CAREER PATHS AND PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRATIONS: PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS

by

KELLIE McELROY HOOPER

(Under the Direction of Karen Webber)

ABSTRACT

Holding only 36% of two-year college presidencies in 2015, the progress toward gender parity has not yet been reached for women. Greater awareness of the under-representation of women in college presidencies and heightened retirements presents an opportunity for the academy to shift to be more equitable for women. Even as opportunities arise, current women in senior leadership positions may face barriers that discourage them from seeking a college presidency. To better understand why more women chief academic officers (CAOs) do not transition to the college presidency, this qualitative study explored the perceptions of 11 female CAOs about the role gender played in their career pathways and presidential aspirations. Findings revealed that being a primary caregiver for children and elderly parents was a significant reason some women CAOs did not pursue a presidency. The findings also indicated that some women CAOs found it challenging to balance their daily work outside the home and personal lives. For some participants, the presidency was perceived as undesirable because it was an externally-focused position, indicating that the job's duties, activities, and functions worked in the external environment (external to the college). One of the key recommendations is a redesign of the CAO and presidential roles to have more of an overlapping alignment in their positional

responsibilities. This may break the perception of the presidency being undesirable by exposing CAOs to some of the external functions of the presidency. Mentoring and encouragement from mentors were noted by many participants, prompting several participants to accept the CAO position. Finally, the participants discussed the importance of organizational culture in creating a gender-equitable workplace. Practices of the gender equality policies are meant to support organizational goals, and that needs to begin with individual attitudes and behaviors. The impending presidential retirements can be seen as an opportunity for women to advance to the top office or as a challenge because many women CAOs choose not to move into the presidency. There could be a loss of talented presidents as they retire in record numbers without seasoned CAOs to replace them.

INDEX WORDS: women community college presidents, gender, sex, masculine, feminine, gendered organization, two-year college, community college, gender binary, gender non-binary, women, female, barriers, chief academic officer, career pathway of women, career aspirations, diversity, disembodied worker, culture, organizational

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my wife, Anne, my life partner and greatest supporter, who has provided steady encouragement and helped me see this was possible every step of the way, making it a reality. I could not have done this without you.

I would like to also dedicate this to all of the women who came before me and paved the way for success for those that followed. In doing this research, I wanted to understand the unique challenges and considerations that influence and all too often limit women's pursuit and attainment of the highest positions within higher education. I hope this small study promotes further reflection and research into how women can fulfill their roles as the center of family life while pursuing their professional aspirations and truly be able “to have it all!”

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nationally, women are underrepresented in the college presidency in all public post-secondary institutions. Although there are more women in two-year college presidencies than four-year institutions, their numbers remain low. The American Council on Education survey (2017) found that only 36% of current public community college presidencies are held by women (Gagliardi et al., 2017). [Author note: community college is synonymous with two-year and associate level colleges.] Progress toward gender parity has been slow, community colleges seeing only a 9% increase in women presidents from 2001-2016 (see Table 1). However, women at community colleges have made the largest strides in occupying the presidency in comparison to their peers at colleges and universities. Only 33% of the presidencies are held by women at bachelor's institutions and 30% at master's institutions (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Furthermore, the gender gap continues to widen as the prestige level of the institution increases, with only 23% of president positions in doctoral institutions held by women (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Table 1

Percentage of Presidencies held by Women, by Institution Type (2001-2016)

Institution Type	2001	2006	2011	2016
Public				
Doctorate-granting	15.7	16.0	23.9	23.2
Master's	20.9	23.1	22.9	30.3
Bachelor's	18.2	34.4	27.5	32.8
Associate	27.0	28.9	32.3	36.0

Source: Gagliardi, J. S., Epinosa, L. L., Turk, J. M., & Taylor, M. (2017). *American college president study 2017.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Community colleges have begun to experience an unprecedented number of turnovers in presidential and senior leadership positions (Smith, 2016). According to the most recent data by American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 80% of community college presidents surveyed in 2015 planned to retire in the next 10 years and these institutions will lose three-quarters of senior administrators to retirement (Phillippe, 2016). There have not been any other recent studies that have measured the number of these retirements to date since the AACC survey in 2015. It is nonetheless important that we have leaders prepared to replace community college presidents amidst the presidential turnover. The combination of the under-representation of women in college presidencies and heightened retirements presents an opportunity for the academy to shift the balance of power to equity for women. This shift could change the existing status quo that has continued to perpetuate the norm of under-representation of women in the college presidency (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

We have not seen such a significant opportunity for the advancement of women's roles in higher education since World War II, when women filled the roles and positions in academe as a large portion of men left to fight the war (Parker, 2015). At that time, many women students and professors took advantage of the opportunity to be college leaders and proved the extent of their capabilities during this period (Parker, 2015). The modern context is, of course, very different than that of the early 1940s, but amid the impending turnovers in institutional leadership, significant institutional transformation is possible.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore how women Chief Academic Officers (CAO) at public two-year institutions in the U.S. understand the role that gender plays in their career paths and postsecondary presidential aspirations. The position of CAO is

significant in the presidential pipeline at two-year colleges because it is the most frequently held position prior to a presidency (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Murray et al. (2000) found that the respondents in their study believed that the CAO position is what Vaugh (1989) called the *pathway to presidency*. The ACE 2017 survey of presidents at public two-year colleges reported 41% were a CAO prior to a presidency. This has been a steady trend since the ACE survey started in 2006, when presidents reported that 43% had previously served as a CAO/Provost prior to their presidency (Johnson, 2017; Gagliardi et al., 2017). We do not have good evidence of what might help lead women CAOs to presidential positions therefore, it is a worthy population to study.

How This Study is Original

The study can help guide aspiring women leaders who can learn from these lived experiences. It can aid in their promotion to the senior-level administrator's positions, which may lead to a college presidency (Amey et al., 2002; Kampel, 2010; Madsen 2007). “It is possible that more women in academe may seek advanced positions if they saw models and norms of a balanced lifestyle, work-family integration, and institutional recognition of the intersection of gender and work” (Ward & Eddy, 2013, para. 10). In addition to gaining insights on career pathways and presidential aspiration patterns, greater knowledge of women CAO perceptions may enable the development of new policies at postsecondary institutions, that can assist in diversifying the two-year college presidency. The outcome of the study illuminated the factors that may be contributing to the lack of equal representation of women in the community college presidency.

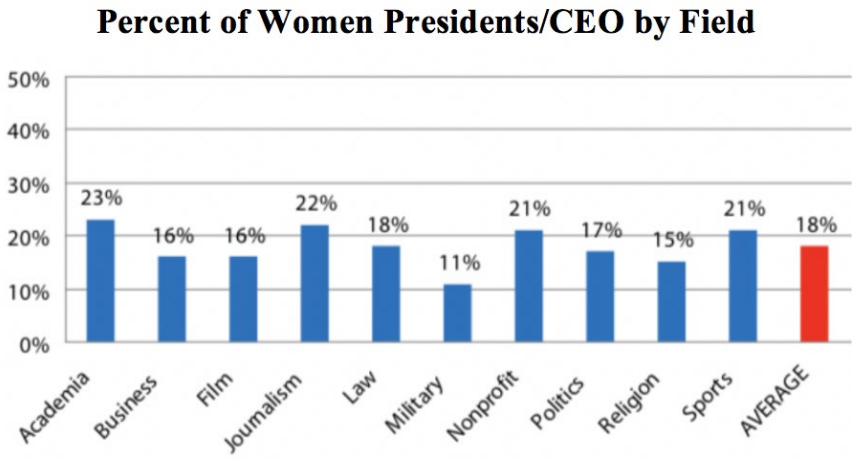
Several qualitative studies have researched the pathways to the community college presidency. These studies found that the traditional pathway pattern begins with a faculty

position and ends with a presidency (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Garza et al., 2008; McKenney & Cejda, 2001; Schults, 2001; Vaughan, 1990; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007), but prior studies found little on the role that gender plays on the career pathways and presidential aspirations of CAOs at these institutions. In addition, demographic data on community college CAOs has only begun to be published in the past few years, which it makes it difficult to track and analyze trends over many years.

The underrepresentation of women in postsecondary presidencies mirrors the progress of women reaching the top-position nationally. The White House Project: Benchmarking Women's Leadership Report (2009) identified that the presence of women in the president/CEO position remains between 11% and 23% within a broad range of fields (see Figure 1). Although 89% of the population expressed comfort with women as leaders ("The White House Project," 2009) the nearly even split in gender in the United States 51% women and 49% men, (Census, 2010) points out that women are disproportionately under-represented in leadership at the top of organizations in a broad range of fields.

Figure 1

Women Presidents/CEOs by Field



Source: The White House Project (2009). Benchmarking women's leadership report.

The White House Project: Benchmarking Women's Leadership Report (2009) identified academia (higher education) as the field wherein women are represented at a higher rate (23%) in Presidential/CEO positions than all other fields. However, academia still has significant work that needs to be done to reduce the presidential gender gap. Because of the sheer size of the field of higher education, it is vital to understand how to diversify the top leadership role in community colleges. For the 2019-2020 school year, public two-year institutions accounted for 40% (7.7 million) students of all year-round undergraduate students nationally (NCES, 2020). Today, community colleges continue to play a very important role in educating many individuals in our society. The missions of community colleges typically are strongly tied to representing the communities that they serve and to be open access institutions.

In addition to disproportions by gender, the race/ethnic diversity of community college campuses has increased among the student body, but the staff, faculty, and administration are not proportionally diverse (Eddy, 2010). This is especially true within the senior academic leadership ranks (Eddy, 2010). According to the American Council on Education (2016), higher education institutions are more focused on diversifying the student body and faculty and less on replacing senior leadership positions with underrepresented and marginalized populations (Toner, 2016).

The onset of presidential retirements presents an opportunity for women CAOs to be positioned for filling the presidential pipeline within community colleges. It is important that presidents bring new leadership models to higher education organizations to help create cultures where diversity thrives to its fullest. College presidents need to be agents of change in higher education to meet the challenges of tomorrow. According to Harrow (1993), "Leadership, when dominated by one segment of society, suffers from a narrow perspective, a lack of richness of ideas and ideals" (p. 146). Higher education has the ability to transform lives and it plays a major

role solving many societal challenges we face in education, healthcare, the economy, the environment, social injustice, and violence. Thus, it is important that women's' voices be represented at the table when discussing and solving these challenges, so that better inclusive decisions are made.

The position of chief academic officer (CAO) is critical to the future of a woman becoming a president, because it is still the most traditional pathway to the college presidency (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women currently represent 56% of all CAOs at public two-year colleges (Gagliardi et al., 2017), and only 36% of two-year college presidents are women (Gagliardi et al., 2017). There is a gap where women are not continuing to progress up the career latter. However, the CAO/provost is the most cited position immediately prior to a presidency (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Forty-six percent of women held the CAO/provost position prior to a presidency as compared to 41% of the men (Gagliardi et al., 2017). This is important because, traditionally the CAO is the presidents' second in command in the organizational hierarchy (Amey et al., 2002). Typically, in two-year colleges the CAO reports directly to the president offering the CAO important experience to help prepare for leading an institution in the future (Murray et al., 2000).

Research Questions

Guided by Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations, this study sought to answer two research questions.

RQ1: How do female chief academic officers understand the role that gender plays in their career path?

RQ2: How do female chief academic officers understand the role that gender plays in their presidential aspirations?

To facilitate the promotion of women within two-year college presidencies, I needed to better understand the experiences of women CAOs. This study also provided insight into why more women CAOs are not moving into the two-year college presidency. “Colleges often reinforce traditional gender expectations and place value on historic conceptions of leadership that are based on male norms” (Eddy, 2010, p. 124). Therefore, Joan Acker’s (1990) theory of gendered organizations served as the framework for this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

While women have made significant gains into American higher education leadership, parity for women as community college presidents has yet to be reached. In some areas of higher education, such as CAOs, women are well represented; however, in the highest leadership position, women remain underrepresented. The literature review addressed conditions and practices that create challenges that women encounter on their career paths in attainment of the college presidency. Like Ragins and Sundstrom's (1989) and Fagenson's (1990) studies, the literature organized these challenges and possible barriers.

Women in Higher Education Leadership

Women face challenges in advancing in higher education leadership such as gender stereotypes, the glass ceiling, recruitment and hiring practices, job descriptions, performance evaluations, and their leadership style. They must deal with organizational policies and practices, face organizational structure barriers, and their career aspirations as well as their work-life balance needs. A better understanding of the challenges, issues, and potential barriers that some women may face as they navigate their career may assist in attempts to diversify and reach gender parity in the community college presidency.

Gender-based Stereotypes

For the purpose of this study, I will define gender and sex. According to Rushton (2019), gender is "socially constructed processes and differences, often aligned with being feminine, masculine, blended elements of both, or neither" (p. 2). "Sex is defined as the physical

characteristics used to identify differences between males and females; this does not mean that a person's gender or physical sex characteristics necessarily align with their sex assigned at birth base on visible genitalia" (Rushton et al., 2019, p. 2).

Gender binaries are challenged today, where some people do not identify with just one of the two categories: male or female. This is referred to as gender non-binary, which are genders that are outside the male and female binary (Rushton et al., 2019). Due to the limitations of this study and lack of available research on the topic, we will discuss only in terms of gender binaries.

Gender-based stereotypes are deeply embedded in our culture and psyche, they often occur "without any conscious awareness of them" (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 86). According to social role theory, gender stereotypes are derived from the differences between men and women into social roles in both the home and at work (Eagly, 1987, 1997; Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Wood, 2016). These gendered stereotypes usually disadvantage women socially, politically, and economically and women assimilate into lower power positions within society (Acker, 1990; Townsend, 1995). According to Townsend (1995), "the amount of institutional power people have is defined by their position within the institutional hierarchy" (p. 2).

