COMMUNITY COLLEGE FEMALE FACULTY TRANSITIONING TO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LIMINALITY OF PROFESSIONAL LIFEWORLDS AND IDENTITIES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED BY LAURA YANNUZZI TO BENEDICTINE UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE
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To my steadfast Phillip, my passionate Brewer, my loving Max and, most of all, to the source of my hope and strength, Dave.

“Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength,

while loving someone deeply gives you courage.”

~ Lao Tzu
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ABSTRACT

The past thirty years have marked incredible growth for women in community colleges and the impending wave of mass retirements represents a “prime opportunity” for women to advance in the community college leadership ranks. While great strides have been made with respect to women’s advancement in faculty positions, women continue to be underrepresented in academic leadership constituting 49% of full time faculty, but only 29% of presidencies in the community college. Little is known concerning how and why women transition from faculty into academic leadership. However, the development of female faculty into leaders represents an urgent need if community colleges are to successfully address the impending leadership shortage suggested in the literature. Therefore, this study sought to explore the ways in which women experienced their liminal period, where they have shed their faculty identities thus transitioning to new roles, with new responsibilities, expectations, and social rules. These women’s diverse experiences and the meaning that they gave to these experiences were considered as both the source of knowledge and the lived phenomena. Nine female deans from southeastern community colleges participated in this phenomenological investigation. Four essential structures emerged from the data to represent the essence of their liminal period, as they transitioned from faculty into academic leadership; (a) Being Open, (b) Drawing Boundaries, (c) Becoming Visible, and (d) Giving Light. As community colleges prepare for the impending leadership gap, this study offers significant insight for institutions, leadership development programs, and individual women in the community college setting.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

“We don’t receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us.”

~Marcel Proust

I began my career in the community college as a faculty member, fully steeped in what it meant to be a faculty due to the preparation I had received in my graduate training. Moving into my first leadership position, I was surprised by the barrier that was suddenly present between me and my former role. I was no longer a member of the faculty. Despite personal relationships with many faculty colleagues and despite my continuation of classroom instruction, I was no longer a faculty. That role was not mine anymore. As a newly promoted department chair, I was not yet a positional leader. In fact, while my responsibilities grew exponentially, I had not yet internalized the sense of empowerment that accompanied my administrative role. I seemed to be present at the moment of transition to the position of leadership, but I could not quite grasp the totality of the experience. I felt, as it were, ‘betwixt and between’ my professional realms of faculty and leader. To put it differently, I found myself in a rather peculiar state of being, that is of liminality.

Liminality refers to a transitional time, when an individual is moving from one status, or role, to another (Turner, 1964). Originally discussed in anthropological settings regarding rites of passage, liminality begins when the individual is removed from their previous status and persists until the new status is achieved (Turner, 1964). This period involves instruction, exploration, and ultimately results in transformation of the individual (Turner, 1964).
Unlike a more traditional rite of passage, such as a coming of age rite, my *liminal* period was optional, not mandatory. I could have remained a faculty for my entire career. Looking back, I thought I could somehow maintain that role in addition to my new responsibilities. However, the faculty role and the context in which one was identified as a faculty were preclusive once my title changed. Instead of being a faculty member with a different title, I found myself removed from my former status and without the comfort that comes with known expectations. As I struggled to make sense of my new role and discover what it meant to *be* a former faculty moving into leadership, I quickly learned that there was not a clear answer. I witnessed many others in this same *liminal* mode of being; receiving instruction, engaging in exploration, and seeking the transformation that would have them emerge as true leaders, recognized for leadership capabilities both internally and externally. Further, I discovered that my *liminal* experiences were unique to my gender identity, the one of a female transitioning from faculty to leadership position, still dominated by men in higher education (American Council on Education, 2007; ASHE, 2011; Keim & Murray, 2008; Lester & Bers, 2010).

It was my *liminal* experiences within this period that brought me to this place at this time. As I progressed through the doctoral program, I wore each completed course as a badge, a representation of my progress through this transition. Each badge had a certain amount of individual meaning, but it was their collective power of transformation that I sought. This study was another, much more coveted, badge to mark my progress and fuel my transformation. I found strength and insight in my progress, but certainty was not present. There was no guaranteed ending to my *liminality*. I could only continue to receive instruction, engage in exploration and do my part to create an opportunity for the transformation. When would I no longer be in transition? When would I emerge a true leader?
The Disappearing Pipeline

Community colleges throughout the nation have experienced newfound public attention, dramatic growth, and a rapid pace of change. Called upon by President Obama to serve as a stabilizing force for our national economy and to provide a source for competitive edge within the global economy, community colleges are revising, restructuring, and re-envisioning the student learning experience (American Association of Community Colleges, 2009). They are attempting these feats during times of increased enrollment and diminishing resources. Perhaps the most significant of these diminishing resources is human capital. Strom, Sanchez, and Downey-Schilling (2011) reported that the number of community college presidents planning to retire in the next decade has “increased dramatically from 68% in 1996 to 84% in 2006” (p. 1). From the president to the faculty ranks, massive retirements are expected in community colleges in the coming years (American Association of Community Colleges, 2008; Shults, 2001). Given that all levels of the institution will experience these retirements, community colleges do not have enough qualified people in the current pipeline to fill the future void (Shults, 2001). Not only will community colleges experience a shortage of talent, but also they will be adversely impacted along the line of the collective and institutional knowledge base (Shults, 2001). In addition to the mammoth tasks that community colleges have been undertaking, “developing a new generation of leaders may be one of the greatest challenges facing this sector” (VanDerLinden, 2004, p. 2).

To help provide a path forward, the American Association of Community Colleges held summits from late 2003 to 2005, consulting with scholars and community college leaders to “delineate a competency framework for today’s and tomorrow’s community college leaders” (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005, p. 1). The collaboration produced a
document titled, “Competencies for Community College Leaders,” which presented a leadership framework comprising six domains: Collaboration, Communication, Community College Advocacy, Organizational Strategy, Professionalism and Resource Management. This framework was thought to “represent the current best thinking as well as provide a forum for continual updating and for improvement in thinking about community college leadership” (AACC, 2005, p. 1). Since its release, the document has received widespread support and use of its framework has appeared in the literature on leadership development cited as “a national consensus about curricular areas that should be part of leadership development programs, wherever and however they were offered” (Ebbers et al., 2010; McNair et al, 2011; Reille & Kezar, 2010, p. 4).

This shortage of qualified people in the community college pipeline may explain the shortening of average tenure times for community college chief academic officers and presidents. With qualified individuals having more opportunities to choose from, people in these positions are demonstrating less commitment to a specific role at a single institution (Kelm & Murray, 2008). In 2007, 45 percent of community college presidents were 61 years of age or older and were spending less time in their roles than their predecessors (ACE, 2007). With an average age of 54, the tenure of chief academic officers has decreased from over six years in 1991 to 4.6 years in 2006 (Amey, VanDerLinden & Brown, 2002; Kelm & Murray, 2008). This same trend is reflected throughout the ranks of the community college, encompassing the faculty as well (Lester & Bers, 2010). Finding, developing, and keeping qualified personnel needs to be an institutional priority if community colleges are to succeed in the challenges that lay before them. Given that 49 percent of faculty and 44 percent of chief academic officers in the community college setting are female, it is clear that opportunities for advancement exist. Yet
only 29 percent of presidents in the community college setting are female, suggesting that opportunities for advancement may involve additional challenges for women as they attempt to progress up the ladder. Since the representation of women in leadership positions becomes disproportionately smaller as one looks higher in the leadership ranks, the advancement of women cannot be ignored or just assumed to occur (American Council on Education, 2007; Keim & Murray, 2008; Lester & Bers, 2010). Therefore, the development of female faculty into leaders represents an urgent need in the community college setting. What are the conditions under which female faculty sought leadership positions? How do they experience the transition from faculty to leadership role? How do they understand and internalize a sense of their professional and personal selves when moving from faculty into leadership capacities in a male dominated context?

Understanding Leadership

In 2002, Brown, Martinez, and Daniel made the bold statement that, “75 years of analysis and research have produced no conclusions about what constitutes effective leadership” (p. 8). As the student population and mission of community colleges become increasingly complex, the challenge of leadership has only intensified as well (Brown et al, 2002; Strom et al, 2011). This lack of clarity on the definition of effective leadership has collided with the pressing importance that community colleges address leadership development (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005; Brown et al, 2002; Campbell, Syed & Morris, 2010; Ebbers, Conover & Samuels, 2010; McNair, Duree & Ebbers, 2011; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). Like most collisions, this serves only to increase the uncertainty of the best path to effective leadership development.
Despite female leaders’ contributions to all social, economic, political, cultural, and educational spheres of life, the vast amount of leadership research focuses on male experiences regarding the definitions of leadership (Hart, 1982; Hollander & Yoder, 1984). When included in the research, female leadership is often viewed in contrast to the male leaders, instead of exploring female leadership in its own merit (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Carli, 2003). In these contrasts, women are found to be more democratic and collaborative in their leadership, skills more highly regarded in 21st Century community college leaders than previous autocratic models (Northouse, 2007). Although women are receiving more recognition for leadership abilities, they still face stereotypes and gendered expectations resulting in very distinct barriers to leadership opportunities (Ridgeway, 2011).

Community colleges may hold great opportunities for women, opportunities that could expand in the coming decades (American Council on Education, 2007; Keim & Murray, 2008; King & Gomez, 2008). Given their preference for the community college setting as well as their strong representation in the faculty ranks, women are poised to fill the talent void. Impending increasing retirements and shortened tenures represent a “prime opportunity for more women” to advance in the community college” (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008, p.2). However, leadership development and succession planning have not occurred in an intentional or orderly fashion for most institutions, leaving a gap between the actual and perceived development needs of women which must be bridged (Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Keim & Murray, 2008; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). In essence, the central question remained: How do women experience the transition from their academic to leadership positions in higher education in general and in the community college in particular?
Problem Statement

The past thirty years have marked incredible growth for women in community colleges. Women have continued to dominate in terms of student demographics, such as enrollment, completion and degrees earned, and have also gained substantial numbers in terms of faculty and administrative positions (Townsend, 2008). Townsend (2008) contends that gender equality has been achieved with respect to faculty pay and tenure (Townsend, 2008). This contributed to the growing body of research suggesting that community colleges are more fertile environments for female leaders than other areas of higher education (Giannini, 2001; Munoz, 2010; Townsend, 2008; Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

However, despite these findings, inequities and discrimination continue in the community college setting, especially as a faculty member endeavored for an administrative position. Townsend and Twombly (2007) found that institutional climates which seem to support the development of female leaders happened more by accident than intent. Giannini (2001) reported that although women increased their overall numbers in leadership positions, these numbers still were not representative when compared to the overall number of female students and female faculty that are found in community colleges. While great strides had been made with respect to gender equality in faculty positions, women continue to be marginalized in academic leadership (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

When examining women in community college leadership positions, the majority of the research has focused on the presidency (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Gillett-Karam, 2001; Pierce & Pedersen, 1997; Stout-Stewart, 2005; Vaughn & Weisman, 1998). In 1996, Vaughn and Weisman conducted a national study of community college presidents. Their findings reported key gender differences which may help to illustrate this disparity in academic leadership. When
compared to their male counterparts, female community college presidents were: (a) approximately 3 years older when beginning their first presidency, (b) in their current role for half the time, (c) devoting more hours per week to their role, and (d) more likely to rate their role as “high stress” and “high risk” (Vaughn & Weisman, 1998).

The relationship between these various findings is not known. Do female community college presidents consider their roles more stressful because they do not yet have the same years of experience as the average male president? Or, were female community college presidents spending less time in their roles because of the higher level of stress they experience? While the answer to these questions remains to be investigated, even less is known about females in other academic leadership positions at community colleges. Are the same disparities found between male and female department chairs, or does that position enjoy more of the gender equality found in the faculty role? Although the numbers of women in academic leadership positions have increased substantially, little is known concerning how and why women transition into academic leadership in the community college.

**Research Purposes and Questions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of women advancing from faculty to senior administrative and leadership positions in public community colleges in the Southeast. The main research question that guided this study was: *How do women experience the transition from their academic to leadership positions in the community college?*

Additionally, I posed the following questions:

- How do these women make sense of their role as a faculty?
- Given the transition, the *liminal* spaces, of their experiences, how do these women perceive the shifting sense of their identity?
• What does liminality mean to them?
• How do they understand the changing status of their professional roles?
• Having gone through the transitional experience, how do these women perceive their identity as a leader?

**Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study**

This study was conceived within the interpretive and phenomenological traditions and systems of educational inquiry (Lukenchuk, 2013; Schutz, 1932). Building upon Husserl’s phenomenological process, this study sought to understand the *lebenswelt*, or lifeworld, of the participants (Schutz, 1932). *Lebenswelt* represents the belief that mind and body (subject and world) are interrelated, interdependent and cannot be understood in isolation from the other (Schutz, 1932). In order to understand the phenomenon under investigation, we need to understand the consciousness and context in which it was experienced. Additionally, social phenomenology provided the framework to not only examine the participants’ *lebenswelt*, but also to explore how their experiences and the meaning ascribed to them were influenced by their sociality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Of particular interest to this study was how gender influenced the phenomenon, which brings forward the work of Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenology of sense perception (1973). Merleau-Ponty proposed that lived experience was always embodied, and we find meaning in our body’s active encounter with the world. Therefore, the active encounters of a female body with the community college environmental context represented an integral piece of the participants’ *lebenswelt* and the phenomenon of study.

Perceptions of lifeworlds are never complete, but are constantly shifting views of reality. This fluid consciousness is the result of an individual attempting to make meaning of the
changing world in which they live, and the results constitute an individual perception of reality (Wertz 1989). To help understand the factors that may be influencing this shifting reality and therefore better understand the lived experiences of the participants, this research was informed by several conceptual and theoretical perspectives on women in higher education. For instance, Oksala (2006) provided specific guidance in attempting to understand gendered experiences in phenomenological studies. Building upon the concept of *lebenswelt*, Oksala discussed a *homeworld* which incorporated the socially constructed history and traditions that influence the individual’s *lebenswelt*. Additionally, the concept of *liminality* allocated boundaries and mechanisms which were beneficial in understanding the experiences of the participants.

*Liminality* is a distinct phase, occurring during transition, and represents a space where individuals have a change in status and receive intense instruction on their new impending status (Turner, 1964). Cultural influence appears in the way people are viewed and prepared during their liminal period. This cultural influence was explored through Ridgeway’s (2011) Expectation States theory, where the status aspects of gender roles (men as instrumentally competent and women as reactive and communal) were examined to determine how they guide not only how we act, but also how we think others should act relative to their status in a group.

This diverse conceptual discourse has shaped, to a great extent, the context of the study, its research purposes and questions, and the choice of methodological techniques and procedures as well as the interpretation of results.

**Significance of the Study**

With community colleges expecting large numbers of retirements in coming years, culminating in a ‘leadership gap,’ women are poised to have tremendous opportunities available to them in academic leadership positions within community colleges (Shults, 2001). Knowing
more about how and why individual women make decisions to transition from faculty to leadership positions can fill in significant gaps in the existing literature on higher education leadership in general and women’s transitional experiences in community college leadership more specifically.

Community colleges can benefit from this study by learning more about how women are experiencing their transition from faculty to leadership. By understanding the concerns and barriers women perceive, community colleges can identify opportunities for creating more gender-neutral environments. Institutions can also learn more concerning the reasons why women decide to move from faculty to leadership. By gaining a more comprehensive picture of the why and how concerning women’s advancement in the community college setting, institutions are better positioned to foster the development of female leaders within their ranks and position their institutions more favorably during the imminent leadership gap.

Leadership development programs and developers can also benefit from this study by gaining a deeper understanding of the factors influencing women’s ascent into leadership and the ways in which gender is connected to these influence. This study attempted to add to the literature exploring how and why women experience leadership differently, therefore adding a clearer picture as to the development needs and challenges faced by women. While the context of this study is the community college, the phenomenon under study is relevant to many areas of women’s lives, many contexts, and many transitions.

In addition to providing insight to institutions and organizations, this study is capable of benefiting all women with interest in academic leadership. This study produced a rich discussion on the experiences of women as they advanced in the community college. These lived experiences as shared by the participants represent the intersection of their lives as women with
their professional contexts in the community college. Their stories touch on their ‘essence’ as women, as leaders and as educators in higher education. Their stories contain lessons learned regarding all of those areas, with wisdom and insight that comes only from lived experiences.

Their stories serve as a depiction of what may lie in the future for women pondering or embarking on their own journey through the ranks of the community college. This depiction serves to inform, to caution, to enrich the journey of the women that choose to discover it. Their stories also serve as a support to those currently experiencing a transition; those entrenched in their own liminal period. A kinship that says ‘you are not alone’ and allows others to find pieces of themselves in the participants’ stories. Most selfishly, this study had the potential to help me discover my own answers: When will I no longer be in transition? When will I emerge a true leader?
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter unfolds a discussion on the advancement of women in community college leadership. Compared to the other areas of industry and education, little is known about the journey women take while advancing in community colleges since their inception in the beginning of the 20th century. Contemporary American women experience extraordinary opportunities in higher education careers in comparison with their counterparts of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries (American Council on Education, 2007; Keim & Murray, 2008; King & Gomez, 2008), and many of them move into leadership positions. While there exists a substantial record of research on women and leadership in higher education, little is known about individual women’s experiences regarding the advancement of their careers (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Christman & McClellan, 2008; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Lester, 2008; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Most of the current sources (Lester & Bers, 2008; Townsend, 2008; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007; Vaughn & Weisman, 1998) focus on the ends of the spectrum, women beginning their careers at the community college and women becoming presidents of the community college. What happens along the way? Why do so few women advance from one end of the spectrum to the other? What lessons can be learned from the experiences of these women for future generations of leaders in higher education and women leaders in particular?
The review of the relevant sources pertaining to women in higher education leadership has resulted in the following themes for analysis: (1) women working in the community college environment; (2) women leaders in the context of the community college; and (3) the primary influences on leadership development in the community college. These themes and the intersections between them are intended to inform the conceptual discourse of this study, its research purposes and questions. At the same time, much remains to be learned from prospective participants of this study. Faculty members transitioning into leadership in community college settings offer experiences and expertise that can help answer persistent questions and explain phenomena, thereby contributing to existing research and scholarship on women in leadership at community colleges.

**Women Working in the Community College Environment**

**Women as Faculty**

When examining the higher education landscape as a whole, the representation of women in that landscape is plentiful. Women account for the majority of higher education enrollment and the majority of degree earners in all levels except for Ph.D. and M.D. levels, where women command 45% of degrees (ASHE, 2011). During their graduate careers, women are more likely to report plans of using their doctorate in a teaching capacity than men. In 2007 women accounted for 46% of full time faculty (ASHE, 2011).

Recent research on the subject has identified trends and differences by distinguishing between institution types and faculty statuses, in order to obtain a clearer picture of women as faculty. When discussing tenured female faculty in the research university setting, women are more likely to report a lack of clarity on tenure related issues, more likely to rate the expectations
for “their performance as scholars, teachers, advisors, colleagues, and members of the community” as unreasonable, more likely to report dissatisfaction with how they spend their time as a faculty member and also report more dissatisfaction with their work/life balance than their male counterparts (COACHE, 2008, p. 7). When examining the global context, female faculty rate both their institutions and their individual departments with significantly less satisfaction than did males (COACHE, 2008). Global satisfaction is defined as the willingness to choose again to work at this institution as well as an overall evaluation of the institution. Therefore, women have reported that they are less likely to choose to work for the same institution. According to what they have reported, these women tend to evaluate their department and institution less favorably than men. This points to markedly different experiences for men and women as tenured faculty, but still it does not give an adequate picture of how female faculty experience higher education.

Women only account for 30% of full time tenure positions at research universities (ASHE, 2011). One possible influence on this number may be parenthood. When looking at parenthood in relation to tenure, males who become parents within 5 years of completing their doctorate are “38 percent more likely than their female counterparts to achieve tenure” (ASHE, 2011, p. 51). Instead, women are more likely to assume non-tenure track positions, such as lecturers, instructors and/or adjuncts; “positions [that] tend to be the least secure, least well paid, and least prestigious among faculty ranks in higher education” (ASHE, 2011, p. 52). While women are represented in numbers, those numbers include many female faculty struggling to find security, success and satisfaction in their roles.

Outside of the tenuous walls of research universities, women in higher education have long found the community college an attractive outlet through which to meet their career goals.
However, the “evidence regarding the climate for female faculty at community colleges is contradictory,” making it difficult to find a clear understanding of the life and experiences of the female faculty member (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007, p. 260). Female faculty members in community colleges procure similar compensation as their male counterparts and account for 49 percent of full time positions, two key indicators of gender equality where community colleges outperform four-year institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2000; Lester & Bers, 2010). Male and female faculty in community colleges also report similar rates of participation in campus governance as well as similar levels of satisfaction with their participation (Lester & Bers, 2008). Female faculty members are almost on par with their male counterparts with respect to tenure in the community college, with 62 percent of women holding tenured positions compared to 68 percent of men (Townsend, 2008). However, some researchers find that female faculty in community colleges experience marginalization, discrimination, and a chilly climate, although perhaps to a lesser extent than their four year, tenure-track counterparts (Clark, 1998, Hagedorn & Laden, 2002, Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007). The above studies suggest that community colleges provide a more attractive path for women to pursue their careers than that in other institutions of higher education.

The Role of Gender in Faculty Experiences

While strides have been made in gender parity within higher education, and more specifically within community colleges, gender continues to play a pivotal role in the work people do and how they experience their work (ASHE, 2011; Ridgeway, 2011; Townsend, 2008). From a feminist standpoint (Ridgeway, 2011), to achieve gender equity in the workplace, more than 40 percent of all women would have to change occupations. Therefore, to truly
understand the experiences of women in the community college, the research on gender contributes a unique and necessary perspective.

Ridgeway (2011) presents gender as “shared cultural expectations associated with being male or female” and it is these shared expectations that serve as a frame of reference in all aspects of our lives (p. 7). It benefits the human species to discover and perpetuate these expectations as a way to promote mutually predictable behavior between people and in groups (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Ridgeway, 2011). These expectations form a sort of ‘common knowledge’ about the perceived capabilities and roles of each gender, and serve as an economical model of typecasting ourselves and others (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Ridgeway, 2011). While economy and predictability may be the driving forces, these expectations have resulted in gender becoming a “primary category” of identity in our society, meaning it is salient to virtually all situations and provides both descriptive as well as prescriptive elements (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Ridgeway, 2011, p. 37). The majority of these expectations fall into the themes of agency (male) versus communion (female), or instrumental (male) versus expressive (female); “Men are rated more highly than women on agenic qualities such as instrumental competence, assertiveness, confidence, independence, forcefulness, and dominance. Women are rated more highly than men on communal attributes such as emotional expressiveness, nurturance, interpersonal sensitivity, kindness, and responsiveness.” (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 58). Again, these terms serve not only as descriptions of what society’s shared expectation are for males and females, but they also serve as prescriptions of how males and females should or should not be creating a continuous system of feedback on how well an individual is aligning with expectations (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Ridgeway, 2011).
Given this agency versus communion perspective, higher education could be viewed in
gendered terms. Research universities, the creators of knowledge, represent a more agenic or
instrumental (male) climate and community colleges, the disseminators of knowledge, are more
focused on creating communal and supportive (female) environments. This gendered lens
provides additional insight into the research concerning some women’s preference for the
community college environment. Community colleges were founded on the principles of access
and inclusion, which are very nurturing principles, and many female faculty are attracted to this
“commitment to social justice” found in the mission of the community college (Lester & Bers,
2010, p. 42). Likewise, the emphasis on teaching rather than research and the increased variety in
the role of the faculty member make the community college a more rewarding work environment
for many women (Lester & Bers, 2010; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007). Female faculty
also report a personal importance placed on maintaining balance between professional and
personal lives, a goal they consider easier to achieve at the community college (Sallee, 2008;

One of the most attractive elements of the community college landscape is its
opportunities for professional growth. Working in institutions with which they are
philosophically aligned, and finding balance between work and home, female faculty seek
growth in their professions and for many this involves movement into academic leadership roles,
with “nearly 90 percent of future community college leaders” coming from within the institution
(Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010, p. 60). With respect to advancement opportunities,
VanDerLinden (2004) finds that in surveying a variety of administrators in Michigan community
colleges, “men and women administrators […] were equally likely to have advanced in their
careers, which may be viewed as one indicator of a gender equitable working environment” (p.
Numerous studies also capture the growth of females serving in the positions of Chief Academic Officer and President in community colleges over the last 20 years (American Council on Education, 2007; Keim & Murray, 2008; King & Gomez, 2008).

