and direct.

Different titles but same positions. Although the traditional path to the presidency in higher education consists of a progression of advancement from faculty, dean, vice-president and/or provost to president, each institution may have different titles for these positions. For example, instead of a position being titled "vice-president" this same role might be called "vice-chancellor" or "provost" at another institution. Or the job description for "vice-president" at one institution, might actually be closer to the job qualifications of a "dean" at a different institution. Job titles, requirements, qualifications, and position descriptions may vary based on whether the institution is private or public, profit or non-profit, and if part of a higher education system. These titles may also differ based on geographical location.

Smooth and direct. The women in this study who reported having a smooth and direct pathway for their career advancement followed the steps of the traditional path. The women followed the hierarchal sequence of promotions to positions in both four-year and two-year institutions of higher education. The smooth and direct traditional pathway allowed women to advance through progressively responsible roles fairly smoothly,

directly, and quickly. Several participants in this study indicated that they believed following the traditional pathway through a smooth and direct administrative natural progression resulted in achieving the presidency role sooner than they initially expected (for example advancing from the dean role to a president within an eight-year timespan).

In addition, aspiring women would need to research and learn about the educational institutions they would want to work in while keeping in mind that there could be different titles for the same positions. In order to have a more quick, smooth, and direct advancement on the traditional pathway, it would also be prudent for aspiring women to always keep the next position in mind for the next advancement until reaching the highest administrative position in education.

The nontraditional path. A nontraditional pathway to the college or university presidency was defined by these female presidents as not immediately going into higher education teaching and/or administration. For some of the presidents, there were many different reasons why the women in this study who considered their paths nontraditional did not begin their careers in education. Some presidents viewed their paths as nontraditional because they had little or no teaching experience, and/or a degree other than a doctorate degree. However, it is important to emphasize that for all the presidents who reported a nontraditional path, their journeys to the presidency at some point flowed into the traditional path.

In terms of the nontraditional pathway for the primary research question, the quantitative data for the presidents (44%) and superintendents (4%) aligned with the qualitative data. The findings from this study reflect that the nontraditional pathway is becoming increasingly more commonplace for female presidents in higher education. In

contrast, the findings indicate that a more nontraditional pathway for female superintendents is nearly nonexistent.

For Theme #1: the nontraditional path, the findings of the presidents who described nontraditional pathways resulted in three main categories: a) previous career, b) break in the pathway, and c) different entry point or skipping steps.

Previous career. For the category of a prior career, the women may have initially worked in completely different careers in other sectors. A president for example, may have worked in a variety of industries including the sciences, sales, auto manufacturing, corporate training, law, accounting, the military, or other career areas. Some women had worked in more than one field and all of the women's first careers were more short-lived than their pathways to the presidency in higher education. The unconventional previous positions held by the women were varied and some included working in male dominated industries. Others worked in advanced ranks in the military, cancer research, sales, corporate training, accounting, and consulting. Other unique first careers included creating a start-up company with partners that eventually was given capital from a major brokerage in the Midwest, joining the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), a military manager of longshoreman, scholarship/fellowship trainee and truck supervisor.

Break in the pathway. Another category of the nontraditional path included presidents who took a break from the traditional path to the presidency. The reasons for the breaks in the traditional path varied by presidents but included: working in areas other than education, working in different sectors of education, travel, moving to a different geographical location, and other reasons. The women in this study considered their pathways nontraditional if there was any pause or break on the typical traditional pathway to the presidency.

For some women, this meant pursuing other opportunities related to education and some that that were not. Some reasons for the break in the pathway included moving, traveling, working in instructional technology and for higher education system offices, fellowships, pursuing higher education degrees, Fulbright fellowship, termination due to organizational restructuring, and transitioning from four-year universities to two-year colleges and vice versa in both the public and private sectors.

Different entry point or skipping steps. For the category of a different entry point or skipping steps, some of the presidents considered their paths nontraditional because they entered their paths at a step that was different from the typical faculty or administration starting point. Others determined that if they skipped one or more of the steps on the traditional path, then they had a nontraditional journey to the presidency in higher education. Several women thought they had nontraditional pathways because they skipped working in a faculty position and went straight into educational administration. Other women viewed their pathways as nontraditional because they did not have a doctorate degree or had earned degrees other than a masters' degree or doctorate. Some

of the female presidents described their pathways as nontraditional because they skipped steps such as vice-president or provost and went straight into the presidency position.

This is important information for women who aspire to the presidency in higher education because they may not even consider applying for an available educational administration position simply due to their perspective of their own non-traditional paths. Interestingly, the presidents who were interviewed for this study reported that the non-traditional pathway is now becoming much more conventional, commonplace, and accepted than ever before.

The findings of the primary research question of the traditional pathway provides salient information for women who are currently in executive leadership and for those who might be considering and/or on the pathway to pursuing a presidency in higher education. Although the women in this study often held different titles for similar positions, the traditional pathway to the presidency provided smooth and direct career advancement. The presidency position is an influential role in not only college and university campuses, but the communities where those institutions are located. This study aimed at exploring specific insights gleaned from female pathways to the presidency in higher education. The insights of the pathways of the presidents in this research could increase the number of female presidents and encourage more women to seek top leadership positions in higher education.

There was a dearth in the literature addressing the paths of women achieving the highest administrative positions in education. In that respect, it is a contribution of this study to indicate that most women will follow the traditional and nontraditional pathways.

While the percentage of college and university female presidents has been gradually increasing over the years, institutions of higher education can and should do more. The student population in IHE is more diverse than ever before, yet diversity in the highest administrative positions in education lags behind. Teague (2015) argued that IHE should take the lead and model diversity of thought and experience in its leadership of the next generation. Although there are more female presidents of institutions of higher education, and superintendents of K-12 schools than ever before, the number is disproportionate to their male counterparts and is still a current and relevant problem (Allred, Maxwell, & Skrla, 2017; De-Frank-Cole, Latimer, Maxwell, & Skrla, 2017; Subbaye & Vithal, 2017; Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard, & Newman, 2017; Neidermeyer, & Wheatly, 2016; Broido, Brown, Stygles, & Bronkema, 2015; Kelsey, Allen, Coke, & Ballard, 2014; Bañuelos, 2008; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; VanDerLinden, 2004; Björk, 2000, Glass, 2000; Keller, 1999).

The majority of the presidents in this study worked at two-year colleges. Supporting the findings in this study, Rhodes (2003) found there was a stronger likelihood that women would be placed in the two-year IHE presidency versus the four-year IHE. Subbaye and Vithal (2017) noted that academic promotions could provide a key strategy to address the issue of the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education. A closer investigation into the traditional paths and nontraditional paths of the women presidents who participated in this research could provide crucial information to any aspiring female. The authentic experiences of the pathways of the women in this study provide rich and meaningful opportunities for all to learn from.

In today's current environment where higher education is accused of being too complacent and too expensive, IHE cannot afford to ignore the benefits of creating environments that are more conducive to gender diversity (Teague, 2105; Supiano, 2014; Laursen & Austin, 2014). Exploring the pathways of women who have achieved the president position in IHE provides a roadmap of success for others to learn from, and to increase diversity in this important and powerful position.

Recommendations for practice. The findings of the primary research question of the traditional pathway provides salient information for women who are currently in executive leadership and for those who might be considering and/or on the pathway to pursuing a presidency in higher education. Although the women in this study often held different titles for similar positions, the traditional pathway to the presidency provided smooth and direct career advancement. The presidency position is an influential role in not only college and university campuses, but the communities where those institutions are located. This study aimed at exploring specific insights gleaned from female pathways to the presidency in higher education. The insights of the pathways of the presidents in this research could increase the number of female presidents and encourage more women to seek top leadership positions in higher education.

In order to begin to solve the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education, it is important for all to be aware of the history underrepresentation of women in these positions. Although women have made progress in obtaining the presidency role in higher education and the superintendency in K-12 schools, there is still more work to be done. This study explored the pathways of those who have successfully achieved the presidency in higher education and the

superintendency in K-12 schools. The findings from this study could potentially serve to help get more women into these powerful positions. The important information gained from the findings of this research, could be most useful for women aspiring to the presidency in IHE. It would serve women well to be prudent about the challenges and supports to the female presidency.

A recommendation for practice for women who are interested in obtaining the university or college presidency position in higher education would be to follow the traditional pathway. Although this may seem like a simplistic solution, there are some issues for women to consider.

For the primary research question of exploring the pathways to the highest educational administrative positions, implications for social change could begin at the individual level. Women who are interested in upper and the highest administrative positions in education could begin to trigger social change by learning from the qualitative data in this research study and carving out their own pathways based on the findings. In terms of a smoother, more direct, and perhaps quicker than usual advancement to the presidency, aspiring women should consider this information carefully. Women could plan their career advancements by not immediately dismissing job titles, and instead looking at the list of job qualifications instead to see if they meet the requirements. This would provide a new lens of viewing their experiences of the administrative natural progression criteria versus the job "title."

However, it is extremely important for women to remember not to engage in lateral moves unless the goal is to get out institution. But if women want to climb the ladder to advancement on their pathways, they need to make climbing moves. On the

other hand, women *should* consider switching IHE and moving to a place where her chances of getting to the presidency are higher (as some of the participants in this study indicated).

Young women who may aspire to the presidency in higher education or the superintendency in K-12 schools should carefully examine the traditional pathway. It would be imperative for aspiring young women to research and learn about the various chronological steps of promotions to positions along the pathway to the highest administrative positions in education. A recommendation for practice would be for women pursuing presidencies to learn the experiences of the presidents' pathways, their challenges, and their supports. Aspiring women could gain an understanding of the problem of underrepresented female presidents in higher education through this work, and therefore anticipate and prepare for similar challenge and support encounters.