"Women elicit communal associations of being especially affectionate, helpful, friendly, kind, and sympathetic as well as interpersonally sensitive, gentle, and soft-spoken. Men elicit agentic association of being especially aggressive, ambitious, dominant, self-confident, and forceful as well as self-reliant and individualistic" (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 86). These associations about gender differences form the basis of gender stereotypes (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Glazer-Raymo (1999) found that gender-based stereotypes affect equality in the higher education workplace through occupational gender segregation. "Despite the increase in the number of

women employed in the sector, there is persistent vertical and horizontal gender segregation" (Glazer-Raymo, 1999, p. 352). Similarly, another study found that women were underrepresented in governance and leadership positions, while being clustered in jobs that are "traditionally associated with stereotypically female interests and aptitudes" (McTavish & Miller, 2009, p. 353).

Glass Ceiling

King and Gomez (2008) found that women held 45% of all higher education senior administrative positions. These are qualified and experienced women who do not advance to the presidential leadership role proportionally. This phenomenon is what many call the "glass ceiling" for women reaching the top job of president/CEO. The term "glass ceiling" has been used in the mainstream vocabulary since 1991, when Congress created the Glass Ceiling Commission as part of the Title II in the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (Redwood, 1995). Aware of the detrimental effects occurring for working women, The Glass Ceiling Commission's focus was on employment discrimination and recognition of these unique barriers for differing groups (Redwood, 1995). The glass ceiling is a metaphor often used to represent the invisible artificial barriers that women experience while they are reaching for the most senior positions within organizations.

The U.S. Department of Labor's (1991) definition of the glass ceiling is "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions." Wheat (2012) noted that the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was established by the U.S. Department of Labor. The Commission report, "Good for business: Making full use of the nation's human capital," was based on governmental research that examined minorities and women in the private sector. The

Commission identified three levels of artificial barriers for advancement in these two groups: "(a) social barriers (e.g., lack of educational attainment, gender bias, etc.), (b) internal structural barriers (e.g., recruitment practices, organizational climates, pipeline barriers, etc.), and (c) governmental barriers (e.g., lack of law enforcement, etc.)" (Wheat, 2012, pp. 7-8).

The glass ceiling is perpetuated by attitudinal, societal, and organizational cultures that stereotype women into prescribed gender norms that create cumulative disadvantage that blocks opportunities at any point on the way to the top levels of management (Redwood, 1995). According to Redwood (1995), societal, governmental, and business barriers often obstruct any attempts for women to advance in executive level positions. These are systemic barriers that women face in higher education reaching to become leaders (Diehl 2013, 2014; Madsen, 2012; The White House Project, 2009). These systemic barriers can be attributed to the gendered organization of higher education and the bureaucratic structure as described as glass ceiling effect. These barriers are complex and create ongoing inequalities within the work organization (Acker, 2009).

Organizational Policies and Practices

Gender discrimination in the workplace continues to be an impediment to gender equality (e.g., Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Gorman, 2005). Research has shown that gender discrimination is not only based on cultural beliefs, but also due to institutionalized policies and practices in workplace organizations (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Glick & Fiske, 2007). Most institutions of higher education have anti-discrimination policies, but those need people to bring them to life. Bobbitt-Zeher (2011) found that institutional policies can be a mechanism for discrimination, "discretionary policy application enforcement is the predominant issue" (p. 776), it is not for the

lack of these policies. "Most narratives show that discretion in policy application or enforcement is the primary mechanism through which discrimination happens" (Bobbit-Zeher, 2011, p. 778).

According to Timmers et al. (2010) study, that examined the efficacy of several universities gender equality policies as part of their research. They found that there was a "discrepancy between official policy documents and the actual state of affairs" (Timmers et al., 2010, p. 731). Further, several of the departments failed to implement suggestions and policy directives made by the Board of the university (Timmers et al., 2010). Instead of these policies being seen as a positive, most of the managers, policy makers, and full professors viewed them as bureaucratic requirements they had to follow (Timmers et al., 2010). No matter how well written, formal policies that support diversity are most often implemented at the departmental level where informal norms can undermine their success (Bagilhole & White, 2008; Timmers et al., 2010). Gender equality policies are necessary in organizations, but the major obstacles faced are societal and cultural which may be working against women.

Recruitment/Hiring

Inequalities between women and men can be manifested in the recruitment and hiring of employees in an organization. Gendering and workplace social processes are embedded in human resource management policies and practices of an organization (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). Human resource practices directly impact hiring training, pay, and the promotion of women (Stanmarske & Son Hing, 2015). Gender stereotyping can be found in the language used in the hiring criteria that profiles the desired characteristics of the position (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). These characteristics are typically described using traditional masculine or feminine language (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). These gender stereotypes reinforce male norms of the "ideal worker" which is the standard to measure job applicants (Acker, 1990). There are also

formal and informal processes of recruitment and hiring that can open up the opportunity for gender bias to impact these decisions (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016). Eagly and Carli (2007) and Bagilhole and White (2008) found that search committees in the higher education field often used social networks and referrals to find candidates. This informal pathway can lead to homosocial reproduction that disadvantages women (Madera, 2017).

Informal paths for recruitment such as referrals can play a significant role in job prospects (Elliott, 2001). The Kellogg (2019) study found that the highest achieving women were more effective when they had a close inner circle of two to three women who can share career advice (Yang et al., 2019). Their research also showed that these women are nearly three times more likely to get a better job than women who do not have that support system. Mastracci and Arreola (2016) describe how gender bias can also be a factor in formal pathways of recruitment and hiring. Language and images used in an organization's recruitment materials, videos, and handbooks can also reinforce gender bias (Kalantari, 2012; Stivers, 2002). Organizational materials may show gendered images of men in leadership positions while depicting women in lower, nonsupervisory positions. Higher education leaders should make intentional efforts to promote and recruit women into senior leadership roles (Manfredi, 2017). Manfredi (2017) suggested that hiring practices need to be aligned with the goal to diversify the senior leadership with women who are underrepresented.

Performance Evaluations/Job Descriptions

Metcalfe (2008) observed that "achievement, control, measurable results and performance goals" (p. 454) were key performance indicators (KPI) in human resource department outcomes. These KPI measures were more closely associated with male dominant characteristics rather those more symbolic of feminine characteristics that would measure

"relationship building, nurturing, communications" (Metcalfe, 2008, p. 454). This is an example of how KPI in a performance evaluation can marginalize women when they are only measured by masculine stereotypes.

Job descriptions are also noted to be delicately grouped into only a few classifications for positions for lower wages. One example offered was for a state position in Oregon where job classifications determined wages (Acker, 2012); many states use such employee classifications for jobs that require a set of skills and the classification identifies wages. Related to job descriptions, for the Oregon state jobs, "women's jobs were described in general terms" (Acker, 2012, p. 215). Alternatively, job descriptions for men's jobs contained specific terms. Terms such as "requires physical tasks and ability to lift x number of pounds consistently" are deemed to describe male characteristics. Terms such as "providing care" have been identified as describing characteristics of women (Acker, 2012).

Leadership Style

Leadership style can be a challenge for women in higher education, and it can be a barrier for CAOs considering a community college presidency. Gender plays a role in the perceptions of who are leaders and their leadership style. According to Deihl (2014), people often perceive the masculine style of leadership as ideal. Women often have difficulties in gaining and keeping leadership positions because they must contend with the pressure to fit their leadership styles into prescribed constructs based on masculinity instead of their own (Deihl, 2014).

Women in community colleges most often fill adjunct teaching positions, administrative positions, and CAO (Murray et al., 2000; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Eddy and Cox's (2008) study concluded that community colleges are still gendered organizations despite attempts to diversify the organizational hierarchy of power. Their study agreed with the research of Amey

and Twombly (1992) that found male norms of leadership are present in college organizational structures (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Gendered organizations have institutional norms that promote masculine traits and male dominance (Eddy, 2010). Bornstein (2008) found that women who are new to the presidency in community colleges often act and lead with male-normed expectations. He concluded that a leaders' ability to exude confidence, decisiveness, and assertiveness provided a sense of comfort and security to their followers (Bornstein, 2008).

If Bornstein is correct, it seems that women continue to battle the entrenched male norms within community colleges, and "as long as women are forced to play by men's rules, they will continue to find glass ceilings and other barriers impeding their progress in higher education administration" (Gill & Jones, 2013, p. 51; see also Eddy & Cox, 2008). Similarly, another study found that women are underrepresented in the position of president at community colleges in the United States (Murray et al., 2000).

Organizational Structure and Organization of Work

Community colleges are bureaucratic organizations that rely on top-down reporting, based on a patriarchal hierarchy structure. Birnbaum (1992) defined bureaucratic organizations as "structures are established to efficiently relate organizational programs to the achievement of specified goals" (p. 107). The institutional or organizational structure may be a source of barriers to women community college leaders' advancement (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006).

According to Kanter (1977), the structure of positions in formal organizations create inequality based on the division of labor in how employees are sorted and rewarded. Women are typically relegated to lower-level positions with marginalized power in the organizational hierarchy. The determinates of status and power are related to the distribution of tasks required

by the position. Careers happen in organizations; therefore, understanding how women fit in the positional hierarchy within community college institutions is important.

The marginalization of women can be seen at the macro-level where more women are clustered in the community college sector, which holds the least prestigious institutional status in higher education, and where women occupy the vast majority of the non-professional staff in the community college (Garza & Eddy, 2008). Although women are represented in greater numbers of students, faculty, and administrators in community colleges compared to four-year institutions, little has been intentionally done to increase equity for women in the community college (Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

Townsend and Twombly coined the term "accidental equity" to explain that there have been no major internal or institutional forces trying to make community colleges more equitable. Accidental equity resulted from the relatively low status of the community college among institutions in higher education, which they attributed mainly to low-cost tuition and limited or no admission standards (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Prestige hierarchies exist in the different classifications of higher education institutions (Nidiffer, 2002). This may explain why more women are represented at the lower levels of institutional status in community college's than at more prestigious four-year and research institutions.

Career Aspirations (Career Choice)

When surveyed, CAOs were asked whether they planned to seek a presidency in the future. More than half (70%) indicated no interest in a presidency (Appiah-Padi, 2014). According to Eckel et al.'s (2009) study, up to 75% of women CAOs had no intention or were undecided about pursuing a presidency. Some scholars have reasoned that gender disparity exists in higher education administration because women have lower aspirations for senior leadership

positions compared to men (Eckel et al., 2009; Garza et al., 2008). Garza et al. (2008) found mid-level women administrators are not motivated to move into more advanced positions, because they find high levels of job satisfaction in their positions. Garza et al. (2008) recommends that college officials look at what might make the senior leadership positions more appealing as well as redesign the positions to draw more women into those roles.

Dicke et al.'s (2019) research found that one's "gender role beliefs about gender specific responsibilities predict one's educational and occupation aspirations and choices" (see also Eccles et al., 1983; Schoon & Parsons, 2002). Gender beliefs about suitable social roles were related to educational and occupational attainment (Dicke et al., 2019). This study provided "some evidence that traditional gender role beliefs are one potential underlying psychological factor that can help explain gender disparity in attainment" (Dicke et al., 2019, p. 11).

Work-Life Balance

As a common theme throughout the literature regarding women administrators and presidents in their approach toward work-life balance issues, women must navigate struggles between traditional roles of women in the family and being in a managerial leadership role at work (e.g., Chliwniak, 1997; Madsen, 2008; Schipani et al., 2009). Women higher education administrators with children must negotiate their multiple roles and commitments as professionals and parents. Hochschild (1989), calls this the second shift where working women have the dual burden of paid and unpaid work. It especially affects working women who are mothers, particularly those with preschool age children (Hochschild, 1989). Hochschild (1989) study found that women in the 1970s. and 1980s were burdened with an extra month of 24-hour days of work a year compared to men due to the second shift. Van Gorp (2013), study found that the amount of time women spend on domestic unpaid work has decreased in the last 30 to 40

years, but “women are still disproportionately responsible for core household work, such as cooking, cleaning, and the more tedious aspects of childcare” (Van Gorp, 2013, p. 32). Van Gorp (2013) states that “until household tasks are divided evenly based on the amount of time each spouse spends working outside the home, there is a fear that the second shift will continue to be an issue for women” (p. 36). Kanter (1977, 2008) believed that once the proportion of women in the workforce reaches a critical mass, the work-life balance for women will become easier because women will advocate on behalf of such changes. Yet, women now comprise more that 50% of the workforce and work-life balance is still elusive for women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020; see also Mastracci & Arreola, 2016).

The 2017 edition of the American College President Study (ACPS) by the American Council on Education (ACE) found that 84% of presidents at two-year institutions were married and 86% had children. The same survey compared the percentage of women and men presidents from two and four-year institutions combined found that only 75% of women presidents reported being married and 74% reported having children, while 90% of male presidents were currently married and 89% had children. The survey further revealed that the percentage of women altering their career progression has only increased slightly from 30% of women presidents in 2001 to 36% in 2016. Although the ACPS provides a focus on the college presidency rather than CAOs, information learned from the ACPS provides helpful insight into why some women may or may not consider the path to the presidency.

The 2017 edition of the Pipelines, Pathways, and Institutional Leadership by the American Council on Education (ACE) survey found, similar to the presidential trend, women CAOs are also less likely to be married and have children (Johnson, 2017). Eighty-nine percent of the men CAOs reported they were currently married and 71% of the women CAOs reported

the same, while 87% of male CAOs and 73% of the women CAOs reported having children (Johnson, 2017). Similar to the ACE survey findings, Nobbe and Manning's (1997) research found that women administrators with children gave up or changed career goals when they had children. This may account for why women CAOs report not having children more than male CAOs. The importance of geographic mobility was also evident when 75% of college presidents at two-year institutions previously worked at a different institution prior to becoming president of their current institution (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Career advancement in higher education often requires relocation, which typically is not an option for women with children in school and in dual-career relationships (Marshall, 2009). There are similar characteristics between the domestic status and responsibilities (married/children/altering career to care for others) for both the CAO and college president positions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Joan Acker's (1990) Theory of Gendered Organizations as the theoretical framework to qualitatively describe how women in the position of CAO at community colleges understand the role gender plays in their career path experiences as well as their presidential aspirations. The findings benefit the field of higher education by providing deeper insights into the presidential pipeline for aspiring women leaders in academe. The knowledge gained from this study may be used to assist in diversifying the community college presidency.