Community colleges appear to offer a more equitable workplace for advancement at every level of the organization when compared to four-year institutions, from the faculty to the presidency (American Association of Community Colleges, 2000; ASHE, 2011; COACHE, 2008; Lester & Bers, 2010). However, the literature also captures many opportunities for improvement. While gender may not have been a factor in promotion in VanDerLinden’s study, as one looks higher in the ranks of an institution, they are less likely to find a female in the position; 49 percent of faculty, 44 percent of chief academic officers, and 29 percent of presidents (American Council on Education, 2007; Keim & Murray, 2008; Lester & Bers, 2010). Moreover, the experiences of leaders in the community college pipeline “remain unknown,” with the majority of research focusing on the ends of the spectrum, faculty or presidency (Garza-Mitchell & Eddy, 2008, p. 5). Clearly, the lack of studies focusing on individual experiences of women leaders in the middle echelon of the hierarchical structure of institutional leadership necessitates more research to be done in this area, and one of the primary purposes of this inquiry is to contribute to it.

**Women as Presidents**

“Understanding the community college presidency is, at best, a complex undertaking. When one attempts to understand the impact of being a female president, the task becomes even more complicated” (Vaughn, 1989, p. 25). Much of the research on women’s advancement in the community college focuses on the presidency. This is likely related to the fact that “these institutions have doubled the number of women leading them compared to doctoral granting
institutions and more overall that any other institutional type,” making community colleges a setting ripe for understanding women’s advancement (Eddy, 2008, p. 1). Community colleges experienced significant gains over the last thirty years, with women representing only six percent of community college presidents in 1986 and now holding 29% (Lester & Bers, 2010).

There are a number of theories in existing research and scholarship that address the reasons why women have been more successful in rising to the presidency in the community college setting. Some of these theories include: (a) viewing the community college as the “bottom of the power rung” in higher education, therefore not as desirable to more power driven males (DiCroce, 1995, p. 80); (b) recognizing that graduate programs focused on community college leadership are more heavily attended by women, therefore the rise in female presidencies is an outgrowth of that enrollment (Gillett-Karam, 2001); and (c) looking at the community college as the more change-adept institution in higher education which can serve as the perfect environment to cultivate women leaders (Stephenson, 2001).

As far as presidents are concerned, the literature suggests that men and women do not have the same experience in their roles. When compared to their male counterparts, female community college presidents are: (a) approximately 3 years older when beginning their first presidency, (b) in their current role for half the time, (c) devoting more hours per week to their role, and (d) more likely to rate their role as “high stress” and “high risk” (Vaughn & Weisman, 1998). Female presidents report having to devote more time and experiencing more stress and less satisfaction in their work than men in similar positions. The above issues seem to be pervasive as women advance through their careers.

Even with the impressive growth from 6 to 29 percent over the period of 28 years, the number of female community college presidents remains disproportionately low given that
women make up 57% of community college students and 49% of community college full time faculty, and the momentum has slowed tremendously in the last decade, with a growth of only 2% since 2001 (Keim & Murray, 2008; Lester & Bers, 2010). One reason for the low numbers may be that women’s paths to senior leadership positions appear to lack intentionality (Eddy, 2008; Mitchell, 2004). Many female presidents and chief academic officers report arriving at their position without having regarded it as a career goal when they began working in higher education (Eddy, 2008; Mitchell, 2004). For these senior leadership roles, the path, although unintentional, is a natural progression up the organizational chart, and often accompanied by encouragement from a mentor figure (Eddy, 2008).

While many women report their path to the presidency is unintentional, the research suggests that the successful ascension to the presidency is associated with several factors such as, completion of a terminal degree, experience as a faculty member, and academic leadership experience within the community college (Keim & Murray, 2008; McNair, Duree & Ebbers, 2011; Weisman & Vaughn, 2007). “However, because of the dynamic nature of community college leadership, the complex skills required of community college presidents, and the regional differences in community college systems, there is no one set of experiences that lead to the acquisition of skills required of today’s community college presidents” (McNair et al, 2011, p. 6). Instead, presidents report that the necessary skill set is honed through multiple paths, including formal and informal educational experiences, mentoring, networking, professional development, and on the job experiences (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; McNair et al, 2011). Many female community college leaders report developing their own skill sets utilizing past experiences and observational learning to surmise what is appropriate administrative behavior within their institution (Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Reille & Kezar, 2010;
Strom et al, 2011). Central to this skill development are the institutional environment and the opportunity to engage in a mentor relationship (Eddy, 2008; Reille & Kezar, 2010). Women who experience mentoring are more likely to achieve senior leadership roles, suggesting that mentors provide a critical function for emerging female leaders (VanDerLinden, 2004). Yet the same research demonstrates that community colleges have a lack of women available to mentor. Given the lack of intentionality that most women report regarding their career paths, the collection of the right skills and experiences seems implausible for the typical female faculty in the community college. Instead of seeking out multiple roles and opportunities to create a skill set for the presidency, it appears that women who intrinsically search for new skills and opportunities later find themselves in a position to contemplate the presidency (Eddy, 2008).

This lack of knowledge about what women actually experience during their journey and how women experience the transition from faculty to leader represents a significant gap in the literature. A useful framework for exploring this transitional time in women’s lives can be found in the concept of liminality. Liminality represents a transitional phase during a rite of passage, where the individual has left behind one state (or role) but has yet to fully identify with the new state (or role) (Tuner, 1964). Liminal individuals are considered ‘betwixt and between’ social categories, often experiencing paradoxical classifications in social status (Turner, 1964). While originating in anthropology, many researchers in the education and social science have found the concept of liminality useful for exploring transitional experiences (Bettis & Mills, 2006). When examining the literature through the lens of liminality, the majority of the research has focused on the beginning and ending of the ‘rite of passage’ with much less to describe what happens in between, what happens during, when she is neither a faculty nor a president.
Women Leaders in the Context of the Community College

The Stereotypical Leader

As with gender, the concept of leader is socially constructed, with culturally held beliefs and expectations that accompany the title (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Ridgeway 2011; Wood & Ridgeway, 2010). Since it is socially constructed, the concept of leader is influenced by many of our societal stereotypes, creating another avenue for individuals to be evaluated on with respect to obeying societal norms (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Ridgeway 2001, 2011; Webster & Foschi, 1988; Williams & Best, 1990; Wood & Ridgeway, 2010). Historically, leaders are considered the high-ranking members of groups, those that direct the actions of lower ranking members of the group, and this hierarchical aspect results in the concept of leader being heavily associated with the advantaged groups in a society (Gerber, 1996; Ridgeway 2001, 2011; Schein, 2001; Webster & Foschi, 1988; Wood & Ridgeway, 2010). Gerber (1996) found that high ranking members in a hierarchy are perceived to be more instrumental and competent, traits associated with the male gender. Webster and Foschi (1988) examined stereotypes regarding race, gender and occupation and discovered that while each stereotype has distinct elements, all stereotypes attached greater social status and perceived competence on valued skills to the advantaged group (White, male, professional). Additionally, in our society men are more likely to engage in paid employment and possess jobs with higher status and power, which researchers argue leads society to infer that men are more agenic or competent (Ridgeway, 2011; Wood & Ridgeway, 2010). Resulting in a ‘think manager, think male’ phenomenon, society has created an expectation of how a leader acts (agenic) and what a leader looks like (male) and is able to confirm this expectation based on the success of men in
positions of power (Schein, 2001). This creates a powerful self-perpetuating bias in the concept of leader (Ridgeway, 2011).

The concept of leader is so deeply intertwined with male gender attributes, that women pursuing leadership can find themselves in a no win situation (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Ridgeway 2001, 2011; Wood & Ridgeway, 2010). Women who continue to act according to their prescribed gender role (communal and expressive) are not as likely to be viewed as competent or considered legitimate in their pursuit of leadership (Lester, 2008; Ridgeway, 2001, 2011). However, those women who break out of their communal role and pursue leadership with more agenic traits are subject to backlash where moving “outside feminine social construction can be detrimental to the perceived competence of the woman’s leadership” (Christman & McClellan, 2008, p. 23; Ridgeway 2001, 2011). So, while the definition of leader has many male gender qualities, that definition also only pertains to men. Women seeking to apply this stereotypical definition of leader will find their legitimacy compromised. This begs the question-how then do women experience leadership?

Conceptualizing the Contemporary Leader

Although the historical, stereotypical concept of leader is very masculine, some women have been able to successfully pursue leadership positions, with the rate of women leading organizations continuing to grow (Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2010; Ridgeway, 2011; Rink, Ryan & Stoker, 2013). However, Ridgeway (2011) cautions that the “content of gender stereotypes has changed in recent years, with perceptions of women becoming more positive, but the essential hierarchical element has remained: Men are still evaluated more favorably in the socially important area of instrumental competence” (p. 639). Given that women are judged on their conformity to a communal, supportive role, women must work harder than their male
counterparts to appear competent and are less likely to receive any recognition for supportive work they perform (Lester, 2008; Swim, Borgida, Maruyama & Meyers, 1989; Ridgeway, 2001, 2011). Because women are expected to be supportive, these behaviors do not relay as skills they contribute to a team or organization, where a supportive male would be more readily recognized as a ‘team player’ (Lester, 2008; Ridgeway, 2011). This bias towards males can also be found in the evaluation of tasks, where research has documented performance on the same task will be evaluated less positively when produced by a woman rather than a man (Ridgeway, 2001; Swim, Borgida, Maruyama & Meyers, 1989). Just knowing the task was performed by a woman appears to somehow justify an opinion of less competence on the performance of the task. Therefore, women must remain in their communal role, and yet work harder than men on the same tasks in order to be viewed as competent as men (Lester, 2008; Swim, Borgida, Maruyama & Meyers, 1989; Ridgeway, 2001, 2011).

As women have risen to meet these arduous challenges, they have also augmented the literature on what is considered effective leadership (Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2010; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003; Ridgeway, 2011; Rink, Ryan & Stoker, 2013). When included in the research, female leadership is often viewed in contrast to the male leaders instead of exploring female leadership in its own merit (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Carli, 2003). Moving away from traditional labels of instrumental and communal, women’s leadership styles are often referred to in terms of transformational leadership (Cuadrado, Navas, Molero, Ferrer & Morales, 2012; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly et al, 2003). Transformational leadership enables many women leaders to assert authority while maintaining a communal emphasis, allowing their leadership to be action oriented while still being perceived as ‘feminine’ (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly et al, 2003). This more current examination of
leadership and gender also indicates that the context (type of task, type of institution) plays a role in how leaders are judged (Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2010; Cuadrado et al, 2003; Ridgeway, 2001, 2011; Rink et al, 2013; Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004). So, while women leaders are found to be more effective in a transformational leadership capacity, this efficacy is also positively influenced when the leadership tasks require more communal skills or the organization promotes more communal values (Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2010; Cuadrado et al, 2003; Ridgeway, 2001, 2011; Rink et al, 2013; Van Engen & Willemsen, 2004). The above studies help to understand why women may experience more professional success in the community college, where the context is aligned with communal values.

“Community colleges are regarded as democratic institutions, admitting anyone through open access and bringing educational opportunities to those not welcomed at many other institutions” yet the majority of these institutions are led by members of the advantaged group (White males) (Eddy & Cox, 2008, p. 69). Research shows that the democratic motif in the community college environment rarely translates into access to leadership ascendancy opportunities for such a historically marginalized group as women. Eddy & Cox (2008) illustrate that although women advance to the presidency more often in the community college setting than other areas of higher education, women leaders are still judged according to male norms and subject to backlash for acting outside their expected gender roles. Other studies have captured this comparison to male normed definitions of leadership and the expectation of women to perform “mom” work through the cultivation and maintenance of a nurturing demeanor, as well as the “glue work” such as taking notes and playing peacemaker to keep the group functioning (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Lester, 2008; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). The above studies also
comment on the need for women to learn how to ‘switch gears,’ to successfully move between gender roles, in order advance in their careers.

Christman and McClellan (2008) refer to this skillful gender role navigation as a component of resiliency. Resiliency is discussed as a transformative process, whereby a person, as a result of adversity, metamorphoses into a steely individual, more prepared, resolved and capable (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Grotberg, 2003). Resiliency depends on self-reflection and a continual adaptation, “this ability to turn inward for assessment became easier over time with each subsequent barrier that could have slowed them down or permanently removed them” (Christman & McClellan, 2008, p. 8; Whatley, 1998). Therefore, when faced with male norms and unfair expectations about competence and appropriate behavior, women pursuing leadership must choose to adapt, to resiliently transform themselves, to become leaders.

This transformation period, of becoming resilient, can be represented by the liminal status of these women. Turner (1964) described liminality as a stage of reflection where the individual is introduced to the sacra and must decide on what identity they will emerge with from the transition. Sacra are the cultural teachings necessary for the individual to understand the transformation and the liminal period provides an opportunity for the individual to experiment, to explore, different aspects of this instruction (Bettis & Mills, 2006; Turner, 1964). “The communication of sacra both teaches the [individuals] how to think with some degree of abstraction about their cultural milieu and gives them ultimate standards of reference. At the same time, it is believed to change their nature, transform them from one kind of human being into another” (Turner, 1964, p. 13). Communication of the sacra occurs in three ways, through (1) the reductions of cultural norms into generalizations, (2) the reconstruction of these generalizations into “fantastic or monstrous patterns,” and (3) finally, the “recombination in
ways that make sense with regard to the next state and status that the [individual] will enter” (Turner, 1964, p 10).

In exploring the *sacra* leadership, these three paths would represent (1) the generalized concept of leader rooted in male gendered terms, (2) the extreme stereotypes (monsters & fantasy) associated with gendered leadership, reflecting the backlash that awaits those who step out of their prescribed roles and (3) the recognition of which elements of leadership and gender are most salient to the individual’s next role and the individual’s opportunity to choose their values, their definition, of ‘leader.’ By understanding the cultural generalizations as well as the dangers associated with the extremes, the individual is faced with the choice of what to include in their transformation, which elements of the sacra will lead to a successful transformation into leadership. This *liminal* period, which involves navigating an ambiguous transition, exploring the *sacra*, and emerging from the transition as a leader, captures Christman & McClellan’s (2008) process of resiliency and the arduous task that lies before women in the community college.

Important to the discussion is not just understanding the content of the *sacra*, but also the vehicles through which the *sacra* are communicated.

**The Primary Influences on Leadership Development in the Community College**

**Current Practices in Professional Development**

One revelation brought forward by the recent literature concerning leadership development is the acknowledgement that “leadership skills are acquired through multiple paths” (McNair et al, 2011, p. 4). Campbell et al (2010) discuss leadership development as occurring in 3 segments: (1) the discipline knowledge base or coursework associated with community college leadership; (2) the development of research and data analysis skills exemplified by the
dissertation-writing process; and (3) strengthening of interpersonal skills, specifically emotional intelligence. This approach relies heavily on graduate training for the majority of the development process, with targeted coaching to assist in the area of interpersonal skills development (Campbell et al, 2010).

Ebbers et al (2010) build upon this model by not only stating the importance of interpersonal skills, but by also identifying ‘stepping stone’ institutions can provide to promote the development of individuals. The authors encourage institutions to focus resources on developing their faculty and staff internally, stating that the vast majority of leaders will come from within the institution. Also incorporating graduate training, the authors propose a stepping stone process involving four steps:

1. Engaging- the institutions should provide an environment where individuals can make known their desires to pursue leadership positions and have access to assessment measures designed to help them understand themselves better and interact within the institution more effectively;

2. Planning- the institution helps individuals develop an intentional plan of action to help move them towards their goal, identifying actions (such as graduate training) and resources (such as professionalism development) necessary to enable their success;

3. Credentialing- the institution encourages individuals to research and secure an appropriate degree for the leadership position they seek to attain. While the doctorate degree is becoming increasingly important, there are also a number of specialized certificates that can benefit future leaders;

4. Emulating- the institution provides individuals with the opportunity to practice leadership skills by “watching and learning from successful experienced leaders” in mentoring and networking relationships (p. 62).
This shift in responsibility for leadership development from graduate training to the individual institution is reflected throughout the current literature (Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). While there is no substitute for formal education, it is not considered sufficient preparation for the role of community college leadership. Instead “scholars implore community colleges to develop their own leadership programs,” which can address the gap that sometimes exists between the skills emphasized in graduate training and those deemed essential to the role (Brown et al, 2002, p. 6).

Referred to as ‘Grow Your Own’ leadership development programs, these internally designed and implemented approaches have become a best practice for community colleges (Ebbers et al, 2010; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). While there is no standard approach to these programs, the common elements include: team building and collaboration, institutional mission and purpose, institutional budgeting processes, institutional funding, institutional culture and values, emerging issues, governance, and ethics (Reille & Kezar, 2010). These common elements are very much in line with the competencies proposed by the AACC: Collaboration, Communication, Community College Advocacy, Organizational Strategy, Professionalism and Resource Management (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005). GYO programs report numerous benefits, including the promotion of many program participants into leadership roles and the development of meaningful skills even for those that did not advance into new positions (Reille & Kezar, 2010). Program participants also “become more involved in campus activities and committees, increase their collaboration across disciplines, develop innovative projects, and improve their problem-solving abilities” (Reille & Kezar, 2010, p. 16). Although the need for these leadership programs is substantial, very few institutions have one in place (Reille & Kezar, 2010).
The current literature on leadership development in the community college is more a call to action than a summation of occurrences. Several important studies show what needs to happen, the skills that need to be developed, the mechanisms by which those skilled can be developed, but most important, it documents the great deficit that exists in access to leadership development (e.g., Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). This deficit may be partly attributed to a divide between the current models and the needs experienced by women in the community college setting. If these models are rooted in the historical male normed concept of leadership, then these programs may be creating additional barriers instead of supports for a large portion of community college faculty, given that women comprise 49% of full time community college faculty positions (American Council on Education, 2007). Additionally, the research supporting the notion that women’s paths to leadership are often unintentional need to inform the design of leadership opportunities if these opportunities are to be successful.

When examining mid-level leadership roles, the unintentional path into leadership is described as “accidental leadership” with leaders being “approached or placed in administrative positions versus seeking them out,” (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008, p. 10). This accidental approach to leadership is indicative of employees’ perceptions of little incentive to seek out the roles on their own. Increased work requirements and lack of financial compensation make administrative positions unattractive, especially to women seeking to balance their professional and personal lives (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Sallee, 2008; Wolf-Wendel, Ward and Twombly, 2007). The need for women to continue to fulfill their gendered expectations in addition to meeting expectations associated with leadership positions create a difficult struggle for balance.
The struggle for balance is captured in Eddy’s (2008) analysis of community college presidents, which states that “a stable home front provided a sense of foundation for these women, but also added constraints with respect to their ability to easily move for career advancement” (p. 6). As Eddy’s study indicates, most presidents were waiting until personal obligations were stable (husband retired, children raised) before pursuing their professional advancements (Eddy, 2008). Therefore, while many women may have a desire for advancement, the increased time away from their families that the advancement would require may make leadership unattractive earlier in their careers. Regardless of these limiting circumstances, many females in community colleges either intentionally pursue leadership or find themselves “accidental” leaders, and these leaders, both accidental and intentional, could then develop into chief academic officers and presidents. Studying individual women’s experiences of their ascent to leadership is both necessary and important. It is necessary because community colleges will not survive the impending talent shortage if they cannot capitalize on the strengths of their female faculty. It is important in regards to a more nuanced understanding of how to make leadership development opportunities more intentional and attractive for women in the community college, to identify the barriers that prevent female leaders from emerging, and to better understand how the transformation of leadership occurs for women in the community college setting.

Undercurrents Influencing the Leadership Development of Women

While the research on gender contributes a meaningful perspective on how women experience leadership, one gender theory in particular seems uniquely positioned to explore women transitioning into leadership. Expectation states theory (Wagner & Berger, 1997) posits
that gender is heavily intertwined with social hierarchy and leadership because status beliefs, or shared expectations, that govern these areas are built upon gender codes. These status beliefs, rooted in gender expectations, lead to evaluative rankings of one group as opposed to another, leading to presumptions of competence and legitimacy based on an individual’s membership to a specific status (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011; Wagner & Berger, 1997). “Expectation states research has demonstrated that when people interact in regard to collective goals, status beliefs shape the enactment of social hierarchies among individuals, affecting influence and leadership,” (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 638). Therefore, expectation states theory argues that the status related to female gender is the primary barrier for women’s advancement (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011). It is the perceived lower status of women that leads to resistance when a woman violates her expected gendered behavior or seeks to assume male normed behaviors involved in power and higher status (Ridgeway 2001, 2011). Expectation states theory describes the process by which these status beliefs shape behavior through *self-other performance expectations* (Ridgeway, 2001; 2011). When brought together in a group to work on a shared responsibility, individuals will draw upon unconscious assumptions of status beliefs to determine where they ‘rank’ in the groups’ hierarchy and will behave in a manner consistent with their group status ranking (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011). Gender categorization happens instantly and carries with it the resulting pressure for women in a mixed sex group to assume supportive, reactive roles due to their perceived lower status (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011).

The distinct perspective of expectation states theory, however, is that the effects of status beliefs on *self-other performance expectations* depends on how salient and task relevant the status is for the group (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011). The effects of gender status will be fluid across situations depending on the contexts and the individuals involved. Influencing this fluidity is the
realization that individuals carry status in areas other than just gender. Therefore, in expectation states theory, “actors combine the positive and negative implications of all salient roles, resources, and status characteristics, each weighted by its relevance to the task, to form aggregated performance expectations for each actor compared to the others” (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 644). By examining different roles, resources and status characteristics, this theory provides a useful perspective for illustrating the different experiences women can have in their careers as their experience depends on more than just their gender. What statuses do successful women leaders exhibit that enable them to move past the confines of their prescribed gender expectations? How did they acquire these statuses? What transpired during their liminal period that led to these statuses?

**Summary**

Over the last 30 years, female representation has increased in every area of higher education. Yet there is still much to be learned about individual experiences of women entering the higher echelons of power in the positions of leadership, specifically the community college environment as it represents a more recent enterprise in higher education.

The community college provides a place where female faculty seem to experience more security, success, and satisfaction if compared with their female counterparts in the four year colleges and universities. The above studies suggest that within the context of community college workplace, female faculty (a) may have more opportunity for advancement with most promotions coming from within the institution; (b) occupy the majority of faculty positions; and (c) men and women experiencing equal access to advancement.
While community colleges have more female presidents than any other higher educational institution, the current 29% is still disproportionately low compared to women’s representation among community college students, 57%, and full time faculty, 49%.

Interestingly, several studies (e.g., Eddy, 2008; Mitchell, 2004) suggest that most female community college presidents have come to their positions by accident, thus displaying a lack of intentionality in terms of career advancement. Yet although unintentional, their path to the presidency was a natural progression up the organizational chart, and often accompanied by encouragement from a mentor figure. Other studies (e.g., Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011) emphasize that women develop their leadership skills independently, citing a need for more intentional development of those who may follow in their footsteps.

With massive retirements expected in community colleges over the next decade, institutions are paying more attention to leadership development. The American Association of Community Colleges’ “Competencies for Community College Leaders” presents a leadership framework comprised of six domains: Collaboration, Communication, Community College Advocacy, Organizational Strategy, Professionalism and Resource Management. This framework is shaping the current discourse on community college leadership development and women leaders are a powerful force within this discourse. Current practices in leadership development falls into two categories: (1) Graduate training for the majority of the development process, with targeted coaching to assist in the area of interpersonal skills development and (2) Grow Your Own programs with internally designed and implemented approaches. However, current practices are not specifically addressing the needs of female leaders. Not enough is known about women leaders’ paths or needs to be able to facilitate their leadership development.
This study sought to address gaps in the literature concerning the advancement of women in the community college, such as the perception of success, satisfaction, and gender parity juxtaposed with diminishing representation in the higher ranks of leadership. This study explored information specific to the transitional period, moving from faculty into leadership positions, while exploring contextual factors that influence this transition. By discovering how women experience their transition from faculty into academic leadership, this study attempted to provide the necessary perspective to better understand why women represent 49% of full time faculty, but only 29% of presidencies in the community college.