However, it is also important for young women who might be interested in a higher education presidency position to realize that it is perfectly okay to have a nontraditional pathway that ultimately leads into a traditional pathway. Therefore, a previous career, a break in the pathway, and/or a different entry point or skipping steps are all acceptable components of a nontraditional pathway that can eventually feed into a traditional pathway to the presidency. The fact that women may have had a previous career in law with a different degree, or worked in other sectors of education, or a male-dominated industry are not factors stopping women from becoming a college or university president. In fact, the knowledge and experience gleaned from nontraditional pathways could be seen as strengths to the presidency.

Another recommendation for practice is for institutions of higher education, boards of trustees, search committees and firms, and overall IHE systems to evaluate their policies and practices through the lens of the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the presidency. Specifically, boards of trustees, search committees and firms, higher education institutions, recruiters and IHE systems could review their policies for challenges for women to the presidency and actively work to eliminate or reduce those challenges and enhance or add supports. Policies and practices could be evaluated, reviewed, and changed to ensure gender equity in all positions.

Secondary research question 1: What challenges (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions? As a disclaimer the figures in this chapter (Figures 1-4) are replicated in their entirety from Chapter four for the convenience of the reader. For this reason, the figure numbers will remain constant.
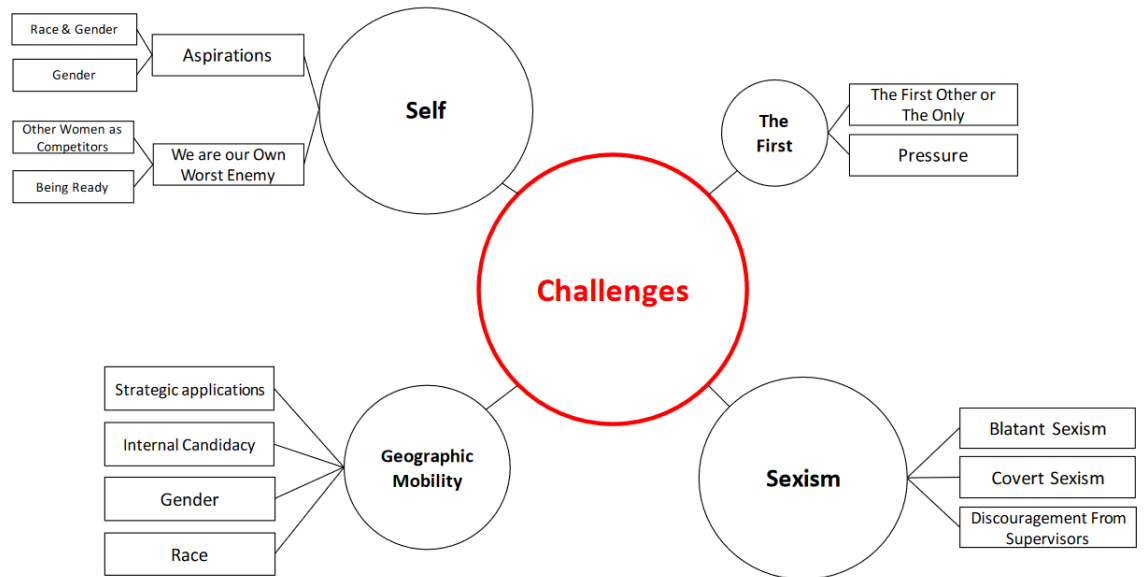
Figure 2. The size of the circles coordinates with the degree of challenges to the female presidency in higher education.

Discussion based on the data. Regarding challenges females faced in achieving the highest administrative positions in education, there were four themes for the secondary research question one: 1) being the first, 2) sexism, 3) geographic mobility, and 4) the self. Each identified theme of challenges contained a number of categories.

Theme #1: The first consisted of two categories: a) The first other or the only, and b) pressure.

Theme #2: Sexism was comprised of three categories: a) blatant sexism, b) covert sexism, and c) discouragement from supervisors.

Theme #3: Geographic mobility had four categories: a) strategic applications, b) internal candidacy, c) gender, d) race.

Theme #4: Self consisted of two categories: a) aspirations and b) we are our own worst enemy. These two categories also contained subcategories. Under the category of *aspirations* there were two subcategories: 1) race and gender, and 2) gender. Under the category of *we are our own worst enemy* there were two subcategories: 1) other women as competitors, and 2) being ready.

The first. Theme #1: The first emerged because the majority of women interviewed stated that they were in their first position as presidents overall in their lives. In some cases, they were also serving as the first female president at their IHE. Several women stated they experienced negative circumstances due to being the first or only president of their IHE. Theme #1: had two categories: The first other or the only and pressure.

The first other or the only. Some presidents reported challenges along their pathways of being the first female in the position. Other women stated there were

challenges associated with others adjusting to the fact that they were the first female

president to lead the IHE. Additionally, if the presidents were the first female president to

have a sexual orientation other than straight, or the first female and a person of color, the

women in this study reported there could be additional challenges with having support

and being accepted in the IHE and community.

If it were the case that a woman would be the first female president to lead the

IHE, some of the women stated they carefully considered the position before applying.

One of the issues the women presidents considered was if there would be support for a

female president. Additionally, having supportive male and female colleagues while

serving as president was another issue to take under consideration.

Some women expressed concern at being the only female. Several presidents

reported often being the only woman in the room in their new roles. Some women stated

they did not want to be "the only" as they did not think they would have long-term

success in the presidency. Some women reported if they were to be the only female

president to lead the IHE, it would be important for them to pay attention to that when

applying for the position.

Other challenges on the pathways to the presidency and being "the only" included

some women stating they sometimes felt like they were being made to be an example, or

role model, or placed on a search committee just because they were female. The women

reported they felt additional challenges if they were a woman of color. Some women

expressed frustration at feeling like they were chosen due to a need to fill a gap rather

than being evaluated for their experience, education, and performance.

Pressure. Some presidents expressed that they felt tangible pressure in serving as the first female president of their IHE. The women acknowledged that they recognized the importance of women in top leadership positions at colleges and universities, and the impact of that on others. Some women felt that acting as the first female at an IHE created an even greater responsibility to be successful. Many females in this study reported feeling pressure of having different expectations from within and outside of the IHE if they were the first woman to fill the role of president.

If the woman was stepping into the presidency position where there was another female who was not successful, there was an even stronger pressure and responsibility felt to perform well and succeed. Some of the women reported being surrounded by male counterparts while teaching or working in male-dominated fields along their pathways which they felt created pressure to constantly prove themselves worthy of their positions.

Sexism. Although progress toward gender equity in the higher education presidency has been made over the past three decades, sexism still exists and is still a challenge. Although Longman and Anderson (2011) found there were ample opportunities for diversity in the presidency position, the majority of the literature noted sexism can be a considerable challenge particularly for women working in education (Wheat & Hill, 2016; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011; Goshgarian, 2015; Oikelome, 2017; Eddy 2003). More work is needed to overcome sexism as a challenge for females in top administrative positions in education.

This study revealed sexism was one of the largest themes defined as overt and covert gender discrimination as well as discouragement for advancement from

supervisors. Theme #2: Sexism was comprised of three categories: a) blatant sexism, b) covert sexism, and c) discouragement from supervisors.

Blatant sexism. In terms of blatant sexism, several presidents described situations where they were called out by mostly men but also some women for having too many females on their executive cabinets and/or staff. Many presidents explained they found these interactions odd considering men were never called out for having too many males on their cabinets and/or staff. The women explained they felt that their gender was a targeted challenge instead of their competency, skills, and performance with the presidency position.

The women in this study were often caught off guard by sexist remarks. For example, some presidents reported hearing remarks from others such as *"there are too many women leading this institution"* or finding denigrating comments about their appearance posted about them on social media outlets after making a difficult decision for the overall good of the IHE. The presidents were often surprised at how openly and explicit the sexist challenges were. Some presidents described a lack of respect for female leaders along their pathways. They reported being told by recruiters that the IHE and/or the community where the IHE was located were not "ready" for a female leader. For example, President 4 stated *"I didn't get a presidency, someone said they were not ready for a woman."* Other instances included some of the women receiving feedback from recruiters that the IHE had a previous bad experience with a female in the leadership position, therefore they would not be considered.

Other presidents described how they were discouraged by their supervisors from seeking further education or professional development to advance their careers or

described situations of gatekeeping advancement on their pathways. For example,

President 3 was told by a powerful male supervisor that she was *"really doing the work*

of a dean" and that she should be a dean, however he next commented that she was

"never going to a dean under the current chancellor." Another example included

President 1 being discouraged from getting her doctorate degree and that *"it's really a*

waste of your time." Women were also told by search firms or search committees that

they did not get the job not because they were not the best candidate, but because faculty,

boards, institutions, and/or higher education institutional systems did not want a woman

in the presidency seat. An important issue to highlight is that these search firms and

committees were willing to interview female candidates. It could be that these search

committees and firms felt compelled to interview a mix of genders and races, but in the

end, they knew what they wanted and chose based on that.

Covert sexism. Covert sexism was also a substantial challenge for presidents. These situations were less obvious and often led women to second guess themselves. Many presidents described instances of getting questioned, interacting with others who were highly critical, being accused of making decisions too swiftly, being called difficult, and having their ideas dismissed only to have another person state the same idea and get it accepted. The women mentioned that these situations were often difficult to pinpoint and were not about their effectiveness or performance but about their gender. A few of the women presidents noted that covert sexism was embedded in American culture. President 2 talked about how she received covert sexist comments along her pathway that have *"been very subtle, but very real. In fact, I think that's part of what makes them so challenging is that they're so subtle."* President 3 explained that her experiences with covert sexism during her advancement on her pathway included *"the different perception we have about women who make hard decisions"* and the perceptions that *"men who make decisions are doing what is best for the institution. Women who make decisions or cause a ruckus in a meeting are difficult."*

Discouragement from supervisors. Some presidents described situations of their superiors discouraging the "pathways" of advancement or "goals." The discouragement could take the form of direct and indirect comments, constant belittling, advising not to get an advanced degree, and that they would never advance to the next step in administration in higher education. President 3 shared how she was told by a supervisor that because she was a woman, she would be lucky to get the same position "when I had 15 years' experience. It's just little things like that, constant belittling and things." President 9 described feeling an undercurrent of discouragement along her pathway

where she received criticism for making a critical decision, "I'll think, Hmmm. I wonder if you would be so critical if I were a male?"