It was not until the 1990s when feminist scholars started to combine the study of gender and organizational theory. According to Bolman and Deal (2010), the study of organizational theory in higher education focuses on structures, behaviors, and motivations of the organizational members. Feminist scholars began to explore how organizational theory was built on male

constructs and how the role of gender was completely overlooked. A key feminist scholar who coined the term "gendered organizations," Joan Acker sought to better understand how deeply gender is embedded in organizations (Acker, 1990). Her seminal work was an important because "gendered organizational theory makes gender bias, discrimination and privilege more visible in organizations" (Fishman-Weaver, 2017, p. 2). Once these issues are out in the open, they are impossible to put back in the background (Fishman-Weaver, 2017). Acker's work not only advanced the understanding of women in the workplace, but it also benefits all members of an organization.

Acker (1990) argued that gender inequality is built into the structure of work organizations where the organizational structure and hierarchy of positions are gender-based. Gendered organizations are associated with the varying levels of skill and responsibility required of positions and how the work is divided between the genders. Both Acker (1990) and Kanter (1977) found that work organizations have built their hierarchies on a gender-based divisions of labor, which marginalizes women and advantages men. Gendered organizations have masculine ways of operating that are deeply embedded within the organization (Acker, 1990). Eddy (2010) found that community colleges often incorporate traditional gender expectations into their organizational structure, where women hold lower-level positions and men are the top administrators. In these institutions, organizational behavior is based on historic male norms of leadership that are masculine in nature (Eddy, 2010).

Acker's (1990) research on the gender subculture of organizations helped explain the persistence of gender inequality in pay equity and job segregation. Acker's (1990) theory was built on the insights gained from Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) Men and Women of the Corporation. Kanter interpreted inequalities between men and women as resulting from where

women were situated in the organizational hierarchy and by the number of women represented within the organization. Kanter explained that gender inequality was structural and not related to the individual level behavior of men and women. This was important scholarly work used to identify the ways in which gender inequality is perpetuated over time. While the theory is dated, Acker (2012) specifically noted that although change has occurred, inequality persists which makes "developments in theorizing gender processes relevant" (p. 214).

Acker (1990) stated that organizational structure, hierarchy, and jobs are defined by male characteristics of masculinity where jobs and hierarchies are defined by abstract concepts that she calls the "disembodied or universal worker" (pp. 149-150). This is predicated on the assumption that the worker will have an unlimited commitment to their career. Attention to other personal obligations, such as family, is taken to imply lack of dedication to one's career. The ideal worker exists only for the work and has no personal obligations outside of the job (Acker, 1990).

Historically, this career model has worked for men by having a wife who is responsible for the care of all other aspects of life including the household, family, and community. This model may still work for men, but not for women who desire an upward trajectory in their careers. According to Eddy (2010), colleges are gendered organizations when they are constructed around the concept of the disembodied worker. Ward and Eddy (2013) found that "ideal workers" are rewarded for completely dedicating themselves to their jobs and duties. Women leaders are expected to meet the male-centric expectations of the worker who exists only for work and the organization. The disembodied worker is a major conceptual underpinning of Acker's theory of gendered organizations (Acker, 1990; Eddy, 2010).

Eddy (2010) incorporates Acker's (1990) theoretical framework in her research, purporting that community colleges are gendered organizations that reinforce traditional gender expectations. In these institutions, organizational behavior is based on historic male norms of leadership which are masculine in nature (Eddy, 2010). According to Amey and Twombly (1992), male norms of leadership are how women leaders are judged in the community college sector (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Often women leaders act in the same way as their counterparts to be considered a successful leader (Eddy, 2010).

Wheat and Hill (2016) described male norms of leadership as traditionally including masculine traits like "task-orientation, aggression, authority, determination, confidence, courage, independence, strength, and vision" (p. 2). This concept is supported by Kanter's (1977) notions of the "masculine ethic," the image of managers in organizations seen as tough-minded, having keen analytic abilities, and devoid of personal and emotional concerns in decisions. These masculine characteristics depict a "cognitive superiority in problem-solving and decision making" (Kanter, 1977, p. 143). Acker's (1990) concept of the "disembodied worker" is similar to Kanter's "masculine ethic" view, which represents the type of worker that is the best individual for a job.

In today's work world, women leaders face the need to not only be what society traditionally expects from women, such as being submissive, warm, and nice, and yet at the same time to display characteristics of the men who are seen as assertive, decisive, competent, and tough. These men and women characteristics of leadership are often seen as opposites, which creates a "double bind" for women leaders (Eddy, 2009). Kanter (1977) calls these "self-defeating traps" that women must navigate through in the workplace (p. 9). Acker (1990) asserted that gender differences in organizational behavior are because of the organizational

structure “rather than to characteristics of men and women as individuals” (p. 143). Kanter (1977) concluded that organizational structures are “gender neutral”, despite her own observations regarding the “masculine ethic” in management. According to Acker (1990),

> To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as “gender neutral.” Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender. (Acker, 1990, p. 146)

Townsend and Twombly (2007) also concluded that community colleges possess hidden institutional gendered norms that can marginalize women and minorities from leadership positions. Their research concluded that the community college is a gendered organization. Townsend and Twombly (2007) believe that these institutions have improved over the last few decades, but the organizational culture and structure do not serve women as well as they should be served.

Acker (1990) theorized that gendering occurs within organizations through five interacting processes. First, the construction of divisions along lines of gender, where men hold the highest level of positional power. Secondly, the construction of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, or oppose those divisions. Images of power are seen as masculine characteristics creating unequal power dynamics. Thirdly, the interactions between women and men, women and women, and men and men that enact male norms of dominance and submission. Organizational hierarchy and culture are based on dominance (masculine) and submission (feminine) constructs. Male norms of dominance that are traditionally viewed as

masculine include strength, courage, independence, leadership, and assertiveness. Male norms of submission are seen as feminine characteristics of being weak, communal, warm, sensitive, and cooperative. Dominance and submission are based on the general beliefs about responsibilities and behaviors deemed appropriate for women and men. Fourth, the process that produces gendered components of individual identity. Finally, gender is implicated in the fundamental ongoing processes of creating and conceptualizing social structures.

Acker (2012) added to her theory of gendered organizations theoretical framework by introducing the concept of "gendered substructure" as the processes and practices of categorizing organizations in ways that perpetuate gender inequalities. It refers to the often-invisible processes in organizations where gendered assumptions about men and women are identified as masculine or feminine. These gendered assumptions are deeply embedded and reproduced resulting in inequalities being perpetuated (Acker, 2012). Acker identifies the wage gap, gender segregation of jobs, gendered occupations, and hierarchical positions as some of the most common gender inequalities (Acker, 2012). Acker's concept of a gendered subculture of organizations helps describe the persistence of gender inequality in pay equity and job segregation.

Gendered Substructures of Organizations

Acker (2012) defined the gendered substructure of organizations as the processes and practices of categorizing organizations in ways that perpetuate gender inequalities. The gendering process occurs when organizational cultures support the reproduction of these processes and practices. An example would be gender differences assumptions and establishing wages based on these assumptions such as only men as managers and women only in specific roles or performing certain functions. "These gendering processes are, at a less visible level,

supported by gender subtext of organizing and a gendered logic of organization that links the persistence of gender divisions to the fundamental organization of capitalist societies" (Acker, 2012, p. 219). Summarized components of the gendered substructure include: Organizing processes; organizational culture; interactions on the job; gendered identities; gender subtext; organizational logic; and the gender neutral, abstract worker.

Organizing Processes

Acker (2012) stated, the "gendered substructure is created in the organizing processes in which inequalities are built into job design, wage determination, distribution of decision-making and supervisory power, the physical design of the workplace, and rules, both explicit and implicit, for behavior at work" (p. 215). An example of organization processes includes how job classification can diminish women's value through lower wage positions and by using generalized job classifications but paying men higher wages and clearly defining job descriptions. She noted that gendered systems of inequality are sometimes hidden in plain sight, as seen with the wage and job classification example (Acker, 2012, p. 216).

The Organizational Culture

Acker (2012) stated that a gendered substructure develops in an organization's culture, which is manifest in beliefs about gender differences and equality/inequality. These are seen in images, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and values. The organization's culture defines what is considered to be masculine or feminine, and what is acceptable or unacceptable. The theory of gendered organizations says that hierarchies contribute to gender segregation in organizations and the hierarchies that reinforce a masculine culture (Acker, 2012).

Interactions on the Job

The gendered substructure is perpetuated daily through "interactions between colleagues, and between those who hold different levels of power and that interactions may occur in formal or informal settings, which may happen in groups or one-on-one person conversations" (Acker 2012, p. 216). Acker (2012) noted that the power dynamic in gendered organizations typically advantages male norms and disadvantages women. Organizations and everyday workplace interactions contain normative societal gender expectations that privilege men and disadvantage women (Acker, 2012).

Gendered Identities

Because the gender substructure is fluid over time and place, an individual develops gendered identities while belonging to organizations as well as those acquired through a lifetime of experiences (Acker, 2012). For example, women in upper-level managerial positions can find themselves in a "double bind" related to their chosen management style. They may be pressured to behave like a stereotypical man, but this may result in being seen as too aggressive and competitive. These women are perceived negatively for not acting in a more typical feminine way; they may even be perceived as ineffective (West & Zimmerman, 1987). According to Allen et al. (2009), women who are new to the college presidency often behave and lead in male-normed expectations to ensure success. Some workers may believe that an effective leader exudes confidence, decisiveness, and assertiveness (Allen et al., 2009). All-important characteristics that provide their followers with a sense of comfort and security (Allen et al., 2009). West and Zimmerman (1987) call this "doing gender," where women change their style to manage more like a man to avoid being labeled as weak or incompetent.

Gendered Subtext

Acker's (2012) defined gendered substructure as "points to often-invisible processes in the ordinary lives of organizations in which gendered assumptions about women and men … are embedded and reproduced" (p. 215). Gendered subtext is a segment or part of gendered substructure. Gendered subtext and gender substructure are sometimes used very similarly. Aker differentiates them when she describes the concept when referring to gender subtexts as "explicit or implicit, written or just common practice, that shape the gendered process and structures" (Acker, 2012, p. 215) whereas substructure is the totality. These gendered subtexts shape many organizing functions and potentially replicate the gendered workplace (Acker, 2012). Acker uses the job evaluation system as an example of gendered subtext. A firm from Acker's (1989) study considered the system of job evaluations as gender-neutral, but evaluations were based on comparisons of jobs, job descriptions and job classifications. According to Acker (2012), the job evaluation system uses policies, guides, memos, and other texts to ensure fairness to all employees, but this system often perpetuates gendered organizational workplaces. Job classifications and descriptions are written with gender norms embedded in them defining the desired worker (Acker, 2012). The ideal worker described in the position is by carefully wording job content as either masculine or feminine, which can have a gendering effect in the workplace.

Organizational Logic

Acker (1990) referred to how organization segments are structured and how they all work together, noting that organizational logic as "an element of gendered subtext" (p. 217). Acker (2012) notes this was her original logic about organizations in general. Men tended to have higher levels of power in their high-level status positions in the organization because their jobs are seen as more complex in nature. Women occupied lower status positions because they are

associated with diminished levels of power within organizations (Acker, 2012). Acker's (2012) work defined organization logic as common understandings about how the organization is structured and how it operates but has now expanded and evolved such as team-based and increasing numbers of women in managerial positions. "Organizational logic is created and transmitted through several communications mediums (text, journals, books, lectures) and in schools of public policy" (Acker, 2012, p. 217). Acker (2012) acknowledges that women are now more represented in jobs categorized as management, but that in many organizations these management jobs still tend to preserve gender segregation through differentiation for management jobs and subtle job description differences for managerial positions.

The Gender-Neutral, Abstract Worker

Acker (2012) described the gendered substructure of the abstract worker as being gender neutral and representative of the "ideal worker" who has no other concern but performing only their established job duties during set hours and taking breaks at specified times. Such ideal workers are felt to be males because of their conforming abilities. As such, some organizations are more prone to hire males thereby producing gender segregation. Stereotypes still exist for women when it comes to jobs they are capable of and unencumbered to perform such as the typical secretary who is rarely, if ever, a male. Assertive women managers are too aggressive or difficult, but a male in the same position would be rewarded for the same assertiveness (Acker, 2012).

Guided and informed by Acker's (1990) concept of gendered organizations, this study explored the perceptions of women CAOs career paths and how it affected their aspirations of becoming a community college president. Community colleges' existing structures and processes create different experiences and expectations based along gender lines (Acker, 1990; Eddy &

Cox, 2008). Stereotypes and organizational structures may affect a CAOs career path by creating real or perceived barriers for advancement or age-related capabilities to perform a job. Work-life balance is often respected and offered to CAOs in community colleges, but the job demands and responsibilities of the community college president may not be highly conducive to ensuring work-life balance. The study will explore participants' perceptions on gender issues and work-life balance concerns for the participants. Despite community colleges being perceived as being more inclusive of women, they are based on hierarchical bureaucracies and on traditional organizational structures that favor men (Jones & Taylor, 2012) and thus gender issues such gendered substructures and subtext or organizational logic emerged for the study participants.

Summary

The chapter reviewed the relevant literature related to the problem statement. There exists limited research on community college women presidents' pathways. However, there is even less research specific to the career pathways of CAOs in community colleges. Research in this area has been mostly about successful women who made it to a presidency and their career paths.

The literature reviewed focused on systemic barriers that help explain some of the reasons why women are underrepresented in college presidencies. This study may assist in gaining a better understanding of how gender can influence the career pathways that women CAOs experience. Prospective women leaders and community college practitioners can then better understand the existence of barriers to advancement, and to improve institutional structure and culture in the community college.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to better understand the lived experiences of women who are Chief Academic Officer's (CAO) in public community colleges in the United States and learn more about the role gender played in their career paths and their presidential aspirations. My intention is to share my findings so that educational leaders can work intentionally to stop the perpetuating cycle of the underrepresentation of women in college presidencies. This study sought to answer two research questions.