Participants’ liminality inheres a wealth of knowledge, which this study will excavate and explore in search of meaning. Delving into their liminal experiences rendered a holistic view of the emergence of participants’ identities as leaders. Instead of a before and after view of the transition, the conceptual framework of liminality allows us to explore the transition as it unfolded, as the identity was being shaped, as the emergence was unfolding. What did it mean to be betwixt and between statuses in the community college? This holistic view allowed for a much greater understanding, not just of the influences involved in the transitions, but of the shifting, changing intersections of influences that coalesced into a new being with a new status. This study attempted to provide new insight into the advancement of women in the community college, and to also add rich depth to the existing literature by exploring the phenomenon as it unfolds.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

“Research begins in wonder and curiosity but ends in teaching” (Shulman, 1997, p. 6).

This chapter outlines the migration from wonder (introduction) to teaching (discussion) by describing the theoretical framework best suited to the pursuit of this specific ‘wonder.’

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of women advancing from faculty to senior administrative and leadership positions in public community colleges in the Southeast. The main research question that guided this study was: How do women experience the transition from their academic to leadership positions in the community college?

Additionally, I posed the following questions:

- How do these women make sense of their role as a faculty?
- Given the transition, the liminal spaces, of their experiences, how do these women perceive the shifting sense of their identity?
- What does liminality mean to them?
- How do they understand the changing status of their professional roles?
- Having gone through the transitional experience, how do these women perceive their identity as a leader?

Insights from this study were especially valuable because they illuminated the first-hand transitional experiences of women leaders in community colleges. Serving to bridge the literature on female faculty with that on female presidents, this study sought to uncover the ways in which
women experienced this liminal period where they have shed their faculty identities thus transitioning to new roles, with new responsibilities, expectations, and social rules. Hearing from women themselves about their experiences of leadership could impact not only individual women with leadership aspirations, but also institutions developing succession plans and professionals designing leadership development models.

**Conceptualizing the Study through the Interpretive Inquiry**

Scholarly discussions concerning research methodologies traditionally focus on the distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell, 2012). However, such distinction does not do justice to the richness and diversity of the traditions and types of research that have been employed in human and natural sciences for centuries. Polkinghorne (1983) positioned what is most often understood as qualitative research within the existential-phenomenological and hermeneutic systems of inquiry. By employing phenomenology as the methodology for this study, I drew extensively from several philosophical and theoretical perspectives associated with the existential-phenomenological system of inquiry.

Exploring the possibilities within this system of inquiry allowed me to integrate the ideas and concepts from several thinkers and scholars into the “tapestry of paradigms” (Ulysse & Lukenchuk, 2013; Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013) that illuminated the purpose of this study and the methods of its investigation. Further, the tapestry in question validated the significance of interpretive research and provided the best road map for this study. In revisiting the questions guiding this study: *How do women experience the transition from their academic to leadership positions, how do they understand the changing status of their professional roles, how do these women perceive their identity as a leader*, the interpretive paradigm aligned well with the
knowledge the researcher was seeking (Creswell, 2012; Lukenchuk, 2013). In the exploration of women’s professional advancement in community colleges, these women’s diverse experiences and the meaning that they give to these experiences were considered as both the source of knowledge and the phenomenon we sought to understand.

**Phenomenology**

The task of phenomenological inquiry is “to describe the phenomena as they appear to our consciousness and to endow them with meaning” (Ulysse & Lukenchuk, 2013, p. 24). Phenomenology has firmly established itself as a distinct methodology in social and human sciences. Phenomenology is regarded as both the philosophy and methodology. As a philosophy, it is closely aligned with existentialism and both seek to understand the human condition. Edward Husserl (1859-1938), considered the father of phenomenology, studied this human condition through structures of consciousness and developed the original, transcendental, strand of phenomenology (Ulysse & Lukenchuk, 2013). This emphasis on consciousness is evident in the concept of *lebenswelt*. Vital to the phenomenological process, *lebenswelt*, or lifeworld, is the belief that mind and body (subject and world) are interrelated, interdependent and cannot be understood in isolation from the other (Schutz, 1932). Therefore, the consciousness we seek to understand must be examined in the context that it inhabits. In addition to this interconnectedness for understanding, *lebenswelt* also reflects an interconnectedness of meaning, as the person’s consciousness is giving meaning to the context; the context is also shaping the individual’s consciousness. Therefore, the phenomenological researcher must attend to not only the individual’s consciousness, but also their context, or environment, if they are to gain understanding and find meaning in the phenomena (Schutz, 1932).
While maintaining its philosophical roots, phenomenology has gained popularity as a contemporary research methodology that seeks to better understand *how* people experience specific phenomena (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Phenomenology is about “revealing, uncovering, exposing, and connecting” lived experiences of individuals (Duncan, 2013, p. 237). Given the goal of this study, to better understand how women experience advancement in the community college, phenomenology provided an appropriate framework without constricting the way in which the participants’ stories were viewed.

**Social Phenomenology**

Contemporary scholars are indebted to Husserl’s original transcendental phenomenology with consciousness treated as ‘pure’ and independent realm. However, it has become important for sociologists to extend the Husserlian realm of pure ‘I’ to ‘we-relationships’ signifying the ‘perceiver’ and the ‘perceived’ in one act of comprehension, i.e., the researcher’s (perceiver) grasping the meaning of phenomena (perceived) as the ‘other’ individual presents it to the researcher’s subjective consciousness (Polkinghorne, 1983). Social phenomenology, in other words, aims at understanding the subjective experience and aggregating the concepts from such experience into a more ‘objective’ knowledge of phenomena of the social world (Polkinghorne). Social phenomenology seeks to understand the reciprocal relationship between the meaning an individual ascribes to experience and the social world; how *is* *lebenswelt* influenced by our social nature (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The meaning an individual draws out of an experience is influenced by the social reality which the individual has helped create: “Man’s self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 51). Therefore, social phenomenology provided a framework not only to examine the participants’ *lebenswelt*, but also to explore how their experiences and the meaning ascribed to them are influenced by
their sociality. Therefore, this study examined a complex “we-relationships” of the participants and their lifeworlds in general, and more specifically, for instance, how potential participants ascribed the meaning to their experiences of social equilibrium and maintaining the status quo versus challenging perceived social constructs within their environments. Social phenomenology allowed for a broader understanding of the structures of consciousness of the individuals as they disclosed the complexity of the relationships with the world at large.

**Phenomenology of Sense Perception**

Studying women’s perceptions of themselves as leaders inevitably involved the questions of their ‘embodied’ experiences (Polkinghorne, 1983). It is the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908—1961) that is particularly interesting to explore in terms of the phenomenology of sense perception, also known as ‘flesh’ or ‘embodied’ perception. The name of Merleau-Ponty still remains peripheral to phenomenological studies. Yet it is precisely his name that has recently stirred interest of scholars in the field of leadership (e.g., Ladkin, 2012). Ladkin (2012) points to the role that bodies play in the enactment of leadership and the insights that the phenomenological studies of sense perception can bring to leadership as ‘flesh’ for leadership practice.

Merleau-Ponty claims consciousness is not private, but a relation to the world. In contrast to Husserl’s private and transcendental realm, consciousness is a spatial and temporal field. Perception is “dehiscence, a splitting open of the body as touching and touched, as seer and seen that allows the body to experience things, that puts the body in contrasts with things where they rest, yet separates it from them at the same time” (cited in Low, 2000, p. 17). People perceive the world with their mind *and* body. Perception is therefore a ‘fabric of experience,’ the ‘flesh of time’ that allows us to connect with the world and others (Merleau-Ponty, 1973). In other words,
lived experience is always embodied, and social beings find meaning in their body’s active encounter with the world. Subsequently, I intended to study the ‘embodied’ experiences of my prospective participants. I was interested to find out how they connected and interacted with their professional lifeworlds in ‘flesh’ and how they ascribed meaning to their ‘corporeal’ experiences.

Perceptions of lifeworlds are never complete, but are constantly shifting views of reality. This fluid consciousness is the result of an individual attempting to make meaning of the changing world in which he or she lives (Wertz 1989). These shifting, changing perceptions, of mind and body, constitute the individual’s reality, suggesting that there is no independent answer that will explain experiences or underscore meaning. Instead, it is the individual’s reality, or perceptions, we must investigate as that is where experience and meaning are given life in consciousness (Polkinghorne, 1989). Human experience “makes sense to those who live it” (Creswell, 1998, p.86).

**Post-phenomenological ‘Homeworld’**

When examining the lived experiences of women, feminist researchers find social phenomenology and the ‘corporeal’ rendition of it most appealing, if compared, for instance, with transcendental phenomenology that treats self as totally devoid of gender. Yet the analysis of gender from a woman’s perspective remains problematic in any traditional phenomenological sense. Oksala (2011) refers to this problem as the paradox of phenomenological reduction that “keeps the empirical and the transcendental strictly separate” (p. 237). Oksala goes on to say that it is problematic to discuss perceptions as being male versus female in the traditional phenomenological sense, as this would imply that (1) reduction to determine the true ‘essence’ did not properly occur or (2) that individual reality is driven by which type of lived body you
possess (Oksala, 2006). She argues that it is too simplistic to view that reality is shaped by the physical body alone and that in order for phenomenology to best serve the investigation of gender, it must be modified. Oksala thus proposes a ‘post-phenomenological’ rendition of gender.

A key piece of Oksala’s modification of phenomenology is the concept of homeworld (Oksala, 2006). Building upon the concept of lebenswelt, homeworld incorporates the socially constructed history and traditions that influence the individual’s lebenswelt. Our homeworld is an intersubjectively constituted system of ‘normalcy’ which teaches the individual convention (what is ‘normal’) as well as the sanctions for violating convention (Oksala, 2006). In light of this homeworld, researchers can begin to understand how perceptions and experiences develop gendered meanings. This homeworld is a reflection of socially constructed concepts and therefore it changes with society. Because this fluid homeworld shapes the individual lebenswelt, it must be considered in the phenomenological pursuit of understanding (Oksala, 2006). The challenge in this post-phenomenological modification is that the homeworld is necessary to understanding gendered experiences, yet it is the very thing that should be bracketed, risen above, during phenomenological analysis. Oksala contends that post-phenomenological analysis cannot ignore, or bracket away, the homeworld. Instead, the researcher must understand that epoché (another term for bracketing) is never complete; rather, it represents an endless circular path striving for deeper understanding (Oksala, 2006). This is an expansion of the core phenomenological tenet that “interpretation is never final, and the process of understanding does not result in finite or objective truth” (Ulysse & Lukenchuk, 2013, p. 26).
Oksala’s notion of *homeworld* was particularly appealing to me in terms of examining the women’s experiences as gendered, their perceptions of themselves as gendered beings, as well as their perceptions of societal expectations of themselves as women.

**Expectation States Theory**

Gender, like all social constructs, has expectations and stereotypes that accompany it. Gender possesses not just descriptive, but also prescriptive elements. To better understand how gender roles and expectations may or may not have shaped the *homeworld* of prospective participants of this study, I drew upon the principles of Expectation States theory (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011; Wagner & Berger, 1997). This theory aligned well with social phenomenology—the tradition within which this study was primarily conceptualized. According to the Expectation States theory, the status aspects of gender roles (men as instrumentally competent and women as reactive and communal) guide not only how we act, but also how we think others should act relative to their status in the group (Ridgeway, 2001). This prescriptive element leads to backlash for those who act outside the socially approved role, providing “distinctly powerful barriers to women’s achievement of positions of authority, leadership and power” (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 638). However, the risk of backlash is dependent on the woman’s overall status in the group and can be mitigated by other statuses achieved such as valued skills, positional title, or educational expertise (Ridgeway, 2001). In this study, I was interested in finding out how women perceived their status within their respective *homeworlds* and what it meant to them to change that status from faculty to leaders.

**Liminality**

Oksala (2011) reminds us that in his later writings Husserl broadened his views on the self-reflective study of consciousness by turning to the fields of anthropology and ethnology
while recognizing the importance of temporality and historicity of human lived experience. An investigation of gendered experience can benefit from an anthropological concept of *liminality* first introduced in the West by Arnold van Gennup (1873-1957). Liminality is a distinct phase occurring during a rite of passage, the transitional state where one has been removed from their primary classification but has not yet achieved their new status within the group (Turner, 1964). Building upon van Gennup’s work, Victor Turner singled out this phase for intense study, considering it “where the building blocks of culture are exposed” (1964, p. 4). Cultural influence appears in the way people are viewed and prepared during their liminal period. When in the liminal spaces, people are considered ‘betwixt and between’ social states, occupying no specific ranking but encouraged to explore new ways of being (Turner, 1964).

Liminality provided yet another lens through which to view the experiences of women transitioning from faculty to leadership positions. How did they perceive themselves betwixt and between their social states? What might be their new ways of being? What meaning do they ascribe to their liminal homeworlds?

**Research Design**

**Participants and Site**

Since phenomenology aims for an in depth understanding of phenomena, it usually works with small samples, thus enabling the researcher to ensure the depth necessary to understand the meanings and experiences of participants (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). The selection of participants is meticulous and purposeful in phenomenological and other types of qualitative research. Purposive sampling targets participants that will have the experiences necessary to address the research questions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The recruitment of the participants
often involves convenience sampling techniques including word-of-mouth networking to obtain referrals from professional contacts. Similarly, snowball technique augments the sample by using those already consented to be part of the study to recruit more participants (Creswell, 2012). Both convenience and snowball sample techniques were employed to obtain a purposive sample in this study. I begin with identifying possible participants that were accessible both geographically and within the data collection timeframe for this study (convenience). Once involved in the study, I used current participants to assist in the location and recruitment of additional women (snowball).

The purposive sample for this study was comprised of women who have experience as academic deans after previously serving as faculty members within a community college setting. Academic dean positions are recognized as those reporting to the Chief Academic Officer. Both former and current employees were considered for the study, with the resulting sample comprise of only current employees.

Miles et al (2014) suggests that the richness of the sample is more important than the quantity of the sample when engaged in qualitative research. Thus, I recruited 9 participants from public community colleges in the southeast region of the United States. Recruitment began with an invitation to participate in the study. This invitation was sent electronically to (1) individuals I already knew professionally, (2) individuals referred to me through professional contacts, and (3) individuals identified as academic deans in organizational charts obtained through web searches. By responding to my invitation, the participants demonstrated their willingness to participate. Of those that accepted my invitation, follow up communication ensured that selected participants had the experiences necessary to contribute to the unique context of this study.
Sources of Data and Their Collection Strategies

Phenomenological studies are exploratory in nature. Relying on rich contextual description and unconcerned with universality, they are best served with little prior instrumentation (Miles et al, 2014). Instead of solidifying extensive data collection methods prior to the collection, the instrumentation, or data collection strategies should reflect the “conceptual focus, research questions, and sampling criteria,” but remain loose enough to allow context to emerge (Miles et al, 2014, p. 40). Unstructured or semi-structured (or both) qualitative interviews typically constitute major data for analysis in phenomenological research supplemented by other sources of data.

Interviews. In-depth, semi-structured interviews provided major data for analysis in this study. Interviewing is a “meaning-making endeavor” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 94) and this study relied on in-depth interviews to collect a rich description of the participants’ experiences and the meaning that had been given to those experiences. In keeping with the exploratory nature of the study, a semi-structured approach was employed during these in-depth interviews to provide minimal guidance to participants as they shared their stories, but also allowing them to expand on details they deem important or meaningful (Miles et al, 2014). This approach supported the goal of phenomenological interviewing to “focus on the deep, lived meanings that events have for individuals, assuming that these meanings guide actions and interactions” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 105).

Interviews for this study were conducted face-to-face with each participant. They lasted approximately one and a half to two hours and were audio-recorded, with the participant’s consent (Appendix B). A professional was hired to assist me with transcribing the interviews. A transcript of the interview was provided to each participant for verification of accuracy.
While phenomenological interviews constitute intense and open conversations with participants, an interview guide (Appendix A) was developed to keep the interviews focused on specific issues relevant to the research questions of the study. The interview guide represented a combination of questions created to best allow the story to unfold, while maintaining a connection to the conceptual boundaries of the study. For instance, the concept of liminality, of a period where the participants are between identities, warranted questions which explored their transition and assumption of new identities, such as: *Please share the most significant experiences during your transition from faculty to leadership*; or: *When did you see yourself as a leader?* An interview guide informed by several ideas, concepts, and theories discussed above was intended to yield the data that would allow me to address the study’s research purposes and questions, without overbearing constraints that would prevent a rich story from emerging.

**Observational and Reflective Notes.** Interview data were supplemented with extensive observational and reflective notes that I took throughout the study. Drawing on the techniques of fieldnotes, these notes recorded the setting of the interviews, including sights, smells, and nonverbal communications provided by the participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). These notes also provided a space for reflection on my role as the researcher throughout this journey and held my impressions, my emerging connections and provided a source of triangulation for the research data (Creswell, 2012).

Once the data were collected, every attempt was made to keep the data confidential and to protect the anonymity of the participants, including the use of a pseudonym for each participant for the duration of study. Transcripts of the interviews and my notes were stored in a locked cabinet, where they will remain for at least seven years and destroyed afterwards if no longer needed. All electronic files are being kept on a secure server. Upon request, the
Phenomenological Process of Data Analysis

This study employed Moustakas’ (1994) approach to the phenomenological process of analyzing data about lived experiences. Moustakas draws extensively from the tradition of transcendental phenomenology, where meaning is at the core of understanding and explicating human experiences (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). The purpose is to arrive at the “essence” of the phenomena that illuminate various lived experiences through “aggregating subjective experiences of a number of individuals” (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 23). This systematic approach involves five processes; epoché, horizonalization, clustering for meaning, imaginative variation, and the synthesis of meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994). Each process brings a certain level of understanding regarding the phenomenon. By using all of the processes, the researcher is provided with scaffolding for an even deeper understanding to emerge (Moustakas, 1994). Consequently, the purpose of this study was to reach the level of understanding the ‘essence’ of liminal experiences of women advancing professionally in community colleges.

Steps of Phenomenological Analysis

Epoché. The first step in the phenomenological process required the researcher to reflect on and describe any personal experiences with the phenomenon with the intent of the researcher setting aside these personal views and experiences. If achieved, then the researcher was free to focus on the experience of the participants and “nothing is determined in advance” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). This step was crucial to ensure that the participants’ experiences were not colored...
by the researcher’s preconceptions or prejudgments (Moustakas, 1994). Also known as bracketing, this step would traditionally have required me, as the researcher for this study, to reflect and set aside my experiences relating to being a woman in the community college setting, being a faculty member who moved into leadership, and my involvement with leadership development. However, it was this step which needed to be altered with the adoption of the post-phenomenological modification suggested by Oksala (2006). Instead of bracketing, or attempting to move beyond, my experiences with gender, I needed to attend to them. To truly understand the ‘essence’ of my participants’ homeworlds, I could not fully bracket gender from the analysis (Oksala, 2006). Therefore, my epoché focused on the reflection and setting aside of my experiences with leadership, with being a faculty member who transitioned to leadership and with leadership development.

**Horizontalization** After all effort was made by the researcher to bracket his or her preconceived ideas of the phenomenon under study, the researcher began to identify statements provided by the participants from the interview transcripts that relate information about the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). These significant statements were not assigned any value or organized in any manner. They were simply collected and helped the researcher identify the range of perspectives involved (Moustakas, 1994). By examining each horizon and its distinct qualities, I began to understand the slivers that make up the homeworlds of my participants.

**Clustering for Meaning.** In this process, the researcher carefully examined the significant statements that emerged in horizontalization and began to group the statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994). Here the researcher began to see connections and these connections
will began to shape the understanding of the larger picture of the participant’s experience (Moustakas, 1994). This process allowed me to take those distinct slivers identified in horizontalization and begin to discover how they are woven together to create meaning. How did the fragments, or individual pieces of experiences, forge into an understanding of an overarching liminal period?

**Imaginative Variation.** During the next step of phenomenological analysis, the researcher used textural descriptions of the themes in order to explicate ‘what’ was experienced by the participant and ‘how’ this experience occurred (Moustakas, 1994). By seeking to address the two fundamental questions posed by phenomenology, this step provided the researcher the forum to reflect on the context of the data in order to extensively explore a number of possible meanings (Creswell, 2012). This process allowed me to expand beyond the superficial themes that emerged and search for a deeper discovery of meaning. Imaginative Variation helped me uncover what it was that defined my phenomenon and what distinguished it from other experiences in the lives of my participants.

**Synthesis of Meanings and Essences.** This final process of data analysis involved “the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). This composite became the essential structure which captured the meaning that is given to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This step allowed me to bring together the varied and individual experiences of my participants into a single, rich, comprehensive story.

**Validation of Research Findings and Researcher’s Self**

Validation of research findings in this qualitative study focused on ensuring the data provided by the participants were accurate and credible (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).
Triangulation of the data and member checks assisted with validation in this study (Creswell, 2012). Triangulation involved collecting data from multiple sources. In this study, data came from the face-to-face interviews as well as extensive observational and reflective notes. Member-checks were conducted individually with each of the participants at the conclusion of each interview, as well as during the analysis of data. Therefore, using multiple sources of data and engaging in member-checking served to assess the accuracy of the data, enhance validity of the findings, and help improve the authenticity of the study.

Having spent most of my career in the community college setting, I have had the opportunity to observe many women in their roles as faculty and in their transitions to leadership. After spending three years in a faculty capacity, I began my own transition into academic leadership. These observations and personal experiences served as my impetus for this study as well as the foundation for my research boundaries. My experiences and background enabled me to construct a study which provided the opportunity for my participants to share their experiences and to discover the ‘essence’ of those experiences. My experiences and background also helped facilitate the interview process, from recruitment to data collection and analysis. The ability to build rapport, to promote intimacy and, at the same time, maintain a ‘distance’ from the participants and their stories were all skills acquired through my graduate training in psychology.

While the similarities between my background and those of my participants signals an enmeshment that could have made epoché a challenge, this enmeshment was counterbalanced by experience with social science research and psychological interviewing that I have practiced for over a decade. Therefore, I was uniquely positioned to use my experience and knowledge to ask the best questions to allow their story to unfold and to then render that story meaningfully to the reader and the scholarly community. “We should therefore accept the hermeneutical circle-at
least in connect with our analysis of gender-and try to see to it that our method continuously turns back upon itself, questioning and modifying itself in an effort to articulate what it secretly thinks. This means understanding epoché not as total, universal and complete, but as an endless, circular and always partial task” (Oksala, 2006, p. 238).

**Reflection on the Research Development Process**

This study served my rather ‘selfish’ purpose, which was to help me to understand my experiences of advancing from a faculty member to academic leadership by examining the experiences of others in similar situations. While this quest began out of self-interest, the responsibility of hearing and relaying my participants’ lived experiences weighed heavily on my soul. My ‘success’ does not just involve what I have learned as the result of this study, but what understanding I am able to bring into the lives of my readers, and potentially my participants.

The concept of *liminality* captured the essence of women’s experiences transitioning from faculty to leadership positions. This inquiry allowed me to enter into the *homeworlds* of my participants to study their in-depth *liminal* experiences. I remained mindful of my own similar experiences, thus making effort to suspend and, yet, at the same time, relate to what they had to share. Delving into the depths of phenomenological investigations brings forth the multiple layers of our selves. Where does one begin as a woman or a faculty member and finds herself as a leader? – this was the question to ponder throughout this study.

We each experience our rites of passage in our own unique way. What seems to matter, in the long run, is the experience itself and how we emerge from it, in a new capacity and as a newly initiated into yet another tradition or position. The rites of passage are trodden by the individuals who belong to a societal group. This study intended to illuminate the individual paths
of women advancing in the community college. Yet their unique experiences unfolded in the particular professional and social contexts of their lives. The interplay of the individual and the public relationships was captured through the lens of social phenomenology.

Using a post-phenomenological lens, I also explored how gender may or may not have played a role in the transitional experiences of these women. Aligned with the purpose of phenomenological studies, the in-depth interviews with the participants allowed me to uncover essential structures of their experiences that spoke to a variety of issues pertaining to what it means to be a 21st century American female leader in a community college and what it takes to become one. Inevitably, I addressed and questioned my own assumptions and experiences along similar lines and throughout the study.

“A strong woman knows she has strength enough for the journey, but a woman of strength knows it is in the journey where she will become strong.”
~Unknown
CHAPTER FOUR
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The journey from faculty to academic leader is not one that comes with a guidebook or
detailed description. Instead it appears to unfold like a foggy trail, piece by piece, with a sense of
uncertainty and possible peril rising from the twists and turns. Yet, something pulls you along
the path, something inside whispers that whatever the journey may bring, you are strong enough.