Geographic mobility. The theme of geographic mobility was a challenge for all of the women in this study at some point along their pathways. However, the challenge of geographic mobility impacted each of the participants in different ways. For some women, geographic mobility was a challenge that they could easily overcome. And yet for some of the other women in this study, geographic mobility was a more significant challenge due to considerations of family, race, gender, and geographical location. Theme #3: Geographic mobility consisted of four categories: a) strategic applications, b) internal candidacy, c) gender and d) race.

Strategic applications. Nearly all the presidents in this study reported needing to make a geographical move at some point in their careers in order to advance on their pathways. Moving to a new geographical location is not an unusual experience for advancing in higher education administration. However, for the women in this study, a significant amount of strategy was put into when and where they would apply for the next step of advancement along their pathways to the presidency. Some reasons for the careful strategy included family, spouse, and community. President 5 reported that a move across the United States and to a new climate *"was a little bit of a shock for me"* but it was in the best interest of advancement on her pathway. President 4 shared that she moved to six different geographical locations with her spouse and family within a short period of time, *"I really had to be strategic about where I wanted to apply…there weren't many opportunities."* President 2 stated she was strategic and carefully considered the next step of advancement on her pathway because it meant not only uprooting herself, but also her

spouse from *"the place I had been for seventeen years and move to a new community."*

  Internal candidacy. An interesting component of geographical mobility is

considering the flip side and not moving at all. Internal candidacy posed its own set of

unique challenges for some of the presidents in this study. President 3 reported that along

her pathway, as an internal candidate she faced criticism, *"but I think when you're*

internal, and you do have relationships, it hurts in a different kind of way because people

are really unfiltered." President 7 also shared experiences with internal candidacy on her

pathway, *"Sometimes it's more difficult to get that next job because people know you…a*

lot of times, it's good that they know you. But it also can be bad because they think they

know everything about you."

  Gender. In terms of geographical mobility, some presidents shared that the issue

of gender was a consideration for advancement on their pathways. President 4 reported,

"I think my gender absolutely dictated where I applied…I really was careful about…I

want this to work." For President 1, the issue of gender was entwined with a geographical

move in order to advance on her pathway. She described gender discrimination and few

opportunities at one of her previous IHE systems. President 1 reported *"it was very*

political. I believe there were three women…out of 28 at the time." President 6 reported

considering the issue of gender during the interview process for the advancement on her

pathway. She stated, *"I've been a couple of places where I interviewed with the board*

and the first thing, I did was to look to see how many women were on the board because

it's indicative of the community."

  Race. The issue of race was a consideration of geographic mobility and

advancement on the pathway to the presidency for some of the women in this study.

President 5 shared that race was an issue when she was the top candidate for a position

and that she declined to visit the IHE and ultimately the position because *"the community*

was not very diverse." President 1 disclosed that she considered the issue of race along

her pathway, *"I always look at the environment in which I'm coming into and race*

provides that lens…a necessary check of the environment that I have to explore, not only

for myself, but for my family as to whether that is safe."

     Self. Theme #4: was the Self which had two categories: a) aspirations and b) we

are our own worst enemy. These two categories each contained two subcategories. Under

the category of *aspirations* there were two subcategories: 1) race and gender, and 2)

gender. Under the category of *we are own worst enemy* there were two subcategories: 1)

other women as competitors, and 2) being ready.

     Aspirations. Over half of the participants in this study reported that the presidency

in IHE was not their first aspiration for a career choice. According to President 8, *"I*

never thought I would take a presidency" in higher education. President 4 described her

love of teaching and how she initially had no desire to work in administration in higher

education, *"I didn't even want to be a dean, never mind the president."* President 3

explained, *"I didn't ever aspire to be a college president. I would have been an advisor*

the rest of my life and been completely happy." President 4 stated, *"I just really fell in*

love with teaching, and thought I would always do that." President 8 shared *"I don't*

think you wake up in a high school class and say, 'Oh I want to be a president of a

college or university!" I don't think that happens…I think it's kind of that natural

progression of really deciding…what you really want out of that kind of life."

For some of the women of color, their aspirations to the presidency were impacted by issues of race and gender. President 1 revealed that the presidency in IHE:

wasn't my first aspiration, because I got a little discouraged when…I found out that the statistics show that presidents of color represented ten percent of all the presidents at community colleges, less than ten percent. And when you add gender on top of that, the chances of becoming president for me in my mind wasn't there.

In terms of the presidency in higher education, President 5 stated:

I had all these other people telling me that…this is what I was going to do. Even though, I never thought that. And I'm the kind of person that, I just didn't have it as a goal. All my steps weren't planned.

President 5 discussed that she began to consider the presidency in IHE while she was in graduate school because it gave her the opportunity to explore the factor of age, gender, and race on the position. She reported, *"I had to research those things. And then I found out, that the world was open for me to consider that."*

In terms of the issue of gender on her pathway to the presidency in higher education, President 1 shared, *"the challenge was that I just never thought it would be something I could get. I knew I couldn't get the opportunity. Most of the presidents were men in those roles."* President 4 described how the issue of gender impacted her aspirations to the presidency in IHE:

I think as a gender, we do not typically see ourselves in roles like this because we're part of a society. And when you think of a college president, there is an image that comes to mind and it's typically not a woman, certainly not a woman of color. It's typically a White male. So, I think we feed into that. And as a young

girl growing up, even from a privileged family, I really just never saw myself doing that.

We are our own worst enemy. Some presidents reported missing opportunities to connect with other women and navigate the presidency because of the need to be guarded. President 9 explained, *"I do think that as women we can, because of the idea like I've got to be as perfect as I can, and I can't really make mistakes and all that…we don't open ourselves up too easily."* President 1 stated that at times: *"we're our own worst enemy."* She went on to say:

> *Many times, we tend to be guarded because…we don't jump out unless we know the circumstances…and I don't care what role you're in, you are guarded because you don't know how you're going to be taken or received. And that is just another layer of uncertainty we face.*

Other presidents stated that women seeing other women as competitors was a challenge in achieving the presidency in IHE. President 3 reported experiencing microaggressions from other women along her pathway:

> *A lot of comments about I had to cut my hair. I'd get that…Certain dress styles and expectations of dress. A lot of that kind of stuff, some of that microaggression about being a certain type of woman…so if you're going to be a woman, you're going to have to fit into this box of leadership. Stop asking about other people's feelings so much.*

President 7 reported her experience with other women as competitors on the pathway to the presidency in IHE, *"you know, if you are not liked by another woman, then they're going to say, well…(mumble)…"*

President 3 described the issue of seeing other women as competitors on the pathway to the presidency due to the scarcity of available positions. *"What I realized when I did research and really looked at the numbers, is it's so ingrained in us because leadership positions have not been and are still not available to women."* President 3 went on to explain:

> *We get this competition factor because we know, when you look at a president's cabinet, or you look at X number of presidencies within our system…even if it's never stated out loud, we know that there's only a certain percentage of those that will be given to women. So, from day one, if we want a job, we see other women as competition. Even if we don't think we do. It's just ingrained in us because for decades and generations, if there are five positions, one was going to a woman.*

Some presidents reported that the feeling of being ready was a challenge for some women in achieving the presidency in IHE. President 8 explained how her own internal attitude could previously get in the way of feeling ready for the next advancement:

> *Yes, there's some male privilege. Absolutely. But mostly it's…our own internal attitude, I think that has kind of really been difficult for many women in higher ed. to get over…I undermined myself many times thinking that way…And then I finally learned to open all the doors, and you don't have to step through. You just open all the doors and decide where you want to go.*

President 6 talked about how women do not apply for positions in upper administration in education due to thinking they needed to complete all of the steps on the pathway in order to apply for the next advancement. In contrast, men would take the risk of applying for advanced positions even if they did not have all of the steps along the

pathway. According to President 6, *"In some cases, although I think it is changing, we take ourselves out of the equation…we don't apply for those jobs. We don't put ourselves in that position."*

President 8 explained that in her experience in mentoring other females, the women thought that everything had to be perfect before advancing to the next level, whereas men thought differently:

> *I think that women in any of these roles tend to do this, and when I have been mentoring women in higher ed. as they're expanding their careers, it comes up over and over and over again that women tend to want to have everything perfect, know that they have met every single requirement of the position. All of that before they make the next leap. When I'm mentoring men, they'll have one or two of the five things that someone thinks they need, and they're willing to take that risk. And it's okay to take the risk. And so, I really try to get the women to understand. Look, it is OK to do that. You will learn some things along the way. That's OK. And understand that this is how your male character counterparts are getting ahead.*

The primary qualitative interviews were connected to the secondary quantitative findings in this study as the prevailing themes all connected to some form of sexism. The four categories of the quantitative findings of glass ceiling, sexism, the good old boys' network and culture, and gender stereotyping all have the common denominator of some shape or form of sexism. The qualitative in-depth interviews align with these same findings as sexism was one of the largest themes discovered. Additionally, the qualitative theme's categories of overt sexism, covert sexism, and discouragement from supervisors

related to the quantitative findings of glass ceiling, sexism, the good old boys' network and culture, and gender stereotyping.

Challenges to female presidency in higher education are contested in the literature with diverse perceptions (Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard, & Newman, 2017; Rhodes, 2003). Therefore, it is important to consider there is not one common challenge keeping women from the presidency in IHE. The literature not only contains diverse perceptions, but sometimes conflicting opinions on the challenges women face in their pathways to the college and university presidencies in higher education. Rhodes (2003) described some of the challenges that women may face on their pathways to the presidency in IHE could include:

> Self-esteem issues, the need for self-improvement for women administrators who desire promotions, lack of women's exposure to challenges and constituencies outside the academic arena, the challenge of balancing family and careers, the lack of mentors to assist in a rise to the top, lack of available networks of influence, and a remoteness from activities that develop a strong understanding of the mission or vision of the college (p. 48).