RQ1: How do female chief academic officers understand the role gender plays in their career path?

RQ2: How do female chief academic officers understand the role gender plays in their presidential aspirations?

Research Approach

A basic qualitative research a was selected because it constructs meaning from how people make sense of their lives and their worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The primary goal of the basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research attempted to identify shared patterns of participants lived experiences of women CAOs in the public community colleges. Because the position of CAO is the most traditional career pathway to the presidency, this study will contribute to the knowledge base of how the college presidencies can become more gender diversified.

Participant Selection

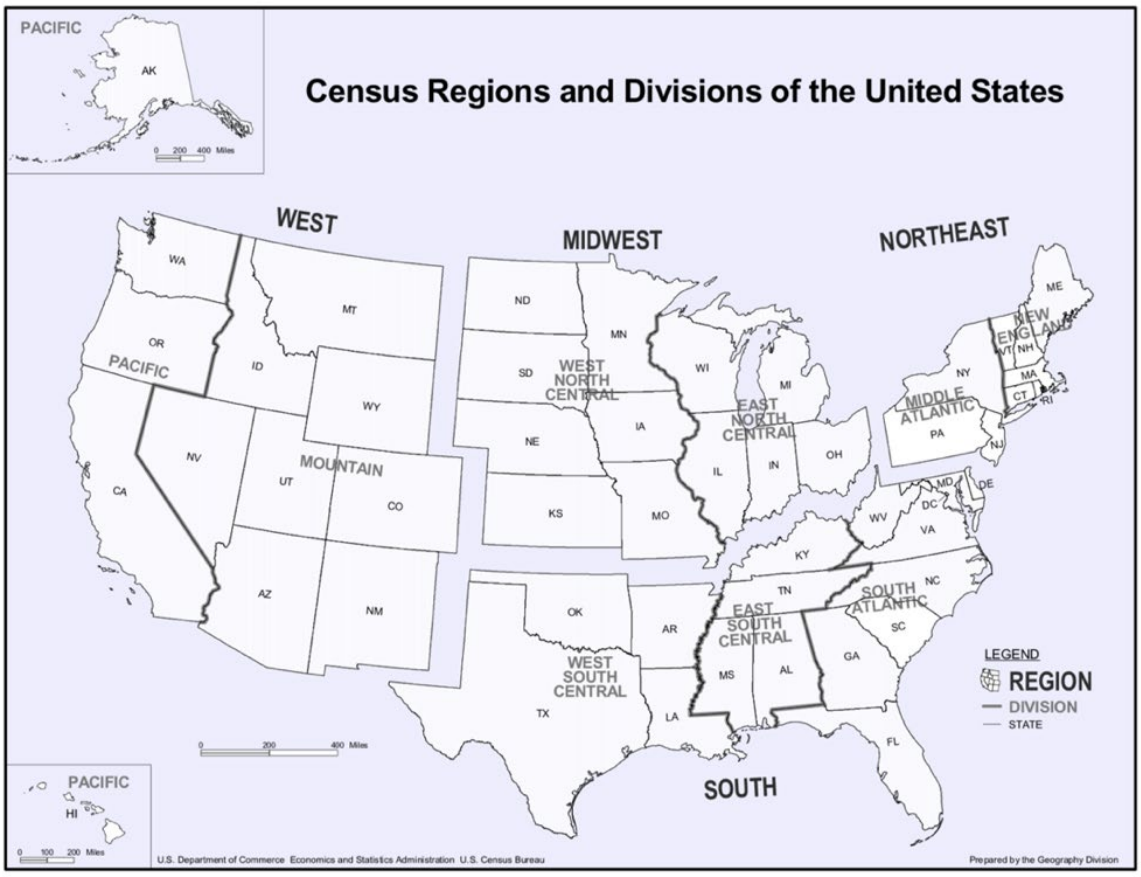
In 2018-2019, there were 1,339 community colleges in the United States and of these, 868 were public two-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2000, Table 317.10). These institutions are accredited by an agency or association that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or recognized directly by the Secretary of Education. This study defined the term public community college to include public two-year colleges that offer an associate degree. Typically, a community college has one senior leader identified as the CAO for the institution, who directs and oversees the academic programs of college.

The participants of the study were women CAOs currently employed at public community colleges in the Midwest. Although I did not know any of the potential participants personally, I believed that establishing a relationship of trust with study participants was important and achievable. Therefore, I selected the Midwest region where I have worked in community colleges for the past nine years to help build rapport with the participants. This helped ensure that authentic descriptions and discussions could be more easily elicited from the participants by myself. Secondly, the purpose of selecting one region was to help ensure a more homogenous representative group for analysis. Grouping nearby states together allowed for a larger sample size.

To sample all female CAOs from each of the 868 institutions was too large for this study. Therefore, the Census Regions and Divisions of the United States (2010) list was used to segment the United States into four regions: West, Midwest, South, Northeast (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Census Regions and Divisions in the United States (2010)



The Midwest region includes the Great Lakes states of: IL, IN, MI, OH, WI, and the Plain states: IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD (Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2019, rev. 2021). According to NCES (2019), the Midwest has a total of 222 two-year associate degree granting institutions. Forty-five have enrollments of 5,000-9,999 students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000), which is considered a large institution (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2021). There were 45 institutions identified from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Comparison Data system (2019), of these 45 institutions 24 had women CAOs. I contacted all 24 potential participants and there was a return of 11 women CAOs who agree to participate in this study. The qualitative sample size for this study was

further limited due to the finite number of possible participants who are female CAOs at large two-year public colleges in the Midwest.

In identifying the sample, this qualitative study used non-probability sampling in the selection of participants. Guest et al. (2006) found that nonprobability sampling is typically used for research that is field oriented and not based on statistical generalizability. It is also the most common method of choice in qualitative research. This method allowed me to solve qualitative problems by "discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking the occurrences" (Honigmann, 1982, p. 84, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). This helped me to select units from a population "that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insights and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). This sampling method is based on the subjective judgement of myself, rather than random selection. Purposeful sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique widely used in qualitative research, which involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Once the female CAOs were identified, I contacted each of the potential participants to invite them to participate in this study. I first contacted each prospective participant through an email followed by a phone call 2 to 3 days later. Once the participant agreed to participate, the informed consent form was sent by email, which provided potential participants with further detail on the study. After three failed attempts to contact the potential participant, I removed them from consideration. Telephone and e-mail communications were used to schedule the individual interviews. See Appendix A for a copy of the recruitment letter and Appendix B for the informed consent form.

Qualitative methods place primary emphasis on saturation, but “there are no published guidelines or tests of adequacy for estimating the sample size required to reach saturation” (Guest et al., 2006, p. 60). However, Guest et al. (2006) research found that “if the goal is to describe a shared perception, belief, or behavior among a relatively homogeneous group, then a sample of twelve will likely be sufficient, as it was in our study” (p. 76). Creswell and Creswell (2017) described saturation as the point when a researcher stops collecting data once new data no longer provides new substantive information. While this study only consisted of 11 participants, the point of saturation was met. There was no new information discovered in the data analysis and there was a redundancy of information being given by the participants.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted synchronously through Zoom, a web conferencing technology. This allowed for the interview to be conducted in real-time and record both audibly and visually. One of the advantages of web interviews was not being constrained by the participant's geographic location. The use of this technology also allowed me to later review the recordings for non-verbal cues for analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also used back-up audio recordings on an iPad for redundancy in case of technology failure. I wrote field notes immediately after each interview to capture any of my reflections. The use of audio and video recordings reduced the need for copious note taking during the interviews and allowed me to focus on the conversation.

Prior to beginning the interviews, participants were asked for consent to allow their interview to be audio and video recorded to ensure accuracy. I used one-on-one individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews to conduct a basic qualitative study of female CAOs at community colleges in the Midwest. The interviews were guided by a series of open-ended

questions (Appendix C Interview Protocol) with appropriate probes as needed. The semi-structured interview format allowed the questions to be more flexibly worded. This allowed me to respond to the current situation, to understand the participants' world view, and to develop new ideas on the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), open-ended questions are meant to guide the interview, but not to completely structure it. The participants were asked to reflect on their perceptions of their personal and professional experiences during their career path to CAO. The participants were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences to obtain the story or the interpretation of the interviewee (Merriam & Tisdell, 2012). Interviews were scheduled at the time of the participants' choice and lasted about 45 to 60 minutes in length. The interview audio recordings were transcribed verbatim in their entirety for the purpose of data analysis using TranscribeMe!, a professional transcription service.

Prior to conducting the interviews for this research, the study was first reviewed and approved by the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I maintained the highest ethical standard by adhering to the University of Georgia's IRB research protocol involving human subjects. This practice ensured that participants were protected from any harm related to the study (Gullemin & Gilliam, 2004). Interviews were conducted as soon as IRB approval was received. The participants remained anonymous and I made a concerted effort to take the necessary precautions to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in the study. All interview transcripts contained only the participant pseudonym and no other identifying markers (e.g., college affiliation). As the researcher, I kept a master list of all real names and pseudonyms in a location separate from the data to maintain anonymity, stored securely and then deleted under terms of data retention.

Demographic Information

As a secondary method of data collection, an informal demographic survey was conducted of personal and professional information prior to conducting the interview. I requested demographic information from each participant relating to such factors as age, race, ethnicity, educational attainment, marital status, number of children, person's highest degree earned, academic discipline, time worked in administrative positions, and position held prior to current position prior to the interviews (see Appendix D CAO Demographic Survey). These questions were in a .pdf-editable document sent to the participants and returned via email. The rationale for requesting the documents prior to the interviews was to enable myself to have a baseline of information to compare each of the participants and to see if any demographic patterns existed that informed the research further. I sorted the demographic information in an excel spreadsheet that was used to help me during the interview as well as in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Once recordings were transcribed, they were downloaded to the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. Analysis and organization of the data began as early as I collected data and was completed by the end of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research, data collection and analysis were simultaneous processes in which I engaged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The process was more intensive as the study progressed and once all the data had been collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that "all qualitative data analysis is inductive and comparative in the service of developing common themes or patterns or categories that cut across the data" (p. 297).

All data that was relevant to the research questions was identified and coded for analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used the inductive coding method to determine meaning from the

data. Initial coding and line-by-line coding process were used, to determine key words, which were then sorted into categories. Through sorting categories to find similar data, overarching themes began to emerge that began to tell a story of the participants' experience. A separate memo was used to document tentative themes or categories that applied across more than one interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of analytic coding involves the interpretations and reflection on the meaning derived from myself. This is an inductive and iterative process that resulted in the renaming of categories or the creation of subcategories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative scholars noted that credibility is key to whether research findings are believable. A credible report reflects how readers feel about the trustworthiness of the information (Tracy, 2010). Key concerns of any research are that it be trustworthy and ethical (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is paramount that I continually be mindful of any issues with the study's conceptualization and how the data are collected, analyzed, interpreted, and findings are presented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative approach to research engages in issues of trustworthiness for assessing the quality of a research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To enhance the trustworthiness, "qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to determine whether the process is credible" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1). All interviews were uploaded to the TranscribeMe! transcription service to have a written record of the data (Creswell, 2014). When the transcription was complete, I listened to each interview while following the written transcript to ensure the text was a verbatim representation of each interview. To further verify the accuracy

of the transcriptions, I utilized a peer reviewer who analyzed the raw transcripts and the codes assigned to the data to check for validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transferability concerns the aspect of applicability whether particular findings can be transferred to another similar context or situation, while still preserving the meanings and inferences from the completed study (Leininger, 1994). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), providing a transferability can be increased when the researcher uses technique of "thick descriptions" of the participants and research process in qualitative research. Providing a robust and detailed account of their experiences during data collection allowed me as the researcher and the reader to make our own transferability judgements about the research. To provide a richer and fuller understanding of the research setting, the day, time, and location type (e.g., office, coffeeshop) of the interview was also documented. The rationale was that this information may help the reader construct the scene that surrounds the research study from the daily lives of the participants, which may highlight any occurrence of implicit biases.

Researcher Reflexivity

My worldview that I brought to this research most closely aligns with social constructivism because I am drawn to seek meaning from the world in which I live and work. I believe these meanings are varied and complex for each person. With these views, I maintained a sense of balance to collect and analyze the data with the utmost integrity.

Finally, examining my position, or practicing reflexivity, represented a strategy to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. As with all qualitative studies, I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I came with my own life experiences and biases which could have impacted the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that researchers identify biases and monitor them "in relation to the theoretical framework and in

light of the researcher's own interest, to make clear how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of the data" (p. 16). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also noted some of the advantages of using the "human instrument" being the ability to be flexible, immediately process non-verbal and verbal communications, and to respond immediately for clarification and confirmation of accuracy. To identify my biases and assumptions, I used a journal to document my experience as the researcher when collecting and analyzing the data. This helped ensure the internal validly of the study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "even in journal articles, authors are being called upon to articulate and clarify their assumptions, experiences, worldview and theoretical orientation to the study at hand" (p. 249).

My personal and professional experiences have contributed to my interest in studying the role of gender in the career paths of female CAOs. During coursework in my public affairs Master's program, I became interested in women's access to political office and the possibility of my running for a state office. This partially influenced my interest in the study of the underrepresentation of women in the community college presidency. I specifically chose to investigate the phenomenon at public community colleges because I have been an administrator in this sector of higher education for the past 15 years. My varied administrative experiences, education, and training have piqued my own interest in seeking a college presidency in the future. It was not until I became a dean approximately six years ago and had experiences engaging with several women and minority presidents that I thought I could possibly be a college president. As a first-generation student/graduate, I never even dreamt of becoming a president at a college.

My first career experience after graduating with my bachelor's degree was as a police officer in Detroit. I chose a male-dominated career field in 1995. I never questioned my ability to

become a police officer because of my gender and felt strongly that I could do any job equal to that of a man. It has always been important for me to further my education and leadership experiences for career advancement, because I wanted to be treated as equal to male peers at my department. However, I now not only see the struggles of women in the workforce through a different lens, but in addition, I have my own experiences with how gender has played role in my own career path. It is important for women to be aware of the barriers other females have faced in their career paths and professional aspirations. This awareness cannot only change the trajectory of their own career path, but it may also influence opportunities for women at large. It is also not just women who need to change, but our society needs to confront the issues holding women back from either seeking or being selected for college presidencies.