The following chapter explores the journeys taken by my participants, bringing together
their experiences and reflections as they transitioned from faculty into academic leadership. This
chapter includes profiles of my 9 participants based on initial impressions garnered through the
interview process and also brings forward the essential structures related to their transition with
supporting textural and structural descriptions. This chapter concludes with a synthesis of the
essential structures into composite description that provided the essence of the phenomenon.
Table 1 below identifies the 9 women involved in this study by their pseudonyms and provides
information related to the breadth of their leadership areas and institutional sizes.
Table 1: Participants’ Area and Institutional Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Currently Dean of..</th>
<th>Size of Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>All curriculum</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidi</td>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Public Safety</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Business &amp; Engineering</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Pre-curricular</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalia</td>
<td>International Studies</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institution Size: Small <5,000 Curriculum Students | Medium 5,000-10,000 Curriculum Students | Large >10,000 Curriculum Students

Data Analysis Process

Immersing myself in the data analysis process allowed me to relive the shared experiences of my participants’ lives through my mind’s eye, and reflect on my own experiences as well. What experiences did we all share? What experiences were truly distinct? And what did it all mean in the development of the leaders we sought to become? To answer these questions, enfolded in the primary research questions guiding this study, I engaged the following steps of phenomenological data analysis.

Epoché. As described in chapter three, my epoché focused on the reflection and setting aside of my experiences with leadership, with being a faculty member who transitioned to leadership and with leadership development. This step occurred not at a single moment in time, but throughout the data collection and analysis period. I strove to hear each participant’s story as
though I had no preconceived notions or beliefs about her roles or experiences. I opened myself to her full experience, with no regard for a right or wrong way to be a leader or to transition. This process was not as difficult as I anticipated, as I approached each participant and each story with an eagerness to discover her uniqueness and a genuine desire to learn about her experiences.

**Horizontalization** After performing member checks with my participants concerning the accuracy of their interview transcripts, I identified statements significant to the phenomenon being studied. These significant statements were not assigned any value or organized, instead they were simply collected and provided the initial understanding of shared as well as unique lived experiences of my participants.

**Clustering for Meaning.** In this process, significant statements were grouped into similar categories or codes and analyzed for themes. This resulted in identification of 127 meaningful codes which were consolidated into 21 themes. Member checks were performed with my dissertation director to further validate the selection of meaningful codes and themes. During this time, connections were discovered which began to create the context in which my participants experienced their phenomenon. Codes, themes, and their relationship to the research questions can be found in Appendix C.

**Imaginative Variation.** During this step of phenomenological analysis, I reflected on my transcripts, notes and themes in order to explicate ‘what’ was experienced by my participants and ‘how’ this experience occurred. I searched for the deeper meaning behind my data to discover the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. Appendix D provides a visual representation of this search for deeper understanding.

**Synthesis of Meanings and Essences.** This final process culminated in a composite of the essential structures, capturing the meaning that is given to the experiences and bringing
together the varied and individual experiences of my participants into ‘invariant’ comprehensive phenomena (Creswell, 2013). The composite serves as the structure for the remaining data analysis sections.

Meeting the Participants through the Researcher’s Eyes

Interviews took place over a three month period filled with winter weather, holidays and the bustling beginnings that accompany the start of a new semester. Prior to these interviews, I had a past working relationship with one participant and could be described as acquainted with two others. Therefore, the majority of my participants were completely foreign to me before our first meeting. Through the scheduling and interview processes, I gleaned my first impressions of the participants. The way they appeared to me made initial imprints that provided color and shape to the data long before I began the formal analysis. This section presents those initial appearances. The descriptions of the participants are presented in the order they were interviewed.

Kate was the first person to agree to participate in my study and the first one to be interviewed. She was eager to ‘pay it forward’ by helping out another in her doctoral research as many had helped her out in the past. She appeared to me as someone full of energy and humor. She asked several questions about my work leading up to the interview, wanting to ensure she provided what I needed during our time together. Her conscientiousness, her willingness to help and her positive energy had already shaped an image of Kate in my mind before I arrived for her interview. Upon meeting, Kate appeared as I had anticipated accompanied by a sense of welcome and sincerity. Our conversation flowed smoothly as we sat next to one another at a long conference table, taking up a small corner in a larger room. Kate was open and candid in her
responses and even when discussing challenging topics she maintained her humor and positivity. Kate provided further glimpses into the ways in which her conscientiousness, her willingness to help and her positive energy had shaped the course of her life’s journey thus far. She provided me with many personal stories and also shared what she had learned as a result of her own studies in leadership. Kate brought to mind a woman who has taken a long and winding path, accumulating and building upon a myriad of experiences, with the intent to use what she learned to help those around her. Kate’s story also brought to mind the notion of ‘finding home.’ It appeared that her happiness and her success in her role were intimately tied to her recognition of finding the right institution for her.

Barbara was my second interview and, although she was very willing to participate, she appeared to be a woman pressed for time. Our communication prior to the interview was always positive, but it was also concise, to the point and only essential. Barbara began to take shape in my mind…helpful…friendly…busy. Upon arriving for the interview, I approached her office and found her mid-task. Typing away at a rapid pace, completely focused on her computer screen, surrounded by small stacks of folders and papers, she was not frantic, but instead she appeared seemingly in a preferred state of fast paced energy. After knocking softly on the door, she turned, greeted me and I joined her at her desk, sitting in the adjacent guest chair. I then proceeded to watch what I can only call Barbara switching gears. While it seemed she was involved in an important task when I arrived, she turned away from it upon my arrival and never looked back at it. Her facial expression moved from one of deep focus to one of calm and receptiveness. She turned her desk chair to face me squarely and she now appeared to be fully at my disposal. Given her fast-paced, busy impressions to this point, I anticipated that her answers to the interview questions would be brief and to the point. However, Barbara provided
thoughtful, lengthy and detailed responses. Her answers were so detailed and rich that I only asked a fraction of my questions; she touched on many without being prompted. Barbara’s stories painted a picture of someone who is trying to make a difference, to do ‘what’s right’ and furthering that cause on many fronts. Perhaps that’s what prompted her to participate in my study, some internal sense that it was ‘the right’ thing to do. In addition to my initial expectations of Barbara as helpful, friendly and busy, she also appeared vibrant, radiating with an undercurrent of energy that propels her forward in her work and in her life.

Alexis was one of many participants that had to have interview times rescheduled due to weather. Her offer of participation as well as all communication regarding the scheduling and rescheduling of the interview conjured an image of graciousness, flexibility and a ‘no worries, we can handle this’ attitude. Alexis had arranged for us to meet in a conference room at one of her branch campuses to make my travels as easy as possible and we finally met, with the threat of winter weather looming in the background yet again. Upon finding the conference room, Alexis was already seated at the table and facing away from the door. I entered and introduced myself. She smiled, greeted me and I took the seat next to her, turning my chair to face her. While she was pleasant, even friendly, I sensed a tension in the room, that feeling that maybe I had walked in on a tense moment or perhaps she was struggling with something today. She did not turn her chair to face me and so we sat perpendicular to one another as I attempted to establish a level of rapport. Alexis is tall and slim and was almost swallowed by the large high back chair we each were sitting in. The sense of her being swallowed was amplified by her body language. Arms closed around her, hands held tight, Alexis gave the impression of someone trying to make herself appear as contained as possible. It seemed that she was on the defensive, preparing for some possible unpleasantness or having just left some unpleasantness. As I
attempted to reconcile this Alexis with my impressions of graciousness and ‘no worries’ flexibility that I acquired prior to the interview, I eased into the interview questions worried that this underlying tension would interfere with the story. Alexis then proceeded to give me one of the richest interviews of this study. She was open, frank and achingly honest in her answers. Each answer was thoughtful and enticed tangents, which we followed and which provided a richer perspective of the story of Alexis’ journey to this point. I left the interview having reconciled the various and seemingly at odds impressions I had garnered about Alexis. She is gracious and flexible. While she may not feel it internally, she will cultivate an environment of ‘no worries’ to prevent undue stresses on those she leads. As for the underlying tension, that can best be described by the notion that Alexis is a warrior of sorts. Fighting for just causes, prepared to do battle for her people, Alexis carries a sense of alertness and guard that she manages to balance with her graciousness in a manner that is complex and beautiful.

Natalia’s interview arrived in the middle of my data collection process. Our electronic communications prior to meeting were brief, cordial and to the point. These exchanges did not foretell the charismatic, passionate spirit that I would encounter. Upon crossing the threshold to her office, I had a feeling of being swept up into her world. Interview conversations flew by with the feeling of girlfriends out to lunch and exchanging stories of their life’s adventures. She had a combination of humor, sincerity and humility that drew me in and a larger than life personality that I imagine enabled her to draw in almost anyone that crossed paths with her. She insisted on showing me around her area. While I silently wondered if I was somehow violating confidentiality principles when it was her idea to introduce me to her staff and faculty, I quickly realized that her purpose was to let her people have a moment of acknowledgement and public praise. We went from office to office, desk to desk with Natalia introducing each member of her
group, providing background information, current projects and big accomplishments along the way. In each interaction, she appeared thrilled to have this person on her team. After our time together, two elements clung in my perceptions of Natalia. She appeared to be a woman of great passion, who has encountered success by intuitively following where her passions may lead. She also appears to be a woman who is fed through personal connection. She seemed driven to spark some type of personal connection with all who come her way. Not content to merely be acquainted with you, she seemed to demand more of her interactions, striving for the ability to relate, to understand.

*Heidi’s* communication prior to the interview was very polite and detailed. Her messages relayed a calming sweetness and she provided a level of detail in her directions that assured I could not possibly have any struggles in locating her on the day of our interview. At our interview, I was greeted warmly and took the seat across the desk from which she was stationed. During our time together, Heidi is soft spoken, perpetually smiling and appears demure. Heidi’s institution is located in her hometown and is the only institution at which she has ever worked. In her stories about her students, her faculty, and her experiences moving up through the ranks, she gives the impression that this is *her college*, to which she is deeply committed. In my conscious mind, her impressions come together to form a personification of benevolence. Her stories confirm this intrinsic desire to be ‘good’ and ‘kind,’ and yet her stories also give insight into the struggles she faces. Despite acknowledging that she has tremendous talents to offer, she appears to worry about disappointing those she respects; perhaps this is a manifestation of her perceived benevolence. She seems suspended between her drive to be kind, to fully realize the potential of her talents, and the tasks she must sometimes complete that may not align with these desires. She appears to be a pendulum swinging between other female leaders on her campus, one
experiencing difficulty because she is seen as too harsh and another who is viewed as too passive. Heidi seems to be struggling to remain true to who she believes herself to be in the midst of these external influences. This struggle appears intensified by the fear of disappointing, especially at a place she’s come to view as her college.

Anne and I met at a café, the only interview to take place off of campus, and another interview that required rescheduling before coming to fruition. Anne handled the schedule adjustments with humor and ease and when the day finally arrived, we fell into conversation easily. With the sounds of other patrons and dishes being served and cleared around us, Anne walked me through her journey. A self-described introvert, Anne appears a quiet and thoughtful person. Preferring to be more ‘behind the scenes’ as a child, she shares that many of her leadership experiences were not sought out, but instead she found herself ‘nudged’ into somewhat reluctantly only to discover that she began to enjoy that which she originally resisted. Reluctance seemed to be an impression that would recrudesce throughout our conversation. Anne appears to be someone who avoids the limelight instead of seeking it out, yet her curriculum vitae is among the most impressive of my participants. While Anne has accumulated many titles and achievements in her career, she appears reluctant to see herself as a leader. It seems that she can call herself a leader, but she appears to have difficulty moving from just using the label and intrinsically accepting this as a part of her identity. It seems that this reluctance has followed throughout her ascension, and that she accepted the label of leader only when forced to by the environment and public nature of her role. But when faced with the question of whether Anne is a leader, her response is that she’s “just Anne.” Unlike my other interviews up to this point, I leave with less of an understanding of Anne than I had when I arrived. Anne is a puzzle that plucks at my consciousness in a way my other participants did not. Was this reluctance an
exaggerated form of humility? Or was there that great of a disconnection between her personal and professional identities? Regardless of its impetus, was this something that helped her succeed or held her back? My mind vacillated between many possible versions of Anne and I wondered at how influential she could be if one day she realized the leader within her.

**Dana** is one participant that I have had previous interactions with and because of this I went into the interview already having a sense of her as a warm and composed person. Arriving at her office, I joined Dana at small table in the corner. Dana had come to academia after a career in healthcare. Not only was she relatively new to academia, she was also very new in her role as dean. While this perspective made her unique in my sample, what truly set her apart was that she had catapulted from faculty to dean. Dana did not ‘come through the ranks,’ one day she was a faculty member and the next she was a dean. The rapid pace with which she ascended into leadership, coupled with the knowledge that she jumped some levels provided the backdrop for conversation during our time together. Dana appeared self-assured and comfortable in her new role. She spoke of the kind of leader she wanted to be, that she hoped to be. Yet, as Dana shared stories and examples, her choices did not appear to mirror the leadership style she was seeking for herself. Describing herself as a nurturing leader, one who wants to develop the people around her, Dana’s stories appeared to focus on fixing problems, holding people accountable and she made several comments about having to make decisions that ‘did not make her popular’ with her faculty. She appeared to be trying to reconcile the leadership style she was drawn to with the demands placed on her in her new role. I left our interview with the impression that Dana was transitioning in the present tense. It was not an activity she had to reflect back on, she was living it and struggling with it here and now. It appeared that her self-assuredness was a cloak, a
comfort, that while she may not have these elements reconciled yet, a successful reconciliation was imminent.

**Madison’s** interview scheduling process took four months from the initial agreement to participate until we actually met for the interview. Busy schedules and winter weather may have hampered our efforts to meet, but Madison’s willingness and perceived enthusiasm never wavered. During these months, Madison also experienced reorganization at her institution and was relinquishing some of her areas while assuming responsibilities for many new ones. So, it was of little surprise when I arrived at her new office for the interview to find her in a room full of boxes waiting to be unpacked and furniture waiting to find its final destination. Despite the lengthy scheduling process, despite the physical and, likely, professional chaos that was part of her life at the moment, Madison greeted me warmly and with that same perceived enthusiasm. This reiterated my initial impressions of Madison as someone who, above all else, has a strong desire to help others, regardless of what challenges she may be facing personally, and as someone who has a spirit of adventure, as she seemed energized by the chaos whereas others may be stressed or anxious. During our time together, she shared her story, a child of educators who wanted nothing to do with her parents’ field. Instead, Madison followed her interests into international arenas, working with international exchange organizations, which led to policy planning and social work, which led to working with the homeless population, which led to working with literacy, which led her to the community college. Madison appeared to thrive on discovering new ways to make a difference, or as she called it “discovering connections.” Madison spoke of her enthusiasm and how it propelled her forward, always seeking new connections, and how she had learn to temper that enthusiasm with collaboration, ensuring everyone is on board before her energy swept them forward in a new direction. While we
chatted, she made mental notes of two new project ideas that occurred to her as a result of our conversation that she thought she may want to explore further. This further solidified my impressions of Madison as someone committed to helping others and someone with a great sense of adventure. Eagerness and enthusiasm seem to emanate from her, all with the purpose of finding the next opportunity to make things better for her students, her faculty, and her community.

*Marie’s* interview would mark the end of my data collection and the placement seemed fitting as it was the most challenging to schedule. Incredibly complex schedules and an unexpected medical issue were partly to blame, but it was the winter weather that was our biggest foe. Repeatedly, once our interview time was scheduled, I would watch a pleasant weather forecast morph into something sinister as the day grew closer. It was as though the fates were conspiring against us and the effect became evident as our pre-interview communications moved from friendly and warm to cordial and frustrated, with Marie admitting at one point that “this is turning into quite a difficult proposition.” When the day of the interview finally arrived, I walked to Marie’s office with a preconceived image of someone who was friendly, willing to help, very in demand and someone who does not shirk responsibility even when that responsibility is not pleasant, as I had begun to feel like a less than pleasant obligation that need to be met. In hindsight, perhaps the fates were conspiring, not to keep us apart but to ensure that Marie’s interview occurred last and to provide some distance between our meeting and my other participants. While each of my participants is unique and their stories represented that individuality, Marie would appear set apart from the others in many ways during our time together. One example of this was her office. It was spotless, like a display of an office instead of one that was actually worked in. About half of my interviews took place in offices, but none
came close to the tidiness of Marie’s space. To my impressions of Marie, I added the notion: She likes order. Marie was my only participant to not share an emotionally laden story concerning her impact on a student’s life. Even when prompted about her experiences as a faculty member and helping students find an a-ha moment, moments typically prized by faculty, Marie’s reply seemed somewhat jaded, “yeah, if you could get an a-ha moment.” While Marie, like my other participants, spoke of her desire to help people, it appeared to me that her manifestation of that desire was to fix things. Most of her stories were about fixing policies, processes and procedures to make things more efficient and effective for her students and her faculty. Marie seemed to be an excellent project manager, with organizational skills and knowledge that brought her into statewide initiatives and led to her being seen as a go-to person at her institution. She also shared her experiences as a wife and mother who had to bide her time, professionally. Moving often for her husband’s career, she spoke of piecing together her education along the way and the ability to reinvent herself in each new setting. It seems these experiences left Marie with many skills and, perhaps, a pent up supply of energy to finally put them to use. Upon arriving at her institution as an adjunct faculty, Marie already had her sights set on moving up as fast and as far as she could, with the intent to fix as much as she could along the way. In my mind, Marie is a fixer finally able to fulfill her professional motivations, she likes to bring order to the world and she is not wasting any time. And as I walked away from her office, I could envision her checking me off of her to-do list, having met her obligation, and happy to move on to the next project.

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For the next few months, these women remained perpetually present in my conscious mind. As I reviewed their transcripts and moved through the data analysis process, my schema for each woman moved from initial impressions to a richer and more comprehensive picture of
who she is and how her journey has unfolded. Discovering their shared and individual lived experiences and diving deeper to understand their transition from faculty into academic leadership became the focus of my attention as well as my dreams.

The Lived Phenomena of Community College Female Faculty Transitioning to Leadership Positions

The Homeworld of Being as Faculty

“Where your talents and the needs of the world cross; there lies your vocation.”

~Aristotle

Each of my participants spent time as a faculty member before moving into academic leadership positions. The scope of their subject matter expertise is vast, ranging from physics to English as a second language. Despite the variety of disciplines, each identified with the role of being a faculty member. Bringing together these nine women’s experiences allowed for the exploration of commonalities in what brought them to this role and what they sought from it.

I Have a Gift

Each participant viewed education and their role in education as something to be valued. Many had guides along the way, encouraging them, and others came to it indirectly. However they journeyed, education began to signify a gift. For some, like Heidi, the gift was intrinsic, talents of sorts that existed within her and could best manifest in an educational setting. “It was pointed out to me several times progressionaly that I have a gift for math and I felt like I needed to share that.” The attention that Heidi received because of her gift, and her enjoyment with
applying her talents in an educational setting, led her to move to the other side of the classroom and pursue a faculty position.

While Heidi’s gift was intrinsic, many of the other participants spoke about the extrinsic gift that culminates in the receiving of educational opportunity. Many of my participants were first generation college students, children and grandchildren of adults who wanted them to have the advantages that were perceived to accompany formal education. These values, this recognition of education as something to be treasured and never squandered, were passed along at an early age. Alexis shared the influence her grandparents had on shaping her view of education:

I was very fortunate to have grandparents who really encouraged me to go on to higher ed. Neither of my grandparents made it past the second or the third grade. They were in agriculture, and very rural. Didn't really have good literacy, but wanted more for their grandchildren. I spent a lot of weekends with my grandparents and they were always encouraging me to read, to draw, and to really explore. One of the best things I remember going over there was we would go to the drug store in the village that they lived in, and I was always told, "Go pick out a book that you want to read this weekend, and tell us about it." I think that was a real impetus. (Alexis)

Anne reflects that “it was important for us to have an education and to do well in our education,” illuminating the notion that these opportunities were not to be taken lightly. Barbara relays as similar message from her family, “I never got a dollar or 50 cents for an A. It was you did the best you could because that’s what you were supposed to do.” Perhaps this view of educational opportunities as a gift to be treasured was instrumental to their educational successes. It appears that this reverence they hold for education, their receiving of the gift, led them to pursue that gift and then try to afford others the same opportunity.

Whether the gift was viewed as an intrinsic quality or an extrinsic opportunity, my participants were not simply good students. Nor were they energized by faculty work occurring in a research setting. By working in a community college, their focus would remain on teaching,
on the students, more so than their counterparts at universities. They were, and remain to this day, women who want to make a difference for others and view education as the best path for that motive. They appear to harness this gift, to use it as a tool, in pursuit of their greater goals.

Help the Underdog

In addition to the shared experiences concerning the early emphasis on education, most of my participants mentioned their desire to help those that have less opportunity or have been marginalized. Many referenced their perceived ability to have an impact in a community college setting, where the proportion of disadvantaged students is much higher than other areas of higher education.

Barbara, a minister’s daughter, recalls this drive to help others becoming evident early in her life, she “always felt compelled to stand up for the underdog, opened my mouth when I didn’t think things were being done the way they should be done and not always necessarily kind of favorably but I did it anyway.” While she admits that “it was totally 100% by accident that I ended up at a community college,” she discovered that “the difference you can make in somebody’s life in a community college is huge.”

Madison described how it was her desire to help those less fortunate that eventually led her to the community college.

When I got involved in literacy, one of the things I worked on was homeless literacy, mostly families. You realize people are homeless because they don’t have good literacy skills, they don’t have job skills. Then that led me to doing things like HRD training and others, in order to help the homeless issue. I mean everything kept coming back to education…I never planned to be an educator but I love it. (Madison)

Alexis provides a wonderful example of how she has been able to use her faculty role to feed this desire to care for the marginalized and the sense of meaning this provides in her work.
I had a student when I taught in high school… He's a bright guy… he was running with a bad crowd. They're having a lot of problems with him. Get through that year, he does graduate. I'm sitting in the office and there had been a murder in town. They caught the three of them. I'm looking up and there he is. I remember never being so sad for somebody before. Just like, wow, I taught him and I didn't think that he'd ever go down that road. He ended up going to prison, spent a couple of years in prison. His father calls me, and said that the young man was on parole and he'd like to come and talk to me, to come over [to my institution].

Management at [my institution] said, "You don't have to take him in if you're concerned about him being a felon." I said, "He's already got a lot of strikes against him. The last thing I want to do is close the door." I had done some research at [university] on recidivism and higher ed. He needs this as a glimmer of optimism for his future because I said, he's already going to have to address this murder charge. He was an accessory. He was not the trigger man.

He comes to my office and I said, we need to talk about your courses, and he did very well. It's the last semester. He had a job opportunity. He comes in and he brings the application with him. I said, "You're going to have to check that box. You've got a felony conviction and you're going to have to address it because if you choose not to, then you're going to have to address it at some other state when they fire you." I said, "I saw you on TV. Chances are some other people saw you on TV too." He didn't want to do it.

I ended up writing him a letter and he got a job with a company where the guy who was his manager or the person on the hiring committee was on my advisory committee, and he said, "I'm very concerned. I don't usually hire felons or ex-felons." I said, "Give him a chance." He got a good skillset. He's done a really good job with the screening. He is now a supervisor at the company. He's done a remarkable job of showing them that he was going to change the direction of his life.

Those are the success stories that don't come very much in a lifetime of a teacher but those are the ones that you really hold on to. It's not the ones who get straight As, it's the ones that have to get over a lot of these hurdles to get where to they need to be. (Alexis)

Bringing together her view of education as a gift to be shared, Alexis helps those less fortunate and creates opportunities that make a difference in a community college. Her story captures the values and experiences prized by many of the participants. Her story also embodies a willingness to step beyond and do things that others may shy away from, a trait that will be given further attention in later sections of data interpretation.
**One of the Boys**

Throughout their early experiences, many participants commented on their perceptions of growing up as a girl in what seemed to be a boy’s world. These remarks were made in response to questions about early influences and early indicators of leadership ability. The interview questions did not reference gender, meaning that it was the participants’ responses which made gender salient to this topic. The remarks fell into two categories, early standards of success and educational influences.