The literature review for this study revealed the following seven challenges to the female presidency in higher education and the superintendency in K-12 schools: a) human capital, b) competency, c) leadership training, d) the glass ceiling, e) sexism, f) good old boy's network and culture, and g) gender stereotyping.

The findings of this study resulted in the following four main themes: 1) The first, 2) sexism, 3) geographic mobility, and 4) self.

According to the literature, there were several different definitions of competency in terms of the highest administrative positions in education (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015; Breton, 2014; McGee, 2010; McCabe, 2001; Paladino, Grady, Haar, & Perry, 2007; Woollen, 2016). Some scholars argued that for the presidency in IHE competency meant collaboration and problem-solving skills, relationship development, fairness, trustworthiness, transparency, and instructional leadership (Breton, 2014; Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). However, Jackson and Harris (2007) noted that women in the highest administrative positions in education faced stereotypical attitudes toward women and beliefs that women were not as competent as men (p. 121).

Much of the literature focused on self-competency as a challenge to the pathways to the highest administrative positions in education for women (Douglas, Lane-Bonds, & Freeman, 2017; McGee, 2010; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Spencer & Kochan, 2000). The issue of competency aligns with the findings of Theme #4: Self in this study. For theme #4: Self, some women reported that the presidency position in IHE was not their initial aspiration. Therefore, if these women had not initially planned on taking the pathway to the presidency in IHE, they may have more challenges to reach the position compared to others who originally aspired to the position. Some female presidents in this study also reported that issues of race and gender, and issues of gender impacted their aspirations to the presidency in IHE.

Another way to look at competency is through the lens of being acutely aware of one's own limitations, education, and experiences. Scholars found women who achieved the highest administrative positions in education to be extraordinarily prepared before applying for the next position of advancement on their pathways (McGee, 2010; Hoff &

Mitchell, 2008; Spencer & Kochan, 2000, Shepherd, 2017). Scholars found that some

women who have reached the highest administrative positions in education delayed entry

into administration in order to be super-prepared before applying and to enter with

greater professional preparation (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; McGee, 2010, Spencer &

Kochan, 2000). Shepherd (2017) argued that women in administrative roles in education

were no less ambitious, competent, or likely to apply for advancement roles than their

male counterparts.

For this research, the literature review on challenges for women's pathways to the

highest administrative positions in education included the issues of the glass ceiling, and

sexism. These challenges both contrasted and aligned with Theme #2: Sexism in this

study.

In the literature, scholars have defined the glass ceiling as a group of women who

are kept from advancing higher because *they are women* (Morrison, et al., 1987;

Oikelome, 2017). Scholars have noted that women still lag behind men in relation to

opportunities to advance to senior leadership positions in higher education (Ibarra &

Kolb, 2011; Wheat & Hill, 2016). In contrast with the academic literature, the females in

this study, although they may have experienced blatant and/or covert sexism, are

examples of women who broke the glass ceiling by achieving the presidency in IHE.

Sexism is recognized in the academic literature as a challenge for women's

pathways to achieving the highest administrative positions in education. The literature

contains many varying definitions of sexism (Kohl, 1992; Goshgarian, 2015; Vettering-

Braggin, Elliston, & English, 1981). Oikelome (2017) defined sexism as challenges to the

progression of advancement of in top educational administration positions stemming

from gender. There was an alignment with the issue of covert sexism in the literature and

Theme #2: Sexism in this study. The literature used various terms to describe covert

sexism such as subtle sexism and modern sexism (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015;

Broido, Brown, Styles, & Bronkemam 2015; Superville 2017; Young, 2002, Biesta,

2010; Dobelli 2013; Buller 2015; Hursh 2016).

The good old boys' network and culture is defined in the literature as a challenge

to women's advancement by men filtering out who the network members believe can

lead and those who should not be allowed to lead (Yearout, Williams, & Brenner, 2017;

Chinn, Lott, Rice, & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007).

Recommendations for practice. In order for women to overcome challenges to

the pathways of the highest administrative positions in education, they must be aware of

the challenges in the first place. The academic literature offers various different barriers

and challenges to the female presidency in higher education. However, this study shed

light on the successful pathways of women who achieved the college and university

presidency. The specific themes in this study could be studied further by other scholars.

Females who aspire to become a president in higher education could learn about

the specific challenges along pathways of advancement in IHE from not only the

academic literature, but from studies like this one. The women in this study are

resplendent examples of overcoming challenges along the pathways to the presidency in

IHE.

Some of the presidents interviewed talked about women not only being qualified,

but perhaps even being overqualified for some of the positions needed to advance to the

presidency in IHE. Another important finding was that several presidents mentioned that

women often feel they need to have met every single step before they apply for the next position of advancement. On the other hand, their male counterparts could have only a few steps met, but were more willing to take the risk to apply for that next advancement position. Therefore, it is important for professional women working in education to understand that their own self-competency could become a challenge if they let a more cautious and perfectionist approach get in the way of their successful advancement. This is particularly salient information for women who may aspire to the presidency or superintendency to consider. This information also could provide useful insights for institutions, professional organizations, professional development programs and systems in education to better support the advancement of women to the highest administrative positions in education.

Secondary Research Question 2: What Supports (if any) did These Females Experience in Achieving their Current Positions? As a disclaimer the figures in this chapter (Figures 1-4) are replicated in their entirety from Chapter four for the convenience of the reader. For this reason, the figure numbers will remain constant.
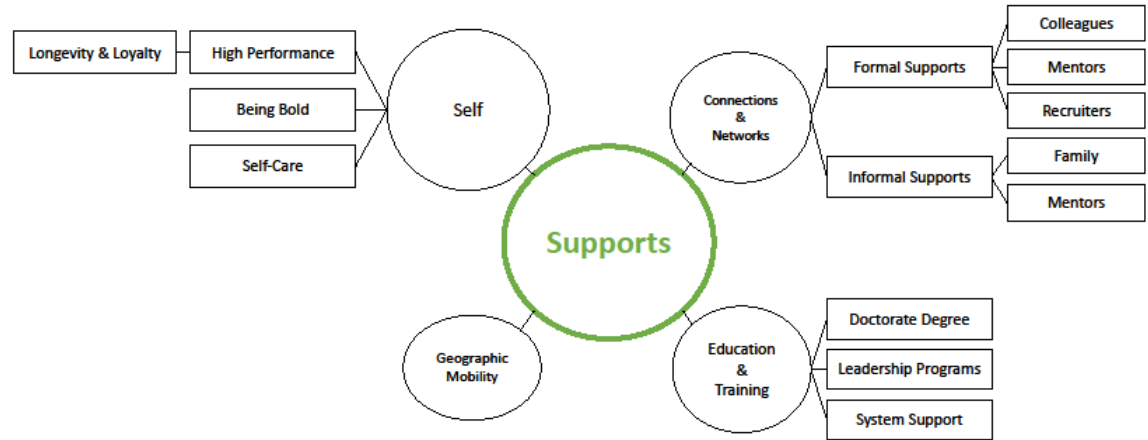
Figure 3. *The size of the circles coordinates with the degree of supports to the female presidency in higher education.*

Discussion based on the data. There were four themes of supports for the secondary research question two: 1) self, 2) connections and networks 3) education and training 4) geographical mobility. The majority of the identified themes of support consisted of categories.

Theme #1: Self had three categories and one subcategory: a) high performance with the subcategory of longevity and loyalty, b) being bold, and c) self-care.

Theme #2: Connections and networks contained two categories: Formal supports and informal supports. The category of formal supports contained three subcategories: a) colleagues, b) mentors, and c) recruiters. The category of informal supports consisted of two subcategories: a) family and b) mentors.

Theme #3: Education and training had three categories: a) doctorate degree, b) leadership programs, and c) system support.

Theme #4: Geographic mobility did not have any categories.

     Self. Self and competency were the strongest support themes that resulted from the qualitative and quantitative data, respectively. The researcher triangulated data and that helped to uncover the most positive driving force of all, self-competency. The most substantial theme of support for this study was Theme #1: Self. Presidents interviewed indicated that they themselves were actually their strongest support.

     All of the presidents in this study were high performers, high achievers, and hard workers with an authentic sense of self that served as a support along their pathways. President 3 defined Theme #1: Self as *"being really strong in that core of who you are, what you're willing to sacrifice, and no matter what at the end of the day, what's most important to you."*

     Theme #1 contained the following three categories and one subcategory: a) high performance with the subcategory of longevity and loyalty, b) being bold, and c) self-care.