Summary

This chapter presented the research design for the study, which was a qualitative design with an exploratory method of inquiry through the world view of social constructivism. Two research questions formed the basis of inquiry through open-ended interviews with 11 female CAO participants. Nonprobability sampling was used to select participants from community colleges in states in the Midwest United States. Inductive coding was used to identify categories and overarching themes from the transcribed interviews. Trustworthiness was demonstrated through thorough discussion of methods of data collection, analysis, and thoroughness as well as the use of researcher reflexivity. Transferability was ensured through recording and providing rich, thick descriptions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Women in senior leadership positions remain underrepresented in U.S. two-year colleges, particularly in the presidency role. To better understand women's motivation to seek a presidency, this study qualitatively explored how women Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) at two-year institutions understand the role gender plays in their career path and presidential aspirations. This chapter presents the findings of this study. Findings can inform higher education leaders about the factors that contribute to or inhibit women CAOs' perceptions about and intent to become a two-year college president.

In this chapter, I provide some demographic information of the eleven women who participated in this study, followed by the major themes that emerged from interviews of the participants. The findings are organized by each of the associated themes. Five themes emerged: (1) second shift; (2) undesirability of presidency; (3) encouragement and mentors; (4) organizational culture versus policy; and (5) gender stereotypes about women's professional abilities.

Demographic Profile of Participants

This study included 11 women currently Chief Academic Officers at their public two-year institution located in five states (IA, IL, MN, OH, WI) across the Midwest region (Great Lakes and Plain states) of the United States.

The basic demographic information presented in Table 2 describes the participants' (a) race/ethnicity, (b) age, (c) marital status, and (d) children. Participants included nine Caucasians,

one African American, and one Asian American. They range in age between 44 and 66, with a mean age of 56. When asked about their current marital status, the majority identified that they were currently married (n=8), divorced (1), widowed (1), and single (1). The divorced and widowed women reported being currently in a relationship with a partner. The average mean number of children was 1.36 and ranged from zero to three children. Seven of the participants had children, but four CAOs had no children.

To protect and maintain the participants' confidentiality in this study, I identify each participant with a pseudonym and present the demographic characteristics in an overall profile rather than using individual and biographical profiles. This procedure follows that by Madsen (2008), whose goal was to safeguard the identities of the ten university presidents she interviewed through providing "a summary of some basic collective demographic information about these women and their institutions" rather than providing descriptive portraits of each individual participant (p. 9).

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Marital Status	Children
Madeleine	White	47	Divorced - Remarried	0
Geraldine	White	54	Married	1
Ruth	White	65	Widowed, w/ partner	2
Amelia	White	57	Married	0
Sandra	White	50	Married	3
Eleanor	White	44	Married	0
Melinda	White	64	Married	2
Nancy	White	50	Divorced, w/ partner	3
Kamala	African American	55	Married	2
Harriet	White	61	Single	0
Hillary	Asian American	66	Married	2

Participants' career demographics (Table 2) were also obtained including: (a) highest degree; (b) academic field; (c) tenure status; (d) year of first appointment; (e) years of employment in higher education; (f) position immediate-prior; (g) years in current position; and (h) previous institution.

Regarding the highest degree of educational attainment, the majority of the group held a doctoral degree, four had a Ph.D., five earned an Ed.D., and one attained a J.D. One participant held a master's degree (considered a terminal degree for this field). Eight of the participants had academic degrees in higher education/leadership as their field of doctoral study. The overall number of years of employment in higher education ranged from 15-37 years. Nine of the 11 participants reported that they came up through faculty appointments; eight of those nine participants achieved tenure. The one participant that did not earn tenure reported that tenure was not offered at that institution. Four of the nine were hired as full-time faculty in their first position in higher education. Five of the nine started as adjunct/part-time faculty in their first position. Two of the 11 participants reported that they began their careers in higher education; one in student affairs and one in administration. Table 3 depicts the higher education career demographics of participants.

Table 3

Higher Education Career Demographics of Participants

Name	Highest Degree	Academic Field	Tenure	First Appoint-ment	Years Higher Educ.	Years Current Position	Previous Position	Previous Institution
Madeleine	Ph.D.	Leadership	Yes	Adjunct Faculty	18	2.5	Assistant V.P., Academic Affairs	Within institution
Geraldine	Ph.D.	Neuroscience	No	Administrator	15	6	Interim President (Community College)	Within same system
Ruth	Ed.D.	Higher Ed. Administration	No	Student Affairs	39	7	Associate Provost	Outside state
Amelia	Ed.D.	Career and Technical Ed.	Yes	Full-time Faculty	34	5	Chancellor (University)	Outside state
Sandra	Ed.D.	Higher Ed. Leadership	Yes	Adjunct Faculty	15	3.5	Interim V.P. Student Affairs	Within same institution
Eleanor	Ed.D.	Education Administration	Yes	Full-time Faculty	21	2.5	Associate V.P. of A.A. and S.A.	Within same system
Melinda	J.D.	Law	Yes	Adjunct Faculty	27	4.5	Assoc Provost & Dean of Applied Science	Within same institution
Nancy	Ph.D.	Education	Yes	Full-time Faculty	21	0.5	Assistant V.P.	Within same system
Kamala	M.F.A	Creative Writing	No	Adjunct Faculty	19	0.5	Faculty/ District Chair	Within same state
Harriet	Ph.D.	Higher Ed. Leadership	Yes	Full-time Faculty	37	1.5	Dean of Health and Wellness	Within same institution
Hillary	Ed.D.	Education	Yes	Adjunct Faculty	20	5.5	Dean of Academic Services	Within same institution

The number of years in their current position as CAO ranged from 0.5 to 7 years, with a mean of 3.5 years. When asked to identify their position immediately prior to becoming a CAO, one of the participants had been a chancellor at a university, and another had been an interim president at a two-year college. Five participants held associate/assistant vice president/provost positions, two came from the rank of a dean, and one had been an interim vice president. Five of

the participants were promoted to CAO within the same institution, three were within the same state system, one was from within the same state, and two moved from outside the state.

The Second Shift

Hochschild's (1989) study found that in the 1970s and 1980s, women were burdened with an extra month of work a year compared to men due to the second shift. The second shift refers to the burden of unpaid domestic labor and child-care duties that follow a day's work for pay outside the home (Hochschild, 1989; Van Gorp, 2013). Women have made significant progress in entering the workforce in the past 40-50 years, but the division of unpaid domestic labor is still gendered. "Women are disproportionately responsible for core household work, such as cooking, cleaning, and the more tedious aspects of child-care" (Van Gorp, 2013, p. 32).

Study participants' comments about second shift gender roles fell into two broad categories: (1) work-family caregiving and (2) work-life balance.

Work-Family Relations

Participants described their ability to balance their professional life with personal life throughout their careers. Ten of the participants shared that the timing patterns of their career path and advancement were heavily influenced by the role they play in their families. The most cited influence was that child-rearing responsibilities often delayed the timing of their career and associated advancement. Nine of the participants began their careers as faculty members, of which four participants started as adjunct faculty (part-time) members. The reason they stated for working only part-time was because they had young children. They commented that the primary caregiver in the family and the adjunct faculty position allowed them to work and raise their child simultaneously. They were happy to have a flexible job while raising their small children.

However, primary caregiving responsibilities were isolated to child-rearing and elder/parent care. The following offers some examples of how the second shift impacted the participants.

Kamala's career path was influenced by her family responsibilities. She was in a dual career household and quit her full-time job when the married couple began having children. The child-rearing of two small children was her primary responsibility in the family. She wanted to find a job that would allow her a flexible schedule, and the adjunct faculty member was a good fit for her. She stated, "When my children were very young, I appreciated having the flexibility of being an adjunct faculty member, that I could pick and choose those days and times."

While Harriet did not report having any children, she became the guardian for her 15-year-old nephew. "That's why I kind of put the doctorate on hold when I was at XXXX because I could have finished…four years earlier, but I chose to raise him and step up and do some things for that."

Melinda left her previous career as an attorney to find a work-life balance as an adjunct faculty member, and, after doing that, she progressed through the traditional academic ranks. She said,

> Well, since I spent most of my career as a faculty member and program chair, I will tell you that I got into academia because of the work-life balance. I'm actually a lawyer as my trade…I got out of the practice of law when I started having kids to raise my family.

Amelia resigned from a university presidency to become the primary caregiver for her elderly mother and father, which changed her career trajectory. The impact of the decision to provide care came later in her career. Amelia stated,

> So, it's a little bit different than balancing with small children. But with the elderly care…it got very difficult, so I ended up moving back [home]…I took a step backward, and I realized that when I was doing it.

Amelia was at the peak of her career as a university president, and the career move was to become a CAO at a two-year college. She stated, she thought that the move may hinder her ability to become a university president again in the future, but that hopefully, it is "not career-ending."

Eleanor stated she would not seek a presidency. Still, her decision was due to her role as a primary caregiver to her mother, and she felt it would also negatively impact her marriage. She noted,

> I have a very supportive husband, so I just think it would take a really big toll on my marital relationship, I think it would take a big toll on -- I am the primary caregiver for my mother… I just don't think it would align with what's going on in my life in terms to make it desirable.

Eleanor also focused explicitly on the toll of the president's job: "Well, I think when you're a president, you live it, you breathe it, and your family lives and breathes it. And so that balance that I seek, I don't know that I could achieve that as a college president."

One of the participants discussed that she had found a good work-family balance, even though she is responsible for much of the domestic work in her household. Geraldine stated, I think women

> still share a lot – in my family, I do the grocery shopping. I do the cooking. I make the doctor's appointments…I feel like I multitask really well. Because I think women, as in

> their role in the family, often are good at multitaskers. I take on those roles within my family.

Geraldine continued by speaking about all the duties women are still responsible for in the family unit. These domestic duties made the presidency undesirable for her (and women) to maintain a work-family balance. Based on her experience as an interim president, she stated, "the environment for the president job is demanding…one of the most important things is work-life balance…I know women that they work in jobs where they're expected to answer emails at 11:00 pm or on the weekends…maybe we need to create a better environment for women." Geraldine stated that the presidency is not best suited for women with family responsibilities or those desiring work-life balance. She elaborated on how she preferred her CAO position over the presidency. It offered her the balance she needed to enjoy her job and have time for her family responsibilities. She felt fortunate to have a direct supervisor (college president) who "definitely understands work-life balance. And that is an important thing for me being a mom and have other responsibilities, including dealing with some medical illness in my family." Geraldine also suggested that the work-life balance issue can be a challenge for women. Geraldine stated,

> I know that there are some institutions where people are less understanding about [work-life balance]. There's a little bit more of a pressure cooker environment. But I think we do our best work when you make sure that people have work-life balance, and that sometimes takes resourcing your organization.

Work-Life Balance

Several participants discussed how they know and appreciate that working in academia offers an excellent work-life balance. Several participants noted that their current position allows

for the balance they seek. Eleanor spoke about her ability to find balance throughout her career path. She stated,

> "I've be very intentional about that balance and drawing lines. So, whether those were timelines, whether those were goals or boundaries I set for myself, whether they were techniques I practice like whether it's managing a calendar in a certain way…I was always very intentional."

However, some participants struggled to balance their personal and professional lives. A positive work-life balance was not the case for all the participants, and others openly acknowledged that their work-life overshadowed their personal life. On the other end of the spectrum of a work-life balance was Nancy, who felt that because she loved her job, it was okay for her job to take the place of engaging in hobbies or other activities. She remarked:

> I don't have a lot of hobbies. I don't knit. I don't crochet. I don't do a lot of that. So, I go for walks. I work out, but work is what I love, right, and when they say you should always have a job that you love doing, this is what I love doing.

Upon asking Madeleine to describe her ability to balance her professional life with personal life throughout her career, she realized she had not taken a vacation in the last year. It appeared that Madeleine felt there was a relationship between vacation and achieving balance. "I am not good at it. [laughter]... I kind of do things all-in and everything's all-in. But I try to shut off at a certain point at night, as far as after 7:00, I try not to work." It seemed that Madeleine achieved work-life balance by "shutting off" regularly because of her all-in lifestyle, which did provide her with satisfaction.

Conclusion

Many of the participants in this study have experienced being the primary caregiver in the family during some point in their careers. Some juggled child-care and work, while others have tried to balance work and care for elderly parents. These are examples of how career women often work a second shift as mothers, daughters, spouses, etc. Also, several participants have not found an everyday balance between their personal and professional work-lives in their current roles. While some other participants talked about not having balance early in their careers, and now, they are finding a positive work-life balance they desire.

Perceived Undesirability of the Presidency

Study participants' comments about the (1) external nature and (2) meaningful work makes the presidency an undesirable career aspiration.

External Nature

Although not directly related to gender for undesirability, it was interesting that nine of the 11 women in this study noted the external nature of a presidency as undesirable or not a good fit for them (see Table 4). Kamala discussed the undesirability of the external duties of the presidential role because of not being hands-on within the college; the role exists externally within the community and businesses. She said:

> I feel like it's more of an outside position than it used to be…it's less hands-on, in the sense of day-to-day operations and more out in the community trying to drum up support through the community, trying to get more support for the College Foundation, trying to get bonds passed, trying to see what kinds of programs we can partner with different businesses.

Melinda also conveyed that she would be retiring soon and that the external nature of the job was undesirable to her because she was comfortable in her position. She said, "I think it's a very political job because the trustees are people who…are appointed by the governor of the state." Madeleine had similar concerns about a presidency, "I just feel like it's a politician. That role has become external and schmoozy, and that has never been desirable for me." Madeleine identified herself as introverted and said she had to psych herself up to attend benefits and other functions. However, she remained undecided about pursuing a presidency. She said she might be interested, but only if the "right fit" came along. When asked what she meant, she referred to a college where she felt comfortable and that the college would be a good fit for her.