Marie reflected back on her leadership ability that began to emerge in childhood, commenting “I grew up with five brothers so I was one of the boys. I don’t really very often think of myself as different or as a female.” Marie connected her early leadership to her ability to assume roles similar to that of her brothers, and it appears she continues to maintain that connection and maintain a leadership identity that suggests leadership means being *one of the boys*. She also shared a story of using her ability to talk sports to impress, and or prove herself, to a high-ranking leader at her institution.

> Actually I was a huge baseball fan growing up. I can speak it; I can talk to them about it. I was actually explaining some of the rules to some of the guys that were there. Several weeks later we were graduation. We’re all in our regalia and he came up to me, the guy. The executive vice president came up and said to somebody, “You know you can take her to a ball game because she knows what she’s talking about.” I was like okay; it looks like I passed the test.

Dana provided a similar story and expanded on how her perceptions of being *one of the boys* have carried through to her career. Also reflecting on early indicators of leadership ability, Dana remarked:

> I grew up in a family of brothers and pretty much in a neighborhood full of boys. I was the only girl in the neighborhood so I always played with the guys and to do that I think I had to be tough to be able to hang. I think just from that aspect I’ve always interacted well with men and been comfortable interacting with men just because of that. I think that
helped me in a lot of regards because as I went to work most of my bosses or people who were over me were men so I was able to relate to men very well. Always I think just kind of always wanted personally to do a little more, to go a little farther. (Dana)

Dana’s story also shows this perceived connection of leadership ability to the assumption of a one of the boys identity. Dana’s story also implies a connection between this ability to be one of the boys, to satisfy that early standard of success, and her internal drive to “do a little more, to go a little farther.”

Based on these examples, it appears that the ability to be successful with male peers early on became a standard of success and it appears that, for some, this may have involved a shying away, or rejection, of their identity as a girl. For these participants, it appears that early messages linked leadership with the perceived ability to meet male standards, with the ability to view themselves in male terms, and, perhaps, instilled a perception that they must continually strive to prove themselves in this identity.

In addition to this notion of one of the boys being a standard of success, participants also reflected on how perceived male standards were thought to have influenced their educational experiences.

In reflecting on her leadership role models in school, Kate shared that:

My band director, who was a man, was the only [leadership role model] and that was why I gravitated toward music education, was because of him. But as female role models go, no, not really [any present]. And a lot of the people that were females, in counseling roles or vice principals were kind of gruff and rough around the edges and [I] probably didn’t want to be like them. (Kate)

Kate also provides a perceived connection between successful leadership models and the identification of male standards. The male band director was the only ‘leader’ who provided a model that Kate was inclined to follow, and the female role models provided what was perceived
to be a negative model. This appears to have further confirmed for Kate that male models were the standard to pursue.

Alexis shared how gender standards influenced the course of her education, by deferring to the perceived acumen of a male authority figure.

I thought about engineering and computer science back in 1981, and was told by my guidance counselor that...women just did not do that. When you're 16 and you're looking for direction, and you see somebody who has been in their career field for 30 years, you really feel that maybe they have some wisdom about that, and I listened. (Alexis)

Providing what could be considered as the other end of the spectrum, Heidi’s story concerning the notion of being one of the boys is actually one of rejecting that identity, of relishing her identity as a girl and as of her perceived awareness that she would encounter resistance in this approach. Her guidance came from her mother, beginning early and following her throughout her education and career.

No one in my family had been to college. I was a first generation college student. I feel like as I started moving into male dominated fields in math and I have a graduate degree in physics, only female in the physics classes, she was there through those struggles. She was very adamant. She said, “You stand up for yourself. It doesn’t matter. Don’t let them tell you that you do less because you are a girl.” (Heidi)

Without prompting, without any previous conversation about gender, many participants spontaneously interjected insight in the influence gender standards may have played early on in their lives and how they believe that influence has continued to shape them. Whether the message was explicit or implicit, for many of these women the message was relayed that they are living in a male world.
In-between the *Homeworlds: Liminality as Lived Experiences of Transitioning from Faculty to Academic Leadership*

All of my participants reported great satisfaction in their roles as faculty. They all spoke of their desire to help students and, yet, they all left that world behind. Their reasons for doing so, their expectations and experiences after doing so are varied. However, the central common experience remains- they each encountered a period of transition, of *liminality*. It appears that no single participant moved from faculty into leadership without encountering personally perceived significant transitional experiences; no one escaped the feeling of being ‘betwixt and between’ worlds.

**Being Open**

“I dwell in possibility”

~ *Emily Dickinson*

In deciding to leave behind their faculty roles, many participants described experiences that seem to indicate their openness; being open to possibilities, whether internally or externally driven, being open to where life’s journey takes you, or being open to different perspectives. It appears that this openness is the essential phenomenon that begins to separate my participants from their faculty peers and what begins to set this *liminal* experience apart from other experiences in the lives of my participants.

**Like a diabetic eating sugar.** For many of my participants, there appeared to be a desire to do more. While content with their role as faculty, it seemed that there was a thirst for more; more challenge, more knowledge, more of an opportunity for making a difference.

Madison shared how the impact she sought as a faculty and her frustrations over not being able to make the difference she wanted to for her students led her to think about expanding her role and leaving her faculty world behind.
There were times where it was frustrating because I felt like administration didn’t understand or why is the system office requiring these things. I guess I still sometimes think of that way and I think things didn’t happen as quickly as I would like them to… I love just connecting the dots. I’m never satisfied, I’m always looking who can we pull in here? What’s the missing piece? Yeah and I think that was one reason that led me to move from the classroom to administration was wanting to do more of that. (Madison)

Barbara shared how her thirst manifested in her decision to leave the faculty world behind.

My motivation has I think has been much more internal in terms of you get to a point of doing something or learning about something and then it’s like well, geez, I’m not done, what’s next? What can I do more? Then there is also something about if someone’s going to be in control of my world but I can be that person or why shouldn’t I be that person? I ran for department chair because I felt like our department chair was doing a crappy job… I knew I could do a better job and I knew that the department needed a better advocate… I felt like I could do a good job of getting us organized, figured out what we really needed. (Barbara)

In her story, we see the thirst for more coupled with her desire to make a difference. This combination appeared in many of my participants’ stories, including Natalia who reflected, “I’ve always liked to be in charge. I’m not one of those people that’s happy with following; people telling me how things are done. I always think that I can do things better. That’s just the truth. I’m always like, “That doesn’t make sense. I can do things better.” Similarly, Dana recounted:

I don't think for me personally I’m ever really satisfied with a status quo. I really enjoy change. I like doing things differently… I've always personally looked for ways to do things differently and want to be able to effect that change. A lot of times in the positions that I had I felt like I couldn’t do that. Part of it was because I just didn't know enough of how the business or organization operated; another part of it was I just wasn't in a position to do it. I wanted to be in a position that I could affect that… Even now I think I find myself still thinking about my next step. (Dana)

Marie reflected on how her thirst was present from the beginning of her academic career, realizing that her role as faculty was simply a first step in what she had planned.

When I became a fulltime instructor and I got to really participate, I was anxious to move up and move on so that I could help influence even more… I think that my years of being in business in a variety of roles and I always, I guess maybe I’m more competitive or more driven than I think I am because I always I’m looking for that next thing that I can do to one, keep it interesting for me and two to just try to influence things and make them better. (Marie)
Unlike Marie, Heidi did not discover her thirst until she began to have a voice in decision making as a faculty. Perhaps because Heidi did not have the previous professional experiences that Marie had accumulated prior to her faculty role, Heidi’s thirst appeared suddenly and with great strength.

It is almost like a diabetic eating sugar. That you get a little bit and you want more. As I got a little bit of a voice in how things work and how they should work, then I enjoyed that and I wanted a stronger voice. I think as I gained experience I could see the big picture a little better that I wanted to do a little more and a little more and I’m still not satisfied where I am. (Heidi)

In each of these stories we see an internal drive to move ahead professionally. However, the motivation for this ascension remains true to the participants’ previously mentioned desire to make a difference. It appears that they do not seek ‘more’ just for the sake of being ‘in charge.’ Instead, this thirst, which results in them leaving behind their faculty world, is really an extension of their desire to make a difference and the realization that, perhaps, ascension would afford them more opportunities to have that desired impacts on the lives of others. Therefore, when these participants say they want ‘more,’ it appears that translates to ‘more opportunities to have influence, impact on the people around them.’ Perhaps, this thirst is really an extension of their desire to make a difference. The desire to help others may be the primary, or more powerful drive, with the drive to do more acting as a catalyst for finding new opportunities to make a difference.

A “Natural Progression.” While some participants actively sought to leave their faculty world behind, others considered their departure to be more of a professional evolution. Instead of a preconceived or explicitly defined path, these participants spoke of following their professional values, interests and passions as well as the importance of finding a place where these values, interests and passions align well with the institutional culture. Therefore, their professional
choices are perceived as more organic as opposed to orchestrated. This is reflected in Natalia’s statement:

That summer, I came and taught a Spanish class as an adjunct instructor, and loved it. Loved the community college, loved the diversity, my colleagues; I just thought, “Wow, this is real.” I was always going to go the professor route, with the four-year “publish or perish” route. That’s what I thought I would do, but then I came to the community college and said, “Oh, no, I belong in the community college… I stumbled upon the community college. It was just such a natural progression. [My institution] was my first “real job” out of grad school, and 15 years later, I’m still here… I don’t … I never consciously set out to get promoted, really, in any of my steps. I was just always taking charge and doing things that I thought we really needed to do. (Natalia)

Heidi shares her perceived “natural progression,” which encompasses many more facets;

I enjoyed college; right after bachelor’s degree it was natural to get a master’s degree. Things just happened. When I finished my master’s degree, the very semester the local community college where I live was hiring a math position…[on moving into leadership] I was next in line for the position, because there were only two curriculum math teachers at that time…It just seemed like fate to me. That was the doors were opening and aligning nicely and I ended up where I needed to be. This is the only full time job I’ve ever had. This is my hometown. This is where I went to school I was born and raised, so it has been a real natural fit for me. It has just all fallen into place I think. (Heidi)

By the repetitive use of phrases such as evolution, natural fit, natural progression, it appears that these participants’ decisions to leave the faculty world behind are resolved differently than those who report always seeking their next opportunity. It appears that these participants evaluate their opportunities based on a different set of variables; did it ‘naturally’ align with their professional values, interests and passions?

Kate provides a glimpse of this evaluation process as she recounts her experiences at two institutions with varying alignment to her professional values, interests and passions, or varying degrees of ‘fit.’

In my previous college, education wasn’t necessarily valued… the day I walked into that college, I saw it as a temporary job. It turned out to be a temporary job for almost 14 years. Seriously. But I never saw myself as retiring from that place. And I do see myself as retiring from here… it’s a good environment. It’s a good group of people. (Kate)
Kate’s story shares the perspective that although the “natural progression” or ‘fit’ can be of importance, someone can find themselves in environments where there is not a good fit. However, it appears that this idea of “natural progression” is really driven by the need for a good fit, or finding a place aligned to your professional values, interest and passions. This lack of alignment, or need for a good fit, led Kate to continue seeking another place for 14 years. So, while these participants may view their paths as “natural progressions,” that does not mean that these progressions happened easily or quickly. Instead, it appears to imply that the progression was driven by a need for alignment between the institutional culture and their professional values, interests and passions.

**Sliding into the Role** While some participants actively sought opportunity, and others looked for the next step in their professional ‘evolution,’ another sect of my participants found themselves removed from their faculty world out of a sense of obligation or responsibility. Perhaps it is again that desire to help others and make a difference, but with a sense of reluctance. They did not proactively choose their path, but instead appear to have reactively decided on it based on external pressures.

Kate, having moved for her husband’s job, reflected that, “My transition from faculty member to administrator was pretty much a forced transition because I was applying for faculty positions and I was applying for administrative positions. And it just so happened that the administrative position came through before faculty position did. So, that pretty much made my decision for me.” Therefore, her decision to leave behind her faculty world was one of economic necessity.

Anne provides another example, hinging on reorganization at her institution and the introduction of department chairs.
They’re soliciting for people to do it internally and no one in the science or physical education department wanted to do it, but nobody also wanted to have someone from outside the department do it. I talked to a couple of people and I said, “I’m willing to give it a try, but I want to be able to go back to my fulltime faculty role if it’s not a fit for me and I don’t know if it’s working for me.” That was the agreement. I started that role I think about a year after we started it, there was a, “Okay, we need to make this a permanent change so are you okay with it?” I had enjoyed it. [I was] Reluctant entering into that first leadership role, because it’s … nobody else is going to do it then I’ll give it a shot. (Anne)

Perhaps the most extensive example of reluctance is offered by Alexis, who, after the loss of the dean, is sought as the appointed replacement by her institution over summer break.

I'd actually been offered the job... They offered the job to me 11 times over the week… They said this is the last time. I said, "I really do not want to take it. I want to stay in instruction..." I get back and they have implemented a new interim dean and it just wasn't working out. I would come in every morning, and there would be people waiting in the parking lot for me talking about they were going to quit, they were sick and tired of what was going on et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. I said, "We need to support him." That was the external dialogue. The internal dialogue, I couldn't stand the man…It ended up coming to a head very quickly, and he left that May. In May, we were without a dean again. I was in a committee meeting and they asked me if I would think about taking the dean's role again and I was like, I'm really not sure I have a choice at this point.

Each of the stories relays a commitment by these women to do what needs to be done, to rise to the challenge presented to them. It also appears that a sense of responsibility played into their decision. In the stories of Anne and Alexis, that responsibility was to their coworkers or to their institution, and for Kate the responsibility was to her family. It seems as though none of these women willingly sought to leave their faculty world behind, but their values, their responsibilities prompted them to do so. For these women, responsibilities, whether intrinsically or environmentally obligated, trump reluctance.

*It wasn’t the right time for my family.* Each of my participants mentioned the notion of balancing professional and personal lives during the interview process. Some participants spoke of it as a perceived struggle that other women have had to resolve, a struggle they had either
witnessed or attempted to help with in some fashion. Other participants spoke of their firsthand experiences in balancing professional goals with their roles as wives and mothers.

Kate explains how her professional ambitions were set aside for her husband’s at a pivotal time in her career.

Right before I left, I got elected to faculty senate. And so unfortunately, I didn’t get to serve my full term because we moved to [another state] for my husband’s job. But, you know, I was just getting to the point where I was becoming known to do some of the things that I wanted to do basically in leadership role. (Kate)

In Kate’s story, it appears that she lost her momentum professionally. Having worked hard to build up her identity at her institution, she then had to start over somewhere new.

Marie expands on this topic with the added notion of ‘waiting her turn’ professionally.

I got out of school I got married very young. My schooling was interrupted. When my husband ended up finishing up his schooling I went back to school and finished my bachelor’s degree. Then he was an aircraft mechanic so we did a lot of moving around…I decided to go back to school. My kids were young. My youngest was about to go … was in kindergarten. [Eventually] He said we wouldn’t move again because I was loving my job here so much and I finally found a place where I was really, really happy in making a great choice. (Marie)

In Marie’s story, the struggle comes in having to piece together her education and career along a series of moves and life changes. Marie provides a wonderful example of persistence, of continuing to pursue as best allowed by life’s circumstances.

Barbara provides yet another example that touches not only on her early career, but also on recent opportunities.

I actually got married while I was still working on actually analyze my data and doing my research … analyzing my data and writing my PhD. I got my masters while I was still in [another state] and we actually moved for my husband’s work. And that was a little bit challenging I felt because your support system’s gone. But we actually moved twice and ended up here when I was writing and defended … finished up my PhD, and we’re in [rural] another state. [Years later] Our dean was stepping down. I actually thought about applying once and then decided that it wasn’t the right time for my family because my daughter was just starting kindergarten. So like you know what, now is not the right
time. So again there my priorities were not to be the dean. It was … the department still needs me, my kids need me, now it’s not the time to add another complicating layer in my life. (Barbara)

From these stories, it appears that issue of balance between professional and personal priorities is something faced by many, and sometimes faced many times in a career. However, none of these stories included any type of remorse or resentment over having to put professional aspirations aside for personal priorities. Instead, these stories were relayed in a matter of fact manner, with no indication that these women were not fully supportive of the decisions that were made.

Therefore, it seems that for many of my participants, their decisions to leave behind their faculty world was due, somewhat, to it being the right time in the life cycle of their family. This timing aligned with whatever motivations existed within them and appears to be more influential than those other motivations. Despite a strong drive to do more, or a need to find the next step in a professional evolution, the first priority remains to familial obligations.

Each of my participants had her reasons and her own environmental influences that contributed to her decision to leave the faculty world behind. Regardless of the rationale, each left a world where she had a few certainties; her role was defined, her boundaries established and her identity intact. Very soon, my participants realized they could no longer count on these certainties. It is the struggle to regain these certainties that makeup the essential liminal experiences of my participants. No longer a faculty, she attempts to move from a nebulous, untethered plane of existence to redefine the most basic tenets of ‘Who am I’ and ‘Where do I belong?’

**Drawing Boundaries**

“Never mind searching for who you are. Search for the person you aspire to be.”

~ Robert Brault
Moving from faculty to academic leadership implies that you can no longer be defined by faculty rules and standards. It implies that you are no longer faculty. However, most of my participants seemed to have been caught off guard by this—beginning their transitions as though they were ‘faculty with extra duties.’ Heidi captures this switch in her reflections by stating, “It almost felt like I didn’t belong in the classroom anymore. That was the time when I realized I’m not really a faculty anymore. I’m really an administrator who teaches versus a teacher who does administrative work.” It appears that each of my participants had some sort of experience where she realized she no longer belonged to that faculty world. She could not continue to subscribe to faculty rules and standards, yet she was not certain of her new rules and standards. Set adrift from what she holds familiar, she must begin to uncover what her new world will look like and how it will function. Of critical importance in helping this new world take shape is the need to draw boundaries.

_Crossing over._ For most of my participants, the sense of no longer belonging to the faculty world involved the changing dynamics with their colleagues. Most of my participants experienced their transitions from faculty to academic leadership at the same institution, meaning they not only left behind the faculty world, they also became the supervisor of the faculty peers they left behind. As Madison states, “the struggle was having to supervise people that had been my peers.” Natalia takes it a step further by declaring, “The hardest thing is to supervise people. I can’t tell you how many times I say, “I would absolutely love my job, if I had nobody reporting to me.” While these statements give the perception that this is an integral piece of the transitional process, other’s stories provide some additional context to help better understand why the movement from peer to supervisor is such a struggle. Heidi frames her struggle in the context of authority;
As I moved up to department head and department division chair and associate dean whatever the titles were, there came a point when I became their supervisor. That was a challenge because I don’t think they respected my authority. They are great people, but I still think they came to me personally instead of as their boss. (Heidi)

Heidi’s perspective adds an external layer to this need to draw boundaries. While my participants realized they no longer belonged to the faculty world, their previous peers may have not yet realized it. The challenge of uncovering new boundaries appears to be further complicated by expectations from previous peers that old boundaries and old rules are still in play. Dana’s story is able to shed some light on possible implications when these expectations are not met;

I think the biggest hurdle I had in this position was going from that peer to a supervisory type status and it was tough because I had to discipline a faculty member who I worked very closely with and was a good friend with. It changed our relationship. I think there would have been a natural evolution anyway but there was a lot of resentment because of that and I think that's been the hardest thing. (Dana)

The conflict and perceived resentment that arose because of Dana’s changing role represents the struggle that most of my participants encountered during their transitions. For the majority, wrestling with these interpersonal issues regarding former peers appears to have served as the defining moments for their realization that they were adrift. Recognizing that they had crossed some sort of threshold, they turned their attention to figuring out how to make sense of and be successful in this new world.

**Reaching out to the right people.** Two of the most frequent preliminary codes were those involving observational learning and seeking out guides or mentors. My participants found themselves in a new world, deposited without map or compass. Their instinct was to seek out all the information they could discover about this new land and its inhabitants. Dana provides a glimpse of how that journey begins, “You always get the if you need anything call or let me know if I can help you, but sometimes you don't even know where to start to ask for help. I think
that was the hardest thing for me was trying to figure where do I start with this? Where’s the best place to go?”

This sense of intense ambiguity did not disable any of my participants, but instead served as an impetus in their transitional process. Each remarked about setting out to learn, with the caveat of seeking to learn from those who could benefit them. Kate recalls, “I set out to learn all I could… I made sure I was reaching out to, if you will, the right people, the people who were doing it right in the first place.” Barbara expands on this notion of the ‘right people’ in her story of seeking guidance in her new role:

I just would seek out other folks and if I was having an [difficult] afternoon or a moment there were probably two that were closest by, one of which who I continued to realize was a good sounding board and one of which whose style was totally different from mine. It was the business management department and they had very much a department chair as business executive boss kind of mindset. And that didn’t fit with my role view. (Barbara)

Barbara’s story illustrates how these women were already starting to identify what kind of leader they wanted to be, and sought out guides that reflected those attributes. Madison’s story adds an additional element, that of gender status;

I did have some men that really mentored me too, but the two women that I mentioned I think …Because they were successful women that they were strong leaders, they weren’t just nice ladies, they were strong leaders, they were good decision makers, they communicated well. Those things I admired in them and I think women have to be a little bit more intentional about developing those skills and getting respect in those areas…I think when I see a woman leader that can make decisions, can communicate well, can involve people, build consensus. That’s something in a woman or a man to admire, but when a woman pulls that off, that’s something you want to learn from. (Madison)

Very quickly in the transition process, my participants are reflecting on what they need to learn and evaluating their potential guides or mentors through a variety of lenses. Which type of leadership do I think is ‘right?’ Which leadership traits align with my preferences? How are other women able to be the kind of leader I would like to be? While some participants mentioned
formal instruction in leadership, the overwhelmingly preferred method appeared to be observation.

*I knew what I didn’t want to be.* While my participants sought to learn from those they perceived as good models, they also valued what could be learned from negative experiences, whether personal or observational. Forming the sketch of their boundaries in this new world required that they not only decide who and how they want to be, but also who and how they did not want to be as leaders.

Barbara shared a story that illustrated the compilation of her do not want list began to take shape in grade school;

I have watched some women who I felt overcompensated for being women and my sixth grade principal had her PhD and I had just moved to this town and I watched her chew out I don’t know a second grader in the hallway for calling her Ms. Johnson instead of Dr. Johnson and I was sixth grade. And I mean I consciously said to myself well if I ever have my PhD I’m certainly not going to do that to anybody and that stuck with me because there are people who will correct my students for me; like other students will correct students and say she’s Dr. XXXX, she’s not Ms. XXXX, she’s …and I don’t care. As long as you’re respectful I don’t care. (Barbara)

This story illustrates the way in which leadership is very personally defined. While many may seek out the recognition that comes with a terminal degree, for very specific reasons this recognition has a negative connotation for Barbara. Moving forward in the lifespan, Anne reflects on her approach to observational learning when first transitioning into academic leadership;

I think there’s a lot of value in paying attention in learning as much from how not to do it. I think examples of people around you handling those things are probably the best ways to learn it, but you can’t just focus on will I handle that really well? Why did they handle that really well? What was handled well about it? You’re going to look over here to, “That was not handled well. That was not a good example, but I can learn from that. What was not good about it? Why was it not handled well and what happened there?” (Anne)
While Barbara’s story shows the very personal nature that leadership can take, Anne illustrates the need for leaders to be reflective, to learn from situations, whether they are directly involved or merely bystanders. Finally, Heidi shares a current struggle she is facing in her career that revolves around the perceptions of a new, female president;

The direct (female) leadership that we have now makes me think that I may always stay a dean and never a president…just by virtue of seeing, I guess, the backlash because ironically some of the women on our board of trustees have been the biggest critics. I think because they are more of the ‘gentile’ society, that is probably not the correct term, but because they expect that from us. Because they are not seeing that I think they’ve been a little more vocal in claiming how harsh the directives have been. (Heidi)

Heidi finds herself currently watching someone who is not perceived to be leading well and finds herself making adjustments in her own behavior, as well as worrying about judgments that may be made against her based on simply belonging to the same gender status as the other leader.

The do not want list appears to exist for each of my participants, with each of them referencing a former situation, colleague or supervisor that led them to conclude, I know that I do not want to be X. While the X remains personal and somewhat individual based on the participant’s experiences, the formation of this schema seems to be a shared experience for all of my participants. It also appears that this list of ever evolving, spanning the length of our educational experiences in some cases and never finite. It appears, there is always more to learn, with respect to your wants as well as your do not wants.