     High performance. For the presidents in this study, high performance meant working long hours, and working hard with work life balance. Longevity and loyalty to higher education was a subtheme of this category. President 1 described her strong sense of self and her high performance along her pathway, *"every job I got at that university, I got because of my performance."* President 3 explained that high performance and sense of self helped her to succeed on her pathway, *"Achiever is one of my biggest strengths…I've always wanted to do what is best for our students in the institution and produce a lot. So, I can get a lot done."*

For the category of high performance, there was a subcategory of longevity and loyalty. Longevity in years of service in higher education was part of many of the women's pathways. President 2 shared she had *"worked in higher education for my entire career, what at this point is about almost 40 years."*

President 6 stated, *"I've been in higher education for…going on 30 years."*

President 5 reflected on her pathway stating, *"this is my first presidency, but I have now served in higher education for 30 years in three states."*

President 3 not only had longevity along her pathway in higher education, but also loyalty to her institution. She reported working at the same IHE for over two decades, which included working with and building *"partnerships and relationships with our…other campuses for 16 years."*

President 7 also had longevity in her career in higher education and loyalty to her institution. She reflected on her pathway stating she *"had spent the bulk of my higher education at the University of XXX. I started out as an adjunct instructor, and 21 years later I was the provost and searching for a presidency."*

Being bold. Several presidents shared that being bold and seeking out opportunities for advancement led to success along their pathways. President 7 stated, *"I think the theme in my higher education career was if someone asks me to take an interim position, I always said yes."*

President 4 reported not spending the magical number or typical number of years in some of her previous positions along her pathway in order to advance more quickly. She explained, *"I would have normally spent more time in those positions. But…opportunities just come up and you got to grab them."*

Self-care. Some of the presidents stated that self-care and work life balance was an important piece of their success. President 3 stated:

> *I...do a lot with balance...I still have kids. I have an X grader, in fact. So that's really out of the norm to have a president who still has children. But that also balances...it forces me to have balance because I'm not willing to be a crappy mom either. And so, it forces me to leave and go home, and go to a hockey game or do whatever I'm going to do with my kids tonight. That forces me to drop this and get engaged with that.*

President 8 reported:

> *You don't have to be alone in this job. I don't think it is healthy if you are. I think you have to also be a human being and make certain that you are practicing some self-care, whatever that may be, mental health, physical health.*

Connections and networks. Theme #2 of supports focused on connections and networks. Connections and networks for the presidents in this study could take place formally and informally and were a common theme of support. There were two categories and five subcategories for Theme #2: Connections and networks. The first category: Formal supports contained three subcategories: Colleagues, mentors, and recruiters. The second category: Informal supports contained two subcategories: Family and mentors.

Formal supports. Formal supports were defined by the women in this study as colleagues, mentors, and recruiters. President 5 reported, *"there's a lot of people like that in my life...over the years, that I'll call, pretty much from everywhere I've been, and throughout my career."*

Several presidents stated that other female president colleagues were formal supports. According to President 2, *"Male presidents are extremely supportive. Don't get me wrong, but there is something about being surrounded by women colleagues that's also very supportive…so, I really appreciated that."*

President 5 explained the importance of the support of other female presidents:

And just sit around with a bunch of other female presidents and talk. You got to have that. You've got to be able to get away from this job…You're always on. And so, to go away, go to another state…with other female presidents it's a real…relief.

President 1 reflected on her relationships with other female presidents:

We stayed connected over the years…having someone to bounce off ideas before you make moves…We consult with each other. We stay in contact. We're still in contact today after all those years of our first working together. When we moved to XXX, I met another friend, another female who was my colleague and at some point, my boss in XXX. And we stayed friends to this day…just bouncing ideas and thoughts and just talking about our struggles and figuring out ways to navigate the politics of these types of roles…be aware of things, kind of like your red flag list of what could come your way and think about a strategy as to how you're going to mitigate those circumstances.

President 1 also stated:

So, I would say I've always connected to someone. The same thing happened in XXX… I will see a friend not too long from now, who I met there and still connected with over time… I did the same thing at XXX with campus presidents

and stayed connected. Same thing in XXX, met some awesome female presidents that we're still in contact today.

Mentors were formal supports for the presidents in this study. Mentors were both male and female and served in superior positions and/or as other colleagues for the women in this study.

President 4 explained how salient mentors were as a source of support for her pathway:

And then professionally, I just got really lucky that I had tremendous mentors along the way…people who punctuate my career…I think, if that person had not helped me see myself in a different way... Or had not helped me realize there is a door I probably should walk through; I would not be doing what I'm doing. So, mentorship was huge. I'm really lucky.

President 5 reported that a former president was a formal support on her pathway, "there were other people in XXX as well, including the president…that just taught me political lessons."

Professional recruiters were also a formal support for some of the women in this study. President 1 stated:

I stayed there for X years prior and while I was there, the recruiter from XXX kept contacting me and asking me to leave that job…I felt that it was not the right time to do that. I owed a longer commitment than XX, and I owed my words to the chancellor when I took the job. So, when she decided to leave, I thought, all bets are off. And I could explore other opportunities. So, this time when the recruiter called, I listened. And then the rest is history.

President 5 reflected, *"interestingly enough, every one of those steps, and really throughout my career, where I've been successful in making a transition and getting the job, I was more or less recruited."*

Informal supports. In addition to formal supports, Theme #2: Connections and Networks was comprised of another category: Informal supports. The category of informal supports was defined as friends, family members, and/or unofficial mentors. President 5 defined informal supports as *"family, friends, mentors, people you can talk to. People that are going to love you unconditionally."* There were two subcategories to the category of informal supports: Family and mentors.

Many presidents stressed the importance of family as a source of informal support for their success. For example, President 4 mentioned, *"I've had a very supportive family, just super supportive of my work and career growth."*

Unofficial mentors were another significant source of supports for the presidents in this study. President 8 defined these unofficial mentors as *"mentorship of a different kind. It's looking for those teachers and mentors…folks who can guide you on the path. And it could be a six-year-old…it could be anyone to tell you that you're thinking about this. But really, here's what's going on."*

Education and training. Theme #3: Education and training consisted of three categories: Doctorate degree, leadership programs, and system support. Advancing their education through additional degrees in higher education and/or professional training were important supports to the presidents' pathways.

Doctorate degree. A doctorate degree was an important source of support and advancement along many of the presidents' pathways in this study. For example, President 2 reported, *"At that point in my career…I decided I wanted to get my doctorate degree because…my aspiration was to be a vice-president."* President 7 explained, *"In higher education, it's always beneficial to have that doctorate degree. So, I determined that I was going to get a doctorate…knowing that I needed that degree…if I wanted to advance to the next level."*

Leadership programs. Leadership program opportunities were another source of supports for the pathways of the presidents. Although it is not an exhaustive list, some of the leadership programs and associations the women in this study mentioned were the American Association of Community Colleges, the Becoming a Provost Academy, the Higher Education Resource Services (HERS), and the American Council on Education (ACE).

System support. If the institutions of higher education that the women served happened to belong to a larger educational system, the system itself could be another source of support. Some of the presidents mentioned system support in the form of optional mentorships and executive training opportunities, executive coaches, and formal meetings. President 7 mentioned, "That type of supportive environment that XXX has for its new presidents, or at least did when I came, has really benefitted me. And it's helped me to…be successful in this role."

Geographical mobility. Geographic mobility was another theme of support for the presidents in this study. Moving to a new geographical location in the United States could mean moving within a state or to another bordering state, or it could mean moving across

the country. President 2 recalled, *"it just reached that point where it seemed obvious to me that if I wanted to continue to move up, I was going to have to be willing to relocate."*

There were few studies in the literature that specifically addressed self-competency as a support to reaching the topmost administrative positions in education specific for women's pathways. When self-competency was acknowledged and addressed as a support for women's pathways to the presidency in IHE in the academic literature, there was a narrow focus on hard work and preparation (Allred, Maxwell, & Skrla, 2017). Therefore, this study would be a contribution to the literature in this field of research.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that there are plenty of studies in the academic literature with a broader focus on *self* and *competency* as driving forces to success for the presidency in IHE (McNair, 2010; Smith & Wolverton, 2010, McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011). Therefore, on a more general basis, this research is consistent with the literature.

Seminal contributions in the literature indicated mentorship as a support for women's pathways to the presidency in IHEs (Tripses, 2004; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Redmond, Gutke, Howard & Newman, 2017; Eddy, 2008; Kamler, 2006; Oikelome, 2017; Allred, Maxwell, & Skrla, 2017). Overall, the findings of supports for Theme #2: Connections and networks in this study are in accordance with the literature. Both formal and informal mentors identified as significant sources of support for the presidents in this study are consistent with what has been found in previous studies (Gillett-Karam, 2001; O'Connor & White, 2011; Glazer-Raymo, 2008). Eddy, 2008; Kamler, 2006).

Only a few works in the literature demonstrate that encouragement is a support to women's pathways in achieving the highest administrative positions in education

(Jackson & Harris, 2007; Vettering-Braggin, Ellison, & English, 1981; Oikelome, 2017). McGee (2010) noted the connection between encouragement and mentorship in assisting women to advance more quickly in their careers. Connell, Cobia and Hodge (2015) acknowledged the power of encouragement that mentors had providing women valuable professional knowledge. The findings of this study tie well with previous studies concluding that mentorship and encouragement are significant sources for women along their pathways in reaching the highest administrative positions in education. Encouragement is central to both professional and personal mentorship and is a support for women making connections and expanding networks along their pathways to the presidency in IHE.

Recommendations for practice. Secondary research question 2 focused on what supports (if any) the females in this study experienced in achieving their current positions. Secondary research question 2 offers important wisdom related to the strong supports the women in this study experienced in order to achieve the highest educational administrative positions. Women interested in the university president, college president, or the school district superintendent positions can be encouraged by the supports women in this study shared.

Women who are striving to the presidency in higher education could seek out both professional and personal sources of encouragement along their pathways. Formal and informal supports could provide significant supports for success in advancing along the pathways to the highest administrative positions in education.

Tangible social change could occur at the individual level by both men and

women being more aware and educated about the specific supports that help to women

not only aspire to but also achieve these positions.

Secondary Research Question 3: What are Possible Solutions to the Dearth

of Females in the Highest Administrative Positions in Education in the United

States? As a disclaimer the figures in this chapter (Figures 1-4) are replicated in their

entirety from Chapter four for the convenience of the reader. For this reason, the figure

numbers will remain constant.

*Figure 4. This represents the key solutions to the underrepresentation of women in the
higher education presidency. Just like most puzzles, all the pieces are needed, and the
solution is often complicated.*

Discussion based on the data. Four themes of possible solutions to the

underrepresentation of female presidents in higher education emerged from this study.

The four themes of solutions were represented as pieces of a puzzle because a few and/or

each one alone can make an impact on solving the problem. However, ultimately it is the combination of all of the themes that can make the greatest impact on solving the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the topmost positions in education. These themes were: Commitment from the top, mentoring, looking at leadership differently, and getting more women into positions.