Hillary's stated, "the presidency is not very desirable because the role has changed." She expounded further, saying that "the work of the foundation is going to be so important to getting any of the frills that you want." She felt that institutions now need gifts even more because operational budgets are so lean and the downturn in enrollment. Interestingly, Hillary is the participant slated to move into the presidential college position in 2023. While she desires the position personally, she realizes how the role has changed (which makes it undesirable to some) and her challenges.

Geraldine elaborated on undesirability, "(As CAO) I like not having to think about some of the business components… and the political components and the external relationship components that you have to necessarily spend more of your time with as a president." Notably, she gained perspective during her one-year interim presidency to realize she prefers the internal-facing CAO role. By internal-facing, Geraldine referred to her preferred work within the college with faculty and students in the CAO role. Once the interim position ended, she decided

to step back from the presidency role to support the academic mission of another college more directly as a CAO.

Table 4

Presidential Aspirations of Participants

Name	Will or Will Not Seek Presidency	Reason
Hillary	Yes	Undesirable – Succession
Sandra	Yes	Desirable – Need Encouragement; Good Fit
Ruth	No	Undesirable – External Nature (negative)
Melinda	No	Undesirable – External Nature (negative); Age/Retire
Eleanor	No	Undesirable – Eldercare (mother); Marriage
Harriet	Undecided	Undesirable – Age/Retire; Good Fit
Nancy	Undecided	Undesirable – External Nature (negative)
Geraldine	Undecided	Undesirable – External Nature (negative)
Madeleine	Undecided	Undesirable – External Nature (negative); Good Fit
Kamala	Undecided	Undesirable – Need Encouragement
Amelia	Undecided	Desirable – External Nature (positive); Good Fit (University Only)

Meaningful Work

Five participants commented that the presidency was undesirable because of the related typical duties they felt were not meaningful. Only one participant felt the position was a good fit for her personally. They spoke of the career satisfaction they experienced in their current position as CAO. They noted that they enjoyed their CAO position because it offered an internally focused position working with other faculty and students. They seemed to perceive the CAO duties as more associated with the internal side of the college focused on the academics and personnel (which they find to be meaningful work). At the same time, the presidency was more focused on external relations (not as meaningful).

Conclusion

The perceived undesirability of the presidency was a significant finding in that all but two participants found the job undesirable for themselves. Several participants noted the aspect that least appeals to them was the external nature of the position. The participants wanted to feel they are engaged in meaningful work, and they stated that being a CAO brings that type of career satisfaction. They perceive their position as CAO as being more internally facing, focusing on academics, students, and faculty.

Encouragement and Mentors

Ten of the 11 participants reported they did not engage in any formal mentoring relationships. However, eight participants spoke of informal mentors who have encouraged them throughout their careers. These relationships were significant during crucial decision points about the trajectory of their careers. For these findings, the following was the definition used for mentoring: "Mentoring is a personal learning partnership between a more experienced professional who acts as a guide, role model, coach, teacher, and sponsor and a less experienced professional" (Searby & Tripses, 2006, p. 32).

Unintentional Career Pathways

None of the participants provided comments that indicated an aspiration to become a CAO when they began their careers. As presented in Table 2, nine of the participants entered the field of higher education through the faculty ranks, respectively, both as an adjunct and full-time faculty. This finding is consistent with studies that found the traditional pathway beginning as a faculty member and ending with a presidency (Garza et al., 2008; McKenney & Cejda, 2001). The remaining two participants started their careers in student affairs and administration. Most often, the participants had their first administrative work experience when they either became a

department chair or had pseudo administrative duties. The administrative work made them realize they enjoyed the nature of the work, and ultimately, they ended up serving in positions of college leadership. Amelia stated,

> I found that I liked administration a lot. I mean, I enjoy teaching fine, but I did like administration, and so after a couple of years of Department Chair, I was asked to move into central administration as Associate Provost.

Encouragement by a mentor to pursue and accept a position was an important catalyst for several of these women. Eight of the participants also reported being asked or encouraged by a mentor to apply and accept a new position at some point in their career path. Many felt unqualified, questioned their abilities for a job, or otherwise lacked the confidence to move into a different position or career path. Some stated they were comfortable in their current roles and that encouragement from a mentor helped them realize the possibility. In other words, they initially lacked intentionality. For example, Hillary described her overall career pathway,

> At each turn, I had someone say, "Would you consider this?" I never started off with, "This is where I want to end."… I'm one of those women that always is, "Really, can I do that?" I didn't have the ambition to do it. But people will say, "Yes, we think you can. Yes, you're a good fit."

Five of the participants indicated that they only moved into the CAO position because a mentor had encouraged them to apply and accept the position. Kamala described her experience when the leader of a professional development training she attended came up to her and encouraged her to apply for her current job.

> There's a position open at XXXX College. XXXX is a smaller college. I think you can manage this. You're already doing some of these things. I'm going to tell the search guy

> who you are and to reach out to you." And I said, "Okay. Fine."…but the more I went through the interview process, the more confident I felt that you know what? I can do this.

Participants indicated that their encouragement came from multiple mentors throughout their careers. These mentors included both men and women supervisors and colleagues. The mentors could pass along what they had learned through their experiences, knowledge, and connections. These mentoring relationships were more organic and informal in nature. The importance of professional encouragement was discussed regarding the participant's career pathways to CAO. Their comments indicated it was important for women who considered a presidential position. Yet ten of the participants reported they were still not using any formal coaching or a formal mentoring program.

Only Sandra reported working with an executive coach. The encouragement she received after a 360 evaluation was the kind of encouragement she needed to hear about becoming a president. She said, "the executive coach's words were, "You are consistent – you are viewed in a very consistent manner"…you should be seeking the presidency." Sandra stated she would be looking for a presidency at a college that would be the right fit for her.

Conclusion

Mentors played an essential role for the majority of the participants regarding their career trajectory by providing needed encouragement. Although these relationships were informal, they were nonetheless significant in their career pathway. The importance of encouragement cannot be overstated. Yet only one participant had taken steps to engage in professional development to advance her career. During one of the sessions, she was encouraged to seek a presidency and has now started that search.

Organizational Culture versus Policy

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits an employer from treating you differently, or less favorably, because of your sex, which is defined to include pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], n.d., Laws enforced by EEOC, para. 1). This law also prohibits employment decisions based on stereotypes (unfair or untrue beliefs) about abilities and traits associated with gender. More specifically, sex discrimination in work situations, the law forbids discrimination when it comes to any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, and any other term or condition of employment (EEOC, n.d., Sex based discrimination, para. 3). This law has prompted organizations to develop explicit policies and procedures for addressing sex discrimination [gender discrimination] in the workplace to avoid legal liability. For this study, the policies discussed in this study are about sex discrimination [gender discrimination] as it relates to organizational culture.

Study participants' comments about organizational culture versus policy fell into two broad categories: (1) culture eats policy for breakfast and (2) good old boys club.

Culture Eats Policy for Breakfast

No matter how good a policy is written, it relies on the organizational culture for a successful implementation. When organizational cultures and policies do not coincide, it affects how it operates. One of the interview questions asked participants to comment on how to increase gender diversity in senior leadership positions. The role of gender's impact on culture, organizational policies and procedures, and organizational structure was discussed. A few participants spoke about the need to change organizational culture rather than the policies and procedures to increase gender diversity. Further, several comments indicated that policies and

procedures could say anything, but there will be no change if the culture does not support them. The saying goes, "culture eats policy for breakfast" sums up this dynamic.

Melinda discussed the importance of having women on the college or system Board of Directors for a balanced representation of men and women. The Board of Directors controls the direction of the president and the college; therefore, they have a lot of influence on the institution's culture, policies, and procedures. She remarked:

> Every community college you're going to talk to has all these non-discrimination policies. All right? So, it's not as if there's something in the policies or even in the college procedures that would lead to women being held back. It's really in the mentality of the people who are running the institution, and when you're at the top of an organization, it's going to be the president, and it's going to be the board of trustees.

Kamala chose to work at her current institution because she felt that her college president had built a culture of diversity and inclusion. She stated,

> This president has put forth and has shared this belief system that "I want this college to be diverse and inclusionary, I am going to put my money where my mouth is." Every college has diversity plans. Every college has goals and objectives, strategic plans to do things like that… it's obviously on paper, but also in action.

Ruth spoke about organizational structure, which impacts the organization's culture to increase gender diversity. She stated,

> I'm not sure that there's organizational structures that are any better. I find organizational structures are like closet organizers, all the same stuff is in there, you just switch it all out…I don't know that it matters much. I think that we just have to keep putting ourselves in the position and say we want that.

Good Old Boys Club

During the discussion on how to increase gender diversity in senior leadership positions, some of the participants related it to discussing the "good old boys club" as a barrier to gender diversity. The “good old boys club” is an informal network of men who mutually support other men.

Throughout her career, Amelia described experiences that were her evidence that the "good old boys club" still exists, which contributed to her perception that it's easier for a man to achieve career success. Amelia also spoke of the quandary and difficulty maneuvering other colleagues' perceptions of women leaders. In discussing how men and women are selected as presidents, she stated,

> There is still a 'good old boys' club out there. I look at who gets these jobs…I think it is easier for a man…I think it's often more about – politics or personality than the person's track record of accomplishments. Both men and women serve as presidents; only a select few get in, and it is not always because of the person's record of accomplishments.

Eleanor also stated, "there are still 'boy's clubs' that you have to work through and manage." Sandra discussed that in her current position, a previous president who overtly treated women differently:

> I had a very difficult president who would treat – I'll just be honest, treated women differently than men. And I had to work harder. I had to smile more. I had to just be better than. And it took me a while to realize I was in that. But that was a pretty serious challenge for me.

Sandra stated that she was going to get through it by "acknowledging the problem and working around it, so to speak." She further said, "I found things that I could leverage and hold

control over. There were times when I had to call it out. And I did call it out." In contrast, Madeleine perceived that her outspoken nature had hindered her career. "I think I am outspoken, and that is not something that always goes over well, especially with men. One of the barriers to gender diversity is the *good old boys club* in organizations with subtle undertones of discrimination."

Conclusion

Gender diversity in any organization, specifically in the two-year college system, is essential. According to the participants, colleges have been working to create a workspace that makes women feel safe and included through organizational policies. According to some of the participants, it does not matter how solid your policies are, and members of your team will hold back its efficacy if they don't share in the proper culture. Some participants also perceived the *good old boys club* to be a barrier to gender diversity.

Gender Stereotypes About Women's Professional Abilities

Gender stereotypes exist and are embedded throughout our society, and they are transmitted through the median, social interaction, and socialization and often promote gender discrimination. Social role theory explains that men and women acting according to their social roles are often segregated along gender lines and that this functions to confirm gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1987, 1997; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). The participants' comments about gender stereotypes fell into two broad categories: (1) perceptions about age and (2) financial acumen.

Perceptions About Age

For Eleanor and Madeleine, gender and age were related to early gendered experiences in their careers. As women, they felt the need to change their appearance and that as women, they

needed to prove themselves to others constantly. Eleanor and Madeleine both spoke about how age was also a barrier; specifically, it created challenges in how colleagues and students perceived them.

Eleanor purposely changed her appearance to intentionally look older. She remarked:

> The barriers early on were age. So, I accepted a dean position at 29 years old. And that was not -- that's not normal, right? And so, there was certainly a way in which I interviewed and dressed for that interview, did my hair, those kinds of things to create a perception of being older. And I did that for quite a while.

Madeleine believed that both age and gender were barriers early in her career:

> A lot of it has to do with being a woman and being young. I was a chair when I was, what, 33. Even being a faculty member in your 20s is hard. Especially at a community college when your students are older than you are, and asking you, "Well, what makes you qualified?" So that was a barrier.

Financial Acumen

Comments from some participants indicated that traditional gender stereotypes still exist and can affect today's women who consider a college presidency. For example, having been chosen to become the next college president at her current institution, Hillary had been advised by a woman's predecessor that "trustees will walk all over you if you show that you're a woman who doesn't understand money." Hillary commented that as a CAO, she did not have to deal with the college-wide finances issues, which she will need to do as a president. Hillary, the gender stereotype about women's having poor financial acumen was something that women who seek a presidency would have to face head-on. Hillary seemed appreciative of forewarning on this topic from the colleague and her predecessor's willingness to share experiences that could help Hillary.

Hillary stated now she makes a concerted effort to work closely with the chief financial officer at her institution to understand organizational finance better.

Conclusion

Two participants noted stereotypes about age and gender as real barriers. Both were younger than typical for their faculty role and were also women. To counter the stereotype, they altered their appearance and interacted with others to perhaps receive more respect. Another stereotype that women face is that they have poor financial acumen.

Summary

The findings of this study were derived from the interview of the 11 women participants. Key findings were organized along with the two research questions and their associated thematic categories. The interviews explored the role gender played in each participant's career pathways and their presidential aspirations to help understand why more women CAOs do not transition to the college presidency.

The second-shift theme emerged related to the unpaid work the participants provided as primary caregivers for children and elderly parents. Also, the finding indicated how difficult it is to find an everyday balance between their work outside the home and personal lives. Seven participants had children, and the majority had a partner/spouse; hence, family relationships and work-life balance were vital to them. A flexible job was essential for them to handle family and caregiver responsibilities. For many participants, their position as a CAO or job in academia did offer them the work-life balance they wanted and needed. They entered higher education for faculty positions knowing that it was likely their roles would be flexible enough for them to achieve work-life balance.

The second theme was the perceived undesirability of the presidency. When queried to describe the role of the college president in terms of its desirability and whether they will intentionally seek the position in the future, only two stated they would certainly do so. Six were undecided, and three clearly said they did not aspire or want the role of the college president. The presidency was undesirable because it was an "external-focused" position, meaning that the job's duties, activities, and functions worked in the external environment (external to the college), such as in the community with many public events and speaking engagements. Participants noted the position was quite political in nature, which never appealed to them. Elaborating on the external nature of the presidency, it was reported as not being "meaningful work" when compared to their work within the college as a CAO, which many felt is very meaningful work—working with students, improving things within the college, and contributing personally to the quality of academics. The notion of not being a "good fit" personally contributed to the research. Many participants have considered the position, are acutely aware of its responsibilities, and are self-aware enough to know it is just not for them.