Establishing the degree of separation. Given that most of my participants reported interpersonal difficulties as their first passage into this new land, it is not surprising that a key piece of their transition revolves around finding a new balance or boundaries in their professional relationships. Marie nicely summarizes the challenge before my participants by stating, “I can’t be as much your pal and I’m not your peer anymore.”
Barbara provides an example of realizing the need for these degrees of separation early in her transition, when she had to handle a difficult student issue with a former peer who was now her direct report;

My mistake was I decided, like my first fundamental mistake, was not when we sat down to talk to say, okay now I need to talk to you as your department chair. And I didn’t set the roles for that particular conversation. And so it became very personal. (Barbara)

It appears that in hindsight, Barbara sees the need for the separation that her new role would bring, but being so new in her transition she was still discovering what that role would look like. Natalia confirms this struggle to keep things from becoming personal, for the necessity of degrees of separation in her reflection, “That’s one lesson I learned. I love my folks, and we have a really good relationship, but I am not friends with any of them.” In these two statements, we see care for colleagues, perhaps some strong former friendships, but also the need to pull back and reframe those relationship boundaries in light of this new role and new world in which my participants are now inhabiting. However, these statements leave some uncertainty- if we are no longer friends or even peers, then what are we? How does that new relationship take shape? And how does it function?

Alexis and Heidi provided some insight into pivotal moments as they worked to establish the degree of separation required in their new worlds;

There were many days where I would spend my commute muttering to myself. I think that you want to do the right thing and you want to be liked, but I think when I reached the conclusion that there were things they weren’t going to like regardless of how nice they were, somebody was going to give me a lot of grief about it. I think that’s when I managed to get over that hump. (Alexis)

I really did have to talk to myself some strong self-talk about you are doing this for the college. This is the what’s right for the college and you do have to focus on and you have to get the job done. That was very difficult the first several times was horrible, not that it is fun now but you do sort of develop that focus in light of what’s best for the college things that has to be done. That was a growth moment for me to sort of take myself a little more seriously. (Heidi)
For most of my participants, their journeys in this new world eventually brought them to a fork in the road. Do you want to do what’s ‘right’ or do you want to be liked? It appears that the transition to leadership brings about many of these forks and the path chosen will define how these women emerge on the other side of their transition.

_Buffalos in the storm._ Somewhat analogous, or perhaps underlying, these other areas was the need for my participants to learn to handle difficulty in an effective manner. This undertaking is made more challenging due to the evolving sense of boundaries in this new world and the redefinition of professional relationships. For some of my participants, the difficult situations were yet another reminder that they no longer belonged to the faculty world.

> There comes a time when you can’t straddle the fence anymore. You have to go on one side or the other of the fence, and that’s when the difficult … I think that’s when it gets difficult. (Anne)

> I think the time where you really feel that change is when you have bad news. When things are good and you don’t have to … you’re not really having to push folks, you’re not really having to change anything, not have to be bad news. You can … it’s easy to keep up that, that you’re still one of the crowd. It’s when you have the bad news to give, when you have to say no. (Barbara)

In these statements, it appears that the difficult moments serve as a catalyst. My participants seemed to have been either reminded or forced to finally acknowledge that their role had changed. Natalia reflected on how she could not act like those around her regarding difficult situations;

> You have to be so careful about how you’re perceived as a leader … I have to keep calm all the time. They come to you, and you could have a million things going on, and have a bad, bad day; when they come to you to ask you something, you have to stay calm. That’s one of the hardest things sometimes. Sometimes, you just … I know that I want to snap sometimes. I’m like, “Really? You’re coming to me with this? I’ve got this, this and this.” (Natalia)
Her story illustrates that the difficult may be internal, not external, and that in this new world my participants find themselves held to different standards. They simply need to figure out what those standards are. Heidi sees this need as one of the most important lessons learned in her transition;

I think the biggest challenge women have in leadership is wanting to avoid confrontation…we tend to want to avoid confrontation. I think that we need to be likes buffalos in the storm. When a buffalo sees a thunderstorm instead of running away from it, the buffalo runs toward it because he knows that if runs toward it he will get through it faster. I think that we need to be more like the buffalo and that when we see confrontation coming instead of trying to avoid it, prepare ourselves, confront it, get through it and move on. That’s the best life lesson I can give… (Heidi)

In these stories, it appears that the transition from faculty to academic leadership will inevitably involve difficulty and that difficulty can provide meaningful instruction and insight. My participants did not shirk from the difficulty, but instead it seems that they learned how to handle it effectively and used it to help discover their boundaries in this new world.

From the time they are removed from their faculty world, my participants appeared to have a feeling of being set adrift, of being undefined and shapeless. This sense of being nebulous brings about the longing for structure, for guidance and so these women begin to draw their boundaries. These boundaries are formed on their changing perspectives, their observations of this new world that they inhabit, their new relationship structures, and their ability to handle the difficult. By wrestling with each of these areas, my participants gained an internal sense of who they would like to be as leaders, what the boundaries of ‘leader’ are for them. The next challenge was manifesting this internal model of leader in their external world.

Becoming Visible

“I am building a fire and every day I train, I add more fuel. At just the right moment, I light the match.”
~Mia Hamm
As my participants began to identify their boundaries, their ideas on the leader they wanted to become, they simultaneously experienced opportunities to apply these ideals, to test this newly drawn boundaries. Can they live up to the leader they have formed in their mind’s eye and effectively be, or exist, in the real world?

Like it or not…this is what a leader does. Many of my participants spoke of coming to terms with the less exciting aspects of their new roles, of the need to commit to the whole role and not just what they perceived and envisioned as the important work that accompanies leadership. Dana and Marie reflected on their struggles to reconcile what they envisioned they would do in their new roles with the reality that quickly ascended.

I think that it surprised me how much paperwork and kind of behind the scenes business stuff I end up doing as dean that you just didn’t think that was part of that job and it keeps you from doing some of the things that you would really like to do. (Marie)

I cannot tell you how caught up I am in the day to day operation of things sometimes which makes it hard to find the time to do the really fun, exciting, innovative things that you'd like to do. That's been the hardest part for me. (Dana)

The sense of disappointment of perceived let down was palpable in their stories. However, this need to adjust expectations was a common experience among my participants. Barbara shared a story that built on this notion of disappointment, even when she had the opportunity to do the important work she envisioned of leaders, there was still an adjustment that needed to occur;

Sometimes even if I’ve played a big role in something happening, my contribution doesn’t necessarily get acknowledged publicly either from above or below. And so I’ve had to let go of that and as long as it’s successful and the colleges look good, the department looks good, then that’s good. That’s enough. (Barbara)

These newly formed boundaries and emerging shapes of ‘leaders’ were quickly experiencing the need to revise their boundaries, to make allowances for the behind the scenes or day to day activities that they had not anticipated. These shifting boundaries must also respond to the
environments they inherit, the environments that were not of their making but are now their responsibility;

When I came in, the expectation was, “Okay. This was a female on this role. Here’s another female on this role. She’s not going to be any better than this person was.” And uh, it took me about three years to overcome the damage that she had created. (Kate)

Kate’s story captures the sense of commitment that I perceive my participants showed in their transitions from faculty to academic leadership. While each was forming their idea of what type of leader she wanted to become, she was also making adjustments to that ideal, that shape, and some of these modifications could have been viewed as disheartening, but my participants continued on their journeys nonetheless.

*Note to self. I need to go shopping.* As my participants struggled with the notion of what kinds of leader they wanted to be and began to bring boundaries to these new structures of their identities, many also reflected on what a leader looked like in the most physical dimensions. How would they physically present themselves in this new world and how would that relate or help define their new role?

When I got this position, I was sitting in executive council and I was wearing a black skirt with flowers down to my knees, and a black T-shirt, and Croc Mary Janes … wedges … that I love … I looked around and said, “Note to self. I need to go shopping.” I did. I started buying some suits. I know Mondays and Tuesdays and Thursdays are big meeting days for me… today’s a casual day for me. I wear blouses and pants and heels, or skirts and heels. I still have my own style… [But] I’m dressing up. (Natalia)

Dress the part…I think that people respond to you by the way you’re dressed. That confidence, people pick up on your confidence 20 feet away. Your body language makes a big difference. (Alexis)

This is something I personally had to work on through the years is work on your presentation and that presentation does not have to be out there and aggressive. I think people will judge you by how you present yourself but also in how you interact with others. (Dana)
Perhaps one the earliest physical manifestations of their progress during their transitions was this acknowledgement that dress appears to have a connection to positions and the adoption of a new style of dress that was perceived to be somehow related to their new role. Again, it seems that my participants were finding a way to combine their internal standards of leader with the expectations of the environment. Natalia captured this reconciliation perfectly by confirming that she changed her standards of dress, but kept her individual sense of style. This area may have been the one easiest for that reconciliation process to be observed as it was purely external in its results.

*Developing a thicker skin.* Just as many of my participants felt the need to make outward changes, many also felt the need to make internal changes. They began to project a persona that I perceived as helping them enact some of the leadership traits they identified as desirable or necessary, even if those traits were not already present in their personality. The adoption of this persona was not easy, but was deemed vital if she was to truly become a leader as Natalia suggests, “I can be a very good actress. I don’t know about actress, but a certain persona that you have to assume, that you can’t falter. It’s really, really hard, but I can do it.”

Heidi and Alexis provided insight into the choices and motivations that were inherent in their adoption of a persona as they traversed this new world.

“I’m very tender hearted…I did have to develop a business persona because I could not cry in front of people that I was reprimanding… The first time it physically made me sick and I went home and cried because you take it very personally but as an administrator I think as you do that, it is bad to say, but the more practice you get, the easier it seems to be. You almost develop a thicker skin but I think part of that with the gender bias, I don’t want to say it is all female because I know it affects men as well, but my dealings with the men on campus, the male supervisors tend to say, “Well that’s different. That’s business, it is not personal.” (Heidi)

Heidi’s persona appeared to have needed in order for her to perform certain functions of her new role. Her story suggests that the repeated use of this persona resulted in an easier execution of
these unpleasant activities. However, it does not appear that she completely internalized this persona as she still identified herself as tender hearted and expressing concern over being involved in those types of situations.

There were days where I didn't think that I could do it. There were days where people were not particularly nice to me but there was a point in my life where I realized that to allow people to treat me badly, that was not where I wanted to be. That to exude confidence and have a certain vibe, people would treat me a different way. I learned to speak up a lot more if I had an opinion. I began to learn to play a game. It's that you start reading people, reading the environment, and you interject when it's politically advantageous to you, and you know not to interject. (Alexis)

In Alexis’s story, the development and use of a persona was not to help her achieve her tasks, as Heidi’s was, but instead it appears that Alexis’s persona became evident in response to her standards regarding how she wished to interact with her colleagues. Alexis’s persona was a culmination of her newly drawn boundaries, her observations she had made thus far in her journey and her desire to find a way to make her emerging shape come to life. It appears that in order to be the kind of leader Alexis sought to be, she recognized that she would need to be perceived in a certain manner and began work to cultivate that perception.

*I’m a grown up now.* To this point in the journey, my participants have said goodbye to their faculty world, wrestled with drawing new boundaries and helping their ideal leader take shape, and have now been confronted with the need to make changes in those boundaries in order to bring their new leader shape to life. While some changes were simply adjustments, Alexis pointed out that, “You learn that along the way, there are things that you have to sacrifice and give up.” It appears this transition would not allow any woman to cross to the new world unchanged. Instead each woman was confronted with the crisis of how much she was willing to sacrifice in order to become a leader.
Natalia and Kate shared examples of the sacrifices they encountered during their transitions, all of which could be thought of in terms of freedoms, personal freedom and professional freedom.

I’ve always been very impulsive, and I tend to speak my mind in my personal life. I’ve learned that I’ve been able to not do that in my professional life…When I became coordinator, I was able to schedule my own schedule. When I became chair, I scheduled my own schedule for sure. At the same time, if I couldn’t find an adjunct instructor to teach this class, I had to teach it. I had to negotiate. (Natalia)

They have an expectation that I will be accessible to them when they need me to be accessible. So, you know, it’s a tradeoff but that was probably the biggest thing was I lost that freedom. (Kate)

This perceived loss of freedom also extends to the realization of an increasing sense of responsibility. No longer an autonomous entity, something cherished in the faculty world, it appeared that my participants struggled with the weight of the responsibility they now carried. This responsibility primarily manifested in the need to take care or provide for those around them and to do so in much more overt and meaningful manner, as Barbara described her realization, “I’m a grown up now, I have people’s jobs in my hand. That was a big transition.”

Others expanded on Barbara’s sentiments, relaying their perceptions of increasing responsibility and the notion that your decisions no longer reflect you alone, but also carry the burden of your increased responsibility of providing for others professionally.

Not only are you responsible for yourself, you’re responsible directly or indirectly for all of these other people. That’s a big step, that’s a big change for a being a faculty member. (Anne)

I have a role in the decision-making process for the college, and I like that. Again, I feel like I have my folks’ interest in mind. I feel like I can make a difference, from the administrative side of things. (Natalia)
I have to remind myself not everybody feels that way. I think I’m better now than I used to be about trying to create affiliation and help people feel reassured. The budget’s terrible, we had 6 deans, we now have three. Things are really ... yes, there’s a lot of change but we’re going to be okay and these are the positive things. It’s hard. (Madison)

However, Kate and Alexis provided statements that display the depths this sense of responsibility can take, well beyond budget requests or even employment. These women spoke of their perceived responsibility to care for the person, outside of the profession, outside of the position.

We’ve … we’ve lost um, aging parents this year together. (Kate)

We were going to lose our dean. He was dying. How are we going to support each other through this? (Alexis)

Those two excerpts spoke volumes of the sacrifices that these women chose to make in the name of leadership, of the sacrifices they viewed as necessary in order to become the kind of leaders they wanted to be.

**Heartbeat moments.** As my participants continued to discover their new roles and attempt to distinguish themselves as leaders in this new world, many reflected back on moments of doubt. Nothing too long lasting, but moments where it appeared they questioned their abilities to make the necessary sacrifices, whether they made the right choices, and whether they would be able to bring this emerging leader inside of them to life.

I was a little concerned what they would think...Because they’ve always had a male dean. When that dean retired, instead of filling that position they put that area under me. So far so good. It’s been different and I am very aware that I’m the only woman where if I’m working with the business or accounting which is now with me and I’m the only woman, I’m not that aware of it. (Madison)

There are multiple days when I sit there and you think, “How did I find myself here? What happened? How did this happen? What am I thinking that I am capable of doing this?” I know lots of people who were in much higher level positions than I am and they tell me they think the same thing. Realizing that you’re not alone in thinking sometimes about how could this possibly not come crashing down around you. (Anne)
There might have been some, maybe some momentary alterations kind of like those heartbeats I talked about when for a minute I wonder if I need to be assertive about something for fear it will come back on me… I think things over twice, three times four times to make sure that what I’m responding to, the way I’m behaving is about the current situation and not about anything that I worry about or perceive as an attitude towards me from that individual…When you’re doing that thing where you’re worried about the next step. Sometimes I think that impacts people and causes them to be safe where they are now, not just … not even work as hard as they should but they don’t want to stir the pot, they don’t want to look as dissenting on anything. (Barbara)

These stories appeared to illustrate the ongoing, symbiotic relationship between my participants’ desired view of themselves as leaders and their struggles to bring that being into reality.

Shrouded in their new and tenuous forms, my participants were forced to strip away that which did not fit, to sacrifice pieces of their form in order to continue on the journey. It appears that these sacrifices brought no guarantees and were not easy to navigate. Entering a new world, seeking to learn all that they can, it seems as though my participants’ transitions encompassed disappointments, sacrifice and doubt.

The transition from faculty to academic leadership, at this point, seemed daunting and begged the question Why? Perhaps it related back to the sense of Being Open. Within my participants, it appeared there lived the hope, the belief, that the transition would be worth whatever was endured. As in many areas of life, those hopes were easier to hold before discovering just how difficult the journey would be, yet my participants persisted and appeared to have used the challenges of the transition thus far to prepare themselves for the duration of the journey. As Anne states, “I’m capable of handling a whole lot more than I probably would have told you I would of then.” Each lesson learned, each sacrifice made, seemed to have allowed my participants to piece together the leader she could be, a reconciliation of the leader she wanted to be and the environment in which she brought that leader to life. She assembled herself in the
manner she thought best to support her goals, her desires and her responsibilities in this new world. Like a newly lit fire, her form became visible and we witnessed her coming to life in fits and bursts—she must find a way to feed her embers and fulfill her purpose, thus justifying the difficult transition.

**Giving Light**

“What is to give light must endure burning.”
~Viktor E. Frankl

During this final stage of their journey, my participants became more fully present in their new worlds. Not completely out of the transition, they appeared to have fused their internal models of leader with the external testing ground in which they found themselves, producing an unseasoned, but burgeoning leader. Having been forged in fire, these women appeared to have developed a sense of who they were and what they valued in this new world. Their new identities solidified and began to radiate.

**The calm in the storm.** My participants reflected on many lessons learned throughout their transitions from faculty to academic leadership. While many of these lessons were external, activities to do or not do, perhaps the most pressing lessons were the ones they learned of themselves and how those lessons influenced the leader they became.

I was young and naïve so I probably had more hopes and goals than I did fears. I was pretty fearless. Looking back, I was extremely optimistic and one of the things that I did which was a little reckless was I went after ever grant that I could and was pretty successful. Then I had grown the programs so much that we didn’t have any more admin help or capacity. I think some of the people that worked with me got frustrated. I’ve had to learn too, I can get really enthusiastic about things and run with it but I had to learn to do better to get everybody else on board and by ends. It’s a fear that I have. Not a fear that something that I have to learn. Then I don’t think I was just cautious. (Madison)

I’ve come up in … in that type of [male dominated] environment. So, it doesn’t phase me… basically, you had to be one step ahead of them. You had to know at least what
they knew… you’re never done learning…things change on a constant basis and you got
to keep up with them. (Kate)

I’ve learned that I’m pretty diplomatic. I know what battles to fight and what … which
ones not. I know that my staff gets frustrated with me sometimes, when I choose not to
fight a battle, but I’m doing it for a reason. I know which battles to pick and which ones
not to pick…when you get in a position of leadership; you realize why you’re in a
position of leadership. You understand what other people do, that’s going to prevent
them from being in a position of leadership even though they’re brilliant and wonderful
… or, people you need to help grow to a position in leadership. (Natalia)

As I’ve changed in all these different roles, my grasp of the big picture has gotten better
and better and has changed and it’s become a little easier to grasp the big picture. It
helped to help learn about myself. I’ve learned that I can adjust leadership style to suit the
situation…I got over the fear and the worry and now I very rarely experience being
worried about the decisions I make because decisions, I’m very confident in my decision-
making process. I feel very good about that and know that even if I make a wrong
decision and we go down the wrong road, I think if I can correct it, usually I could fix it
and I use everything I could to make the decision to start with so it wouldn’t have been
any different had I gone back and did it again. Freedom in that that’s really nice, when
you get to that point. (Anne)

Whatever the strategy or the goal is, that you have the charisma or you have the nature to
get people headed in that direction. How you do that is very individual to the person. Not
everyone is going to be led down that path the same way. Some people won't be led at all,
but I think the nature of leadership is also being the calm in the storm. (Alexis)

These stories provided a sense of the individual choices each participant made along their
journey and what they feel they gained as a result of the choice. It appears that while the ideals
and potential sacrifices concerning her role as a leader were very specific to each participant,
their collective reflections suggest that all felt the pressure to changes themselves in order to fit
into their new world. These stories also implied a stronger sense of self among the participants.
Their identities seemed malleable yet more solid than before, no longer the nebulous forms that
were initially pulled away from their faculty world.
Be the logic in all of that which is chaos. While my participants gained a firmer sense of who they were becoming as leaders, they simultaneously wrestled with their sense of authority, how they were going to lead. Each of them spoke of the importance to ‘do what’s right,’ yet right was a subjective and evolving target. This sense of authority seemed to call into question, How would they define the right decision?

For Marie and Kate, the focus of authority seemed to be on providing for their people, giving them what they needed in order to meet their goals.

I think that I’m conscientious about doing a good job for the college and for the people that work in my division. I do want to provide what they need, what’s best for our students and so I work really hard to make sure that I can provide that. I work hard to try to protect them from the things I can protect them from. (Marie)

[Being a leader] means helping people to do their jobs more effectively…helping people through my educational experiences to develop their own informal education experiences to make them better people. (Kate)

It appears that as newly emerging leaders, these participants’ goals were very straightforward; to use whatever tools they had at their disposal to provide for their people. On what could be perceived as the other end of the spectrum, Natalia relays concern about her people, but they were not her focus, ”I’m a big vision person … I rely on my folks to be detail oriented, and to tell me if they need to be managed more.” These two perspectives both appear to indicate the importance of my participants to care for their people, but display the different lens through which leaders could view their people; are they children to be cared for and protected or are they vessels to be filled and given purpose?

Barbara provided yet another lens, caring for her people, wishing to grow her people, but also focused on her sense of integrity, on leading in a manner that aligned with her personal values;
I want to be the mentor, the nurturer not the, ‘I’m gonna put you through hell because I’ve been through hell’ type of person. I’m helping those around me meet their potential …I know at the end of the day I want to sleep at night. And if I start making decisions based on how someone is going to view that decision and is that going to impact my future at this, not even in this role but in moving up, then I’m making these decisions for the wrong reason and that just doesn’t work for me. (Barbara)

Each of these women seemed to have identified some defining characteristics of how they would lead and I perceived a sense of accord between their views and the examples they shared with me. However, Dana’s story appeared to be more fragmented, with what I perceived to be discrepancies between her views of herself as an emerging leader and the examples that she shared with me. In several instances, Dana described herself as a nurturer, and did so once again when describing herself as a leader stating, “I’m a nurturer and I’m a developer so for me to lead I want to develop the people I work with.” However, during our time together, Dana did not seem to provide a single example of this nurturing style of leadership, nor any examples of her developing her people. Instead, I perceived that Dana’s examples focused on getting results, even at the expense of the people she claimed she wanted to nurture and develop.

There were a lot of people there who just weren’t … They were good at what they did but they weren’t the right fit for that job, so I came into the job really looked hard at that whole area and started reassigning people and hiring some new people in and we’re really starting to see things turn around. I’m very proud of the fact that I was able to make some really tough decisions early on that have made a difference and really started to move that area forward, so it’s been good. I was not very popular with a lot of people when I did that because those were people that worked here a long time and they have their friends and you know how the grapevine goes… the results are there and I think the results speak for themselves, so regardless of what other people say those were good moves to make. I think that kind of falls back to what I was talking about earlier when I said I can separate myself personally from those situations because I knew a lot of these people, worked with them for many years and had to make some really tough decisions and it was hard. (Dana)

Dana’s story was the only one with these perceived discrepancies, and Dana was the only participant who not only went straight from faculty to dean, but also the only participant to have been in her role less than a year. Perhaps, the transition was still unfolding for Dana and these
perceived discrepancies were the result of her failure, so far, to be the type of leader she would like to be. Perhaps, she was still trying to bring that nurturing leader to life in an environment that was pressuring her in different directions. Perhaps, this very excerpt illustrated that she may not have made it this far in her journey, instead she appeared to be struggling to reconcile her ideals of leader with her environmental demands.

_I certainly do like driving my BMW._ As my participants stepped into their new roles and new worlds more fully, displaying a sense of strength and authority they appeared to also assume a higher level of status, or recognition. While the change in status seemed to be a shared experience among my participants, the expression of that status took many different forms.

For Kate, the change in her status was immediate, moving from one institution, where education was not valued, to another, where her doctorate was regarded with respect;

I’ve never been a really big status person. I’ve just always wanted to do what felt right for me. So, you know, that [getting my doctorate] was just something that … that I needed to do with the time or that I wanted to do with the time…when I came here because I wasn’t used to … to that doctorate mattering. I got here and it took me a while to get used to being called Dr. Jones because I was used just to being called Kate. But here, it’s a different culture. The doctorate means something which spurs people on to get it because they want … It … It is a status thing. I don’t necessarily look at it as a status thing. It’s just something that I’ve got. It’s the education that I’ve got. But other people do see it that way. (Kate)

Kate attained her doctorate for personal reasons, but now belonged to an environment where it brought her status and could be used to motivate and develop others. These uses aligned well with Kate’s approach to leadership, suggesting that she used her status as a way to further her goals as a leader.