Commitment from the top. The theme of commitment from the top included dedication and deliberate action to solve the problem of underrepresented women in the highest administrative positions in education from chancellors, systems of institutions of higher education, and boards of trustees, hiring entities, and more. President 2 described how chancellors had impact on solving the problem:

> *When he became chancellor, virtually all of the presidents in our system were White men. And by the time he left…there was gender balance and an incredible racial and ethnic diversity compared to the national average. And so, I think it requires a commitment from the very top. And it requires more than just words, but action. And I think if you demonstrate that you're committed, you will achieve results.*

Systemic support. The women in this study also discussed the component of system support for the solution of commitment from the top. If the colleges or universities where they were employed were part of a system of IHE, it was crucial to have system support in order to achieve more gender equity in the president position. President 4 stated, *"I think systems have to make very specific intentional efforts to say we really need to fix this gender inequity problem."*

Retention. Another important component of commitment from the top to solve the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education was retention. The ability to keep women in the presidency once they were hired in higher education was a crucial consideration. For example, President 2 stated:

> *It takes that leadership…from the very top. And then of course you have to think about retention, because changing the statistics isn't just about who you recruit and hire, but it's about creating the environment where people succeed and then want to stay…So, possible solutions are commitment from the top. And, putting actions behind that commitment, and then really thinking about how to retain and support, in this case, women, once they are hired into the presidency.*

Mentoring. Mentorship in both formal and informal formats was another theme that emerged for solutions to the problem of the underrepresentation of women presidents in higher education. Formal mentorships sometimes included professional training. Encouragement was an important component of successful mentorship. In addition, doctoral programs were another opportunity for mentoring.

Formal mentorship programs. Formal mentorship programs were identified as a source for solving the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the presidency in

IHE. For example, President 4 stated, "I think if we are going to change this issue, formal mentorship, or at least, allowing people to make…or encouraging those connections could be a very powerful force in changing that dearth."

Encouragement. Encouragement was another important piece of mentoring and solving the problem of the underrepresentation of women presidents in higher education. President 7 explained:

> *Encouraging some of your younger faculty in particular to take on first that department chair responsibility…just any number of types of committee assignments that can help you get some more broad experience so that you're not simply focused in your academic discipline.*

Informal mentorship. Informal mentors were just as important as formal mentors in terms of mentorship solving the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions. President 9 mentioned:

> *Connecting to mentors...not to be afraid to form those relationships, to find people that you can talk to and who will give you good advice and help you along the way...I think just giving it a try and building your confidence that way.*

Doctoral programs. Higher education doctoral programs also were another source of opportunities for mentorship and solving the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the presidency at IHE. President 4 stated, "I think that we have to create mentorship opportunities. I think programs…doctoral pathways into higher education are absolutely helping this. I believe that. I believe that more and more women are going into those programs."

Looking at leadership differently. Another piece of the puzzle for the solution to the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the presidency role in higher education was looking at leadership differently. President 8 explained, *"it really does have to do with changing attitudes and changing the way we think about leadership and who can lead."* Looking at leadership differently included creating cultures that were more accepting of female leadership and normalizing all female leadership teams.

Creating cultures more accepting of female leadership. Creating cultures that are more accepting of female leadership was a component of looking at leadership differently in order to solve the problem of the underrepresentation of women presidents in IHEs. President 7 shared that the system her IHE was part of helped to create cultures more accepting of female leadership. She mentioned that her system *"has done a really good job in their search processes for presidents as well. I think they're very intentional about getting a diverse pool of candidates and getting the best candidates."*

Recruiting was a component of creating cultures that are more accepting of female leadership. The recruitment process was another avenue of looking at leadership differently. President 6 stated that recruiters and search firms could look at leadership through the lens of creating cultures more accepting of female leadership:

> *Search committees need to start to look at leadership very differently. So, you could have a female who does a lot of work on committees…but somebody is looking for, "Were you the leader of that committee?" But not recognizing that maybe as a member of a particular committee, you actually did more work and have more responsibilities than the leader. And so, it's really about getting not*

only women, but people who are on search committees and search firms to look at

people very differently.

Creating a space to talk about sexism was another component of creating cultures

more accepting of female leadership and looking at leadership differently. President 2

explained how young women in K-12 schools recognize that there is an

underrepresentation of female presidents in higher education. She explained:

She's 14 years old and gets that…sexism is still at work. And so, I think trying to

create a space where younger women can talk about these things and strategize

and lean on one another. And I think that's part of it too.

All female leadership teams more normalized. The presidents in this study also

stressed that normalizing all female leadership teams was another component of looking

at leadership differently. President 7 recalled the four-year university XXX in the United

States that hired a female president for the first time and stated:

But there's so much more we can do. I mean right now I think the statistic is

about 30 percent across the nation are women in presidential positions in higher

ed. And the XXX is doing even better because what, four of their five now are

women…so that's excellent. But we've got a long way to go.

President 6 explained the importance of normalizing all female leadership teams:

It just happened. My entire cabinet is all women…we were walking through the

hallway after a cabinet meeting. And one of our staff members was like, "Oh, my

gosh. You guys are all women!" And we were like, oh, my gosh, we are. But

that's...and then what does that say…for young women coming up? Actually,

young men even coming up…

President 9 also mentioned the significance of all female leadership teams being normalized in higher education:

> *It's kind of interesting because…I have a lot of female vice-presidents. In fact, and I think there's a bit of a gender issue at play right on a campus, where I have heard people comment: "Well, all she does is hire women." And I think, "Wow, for so many years, there's been administrations that are completely men. But* nobody *was saying, "Well, all he does is hire men."…We all have our implicit bias. It's not like I feel I was specifically seeking out women. But I also hear them say they were attracted to apply for the position because there was a female president. So, they're getting experiences that, they could become presidents one day if they decide to.*

Getting more women into positions. The theme of getting more women into positions was another piece of the puzzle in solving the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education. President 2 explained her experience within her IHE's system, "When I was hired to be president here, there was kind of an understanding that presidents in our system generally did not come from within the institution. They came from outside." However, since the time she was hired, some women started getting hired from within their own institutions. President 2 discussed the need for considering more internal candidates in order to get more women into positions in higher education administration. She continued:

> *I think that is one of the things, to answer the question about possible solutions to support women. Because you can't just declare a goal of having women be*

presidents if there aren't any women who've had the experiences to get there.

Right?

The presidents explained that paying it forward and hard work were included in

getting more women into positions.

Paying it forward meant volunteering to either formally or informally mentor

women in order for to get more women into administrative positions in academia.

President 9 discussed her experience:

> *I make it a point to volunteer to be a mentor in these leadership development*
>
> *programs. And I usually do get assigned to a female mentee. And so hopefully, I*
>
> *have given them some skills and confidence to go ahead and apply for those next*
>
> *level positions.*

Hard work often meant that the women in this study felt the need to prove

themselves. President 1 explained that the solution to the underrepresentation of women

in the higher education presidency not only included getting more women into more

positions, but also working hard once they got there. She stated, *"I think the solution is*

that we continue to do great jobs." President 2 also mentioned, *"I guess what I am trying*

to say is that it shouldn't be that you got the job because somebody put you there. You got

the job because you know your stuff." Support from men was also an important

component of hard work and getting more women into administrative positions in higher

education. She explained, *"the thing that helped me, it wasn't necessarily another*

woman…it was a man and having individuals across higher education who support

women in leadership is a critical piece."

This study aligns with the literature in that possible solutions to the underrepresentation of women in the topmost administrative positions in education could lie in mentorship (Bynum, 2015; Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). Mentorship was one of the pieces of the puzzle to solve the problem of underrepresented women in the highest administrative positions in education. Interestingly, mentoring was also a theme of support in terms of connection and networks to help women advance in their careers. Both formal and informal mentors were significant sources of support providing the women in this study with important information, training, and skills to advance to the highest administrative positions in education.

Recommendations for practice. Women wanting to advance their careers in education could benefit significantly from both male and female mentors. In addition, some of the presidents interviewed shared that they felt an obligation to pay it forward and mentor other women just like they were mentored in their own careers. Both formal and informal mentoring programs could be implemented in higher education institutions, school districts and school systems with a focus of not only supporting women, but also with an overall goal to help solve the problem of the underrepresentation of women in top educational administrative positions.

Recommendations for Future Research

The problem of the underrepresentation of women in the top administrative positions in education is a complicated and complex issue that does not have one simple solution. However, it is exciting to consider the narratives of the women in this study because they have shared their lived experiences of success in achieving the highest

administrative positions in education. This research reveals the standpoints of women whose professional access often was limited due to the demanding nature of their jobs. The information shared in this research provides crucial insights of female presidents in IHE that could provide roadmaps of success to future women striving for the position. The standpoints, narratives, and insights of the women in this study could help to inspire other women to consider pursuing these powerful and socially transformative positions.

Recommendations for future research include the replication with a larger more extensive sample of women nationally and globally in order to gain even more important insights to the female president pathways in higher education, and to see if geographical location impacted findings.

Limitations of the study

Data collection for this research study took place over a two-month period of time. Regarding the limitations of this study, it could be argued that this short timeframe is a limitation of the scope of the study. The results of this study were limited to the perceptions of the university and college presidents from January 1, 2020 to February 29, 2020.

Another limitation to consider was the one-hour timeframe of the interviews. The study could have been strengthened by conducting longer interviews and/or multiple interviews with the same participant versus a single interview. The study could also have been strengthened by having more participants as it was not a large sample to begin with.

The qualitative interviews with presidents were conducted within one Midwestern state across nine different geographical locations, and the quantitative research took place in a virtual environment. Therefore, one limitation is generalizability. The findings of this

study will not be generalizable to other educational higher education systems since this

scope of data collection is limited to one system of higher education. It should be noted

that generalizability was not necessarily a priority for this research study as greater

emphasis was placed on the exploration of the experiences, narratives and standpoints of

the women presidents and superintendents.

Another limitation is that those presidents who served multi-campus institutions,

those presidents who presided over both community college and universities may have

responded differently from presidents of single institutions.