The third theme was about the unintentional career pathways of the participants. At the beginning of their careers, none of the participants aspired to become CAOs. Many participants noted that it was the encouragement from respected others during their career, rather than their intentionality or ambition, that led to them accepting a CAO position. Several noted feeling unqualified for the CAO position, which was pointed out as a perceived barrier. Encouragement often came from a supervisor, mentor, or colleague, individuals within whom they had connections.

The fourth theme was about organizational culture versus policy in relation to gender discrimination. Some barriers were felt to exist at the organizational level related to gender.

Participants noted that there was a perceived imbalance at times, such as the gender make-up of the Board of Directors. It was pointed out that organizational policies and procedures were not an issue. Still, it was the organizational culture where gender barriers existed or that mentalities at higher organizational levels contributed to gender inequities.

The last theme was about the stereotypes about age and gender, which were noted to be real barriers by two participants; both were younger than typical for their respective positions. To counter the stereotype, they altered their appearance and interacted with others to perhaps receive more respect. Another stereotype that women face is that they have poor financial acumen. One of the participants spoke about how she was advised to talk with the Board of Directors about college fiscal issues.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Women are underrepresented as the chief executive officer in U.S. higher education institutions today. This study sought to examine the perceptions of women who are chief academic officers (CAO) in public two-year colleges in the U.S. and learn more about the role that gender played in their career path and their presidential aspirations. Findings from this study can assist educational leaders in consciously and proactively developing strategies that will encourage experienced women professionals to consider college presidencies, thereby increasing women in higher education leadership positions.

Using Acker's (1990) conceptual model of gendered organizations as the theoretical framework, this basic qualitative study provides insight into how gender played a role in the participants' career pathway and presidential aspirations. This chapter presents a discussion and implications of the study framed around the two research questions. Research Question One asked how do female chief academic officers understand the role that gender plays in their career path and was organized by the following themes: (1) second shift; (2) encouragement and mentors; (3) organizational culture versus policy; and (4) gender stereotypes about women's professional abilities.

How do Female Chief Academic Officers Understand the Role that Gender Plays in Their Career Path?

Second Shift

Related to work-family relations regarding the caregiving role contributed to their career pathways. The most cited influence by the participants was that child-rearing responsibilities often delayed the timing of their career and associated advancement. Findings from this study support Nobbe and Manning's (1997) finding that women administrators with children gave up or changed career goals when they had children. The participants in this study made career choices based on their familial responsibilities that impacted their career opportunities. They cited that flexibility, and a positive work-family relation were vital to the career choices, which allowed them to accommodate all of their responsibilities.

While findings herein found that some participants made the hard choice to forgo career advancement, my findings did not support Kanter's (1977, 2008) theory that the work-life balance will become easier once a critical mass of women is reached in the workforce. She contended that an increase in the number of women would change the male-dominant culture in organizations. "Critical mass, although not identified as a concrete threshold (Kanter 1977, 2008), is around one-third of the workforce" (Mastracci & Arreola, 2016, p. 137). Currently, women have surpassed the critical mass threshold in the overall workforce (50%) in the United States (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Yet, women still face barriers to the top office, as evidenced in interview comments and as seen in the number of women in the two-year college presidency (36%) nationally.

The theme of the second shift also relates to Acker's (1990) work on the disembodied worker norm. Several participants acknowledged that their work-life overshadowed their

personal life, and one participant stated she did not have hobbies or interests outside of work. Another participant said she becomes so emersed in her work that she has even forgotten to take a vacation. These participants illustrate Acker's (1990) concept of the "disembodied worker," where the worker is wholly devoted to work and has no personal responsibilities apart from work (Acker, 1990). This is built on the gendered organizational masculine norms where these ideal workers have someone at home to handle all their personal obligations (Acker, 1990).

Acker (1990) describes this in terms of masculine characteristics, which perpetuate gender inequality rooted firmly in community colleges' organizational structures (Eddy, 2019). Female workers often find incongruence between their socialized caregiving roles, not having a partner who cares for their personal needs, and the consequent impact on their work and career (Eddy, 2019). This reversed norm leaves women to struggle to balance their professional and personal lives (Eddy). Perhaps changing the status quo of the disembodied worker model will allow women to be on a more equitable career path with their male counterparts. "It is possible more women in the academe may seek advance positions if they saw models and norms of a balanced lifestyle, work-family integration, and institutional recognition of the intersection of gender and work" (Ward & Eddy, 2013, para. 10).

Encouragement and Mentors

The career path for most participants in this study began in academe as an adjunct or full-time faculty member, progressing to departmental chair/dean, and eventually becoming a CAO. This finding is similar to studies that found that the traditional pathway for CAOs began as faculty members and ended with a presidency (Eddy, 2009; Garza et al., 2008; McKenney & Cejda, 2001). While many participants from this study moved along the traditional academic career path, none intentionally began their path to become a CAO. It was not until later in their

careers that participants entertained becoming a CAO when they received some encouragement to pursue the position.

Being motivated by informal mentors' encouragement was common throughout several participants' careers and seemed critical in motivating them to seek career advancements. Several participants reported that they had been asked and encouraged at some point in their careers by informal mentors or other individuals to accept or apply for other academic positions. Participants stated they felt unqualified, questioned their abilities for a job, or lacked the confidence to move into a different position or career path. They appeared to need the support of encouragement, and when that happened, it seemed to spur them to reach further in their career.

Findings also revealed that as the participants moved farther up the career ladder to CAO, they needed less encouragement overall to pursue the position. Only a few participants indicated that they probably would not have made the career move to CAO without this support. Perhaps these participants have not sought a presidency because they have not received the needed encouragement. This was similar to what Eddy (2009) and Madsen (2008) found; if it were not for the encouragement from mentors, they might not have considered the presidency.

According to Eddy (2009), most women college presidents did not plan to become a president. Eddy (2009) stated that, unlike male peers, women's lack of career planning "did not necessarily expose themselves to opportunities that would help them prepare for leading a college" (p. 20). Eddy (2009) reported that men "sought their presidencies through the encouragement of mentors, through promotions throughout the years, and often with an intentionality that was lacking in the female participants" (p. 21). It seems likely that these apparent differences in how men and women plan their careers are rooted in gender. There are no straight lines in life, but career planning means thinking big while being flexible to opportunities

that come up. The more you know what you want in your career, the more precise are the possibilities.

Organizational Culture versus Policy

Acker (1990) argued that gender inequality is embedded in work organizations where the organizational structure and hierarchy of positions are gender-based. Gender discrimination undertones make it less visible but are seen in the language in job descriptions, ratings for performance evaluations, images of men in positions of power in institutional literature, and salary disparities between women and men (Acker, 1990). Acker (2012) noted that since her work approximately two decades later, gender imbalances still existed. Acker (2012) argued that gender imbalances are attributed to gender substructures, noting that "these gendering processes are, at a less visible level, supported by gender subtext of organizing and a gendered logic of organization that links the persistence of gender divisions to the fundamental organizations of capitalist societies" (p. 219).

The participants discussed the role of gender's impact on culture, organizational policies, and procedures, seeming to affirm Acker's (2012) points. Several of the participants in this study acknowledged the importance of having gender non-discrimination policies and procedures, but in many instances, stated that their college already had them in place. Participants noted that the organizational culture needed to be changed regarding gender equity and diversity in the workplace.

Several participants also referenced the "good ole boys club" as an organizational cultural barrier women face in the workplace. According to Cullen (2019), there is a gap between men and women, where men "can schmooze, network, and interact with more powerful men in ways that are less accessible to women" (p. 3). This becomes a self-perpetuating cycle where male

managers disproportionately promote male employees, who continue the process by fostering other men (Cullen, 2019). Although organizations may not technically exclude women, when women members are treated as outsiders, they do not feel welcomed or part of the professional group. Gray and Barbara (2013, as cited in Cullen, 2019) found that 81% of women say they feel excluded from relationship building at work and after work hours socializing. This lack of social networking opportunities may impact their career trajectory and aspirations.

These were essential findings. Higher education institutions have been pursuing equity and diversity within their organizations. Institutions need to have non-discrimination policies because they clarify what is not acceptable behavior and the consequences for failure to comply. Yet, "traditional employment anti-discrimination efforts have largely ignored the role that work culture plays in perpetuating workplace discrimination and segregation" (Green, 2005, p. 625). Institutions cannot be blind when it comes to a gender-discriminatory organizational culture. Anti-discrimination policies that rely on a punitive approach are necessary but insufficient to combat discrimination. As the adage goes, "Culture eats policy for breakfast!"

Gender Stereotypes About Women's Professional Abilities

According to comments shared, gender bias experienced through stereotyping was an issue for a couple of participants early in their careers. Earlier in their career, these participants perceived that they were judged by their young age, and therefore, they altered their appearance to look older. Their comments also revealed that because of their gender, they felt continually judged by students and peers more harshly than their male counterparts. Although both participants have successfully moved into the second-highest position in their institution, one is still undecided about the presidency, and the other will not pursue it. Perhaps, the gender bias they perceived may have impacted their career paths and possibly their long-term career.

Responses to Research Question Two on how female CAOs understand the role that gender played in their career aspirations was organized by the following themes: (1) second shift; (2) perceived undesirability of presidency; and (3) gender stereotypes about women's professional abilities.

How do Female Chief Academic Officers Understand the Role Gender Plays in Their Presidential Aspirations?

Second Shift

The timing of life events affected the participants' decisions about how to structure their work and family relations. For example, a couple of participants spoke about prioritizing family responsibilities over their presidential aspirations. They both are currently performing prescribed gendered roles as the primary caregiver to their parent(s). For example, one participant could no longer balance being the primary caregiver for her parents and her work responsibilities. Therefore, she gave up her university presidency and moved closer to her parents to be the primary caregiver. She hopes that this career move will not impact any future opportunities for another university presidency. She still has presidential aspirations, but she worries that the stigma of working at the community college level as a CAO for several years may impact her chances to return to the university level. Another participant stated she would not seek a presidency due to her work-family relations role as the primary caregiver for her mother and role as a wife. She believed that the presidency would take too big a toll on her marriage, thus serving as a barrier to pursuing a presidency.

These findings are consistent with Madsen's (2008) research that found that women college presidents also must navigate struggles between traditional gender roles in the family and their leadership roles at work. This also supports Hochschilid's (1989) depiction of the "second

shift" that working women experience. Both of the afore mentioned participants still maintained full-time employment and worked a second shift as the primary caregiver to their parent(s).

Several of the participants acknowledged the importance of their responsibilities in the family and were unsure that their everyday balance was something they could maintain as a president. Perhaps, it is likely that if women do not find ways to balance their work and family relationships, the systemic cycle of gender positional disparity will continue.

Perceived Undesirability of the Presidency

According to Amey et al. (2002), the CAO is the president's second in command in the organizational hierarchy. According to Murray et al. (2000), experience as second in command offers the CAO vital experience to help prepare him or her for leading an institution in the future. Yet, a majority of this study's participants noted that the position of the president was undesirable, and the most cited reason was the external nature of the functions of the job (see Table 4). Most participants seemed to perceive the presidency as an undesirable position primarily because of the need to be engaged in external relations such as fundraising and community events, which many felt was not "meaningful work" compared to their work as CAO as being more meaningful work. Several participants stated that they were happier working internally in supporting the college's core mission (academics) rather than working externally with stakeholders, partnerships, and being the "face" of the college.

In higher education, the roles of CAO and president do not overlap significantly, even though the position of CAO is considered the second in command. The move from CAO to the presidency is often perceived as a career change, because of the incongruence between the roles (Appiah-Padi, 2014). There has been some related research that has indicated that

> doctorate-granting and baccalaureate institutions revealed that doctorate-granting CAOs who tended to spend moderate-to-significant time on typical presidential functions, such as fundraising, fiscal management, strategic planning, alumni relations, and economic development, were more likely to move into the presidency (43.5%) than CAOs from baccalaureate institutions (15.7%), who typically did not perform those functions" (Appiah-Padi, 2014, p. 7).

Perhaps it is possible to redesign the CAO position to include some of these types of traditional presidential responsibilities so that CAOs may find the presidency more desirable. There is no research on CAO job redesign at the two-year college level. However, perhaps by overlapping the two positions women would find the presidency more desirable through these experiences. Then the CAO could become more of an actual pipeline to the presidency for women CAOs at two-year colleges.

Gender Stereotypes About Women's Professional Abilities

Another long-standing gender stereotype is that women have poor financial acumen. This is a deeply embedded patriarchal attitude in which women are thought to have low levels of financial literacy. Financial decision-making resulted in men having the power in a relationship, leaving women dependent. It was not until the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA) enacted a law in October 1974 that made it unlawful for any creditor to discriminate against any applicant, concerning any aspect of credit transaction, based on sex and other protected classes of individuals (ECOA, 1974). This law made women legally able to make purchases without the consent of the husband or other male authority.

One participant who has been selected to serve as the next president received advice from her predecessor about becoming a president. The participant was told that she needed to be aware

that the board of trustees will ‘walk all over a woman’ who does not understand finances. Perhaps, this example indicated that this stereotype is still prevalent and may affect women's presidential aspirations. There is some limited research on women and financial literacy. Lusardi and Mitchell (2008) found that those women who display higher financial literacy are more likely to be better planners and be more successful. They further found that older women in the U.S. had very low levels of financial literacy.

This study did not conclusively find that poor financial acumen was a stereotype that women face. The research found that this stereotype has some validity to it. This would be an area for further research, to see how this stereotype could lead to women being blocked from becoming college presidents.

Recommendations for Practice

Within each of the themes identified in this study, there are opportunities for institutions to start examining how gendering may be taking place in their organization. The following recommendations may be used as a guide to help organizations make changes for women senior leaders, especially CAOs, to empower and aspire to the college presidency.