Similar to Kate, many other participants spoke of status as a tool, something to be used to achieve their goals as a leader. Marie qualified, “You have professional status if people respect
what you say, look for your advice, look for your input.” Others provided more insight into their use of this tool, this ability to have input;

I like to help others and make a difference. I think having leadership and I guess you would say status in a role where you’re a decision maker or a key player. It’s something I value to be able to make a difference for others. I never sought out to be a dean or president or VP, that wasn’t … just one thing led to another, well pretty much yeah…I think especially for other women colleagues. I want to make sure they’ve got opportunity… I want to do a good job to make way for them. That’s important. (Madison)

I think it was not so much me itching to become an administrator, as much as me itching to do something that I wanted to do. The only way you can do something that you want to do, is to have some influence. The only way you can do that, is to have a position of influence. The only way you can do that, is through status… Status carries weight. Of course, you have a lot of responsibility, but it’s nice. When I realized that I could use it to the benefit of my folks and my students … or students in general … then I embraced it. (Natalia).

For these women, status was not something to achieve for the sake of possession, it was more a resource that they could leverage in pursuit of their missions. Statues was not simply something that they had, it was something that they used.

A very different perspective on status was offered by other participants. They did not reference any connection between their status and their professional experiences, but instead spoke of status as type of reward that comes with their accomplishments, and was best enjoyed privately.

It's funny because I never thought of myself as being status-focused or oriented but I certainly do like driving my BMW right now. (Alexis)

I don’t emphasize my doctorate a lot. I look back now and I think that I can’t believe I pulled it off. I’m proud of that accomplishment on a personal level, it’s not as much as the professional level. Just a personal level that I was able to do that level of work and I did it pretty well. (Anne)
Alexis’s BMW has nothing to contribute to her input in her professional role, but appears to represent a byproduct of the work she does, which she takes great pride in. The car, which carried its own status, seemed to be her way of recognizing her own professional accomplishments and celebrating all that she had done. Anne’s status from her doctorate could certainly have carried influence in her professional role, but instead it was also a private celebration which seemed to provide her a source of pride and enjoyment. Their ‘status symbols’ were very different in nature, but both carried the message: Look at how hard I’ve worked!

While Marie, Madison and Marie embraced their status publically, in an effort to move forward their goals, Alexis and Anne also embraced their status, although more privately, and used their private celebrations of status to serve as motivation to continue their work to move goals forward. Status existed and was embraced by all of my participants. However, what form that status took and how it was used, publicly or privately, was very personal to the individual. In the end, status appeared to have the same results- creating energy for my participants to continue to move forward in their missions.

Having moved through the transition from faculty to academic leadership and having faced many challenges, perhaps it was the discovery of status that finally solidified their new identity as a leader and marked the culmination of their liminal period. My participants entered their transitions seeking to learn, forming a vision of who and what they wanted to be as leaders. They struggled to bring that vision to life in their new environments and to make themselves visible as leaders. Again they faced more challenges, more disappointments, as they sought to share their newly formed selves and to lead others. However, my participants also discovered ways to be sustained, to stay motivated and to be fed as they traversed this harsh journey. By
finally achieving status, in a form that was important to them, it appears that my participants were finally able to say: I made it! And possibly just as important: It was worth it!

The Homeworld of Being as Leader

“You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”
~Eleanor Roosevelt

In the faculty world, my participants had commonality, all were well educated and faculty members, as well as diversity, such as the variety of subject matter expertise. Their world contained certainties, with rules, expectations and roles. These certainties were defined by the environment, the history of ‘being a faculty’ and by the people holding those positions.

Now, as leaders, my participants once again presented commonality as well as diversity. They once again had certainties, rules, expectations and roles that were shaped by their environments, their cultures and, most of all, themselves. Their commonality was their achievement of their title and rank, they were leaders. Their diversity lied in their approach to that title, the what and how of their positions; what did she do as a leader and how did she do it?

Model for Others

For many of my participants, their sense of responsibility extended to helping others in their transitions to leadership. For some, it was a simple matter of sharing lessons learned with colleagues, as Madison had, “I’m going through a bit of a transition now with our recent re-org… I think that’s in this transition, that’s been something I’ve been able to help my colleagues [based on her previous experiences]. For others, it was a bigger quest;

I would stay away from talking about advancement of women. By advancing women, you’re implying that there is a discrepancy in opportunity. I think it’s time for us to get past that. Especially in education, I don’t think that women are at a lesser advantage than men. I would probably stay away from talking about the advancement of women, or the advancement of blacks, or the advancement of Hispanics. I would just talk about advancement, and what are the qualities that you need to advance. (Natalia)
I’ll never forget the day she said to me that she didn’t know a woman could do what I had done and that just speaks it all, right? And … so again modeling that behavior, it just becomes so important…so I think there’s been some benefit I hope to having a woman in the dean’s role as far as … first one ever at this college and in curriculum. And I think, I see that as a plus. I know that it’s been … I’ve had positive comments…for others to see my kids, to see that they’re happy, to see that they’re good kids, they’re doing fine in school and that you … it’s hard but that you can balance. (Barbara)

These stories painted a picture of survivors, perhaps. People who had successfully navigated an arduous journey and were motivated to help others also be successful on their own journey. Each story presents this same idea in different scale; Madison with her situation specific guidance, Barbara with her interest in serving as a guide or model for women in her sphere of influence and Natalia’s charge to move past qualifiers and promote advancement in general. As with many other areas of this journey, my participants present some commonality, their desire the model for those coming behind them, and yet they exude this differently, individually, in a way that has meaning for them.

**The Focal Point**

This final section of data represents the end point, the perceived result of the journey from faculty to academic leadership. Other than Dana, who appeared to still be reconciling her internal concept of herself as a leader with the environment she was working in, my participants seemed to have solidified their new identities as leaders. No longer nebulous or making substantial adjustments, the majority of my participants appeared to have a strong sense of who they were as leaders and what they felt was the ‘right’ way to lead. The different approaches presented by my participants seemed to be related to where they placed their focus as a leader.

Part of me wants to say well it’s just a job and so. I’m so busy just doing what I need to do that I don’t know that I get things that are pivotal… [faculty] they’re questioning why does it have to be that way? It’s because well I said it, it has to be that way for them and it’s going to have to improve. (Marie)
Marie, like all of my participants, reflected on the interpersonal struggles encountered in transitioning from faculty to academic leadership and expressed her belief that as a leader she sought to protect and provide for her faculty. However, despite this desire to provide and protect, it appears to me that Marie’s focus as a leader was on results, with less attention on relationships. Perhaps, through this almost parental role she assumed in her leadership, her expectation was one of compliance, just as parents may not worry about as to whether a child likes them so much as they would be concerned that the child was doing what it was supposed to do.

Help them understand what needs to be done and make sure they get what they need to be done. They know that you’re committed to it with them. Helping all of that move forward in the same direction (Anne)

Like Maries, it appears that Anne’s focus is on getting results, achieving goals. However, while her focus may be on results, Anne paid attention to relationships. It seems that Anne portrays her people as more peers, colleagues, collaborators. She still presented a desire to provide for them, but the notion of being “committed with them” implies a mutual respect that was not apparent in Marie’s story.

We were sitting right in this room and it was a conversation between her and our vice president and me. And I made some comment about there being a problem. And she piped up and said, “Are you saying there’s a problem with my leadership style?” And the vice president and I looked at each other and humorously we said, “Yes.” And it was just an eye-opening experience for her. But she took that to heart … We started working together every week. We would sit down and have a meeting together. What happened this week? What worked? What didn’t work? What can we do on this stuff that wasn’t working to make it work next week? And we probably met weekly for about a year. And things are great now. Yeah, things have turned totally around. (Kate)

Kate’s story appears to present an approach to leadership which focused on relationships while paying attention to goals and needed results. This particular excerpt caused me to reflect on how my other participants may have responded to this type of situation. Would each take the time to
work with and develop this person or would some consider her a poor performer and simply remove her? Kate’s commitment to developing her people, for the good of the institution, seems a distinctly different approach.

To be creative, innovative; to have a vision, and to lead people to that vision, maximizing … helping them grow to their maximum potential, and grow within their strengths, and do the best job that they can, and help them with their weaknesses, as much as … I can’t have expectations up here, and expect everybody to meet those expectations. I can’t be prescriptive. You really have to take individuals, and figure out what their roles are; what they’re good at. (Natalia)

Natalia’s approach builds on Kate’s and seems to highlight the unmistakable shift from management to leadership. In Natalia’s story, results are not a primary or secondary concern. It appears that her focus rests on the vision and bringing that vision to fruition through the development of her people. Her approach to leadership appears to be at once all encompassing, we are all working towards the same vision, and individualized, tailored to the specific needs of each person.

My nine participants yielded nine approaches to leadership. These women ended their transition from faculty to academic leadership just as individual and unique as they began it, but they did appear to have the same sense of openness prior to their journey and it seemed that they did wrestle with the same crisis as they formed their new identities as leaders. Through their observations, their searches for guidance and their attempts to bring their concept of leader to life, the journeys appeared to have solidified their focal point- the representation what they valued most, what they would not sacrifice, what they would use to determine their success. Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of the composite of these essential structures as they come together to provide the essence of the phenomena.
Figure 1: Composite of the Essential Structures. Each woman begins as a Faculty, then something (internal or external) pulls her away from the world she knows. This something can only pull her away because she possesses this ability to Be Open to possibilities. Upon leaving her faculty world, she is without status, without defined space and must resolve three interconnected crisis that will then define her new role in her new world. She begins her liminal period open and nebulous, then must immediately begin reigning in that openness to Draw Boundaries, boundaries that help her ‘leader’ image take shape and Become Visible. Lastly, she must decide how her shape or visible ‘leader’ form will Give Light to illuminate her work in her new world.

“Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.”
~Ralph Waldo Emerson
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND REFLECTION

“Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”
~ Søren Kierkegaard

The past thirty years have marked incredible growth for women in community colleges and the impending wave of mass retirements represented a “prime opportunity” for women to advance in the community college leadership ranks (Garza, Mitchell, & Eddy, 2008, p. 2). The development of female faculty into leaders represents an urgent need in the community college setting; however, little is known concerning how and why women transition from faculty into academic leadership. By discovering what and how regarding women’s experiences of transitioning from faculty to academic leadership, this phenomenological study sought to attain a deeper level of understanding why women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in community colleges. In particular, this study explored the lived experiences of 9 female community college deans in southeastern community colleges. This chapter elaborates on the discussion of the findings, addresses implications for further research, and provides reflections on the overall research experience.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study speak eloquently to existing literature concerning the advancement of women in the community college, corroborating and building upon topics such as the perception of success, satisfaction, and gender parity juxtaposed with diminishing representation in the higher ranks of leadership. How do individual women experience the transition from their academic to leadership positions in the community college?
The lived experiences of nine female academic leaders in southeastern community colleges were the focus of this phenomenological study. Their perspectives and experiences related to their transition from faculty to academic leadership served as the central phenomenon of investigation. The use of semi-structured interviews led to the identification and exploration of the themes to generate a better understanding of the heights and challenges that these women experienced as they left behind their faculty world to move into unchartered territory of leadership. The essential structures of their transitions that emerged from the data analysis include: (a) Being Open, (b) Drawing Boundaries, (c) Becoming Visible, and (d) Giving Light.

**Being Open**

The existing literature on community college female leaders, focused mainly on presidents, reported that many women arrive at leadership in an unintentional manner (Eddy, 2008; Mitchell, 2004). Likewise, the majority of my participants found themselves in positions that were not originally regarded as a career goal. Their descriptions of their transitions from faculty into academic leadership ranged from reluctant to natural, presenting an interesting spectrum of these unintentional paths.

Many of the women involved in this study spoke of their desire for more; more variety in their roles, more of an opportunity to make a difference, more understanding of how their institution functioned. This intrinsic drive exhibited by my participants was supportive of the research demonstrating that women were more likely to be involved in campus governance and the tenure process, and were more satisfied in these areas than their counterparts at four year universities (Lester & Bers, 2008; Townsend, 2008). The women of this study also remarked on their need to maintain balance between professional and personal lives, a goal that research suggested easier to achieve at the community college (Sallee, 2008; Wolf-Wendel, Ward &
Twombly, 2007). The existing research, as well as the reflections of my participants, revealed the importance of access to opportunity in the transitional experiences of faculty to academic leaders. The flexibility and variety presented by their roles in the community college allowed my participants to explore and be exposed to various aspects of leadership before making their full departure from the faculty world.

Many of the women involved in this study spoke of their arrival at the community college as accidental, but reported realizing that they had found their niche, or an environment aligned with the professional values. This was supported by previous research where Lester and Bers (2010) found that women were attracted to the principles surrounding social justice that shape the mission and the work of the community college. Also aligned with previous research, the ability to impact students in a variety of roles or capacities, as opposed to a focus on research, was one of the primary reasons why my participants selected the community college for their professional pursuits (Lester & Bers, 2010; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007). This variety allowed these women to follow their professional values, interests and passions which led to a professional evolution, an evolution that is supported by the finding that “nearly 90 percent of future community college leaders” come from within an institution (Ebbers et al, 2010, p. 60). All but one of my participants moved from faculty into leadership at the same institution.

A few of the women of this study did not seek out their transitions, did not initiate their departure from their faculty world. Described in the literature as “accidental leadership,” these leaders were “approached or placed in administrative positions versus seeking them out” (Garza, Mitchell, & Eddy, 2008, p. 10). Consistent with the literature, this accidental approach to leadership involved perspectives of reluctance and fear, but ultimately centered on a sense of responsibility to coworkers and/ or the institution.
The need to balance professional and personal priorities was noted by several of the women involved with this study. This pressure to balance, typically at the expense of their professional aspirations, coincided with existing research on women in the workforce and specifically women pursuing leadership (Garza, Mitchell, & Eddy, 2008; Sallee, 2008; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007). In some instances, my participants delayed their education and their pursuit of promotions due to perceived family needs. Others assumed a piecemeal approach to their careers, assembling skills and experiences as they followed their husbands’ careers around the country. Once they were in a position, as a family, where they could pursue their professional goals, these women displayed a faster pace than some of my other participants who did not report the same pressure to balance personal and professional lives.

These experiences connected well with the work of Eddy’s (2008) analysis of community college presidents which stated that “a stable home front provided a sense of foundation for these women, but also added constraints with respect to their ability to easily move for career advancement” (p. 6). As Eddy’s study indicated, most presidents were waiting until personal obligations were stable (husband retired, children raised) before pursuing their professional advancements (Eddy, 2008). Therefore, while many women may have desired advancement, the increased time away from their families that the advancement would require may have made leadership unattractive earlier in their careers.

**Drawing Boundaries**

Research on women who successfully ascend into community college presidencies testifies that their success is typically associated with several factors such as, a completion of a terminal degree, experience as a faculty member, and academic leadership experience within the community college (Keim & Murray, 2008; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Weisman &
Vaughn, 2007). Existing studies also suggest that the necessary skill set is honed through multiple paths, including formal and informal educational experiences, mentoring, networking, professional development, and on the job experiences (Amey & VanDerLinden, 2002; McNair et al, 2011). The testimonies of the women of this study add significantly to the above research, especially to the findings by Garza, Mitchell, and Eddy (2008) emphasizing that women “had to develop their skills on their own” (p. 13).

For most of my participants, the transition from faculty to academic leadership was marked early on by interpersonal difficulties, specifically those involving former peers who became subordinates. In reviewing the literature, this struggle appeared to be an element of the phenomenon that was more strongly influenced by gender. “Women are rated more highly than men on communal attributes such as emotional expressiveness, nurturance, interpersonal sensitivity, kindness, and responsiveness” (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 58). These terms served not only as descriptions of what society’s shared expectation were for females, but they also served as prescriptions of how females should or should not be creating a continuous system of feedback on how well an individual was aligning with expectations (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Ridgeway, 2011). Existing research on female leaders demonstrates that “the choice to move too far within or outside feminine social constructions can be detrimental to the perceived competence of the woman’s leadership” (McClellan, 2007, p. 23).

The struggles experienced by the women of this study appeared to have been reflective of their departure from these prescribed gender roles. When, in their new roles, they acted in an authoritative manner, they were met with resistance or backlash from their previous peers. Given their previous ‘friendly’ relationships and, possibly, attendance to more traditional gender roles, my participants were now seen as not adhering to the should and should not lists associated with
their gender. However, the literature on gender and leadership demonstrates that women who continue to act according to their prescribed gender role (communal and expressive) are not as likely to be viewed as competent or considered legitimate in their pursuit of leadership (Lester, 2008; Ridgeway, 2001, 2011). For many of my participants, this struggle marked a defining moment of their transition. “Women are often penalized for acting in ways that are outside what is expected of them. Paradoxically they are at the same time judged against male norms” (Eddy & Cox, 2008, p. 74). They would have to find a way to be the leader they sought to be in an environment that had its own standards and expectations.

“Merely watching how other leaders operated within the college and in handling their administrative functions provided a template of how to function as an administrator” (Garza, Mitchell, & Eddy, 2008, p. 16). All of the women involved in this study reported the use of observational learning to surmise what type of leader they would like to become as well as learning what was expected in their new environments, consistent with much of the existing literature (Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). Central to the development of this internal concept of leader was access to the “right people” or mentors as depicted in the literature (Eddy, 2008; Reille & Kezar, 2010).

Many studies on gender and leadership state that women who experienced mentoring were more likely to achieve senior leadership roles, suggesting that mentors provided a critical function for emerging female leaders (VanDerLinden, 2004). This is consistent with the experiences of my participants, as the access and involvement of the “right people” during their transitional experiences was viewed as critical to their success. Equally relevant to and consistent with existing research, the women of this study reported some degree of difficulty in the mentor process with none reporting success with a formal mentoring program (Garza Mitchell & Eddy,
The women of this study often had to seek out their own mentors or guides, determine who was appropriate for the role, and faced a perceived supply and demand problem when trying to intentionally seek out female guides, as there just weren’t many out there. Therefore, the findings of this study speak forcefully to the overarching literature concerning mentors; i.e., while viewed as a vital resource, most women participating in this study reported difficulty in finding mentors.

Observational learning helped my participants form internal concepts of the leaders they sought to be as well as the leaders they did not want to emulate. Concerning the do not want list, the reflections of many women appeared to revolve heavily around experiences with female leaders acting outside of their prescribed gender roles and in some cases experiencing backlash due to their actions. The literature on gender and leadership asserts that women who break out of their communal role and pursue leadership with more agenic traits are typically subject to backlash because, presumably, moving “outside feminine social construction can be detrimental to the perceived competence of the woman’s leadership” (Christman & McClellan, 2008, p. 23; Ridgeway 2001, 2011).

The participants of this study described situations where they made conscious choices to modify their concept of ideal leader based on observations of other women engaging in what they [the participants] considered unsuccessful or inappropriate leadership behavior, connecting these behaviors to the gender status of the individual. This is consistent with the literature on backlash related to Expectation States Theory suggesting that observational learning appears to be gender specific, with certain behaviors being judged successful or unsuccessful due in part to the gender of the person carrying out the behaviors.
Most of the women involved with this study faced the daunting challenge to redefine their boundaries and establish a new balance in their professional relationships. Based on their observational learning and exposure to guides, all participants of this study had shaped an internal concept of the leader they sought to be, but bringing that leader to life was more challenging due to the gender constraints imposed by the external settings such as, for instance, institutional culture. The literature on gender and leadership presents ample evidence for this challenge, illustrating several studies that find that the concept of leader is so strongly intertwined with male gender attributes, that women pursuing leadership found themselves in a no win situation (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Ridgeway 2001, 2011; Wood & Ridgeway, 2010). Therefore, the task before all of the women of this study was to find a way to reconcile the leader they sought to be with the gendered environment in which they would have to bring this leader to life successfully. Not surprisingly, in my view, the issues concerning professional relationships and boundaries, as described by the women of this study, presented the biggest problems, given the stereotypical women’s prescription to be communal and nurturing.

Perhaps the culmination of my participants’ struggle to reconcile their internal models of leader with gendered environmental expectations, many women reflected on their lessons learned in handling difficulty. Consistent with the literature gender expectations as well as gender and leadership, most of the participants in this study discussed how conflict pitted them completely against their prescribed gender roles, and yet conflict was not something they felt could be avoided if they were to become effective leaders. Evidently and consistent with the research on gender and leadership, the women of this study were pressured to remain in their communal role, and then work harder than men on the same tasks just to appear at a similar level of competence
as the men were originally perceived (Lester, 2008; Swim, Borgida, Maruyama, & Meyers, 1989; Ridgeway, 2001, 2011). This pressure found my participants reflecting on which ideals they would seek to meet, those internally derived or externally prescribed. Instead of avoiding the conflict, all women of this study reported using the conflict, the difficulty, as learning opportunities to discover how their version of leader would ultimately take shape.

**Becoming Visible**

Existing literature on gender and leadership suggests that female leaders are still being judged according to male norms and subject to backlash for acting outside their expected gender roles, with studies illustrating the expectation of women to perform “mom” work through the cultivation and maintenance of a nurturing demeanor, as well as the “glue work” such as taking notes and playing peacemaker to keep the group functioning (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Lester, 2008; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). As they moved from the faculty to academic leadership positions, a majority of the women of this study described their perceived need to adjust their internal, desired concept of leader with the external demands and expectations. These adjustments resulted in my participants learning how to ‘switch gears’ and to successfully move between gender roles in order to transition successfully.

In examining the literature concerning leadership development, two approaches stood out. First, the more small scale ‘Grow Your Own’ leadership development programs, a best practice for community colleges, typically included: team building and collaboration, institutional mission and purpose, institutional budgeting processes, institutional funding, institutional culture and values, emerging issues, governance, and ethics (Ebbers et al, 2010; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). These common elements were very much in line with the second approach, a large scale discourse on overarching competencies, proposed by the

In this study, most of the women involved had been exposed to these topics and relayed a sense of anticipation at the ability to explore in them more fully in their new roles. However, the participants expressed disappointment of a ‘day to day’ work that took over their attention, while leaving little time for more substantive issues that they longed to delve into as new leaders. Even those that engaged in these higher level aspects of leadership reported doing so in an environment that did not match up with their expectations, suggesting that most were dealing with feelings of disappointment, perhaps disillusionment, as they began to act in their new leader capacities.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the literature on gender and leadership presents strong evidence that many female community college leaders draw upon their past experiences and observational learning as they construct their identities as leaders (Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). Interestingly, this also relates to their professional attire. Many of the women involved in this study spoke of changing the way in which they dressed to either match institutional norms or in order to evoke a more professional response from their colleagues. While this change may have originated in observational learning, it manifested in a sort of experiment as my participants also reported needing to keep a sense of individuality. Therefore, it suggests that what began in observation morphed into a striking of a balance, to maintain a sense of personal style while meeting or evoking the right response from the environment.

“Women who were appointed or moved into a role indicated they had to act differently and were treated differently because of their sex” (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008, p. 14).
Mirroring the external changes that some of my participants discussed making in their dress, they also reported making changes to their internal selves, either through the development of a persona or through the identification and modification of skills perceived as needed in negotiating their new roles. This ‘thicker skin’ is referenced in the literature concerning female leadership, noting the need for women to balance gender expectations with male-defined leadership expectations (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Eagly & Mladinic, 1994; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Ridgeway 2001, 2011; Wood & Ridgeway, 2010).

The reflections provided by the women in this study also called to mind the literature of observational learning as they based their personas on previous experiences and people in leadership capacities (Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). The contrasting expectations and messages appeared to have led most participants of this study to “develop sophisticated performances that they are bale to change from one moment to the next” (Lester, 2008, p. 11). All women involved with this study were faced with the challenge of growing this thicker skin that would allow them to meet gendered environmental expectations, while staying ‘true’ to themselves and developing into an effective leader.

During their transition from faculty to academic leaders, each of the women involved in the study reflected on the sacrifices they made and the freedoms they gave up, along their journeys. For most of them, the result was an increased sense of responsibility. Not only did they feel responsible for more people, they also felt responsible to more people and these responsibilities felt deeper than previous ones. In the literature on leadership development, there are elements that slightly touched on this sacrifice and responsibility such as organizational strategy, professionalism, team building and collaboration, institutional mission and purpose,
institutional culture and values, or ethics (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005; Reille & Kezar, 2010). However, none of these seemed to fully capture the essence of these women’s experiences. The struggles relayed by my participants were also reflected in the gendered environmental expectations surrounding them, environments that expected more from their female leaders in terms of group responsibility and ‘mom’ functions (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Lester, 2008; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996).