The questionnaire was designed to be disseminated and administered

electronically. The use of an online survey instrument during the early portions of a

spring semester may have affected the willingness and ability for female presidents of

IHEs and superintendents to respond accurately and in a timely fashion.

This research study was also limited by time, money, travel, scheduling logistics,

and communication with the assistants to the presidents. This study could have been

strengthened if these limitations did not play a factor in the research.

Conclusions

Currently, there are no studies specifically exploring the underrepresentation of

women in the highest administrative positions in education through the lens of a mixed-

methods concurrent triangulation research design. In addition, there are currently no

studies using the three data sets of qualitative in-person interviews and quantitative

questionnaires with female presidents in higher education, and quantitative questionnaires

with female superintendents. Finally, there was no quantitative questionnaire exploring

the specific issues the researcher wanted to explore. Consequently, the researcher had to

design one.

The researcher was inspired by the fact that this specific research approach and

direction did not exist and therefore her study would fulfill a gap in the literature. The

researcher is hopeful that others will also be inspired, and that educational systems,

boards, search committees, as well as recruiting firms will gain new insights into the

underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education, their

struggles, supports, and suggestions for possible solutions to the problem.

Since this study focused on qualitative in-depth in person interviews with female

presidents in higher education, some final thoughts relate to the researcher's reflection on

the research process and an overall conclusion.

Hesse-Biber (2007) defined reflexivity as the heart of in-depth interviews and "a

process whereby the researcher is sensitive to the important 'situational' dynamics that

exist between the researcher and the researched that can affect the creation of

knowledge" (p. 130). Reflecting on the researcher's experience with the overall process

of this study was crucial in order to be aware of any biases and ensure objectivity.

"Reflexivity means taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one's own lived reality

and experiences" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 129). The researcher needed to take a critical

stance on how her own experiences and reality might influence this study. Hesse-Biber

(2007) noted that "like the researched or respondent, the researcher is a product of his or

her society's social structures and institutions" (p. 129).

The journey of self-reflection is an important part of the research process. The

researcher acknowledges that she is a White, middle class, middle aged female who

works at an institution of higher education, which are all positions of privilege.

Moreover, the researcher was interested in this topic because she wanted to explore her

own professional and personal ambitions to aspire to the presidency in higher education.

The researcher has a position of privilege and also had insider access to presidents

because of her own professional position in an institution within the system. It was

crucial that the researcher was aware of her own lived experiences and reality at every

step of the research process in order to ensure an unbiased and objective dissertation. The

mixed-methods concurrent triangulation research design, the researcher's *epoché*, and

three data sets helped to safeguard the objectivity and integrity of this study.

In conclusion, this study is ultimately about the voices of the women who

participated in this research. It is about their professional achievements, struggles,

supports, and ideas about improving the underrepresentation of women in top

administrative positions in education. The positions of college president, university

president, and superintendent are busy and demanding jobs, and this study offers a rare

glimpse into the female experience in these prominent positions.

Hesse-Biber (2007) stated that "the researcher's primary job is to listen carefully,

discerningly, and intently to the comments of the researched" (p. 134). It is important to

listen to the experiences, struggles, supports, accomplishments, and narratives from all of

the women in this study. In a caring way, the world needs to listen to and understand that

as a united front, the women in this research study offer practical applications and

recommendations for solving the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the

highest administrative positions in education. These recommendations include a

commitment from the top for change, mentoring, looking at leadership differently and

creatively, and getting more women into advanced positions in education. The women in

this research study have bravely shared their struggles and successes in order to share

their rise to the top. It is the researcher's hope that the platform of this dissertation can

reflect the light of the stories of these women to other future women reading this work.

Lastly, in order to use the analogy of weaving individual pieces of fabric into a

large and intricate quilt, this work was intentional about highlighting each individual

woman's story and then finding common themes to describe an overall narrative. This

work aimed to spotlight that although progress has been made, there is still a problem of

the underrepresentation of women in the highest administrative positions in education.

Therefore, it seemed fitting to end this study with a voice from one of the president

interviews:

> *I'm just glad you're doing the work. I'm glad that you're bringing attention to it. You know, it's interesting, women in higher education I think, are at an interesting point in history…20 years ago, you really did not see women leading institutions of higher education. And if then you would have said there's a dearth, I think people would've been "Oh, of course." But now, there are women leading in higher education. The numbers are still not what they should be. But there are prominent women, leading, in a lot of places. And I think some people in our communities, and in the nation, think, "Oh, that's been fixed." Some of that is social media, which we didn't have 20 years ago. So, it's an interesting time. And I'm really glad you're shining a light on it, because we have an enormous amount of work to do…It is also part of the greater work to achieve equity in many different ways. So, we really have to shine a light on this work.*

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APPENDIX A.

Research Questions for the researcher's dissertation

One central question and three sub-questions were guiding this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study. The central question is: How do females describe their pathways to the highest administration positions in education?

The following sub-questions further the define direction of this mixed-methods concurrent triangulation study:

1. What challenges (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions?

2. What supports (if any) did these females experience in achieving their current positions?

3. What are possible solutions to the dearth of females in the highest administration positions in education in the United States?

Questions for Female Community College and University Presidents:

1. How did you get to your current position? What positions did you hold prior to the presidency? (If important: how much time did you spend on each one?)

2. How would you describe your pathway to the presidency at this college/presidency at this university/college?

   a. (If they do not mention anything about challenges) What challenges did you experience? What was the most significant to overcome?

   b. (If they do not mention anything about supports) What supports did you experience? Which one was the most significant in your journey?

3. What do you see as possible solutions to the dearth of females in the highest

administration positions in the educational system (specifically, at institutions of

higher education)?

4. (If they did not address *gender* at any other time prior to this point, ask the

following) Overall, in your journey to your current position what was the role

played by your gender?

5. (If they did not address *race/ethnicity* at any other time prior to this point, ask

the following) Overall, in your journey to your current position what was the

role played by your race?

6. What advice would you give to a female aspiring to the

presidency/superintendent position?

7. Is there anything else you would like to add/share?

APPENDIX B.

My name is Amy Rawson, Minnesota State University, Moorhead (MSUM) Cohort 1 Educational Leadership Doctoral Student. Please read this Letter of Informed Consent. You do not need to sign this letter. By submitting the Questionnaire, you will be providing consent to use your responses as part of my study. This Questionnaire is anonymous, unless you provide your contact information allowing me to interview you in person or virtually. Please enter your name only if you would like me to interview you in person.

Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in this study. Please be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to voluntarily withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with me, the Communication department, Century College or Minnesota State University, Moorhead. The purpose of the study is to explore the journeys of females who have achieved the highest educational positions. The procedures include a quantitative survey and the possibility of qualitative interviews. At this stage in the research, the process will be generally defined as the research for my dissertation. Data will include results from the survey, interviews (transcripts of interviews between participants), and observations and field notes (made by the researcher). Individuals involved in the data collection will be the researcher and the female superintendent and female president participants. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. I will be happy to share the findings with you after the research is completed. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know your identity as a participant.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information about the experiences of females who have achieved the highest educational positions in a triangulated research study. In addition, any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. I will do my best to keep your personal information confidential. I may use a pseudonym if desired. To help protect your confidentiality: (1) storage of data and notes will be kept in a secured location accessible only to me, ; (2) purging of all personally identifiable information from transcripts, and research reports submitted to me. If I write an article or book about this research project, your identity will be protected to the fullest extent possible. This research project may involve making digital recordings of interview conversations. The digital recordings, accompanying notes, and transcriptions will be kept on a password protected computer. Information from this study will be kept until May 2023 when all information will be destroyed.

Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study. You may contact Amy Rawson if you have additional questions: Amy Rawson, Communication Faculty, Century College, W1113, White Bear Lake, Minnesota, 651-748-2635.

Any questions about your rights may be directed to Dr. Lisa I. Karch, Chair of the MSUM Institutional Review Board, 218-477-2699 irb@mnstate.edu.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep. You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study. Acceptance to Participate: Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, and you have consent to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty after signing this form.

Signature of Participant _____ Date_____

Signature of Investigator_____ Date_____

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Amy Rawson

APPENDIX C.

Minnesota State University, Moorhead
School of Teaching and Learning
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership program
1104 7th Avenue South
Moorhead, Minnesota 56563

Consent Form

Participation in Research

Title: Exploring the Journeys of Females Who Have Achieved the Highest Educational Positions.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore the journeys of current female presidents at colleges and universities, and female superintendents to their positions. This information could then be used in the future to create a roadmap for future females interested in similar positions and could potentially impact educational system changes.

Study information: This study will ask female college and university presidents and female superintendents about their experiences in achieving their positions and ask about the supports and challenges they experienced on their journeys.

Time: The few participants that are selected to be interviewed will be taped for the purpose of accurately recording answers. Afterwards all recordings will be destroyed. The interviews should take approximately sixty minutes.

Risks: There should be no potential sources of harm (physical or psychological) to the participants. Participants can choose to opt out of the study or quit at any time.

Benefits: Participation may help women feel empowered by sharing their story with others.

Confidentiality: Participant's identity will not be shared with anyone beyond the principal investigator, Amy E. Rawson. All individual information will be recorded and tracked under an identification number and not the participant's name.

Participation and withdrawal: Participation in this study is optional. Participants can choose not to participate or choose to withdraw at any time without any negative effects on the relationship with the researcher, or relationship with Century College or Minnesota State University.

Contact: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact any of these people:

Ximena Suarez-Sousa Chair of Dissertation Committee ph. 218.477.2007 Email: suarez@mnstate.edu	Amy Rawson, M.S. Principal Investigator Communication Faculty Century College ph. 651.748.2635 Email: amy.rawson@century.edu

Any questions about your rights may be directed to Lisa Karch, Ph. D., Chair of the MSUM Institutional Review Board, at 218-477-2699 or by lisa.karch@mnstate.edu.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

"I have been informed of the study details and understand what participating in the study means. I understand that my identity will be protected and that I can choose to stop participating in the study at any time. By signing this form, I am agreeing to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age or older."