As women continue to have work-family conflict, employers can help level the playing field between women and men. Employers could offer employees options to address work and personal commitments so that women [or men] would not need to prioritize work over family responsibilities. For example, employers should develop a work-family-friendly culture that acknowledges and respects its employees' family responsibilities and obligations. This would involve management and employees working together to meet personal and work needs simultaneously. Perhaps this would benefit the organization by having more productive employees. This is possibly an untapped workplace solution that could answer women find more

equity in the workplace. If women are not provided these types of family support, the work-family conflict may be too much for women to overcome (Eddy, 2008), leaving them to remain in lower levels of administrative management or perhaps to even leave the workforce.

Women CAOs may need extra encouragement to pursue a presidency and therefore formalized mentoring could be offered and encouraged. Institutions officials may wish to ensure that this type of professional development is available to help women CAOs proactively manage their careers. This may help women achieve short-term and long-term personal and professional growth. According to Eddy (2008), mentoring are opportunities for the mentee to receive "support via advice, opportunities to acquire diverse experiences, and access to leadership development provide critical career skills" (p. 63). This would provide the support to women CAOs to encourage them to think about a presidency. Then women CAOs could be more intentional about aspiring to a presidency rather than it happening by chance.

According to Gagliardi et al. (2017), when American college presidents were surveyed, they were asked to rate how they spent their time. The activity that captured the most significant time (65%) was budget and financial management, followed by fundraising (58%). Therefore, being adept at finance is crucial for aspiring presidents, especially for women still being impacted by the stereotype that women have poor financial acumen. I recommend that multiple professional development opportunities be available for CAOs related to budgeting and fundraising to address these limitations. This would help prepare female CAOs to become more comfortable and confident with the financial aspects of the presidential role. This may empower women to be more confident regarding finance and help break down the existing gender barriers that women are not competent with finances.

The CAO and presidential roles are different, and they have minimal overlap in their positional responsibilities (Murray, 2008). CAOs are not acquiring on-the-job skills needed for successful presidencies (Appiah-Padi, 2014). Therefore, like Appiah-Padi (2014), I recommend a redesign of the CAO and president roles. For the CAO to be a genuine pathway to the presidency, the CAO position needs to overlap with the presidential duties to allow for a more balanced experience. "A job redesign that leads to an overlapping alignment between the CAO and president role will help reduce or even eliminate the perception of 'career change' sometimes negatively associated with the move from CAO to presidency" (Appiah-Padi, 2014, p. 7). The CAO position predominately aligns with the academic mission of the college, while the president is more focused on external relations. These two positions are seen as quite different because one is internally operationally focused, and the other is external focused. The job redesign would blend the internal and external responsibilities of the CAO and president. According to Appiah-Padi (2014), CAOs at doctoral institutions have these types of presidential duties as part of their responsibilities. Therefore, they were more likely to move into the presidency than those CAOs from other institutions where the position responsibilities were more traditional.

Gender inequality in organizations is complex because there are general policies that outline acceptable and unacceptable behavior relate to gender discrimination. However, internal attitudes and assumptions that contribute to outward behavior are difficult to identify and are doubly challenging to change within organizational culture. Organization leaders should focus on practices of the policies which are meant to support organizational goals and that needs to begin with individual attitudes and behaviors. "Cultures arise from the values of the founders of the organization and assumptions about the right way of doing things, which are learned from

dealing with challenges over time" (Stamarski et al., 2015, p. 7). My recommendation for changing the organizational culture is for there to be a formal plan laid out by the leaders of the institution to address a culture of gender equality.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Several gaps in our knowledge around the role of gender follow this study's findings, which would benefit from further research. This study was isolated to two-year colleges in the Midwest region only. Future research could explore how gender impacts the career paths and presidential aspirations of female CAOs in other regions of the country to determine if there are any regional differences in different institution types (particularly, baccalaureate and graduate-degree granting institutions).

Secondly, future studies could expand on this study to examine how women's perceptions compare to the career pathway and presidential aspirations of male college CAOs. There is scant research that compares both women and men CAOs at the two-year college level.

Thirdly, future research could examine the efficacy of family-friendly policies (i.e., flexible working) in higher education institutions. To examine the nature of work-family conflict and its impact in both the home and in the workplace. This research would be seeking to assess the efficacy of the family-friendly policies outcomes.

Fourthly, further research could explore how to redesign the roles between the CAO and president, leading to overlapping responsibilities. Previous studies identified typical presidential functions (i.e., finance, budget, fundraising) that would help a CAO to be more confident in areas outside the scope of their current duties and help them move into a presidency more easily.

Finally, encouragement seems to be positively related to gender for the participants as a catalyst in supporting their pursuit of career advancement. Findings showed that encouragement

from mentors helped support women in their career paths. Future research may examine the typology (i.e., formal, informal) and personal relationship with mentors that work best for women leaders in higher education.

Conclusion

This basic qualitative study examined female CAOs perceptions of how gender played a role in their career pathway and presidential aspirations. Findings from this study increase the body of knowledge of the factors that may contribute to the under-representation of women in the two-year college presidency.

The study used Joan Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations to help provide a new and valuable lens to understand better how community colleges are gendered organizations. Analysis of the data gathered from the 11 participants revealed that gender played a role in the career pathway and presidential aspirations of most of the female CAOs interviewed. Data was organized along five major themes: second shift; the perceived undesirability of presidency; encouragement and mentors; organizational culture versus policy; and gender stereotypes about women's professional abilities.

Currently, officials at two-year colleges have been pursuing equity and diversity within their organizations. Similarly, participants discussed the importance of changing the organizational culture to address gender equity and diversity in the college presidency. Acker's (1990) position that gender inequality is deeply embedded in the work organization structure and hierarchy was foundational to this study. If more women CAOs are to pursue the presidency, organizational leaders need to focus not only the gender equality policies but also the cultural practices of the policies within the institutions.

Another key finding is based on Acker's (1990, 2012) notion that organizations are gendered and built on the ideal worker (disembodied worker) concept. The ideal worker is that individual who has no obligations outside of work and has someone at home doing the daily domestic tasks. This concept helps explain the unequal playing fields between working women and men. This study highlighted that women often work a second shift related to their domestic family responsibilities in addition to their daily paid work. If women do not find ways to balance their work and family relationships, the systemic cycle of gender positional disparity will continue.

While there is an ongoing shift in society today that legitimizes women, such as seen with the "me too" movement, work remains to be done for women's equity in the workforce. This is especially true in the two-year college environment. However, the two-year colleges are experiencing an opportunity for more women CAOs to opt-in to the college presidency. Findings herein contribute to the research on gender's role in women CAOs career pathways and their aspirations to be a college president.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Recruitment Letter

Recruitment e-mail for Chief Academic Officers

Dear XX:

I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of professor Dr. Karen Webber in the Institute of Higher Education at The University of Georgia. During my 14-year career as an administrator in higher education I have become increasingly interested in gender equity for women. I currently I serve as a Dean of Career and Technical Education in the Minnesota State system.

The focus of my qualitative research entitled Career Paths and Presidential Aspirations: Perceptions of Female Chief Academic Officers. The purpose of this study is to study female Chief Academic Officers at two-year institutions in the Midwest, to understand the role gender plays in their career path and presidential aspirations.

I am inviting you to participate in this study and found your contact information from IPEDS and your institutional website. You're eligible to be in this study because you are a woman who currently holds the office of Chief Academic Officer at your institution. Your participation would be voluntary and confidential, and there are no expected risks. Neither you nor your institution will be identified in the study.

Your participation will involve an interview, which will last up to an hour using web conferencing technology (via Zoom). The interview will take place during the months of October or November. I will provide a consent form and will ask your permission to record the interview for analysis purposes. Once the dissertation is submitted and approved, the recordings will be destroyed. Prior to the interview you will receive a demographic informational survey via email that should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete and return via email.

The potential benefits will be to better understand the issues of gender equity and diversity in community college presidencies. The study will help practitioners in the field better understand what influences women to pursue the college presidency and how to best strategize ways to increase their representation.

I understand the demands on your time and appreciate your consideration this request. Please respond to this email (kellie.mcelroyhooper@uga.edu) or call me at (727) 501-2876. If you agree to participate, I will work with your assistant to schedule the interview on a date and time at your convivence.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Kellie McElroy Hooper
Doctoral Candidate
University of Georgia

Appendix B. Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

Career Paths and Presidential Aspirations: Perceptions of Female Chief Academic Officers

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Karen Webber
Institute of Higher Education
kwebber@uga.edu
(706) 542-6831

Co-Investigator: Kellie McElroy Hooper
Institute of Higher Education
kellie.mcelroyhooper@uga.edu
(727) 501-2876

You are being invited to be in this research study because you are a female chief academic officer (CAO) at a public community college in the Midwest. This study defines the term public community college to also include public two-year colleges that offer an associate degree.

This research will explore how female chief academic officers understand the role gender plays in their career path, and their perceptions about the desirability of the presidency? The interviews will be conducted synchronously via Zoom, a web conferencing technology. Interviews will be recorded both audibly and visually. The researcher will also back-up audio recordings on an iPad for redundancy in case of technology failure.

As a secondary method of data collection, an informal demographic survey will be conducted of personal and professional information prior to conducting the interview. The demographic information will be requested of each participant relating to such factors as age, race, ethnicity, educational attainment, marital status, number of children, person's highest degree earned, academic discipline, time worked in administrative positions, and position held prior to current position etc. prior to the interviews

If you agree to participate in this study:

- We will collect information about how female chief academic officers understand the role gender plays in their career path, and their perceptions about the desirability of the presidency?
- We will ask you to participate in responding to an informal demographic survey.
- We will ask you to participate in a recorded zoom interview. It will take about 45-60 minutes.
- We will follow up in 4-6 months by May 2021.

Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to refuse or withdraw will not affect any benefits the participant is otherwise entitled to or other activities that are otherwise conducted.

The participants will be asked to reflect on their perceptions of their personal and professional experiences during their career path to CAO. The questions are of a personal nature and there may be questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can skip these questions if you do not wish to answer them.

Your responses may help us better understand the perpetuating cycle of the underrepresentation of women in college presidencies. My intention is to share my findings, so that educational leaders can work intentionally work to improve gender parity in college presidencies.

The participants will remain anonymous and the researcher will make a concerted effort to take the necessary precautions to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in the study. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms and all interview transcripts will contain only the pseudonyms and no other identifying markers (e.g., college affiliation). This researcher will keep a master list of all real names and pseudonyms in a location separate from the data to maintain anonymity, stored securely and then deleted under terms of data retention. Your decision to participate will have no impact in your participation in any other programs.
We will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, we will destroy the master list. We will only keep information that could identify you for up to 1 year. The information will not be used or distributed for future research.

The interviews will be conducted synchronously via Zoom, a web conferencing technology. This allows for the interview to be conducted in real-time and also recorded both audibly and visually. One of the advantages of web interviews is the researcher is no longer constrained by the participant's geographic location. The use of this technology also allows the researcher to later review the recordings for non-verbal cues for analysis. The researcher will also back-up audio recordings on an iPad for redundancy in case of technology failure. The use of audio and video recordings reduces the need for copious note taking during the interviews and allows the researcher to focus on the conversation. Prior to beginning the interviews, participants will be asked for consent to allow their interview to be audio and video recorded to ensure participant consent.

Please feel free to ask questions about this research at any time. You can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Karen Webber at (706) 542-6831, kwebber@uga.edu and/or the co-investigator, Kellie McElroy Hooper at (727) 501-2876, kellie.mcelroyhooper@uga.edu. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below:

Kellie McElroy Hooper	*Kellie McElroy Hooper*	**10/28/20**
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

Appendix C. CAO Interview Protocol

Career Pathway

1. Could you briefly describe the career path that you took to becoming a CAO?
    a. Did you have a specific goal or vision for your career path?
    b. When did you first consider becoming a CAO?

2. How would you describe your ability to balance your professional life with your personal life throughout your career?

3. Have you experienced any barriers or challenges throughout your career as you moved toward becoming a CAO?
    a. How did you deal with those barriers or challenges?

4. Have you felt supported in pursuing your career goals? (By whom? How so?)

Leadership

5. How would you describe your personal leadership style and associated characteristics?
    a. How does this compare to other higher ed leaders?
    b. Is there a particular leader or leadership style you try to emulate?

6. What have been the biggest influences that helped shape your personal leadership style?

7. Have you ever had to change or modify your personal leadership style to meet other's expectations?

Organizational Structure

8. What organizational policies, job descriptions, or processes are needed to increase gender diversity in senior leadership roles?

9. What type of professional development opportunities have been available to you that you perceive as important to becoming a CAO?

10. What type of support do you receive from your direct supervisor?

Presidential Aspirations

11. Do you know of other female colleagues that transitioned from CAO to college president?
    a. What was that experience like for them?

12. How would you describe the role of a college president in terms of its desirability?

13. Will you seek a college presidency?
    - If yes, when and why?
    - If no, when and why?
    - If undecided, why?

Appendix D. Demographic Survey of Participants

1. Race and/or ethnicity: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Marital status:
    a. Single, never married
    b. Single, but living with a partner
    c. Married
    d. Divorced
    e. Divorced, remarried
    f. Separated
    g. Widowed
4. Do you have children? Yes No
    a. If yes, number of children: _____
    b. If yes, please list the ages of your children:

    _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
5. Highest degree earned: _____
6. Academic field of highest degree: _____
7. Have you ever held a position with academic tenure? _____
    a. If yes, position held: _____
8. Total number of years of full-time career experience working in higher education: _____
9. Please list all employment positions you have held in higher education (e.g., adjunct instructor, non-tenure faculty, tenure faculty, coordinator, director, dean, vice provost, etc.):

Position title:	Date of Service:
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

10. What was the immediate prior position that you held before assuming your current position as chief academic officer? _____
11. Total number of years in current position: _____

12. Did you move to the chief academic officer position from:
    a. Within the institution
    b. Within the same state system
    c. Within the same state
    d. Outside the state
    e. Other (please describe): _____

13. As chief academic officer, to whom do you report? _____

14. Are you willing to relocate for new positions? _____