_____

Name of Participant (Print)

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX D.

Rawson Quantitative Survey Exploring the Pathways of Female Superintendents of PK-12 Schools

By submitting this questionnaire, you are providing consent for me to use your responses as part of my survey. Please enter your initials for consent.

The purpose of this research is to explore the journeys of female administrators currently holding the highest positions within higher education and K-12 education systems. This survey explores the role played by factors identified in the current literature as having contributed or challenged the journey to your current position.

Thank you for your time and participation. Please fill in the following blanks:

Administrative Position:

- o   President of a two-year college
- o   President of a four-year university
- o   Superintendent

Age:

[   ]

Marital status:

[   ]

Number of children:

[   ]

Race:

[   ]

Gender identified as:

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[                                                                    ]
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Educational background:

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[                                                                    ]
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Professional background:

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[                                                                    ]
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Size of your institution/educational system in terms of students:

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[                                                                    ]
```

Size of your institution/educational system in terms of faculty:

```
[                                                                    ]
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Identify institution as a two-year, four-year, or school district:

- o Two-Year
- o Four-year
- o School District

Click the arrow in the lower right corner to move to the next section of the survey.

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[ » ]
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Instructions: Below are 12 factors indicated in the professional literature as influences on women in leadership. As you read each factor, please rate each one on a continuum. Did the factor challenge your journey to your current administrative position? Did the factor support your journey? Or did it have little impact on your journey?

1. Human Capital - Relates to my leadership and administrative acumen (Woollen,

2016). The return of investment will exceed the cost of my position (Goldin, 2014).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

2. Competency- Relates to my leadership, collaboration, problem-solving skills,

fairness, and trustworthiness (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). The accumulated

knowledge, skills, through multiple positions I held along the way (Woollen, 2016).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

3. Leadership Training- Relates to a variety of activities I engaged as part of my

leadership development such as: graduate education programs, membership in

professional associations, and formalized leadership training as well as participation and

networking in state and national organizations (Horn, 2018; Vaughn & Weisman, 2003;

Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

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[                                                                    ]
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4. Glass Ceiling- Relates to experiencing a barrier based on the perceived inability to handle a higher-level job *because I am a woman.* (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

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[                                                                    ]
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5. Sexism - Relates to experiencing gender discrimination in my professional life despite affirmative action and legal initiatives. I face scrutiny men do not and have experienced negative treatment for asserting authority (Wheat & Hill, 2016; Superville, 2017).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

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[                                                                    ]
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6. *Good Ol' Boys* network and culture- Relates to an invisible network *(that I am excluded from because I am a woman)* of sponsorship whereby older professional men groom younger versions of themselves for leadership positions and recruitment messages reflect this issue (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015; McGee, 2010).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

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7. Gender Stereotyping - Relates to the conceptions of leadership that *compare* me to masculine stereotypes and I am faulted for not adopting or being willing to accept those standards (Woollen 2016).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

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8. Mentorship - Relates to having had someone who taught, coached, advised, guided, and lead me through this professional journey (Munoz, Pankake, Mills, & Simonsson, 2018).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

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```

9. Encouragement- Relates to being encouraged to apply to the highest position within

the institution or system (Oikelome, 2017; Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

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10. Institutional Fit- I was intentional in selecting those institutions at which I was

confident my integrity would not suffer and would find communities of professional

support (Oikelome, 2017).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

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```

11. Geographic Mobility - Related to my willingness to relocate in spite of the comfort

and importance of keeping established relationships and maintaining my

spouses'/partner's job (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

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12. Personal and Professional Balance - Relates to my ability to juggle family *and*

personal responsibilities (e.g., housework) professional responsibilities (Wyland, 2016;

Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

Click the arrow in the lower right corner to move to the next section of the survey.

»

13. To what extent was your journey to your current position facilitated or challenged by

gender?

14. To what extent was your journey to your current position facilitated or challenged by

race?

15. What do you think are possible solutions to the lack of females in the position you

hold?

Thank you for your responses to this brief survey. Your participation provides a unique opportunity to gather useful information for other women considering to embark on a similar journey to yours. The results of this research could also be beneficial in other ways such as impacting educational systems including superintendents, K-12 education, presidents, and higher education.

APPENDIX E.

Rawson Quantitative Survey Exploring the Pathways of Female University and College Presidents

By submitting this questionnaire, you are providing consent for me to use your responses as part of my survey. Please enter your initials for consent.

The purpose of this research is to explore the journeys of female administrators currently holding the highest positions within higher education and K-12 education systems. This survey explores the role played by factors identified in the current literature as having contributed or challenged the journey to your current position.

Thank you for your time and participation. Please fill in the following blanks:

Administrative Position:
- o   President of a two-year college
- o   President of a four-year university
- o   Superintendent

Age:

Marital status:

Number of children:

Race:

Gender identified as:

[   ]

Educational background:

[   ]

Professional background:

[   ]

Size of your institution/educational system in terms of students:

[   ]

Size of your institution/educational system in terms of faculty:

[   ]

Identify institution as a two-year, four-year, or school district:

- o   Two-Year
- o   Four-year
- o   School District

Click the arrow in the lower right corner to move to the next section of the survey.

»

Instructions: Below are 12 factors indicated in the professional literature as influences on women in leadership. As you read each factor, please rate each one on a continuum. Did the factor challenge your journey to your current administrative position? Did the factor support your journey? Or did it have little impact on your journey?

1. Human Capital - Relates to my leadership and administrative acumen (Woollen, 2016). The return of investment will exceed the cost of my position (Goldin, 2014).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

2. Competency- Relates to my leadership, collaboration, problem-solving skills, fairness, and trustworthiness (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015). The accumulated knowledge, skills, through multiple positions I held along the way (Woollen, 2016).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

3. Leadership Training- Relates to a variety of activities I engaged as part of my leadership development such as: graduate education programs, membership in professional associations, and formalized leadership training as well as participation and networking in state and national organizations (Horn, 2018; Vaughn & Weisman, 2003; Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

4. Glass Ceiling- Relates to experiencing a barrier based on the perceived inability to handle a higher-level job *because I am a woman.* (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

5. Sexism - Relates to experiencing gender discrimination in my professional life despite affirmative action and legal initiatives. I face scrutiny men do not and have experienced negative treatment for asserting authority (Wheat & Hill, 2016; Superville, 2017).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

6. *Good Ol' Boys* network and culture- Relates to an invisible network *(that I am excluded from because I am a woman)* of sponsorship whereby older professional men groom younger versions of themselves for leadership positions and recruitment messages reflect this issue (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015; McGee, 2010).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

[   ]

7. Gender Stereotyping - Relates to the conceptions of leadership that *compare* me to masculine stereotypes and I am faulted for not adopting or being willing to accept those standards (Woollen 2016).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

[   ]

8. Mentorship - Relates to having had someone who taught, coached, advised, guided, and lead me through this professional journey (Munoz, Pankake, Mills, & Simonsson, 2018).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

[   ]

9. Encouragement- Relates to being encouraged to apply to the highest position within the institution or system (Oikelome, 2017; Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

10. Institutional Fit- I was intentional in selecting those institutions at which I was confident my integrity would not suffer and would find communities of professional support (Oikelome, 2017).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

11. Geographic Mobility - Related to my willingness to relocate in spite of the comfort and importance of keeping established relationships and maintaining my spouses'/partner's job (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

12. Personal and Professional Balance - Relates to my ability to juggle family *and*

personal responsibilities (e.g., housework) professional responsibilities (Wyland, 2016;

Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Challenged my journey   Supported my journey

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

If you would like to clarify your answer, write here:

Click the arrow in the lower right corner to move to the next section of the survey.

»

13. To what extent was your journey to your current position facilitated or challenged by

gender?

14. To what extent was your journey to your current position facilitated or challenged by

race?

15. What do you think are possible solutions to the lack of females in the position you

hold?

Thank you for your responses to this brief survey. Your participation provides a unique opportunity to gather useful information for other women considering to embark on a similar journey to yours. The results of this research could also be beneficial in other ways such as impacting educational systems including superintendents, K-12 education, presidents, and higher education.

If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview (no longer than 60 minutes) please provide your name and the best contact information below:

APPENDIX F

Sample Invitation Letter

Good morning President XXX! I hope this email finds you doing well.

My name is Amy Rawson, XXX Cohort 1 Doctoral Student. I am conducting transformative research on females' journey to achieve the highest educational leadership positions.

I would like to invite you to participate in this transformative experience by completing a brief questionnaire that should take you no longer than <u>15 minutes.</u> There are approximately 10 demographic questions at the beginning and the Questionnaire contains 18 items. <u>Your participation is crucial.</u> There is a dearth in the literature of studies addressing the females' experience to the presidency position in higher education. Sharing your insights will help to close the gap in the literature.

Below is the link to the Qualtrics Questionnaire.

In addition to this questionnaire, I would like to invite you to a 1-hour in-depth interview to further explore your professional leadership experience. For your convenience, I could interview you in person at your preferred location or via Zoom any date/time in the month of January and early February. While I understand you hold a very demanding position, your participation will have significant impact on females aspiring toward the highest educational leadership positions as well as benefit the educational system at large.

Thank you very much for considering to participate of this transformative project!

<u>https://XXstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9N3eVPRjkCaOH9H</u>

<u>Online Survey Software | Qualtrics Survey Solutions</u>
Qualtrics sophisticated online survey software solutions make creating online surveys easy. Learn more about Research Suite and get a free account today.
mnstate.co1.qualtrics.com

(You may need to copy/paste this link in a separate tab).

Sincerely,

Amy Rawson

(Attached is a Letter of Informed Consent. You do not need to sign this letter. By submitting the Questionnaire, you will be providing consent to use your responses as part of my study. This Questionnaire is anonymous, unless you provide your contact information allowing me to interview you in person or virtually.)