As the women involved in this study moved through their transitions, learning about themselves and the kind of leader they wanted to be as well as the kind of leader their gendered environment would allow them to be, they spoke of moments of doubt. Am I making the right choice? Can I do this? Is it worth it? While fleeting, these moments provided another perspective of their struggle to embrace the status of leader. Perhaps these heartbeat moments represented cracks when my participants experienced more strongly these gendered expectations. These gendered expectations led to evaluative rankings, one group opposed to another, related to presumptions of competence and legitimacy based on an individual’s membership to a specific status and with respect to leadership the presumed competence belonged to males (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011; Wagner & Berger, 1997).

Existing literature on female leaders finds that “when interacting in particular episodes, women leaders embrace or disclaim one gender norm for another to varying degrees. Rather than relocate themselves along one norm of the other, they move fluidly between them. For women, however, this leadership still becomes problematic because others still expect them to behave according to social constructs of gender” (McClellan, 2007, p. 21). Perhaps these heartbeat moments were my participants’ acknowledgement that the pressures of the gendered environment don’t completely disappear, that even if progress has been made, doubts concerning
competence and legitimacy may remain or reappear and that these doubts, through driven externally, could find a way inside your own head.

**Giving Light**

During this final stage of their transition from faculty to academic leader, the women of this study appeared to have identified who they are and what they value as leaders. Much of this exploration and identification seemed to have resulted from self-study, observational learning coupled with personal experimentation. Their reflections and experiences echo some of the existing studies on gender expectations as well as gender and leadership that suggest that leadership development, although highly needed, does not appear to be readily available. A shift in the responsibility for leadership development from graduate training to the individual institution was reflected throughout the current literature (Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). Several studies on leadership development show what needs to happen, the skills that need to be developed, the mechanisms by which those skilled could have been developed, but most important, they document the great deficit that exists in access to leadership development (e.g., Brown et al, 2002; Ebbers et al, 2010; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011).

In addition to insufficient leadership development opportunities, a disconnect exists between current opportunities and the needs experienced by women transitioning in the community college setting. Models rooted in the historical male normed concept of leadership and gendered environments may have created additional barriers, instead of supporting women such as the participants of this study who need to find a way to reconcile the leader they want to be with the one they can successfully bring to life in their current environment.
The women of this study reflected on their choices made during their transitions from faculty to academic leadership, the sacrifices that they made, and the perceived results of those sacrifices. The analysis of their experiences resulted in delineating lessons learned highlighted by a sense of inner strength gained from the journey. The shared experiences by the participants of this study echo the literature concerning resiliency in female leaders. Resiliency is understood as a transformative process, whereby a person becomes changed as a result of challenging circumstances, thus preparing himself or herself to persevere through future hardships (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Grotberg, 2003). Resiliency depends on self-reflection and a continual adaptation: “this ability to turn inward for assessment became easier over time with each subsequent barrier that could have slowed them down or permanently removed them” (Christman & McClellan, 2008, p. 8; Whatley, 1998).

The above quoted studies echo the internal processes described by many of my participants; self-reflection, learning from past experiences and finding a way to rise above the challenges were common discussion points of my interviews. “The resilient woman leader, because of her multidimensional gendered leadership, has learned how to vary her responses to fit the complexity of the organization’s expectations” (McClellan, 2007, p. 23). Given the ways in which these processes were described, it appeared as though my participants were manifesting this kind of resiliency during their transitions. Given their stories concerning early influences, it may have been possible to find threads of this resiliency early in their lives and educational pursuits. Perhaps this resiliency, or the manifestation of it, was a necessary component of a successful transition; one that needed to be present from the beginning or one that could be honed and developed during the journey remained to be seen.
As the women of this study began to emerge as leaders, they each displayed the desire to do what was ‘right,’ yet ‘right’ seemed to depend on the perspective. Faced with this ambiguity, my participants appeared to have developed their sense of authority, and their definition of ‘right.’ This authority was sometimes developed internally, driven by personal and professional values, and sometimes assumed from external influences, what the environment concludes is ‘right.’ Existing literature on this subject shows that around half of all leaders find a sense of their authority in their title or position (external) (Eddy & Cox, 2008). While my participants had the shared experience of embracing their authority, there was great diversity in the way that it happened and the result of that authority on how each led her people.

This diversity relates to the study by Brown et al (2008), which claims “75 years of analysis and research have produced no conclusions about what constitutes effective leadership” (p. 8). Existing literature on current issues facing community colleges as well as leadership development in the community college suggests that the challenges of leadership in the community college setting becomes increasingly complex, and this complexity collides with a lack of clarity on the definition on effective leadership (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005; Brown et al, 2002; Campbell, Syed & Morris, 2010; Ebbers, Conover & Samuels, 2010; McNair, Duree & Ebbers, 2011; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Strom et al, 2011). The women of this study, while transitioning from faculty to leadership positions, found themselves in the crosshairs of this collision, in an increasingly complex world with several different versions of ‘right’ being presented to them. It seems that my participants knew that they had to make a choice and the choice they made would define them in their new world.

Appearing to me as the final symbolic steps in their transitions from faculty to academic leaders, the women involved in this study seemed to have found a way to bring their new
identities as leaders to fruition in an effective manner. This effectiveness, this sense of success, was illustrated in their ability to achieve status. For my participants, status was a source of reward, or reinforcement that their work as leaders was ‘making a difference,’ something they desired from long before this journey began. The manifestation and use of status was as individual as each woman’s approaches to leadership, yet they succeeded in finding a way to have the influence they desired and feed their souls in the process.

Consistent with the literature on gender and leadership, most of my participants were recognized as leaders, as the high ranking members of their respective groups, those that direct the actions of lower ranking members of the group and warranted a special status due to their ranking (Gerber, 1996; Ridgeway 2001, 2011; Schein, 2001; Webster & Foschi, 1988; Wood & Ridgeway, 2010). Their individual approach to status, its purpose and its manifestation, aligned more so with the literature concerning gender, suggesting that different roles, resources, and additional statuses present in the woman would influence the way status was approached and utilized (Ridgeway 2001, 2011; Schein, 2001; Webster & Foschi, 1988; Wood & Ridgeway, 2010). Just as there was not one single definition to ‘right,’ it appeared that there was not one single definition of ‘status,’ but its importance was conveyed nonetheless.

To summarize briefly the above stated relevance of this study’s findings to the existing literature on the advancement of women in the leadership positions in higher education, several important contributing points can be made plausible. First, this study shows that many women come to their positions of leadership unintentionally. The women of this study affirmed that their transitions from faculty into academic leadership ranged from reluctant to natural, presenting a wide spectrum of unintentional paths. Regardless of these paths however, many participants of this study mentioned the need to balance professional and personal priorities. This
pressure to balance, typically at the expense of their professional aspirations, connects fittingly with existing research on women in the workforce and specifically women pursuing leadership. Also consistent with existing literature, the transformational process exhibited by the women of this study aligned well with the work regarding resiliency in female leaders.

Not as well documented in existing literature was the overarching struggle faced by my participants to find a way to be the leader they sought to be in an environment that had its own standards and expectations. Observational learning and the use of mentors, or guides, appeared to be valuable tools as the women of this study navigated their new worlds and began to give shape to their new identities. While these tools were referenced in the literature, the existing studies do not provide the adequate perspective that was provided by my participants’ reflections. Resulting from this study’s findings is the impetus that provides substantive cohesive arguments with the studies on women’s advancement in higher education leadership, as well as the opportunities for an expanded exploration of women’s lived experiences as they aspire to leadership positions.

Women Transitioning from Faculty to Leadership Positions:

Methodologically Uncovered Lived Experiences

“I’m not afraid of storms, for I’m learning to sail my ship.”

~ Louisa May Alcott

As discussed in Chapter 3, I sought to integrate the ideas and concepts from several thinkers and scholars into a “tapestry of paradigms” (Ulysse & Lukenchuk, 2013; Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013) that illuminated the purpose of this study and the methods of its investigation. At its core, this study was phenomenological in its design, striving to discover the what and how concerning women’s advancement in the community college setting. Accordingly, I attended not
only to the individual’s consciousness, but also their context, or environment in order to gain understanding and make meaning in the phenomena (Schutz, 1932). Building upon Husserl’s phenomenological process, this study sought to understand the *lebenswelt*, or lifeworld, of the women involved in this study (Schutz, 1932). Additionally, social phenomenology provided the framework not only to examine the participants’ *lebenswelt*, but also to explore how their experiences and the meaning ascribed to them were influenced by their sociality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Of particular interest to this study was how gender influences the phenomenon, which brought forward the work of Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenology of sense perception (1973). Merleau-Ponty proposed that lived experience was always embodied, and claimed that human beings find meaning in their body’s active encounter with the world. Therefore, the active encounters of a female body with the community college context represented an integral piece of these women’s *lebenswelt* and the phenomenon of study.

This methodological approach provided a fitting foundation for the specific knowledge that I was pursuing. It allowed me to focus on “revealing, uncovering, exposing, and connecting” the lived experiences of the nine women involved in this study, and provided a framework without constricting the stories that needed to emerge (Duncan, 2013, p. 237). By building on this phenomenological foundation, I was able to discover my participants’ reality, or perceptions, through my own conscious mind (Polkinghorne, 1989). Reflecting on the tenet that experience and meaning are given life in consciousness, I yearned to truly understand the consciousness of the women of this study, knowing that human experience “makes sense to those who live it” (Creswell, 1998, p.86). Drawing on the additional conceptual and theoretical ‘threads’ in my tapestry, I was afforded a greater opportunity to get into my participants’ minds as well as their flesh.
The Participants’ Post-phenomenological ‘Homeworld’

Building upon the concept of lebenswelt, Oksala’s homeworld incorporates the socially constructed history and traditions that influence the individual’s lebenswelt. Our homeworld is an intersubjectively constituted system of ‘normalcy’ which teaches the individual convention (what is ‘normal’) as well as the sanctions for violating convention (Oksala, 2006). With the addition of this homeworld lens, I was able to better understand how my participants’ perceptions and experiences encompassed gendered meanings. Freeing me from the responsibility of bracketing gender, Oksala’s post-phenomenological homeworld allowed me to examine my participants’ experiences as gendered, their perceptions of themselves as gendered beings, as well as their perceptions of societal expectations of themselves as women and as leaders.

The inquiry into my participants’ homeworlds was essential, since it brought to surface what they were as faculty and their migration between those two worlds. It was the restructuring of their homeworld that seemed to illustrate their successful transition from faculty to academic leader. The rendition of the experiences of this study’s participants through the lens of Oksala’s (2006) philosophy deems especially significant within the context of gender and leadership.

Expectation States Theory (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011; Wagner & Berger, 1997) alluded to the relevance of this study as to how gender roles and expectations may or may not have shaped the homeworld of the women of this study. Expectation States Theory posits that gender is heavily intertwined with social hierarchy and leadership because status beliefs, or shared expectations, that govern these areas are built upon gender codes. When brought together in a group to work on a shared responsibility, individuals will draw upon unconscious assumptions of status beliefs to determine where they ‘rank’ in the groups’ hierarchy and will behave in a manner consistent with their group status ranking, resulting in pressure for women in a mixed
sex group to assume supportive, reactive roles due to their perceived lower status (Ridgeway, 2001, 2011).

Ridgeway’s work provided the backdrop to explore my participants’ experiences with gendered environments, backlash, status and the struggle to reconcile internal desires with external forces regarding their identities as emerging leaders. In this study, the women involved reflected on their concerns about external expectations, worrying about or modifying their behavior out of concern as to how it would be interpreted based on her gender. While none of my participants revealed any personal doubts based on her gender, indeed many saw it as a source of strength, many of the women involved in this study revealed a perception of external doubts and challenges she faced as a result of her gender. It appeared that considerable attention was paid to how best to act in order to mitigate these challenges, representing additional burdens faced as they sought to transition from faculty into academic leaders.

**Liminality: Revealed and Restoried**

*Liminality* refers to a transitional time, when an individual is moving from one status, or role, to another (Turner, 1964). Originally discussed in anthropological settings regarding rites of passage, *liminality* begins when the individual is removed from their previous status and persists until the new status is achieved. This period involves instruction, exploration, and ultimately results in transformation of the individual. *Liminality* provided a meaningful framework for the exploration of my participants’ experiences. Not only was I able to explore their transition from faculty (a distinct status) to academic leader (a distinct status) through this lens, I was also able to bring together the processes they experienced under the headings of instruction and exploration.
While I did not let this concept of liminality drive my data collection, it was during my last steps of phenomenological data analysis that I discovered the meaningful alignment between my essential structures and Turner’s *Rites of Passage*. While the focus of this study was on the transition, the *liminal* period, my essential structures captured the three distinct stages Turner discussed; *Separation* (leaving the first status), *Liminality* (being on the margins), and *Aggregation* (joining new status). My essential structure of *Being Open* reflects my participants’ departure from the faculty world and, thus, aligned perfectly with the *Separation* phase. Likewise, at the other end of the spectrum, the *Aggregation* phase was marked by essential structure of *Leader* that each of my participants was moving towards during their transitions. Betwixt and between, the *Liminal* phase included instruction, exploration and transformation. These processes appeared in my essential structures of *Drawing Boundaries, Becoming Visible and Giving Light* to different degrees as my participants persisted in their journeys.

Additionally, Turner’s *Sacra* became a central theme in my data analysis, in the forms of observational learning and the use of guides, or mentors, by the women involved in this study. Overall, the use of this concept yielded a much more meaningful understanding than I initially anticipated. It provided a structure and flow of influence for the stories that unfolded from the women of this study.

As I collected the shared experiences of the women of this study, its ‘tapestry’ provided considerable support for the discovery of my participants’ experiences and its interwoven concepts and theories enabled the emergence of a rich and multilayered phenomenon. Each thread of the tapestry was indispensable, and excluding any of them would have damped its beauty. Figure 2 below demonstrates a visual representation of this tapestry.
Figure 2- Essential Structures of the Participants’ Experiences of Transitioning from Faculty to Leadership Positions

This above figure conveys similar findings represented in an alternative way in chapter 4 above.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study sought to contribute to existing studies in women’s transitional experiences in community college leadership. With community colleges expecting large numbers of retirements in coming years, culminating in a ‘leadership gap,’ women are poised to have tremendous opportunities available to them in academic leadership positions within community colleges (Shults, 2001). Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of how and what women experience as they move from faculty into academic leadership positions could help women and institutions capitalize on these impending opportunities. Given that one of the paramount findings in this study was a better understanding of the struggle of my participants to reconcile their internal desires of leadership with the expectations of their gendered environments, this study does offer significant insights for institutions, leadership development programs, and women in community college settings.
Institutional Research

For each of the essential structures identified in the current study, there exists opportunities for institutions to reflect on how their environment and institutional culture may be influencing the *liminal* period of its female leaders. Institutions could start with an examination of the environment for the expectations that are being relayed towards emerging female leaders. As an institution, are we putting forward what we desire? How can we be a less gendered institution? Positive attributes of institutions included the flexibility and variety associated with roles in the community college, which allowed my participants to explore and be exposed to various aspects of leadership before making their full departure from the faculty world. Therefore, institutions would benefit from ensuring that female faculty and emerging leaders have increased responsibilities to maximize their talents and skills and opportunities for professional development in their current roles.

When looking to intentionally grow leaders, institutions will need to attend to the pressure of female leaders to balance personal and professional priorities. Any steps that institutions could take to either assist in the balancing or addressing unrealistic gendered expectations would likely help cultivate a greater pool of potential leaders. Institutions will also need to pay more attention to the development of its accidental leaders. The majority of the women involved in this study found themselves in positions that were not originally regarded as a career goal and all but one of my participants moved from faculty into leadership at the same institution. Consistent with the literature, this accidental approach to leadership involved perspectives of reluctance and fear, but ultimately centered on a sense of responsibility to coworkers and/or the institution. Therefore, institutions could benefit greatly from providing resources to help with expectations, reducing fears that may be associated with leadership
positions and, in general, finding ways to make leadership look more attractive. By having a glimpse inside the thought processes and struggles of my participants, institutions have much to examine with respect to expectations and pressures being exerted by their gendered environment.

**Professional Development Programs**

Those responsible for leadership development programs, either free standing or an institutional Grow Your Own program, could benefit from the notion of a *liminal* period used in the current study and the themes that were identified. The essential structures that emerged from the data could serve as a possible format or structure, or at the very least provide relevant topics of discovery for the program participants. From a leadership development standpoint, the *liminal* period, and its essential structures, focuses on the struggle for emerging leaders to reconcile their internal values and desires concerning the leader they sought to be with the gendered environment that presented its own standards and expectations. Helping women and men to better understand what they will encounter in their transitions from faculty to academic leadership can assist them in the reconciliation that will need to occur. Special attention should also be paid to what expectations each gender may face. Based on the current study, women would seem to benefit from leadership development focused on specific areas such as; redefining boundaries, establishing a new balance in professional relationships, successfully handling & learning from difficult situations, understanding the changing sense of responsibility, dealing with self-doubt.

Also noted, by helping women to strengthen skills related to observational learning, self-reflection and the identification and selection of mentors, or guides, leadership development programs can assist their participants in developing some of their own skill sets, supporting strategies documented in the existing literature as well as the current study. Finally, leadership
development programs may want to evaluate the expectations that are presented concerning the daily life of a leader. The reflections of the women involved in this study suggest the need for a more realistic portrayal of what their professional life will look like as emerging leaders, as many expressed disappointed in the amount of ‘day to day’ work that comprised their attention as opposed to the work they associated with leading and those that comprise the majority of leadership development topics.

**Women Leaders Open for Possibilities**

Originally, the current study was thought to be potentially beneficial to women in the community college setting that were aspiring to leadership positions. However, most of my participants were not aspiring. Instead they moved into leadership either through a professional evolution or a reluctant ‘accidental leader’ type of situation. Therefore, it appears that the current study could benefit many more women in the community college setting that previously considered, as most of tomorrow’s leaders may find themselves involved in unanticipated transitions from faculty into academic leadership.

The essential structures that emerged from the data include: (a) Being Open, (b) Drawing Boundaries, (c) Becoming Visible, and (d) Giving Light. These provide women a preview of their possible path as well as issues they may wrestle with during their transitions. In examining the data, the fundamental questions that my participants seemed to be faced with along their journey included:

- *How will I care for my people?*
- *Whose definition of ‘right’ will I subscribe to as a leader?*
- *What am I willing to sacrifice?*
- *How will I use my status? What will keep me motivated?*

The ways in which these questions were addressed began to define my participants in their new roles and in their new worlds. The answering of these questions provided the mechanisms by
which these women navigated the essential structures of their *liminal* periods. Therefore, regardless of her current role, women could benefit by beginning to reflect on how she would like to answer these questions and understand the ways in which her gendered environment may present challenges to her answers.

Additionally, it appears that women could benefit from strengthening their skill sets involving observational learning, finding and using guides, and the development of resiliency. Those skills, more than any other experiences, appeared to have been pivotal in the transitions of my participants. Therefore, women could begin exploring and identifying ways to grow in these areas now to better position or prepare themselves for what the future may hold.

**Reflections on My Journey**

It was my *liminal* experiences that brought me to this study. As I progressed through my career and my doctoral program, I wore each accomplishment as a badge, a representation of my progress through this transition. While each badge had a certain amount of individual meaning, it was their collective power of transformation that I sought. This study was another, much more coveted, badge to mark my progress and fuel my transformation. I found strength and insight in my progress, but certainty was not present. There was no guaranteed ending to my *liminality*. I could only continue to receive instruction, engage in exploration and do my part to create an opportunity for the transformation. When would I no longer be in transition? When would I emerge a true leader?

Over the course of this journey, I discovered that the ability to learn from others, through observation and through the use of mentors, can help me, or any woman, answer those questions. It is through the learning process that we are able to better reconcile what we long to *be* with what we can effectively achieve given our environments. What are we willing to sacrifice and
what are we willing to stand for as leaders? There does not seem to be one right answer, but only the discovery of your right answer.

These nine remarkable women who shared their stories with me taught me the power of learning from others, and they taught me so much more. By sharing their reflections and experiences with me, they became my mentors, my guides, my sources for observational learning and reflection. These nine women have walked nine different paths and emerged into nine distinct leaders, yet each of them is talented, dedicated and worthy of learning from. As my data analysis transpired, I would find myself reflecting on professional situations and speculating as to how my different participants would approach said situations. By examining what I learned about the women involved in this study, I was able to learn so much about myself. By reflecting on their struggles, I was able to reflect and learn from mine, and also hopefully better prepare for the next one. By exploring the essence of their experiences, by seeking to understand their source of resiliency, I better understood my own and developed a greater sense of strength. In their stories, I saw myself as well as whom I would like to be.

I carry with me these nine women, my guides, and I draw on their strengths to sharpen my own. I move forward with Kate’s drive to never stop learning, Barbara’s commitment to her internal compass, Alexis’s preparedness to fight for a just cause, Natalia’s openness to see where her passions may lead her, Heidi’s dedication to her college, Anne’s wisdom that what we shy away from can lead to great things if we are willing to take the risk, Dana’s quiet self-assuredness, Madison’s perpetual enthusiasm and Marie’s incredible efficacy.

When will I no longer be in transition? When will I emerge a true leader? How about now…

“Not knowing when the dawn will come, I open every door.”
~ Emily Dickinson
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

I. The Participants’ Homeworlds Unveiled:

1. Please tell me about your experiences growing up and getting your education (primary, secondary, high-school, and college-level) that you think might have led you to choose a career in higher education? Probing/follow-up questions:
   - Was education emphasized in your family? Is so, then how?
   - What about the academic leadership potential, do you think that you displayed leadership characteristics growing up? If so, how, in what instances?
   - Were there any role models in your early life that could have encouraged your desire to pursue graduate studies and eventually leadership positions?

2. What comes to your mind when you think about professional status? Please elaborate on your answer. Probing/follow-up questions:
   - Do you remember the times when belonging to a certain status such as being a woman or a professional might have been important while you were growing up? If so, then how? Please elaborate on your answer.
   - Do you think that gaining a specific status such as the status of the position of leadership and/or power plays a role in person’s life? If so, then how? If not, then why not?

3. Looking back at your educational path, what brought you to become a faculty member at your college?
4. Please tell me about your life as a faculty. Probing/follow-up questions:

- Was it what you expected?
- What were the most rewarding experiences of it?
- What were your biggest challenges?
- Have you ever felt not quite satisfied with your faculty position? If so, then why not?

II. Entering the Liminality Stage:

5. How did you come to arrive at the thought of pursuing a leadership role?

Probing/follow-up questions:

- When did you first feel the need to pursue a leadership position?
- What were your thoughts at the moment?
- What were the most decisive moments?

6. Could you, please, describe in detail several episodes that you have experienced when transitioning from faculty to leadership positions?

Probing/follow-up questions:

- What were your hopes, goals, or doubts?
- Was there any internal and/or external struggles? If so, then what were they?
- What was your motivation to move forward? Please elaborate on your answer.
- Was there anything that held you back to remain a faculty? Please elaborate on your answer.

7. Have you ever felt supported by specific individuals from your institution in terms of pursuing the leadership position? If so, then by whom and how?
8. Have you ever felt supported by specific individuals from your immediate family surroundings to pursue the position of leadership? If so, then by whom and how?

III. Experiencing *Liminality*:

9. Please describe in as much detail as you can the transitional experiences of your move from a faculty to leadership role. Probing/follow-up questions:
   - What did you expect the transition to be like?
   - Were there any surprising or unexpected experiences? If so, then what were they?
   - Were there any challenges? If so, what were they?
   - What did you learn, if anything, about yourself when going through the transition? Please elaborate on your answer.
   - Would you like to share your innermost thoughts and emotions that you experienced during the transitional period? If so, please feel free to share as much as you can.

10. Have you ever heard of the phrase ‘the rites of passage’? If so, please tell me how you understand it. If not, let me share a few thoughts with you [the researcher provides basic information about the rite of passage]. Considering the rite of passage in metaphorical terms, would you say that your moving from the position of a faculty to a leadership position was the ‘rite of passage’? If so, then how would you interpret it? In other words, what was it like for you to go through the transition? Please elaborate on your answer.

11. One of the key experiences of the rite of passage, according to anthropological studies, is *Sacra*, whereby the person receives formal and informal instruction on how to “be” in his or her upcoming status. Given this rendition of the word Sacra, what does it mean to you to receive formal and informal instruction on how to become the leader? In other
words, can you distinguish between formal and informal instruction, or training, during
the stage of transition to the position of leadership? If so, then how? Please elaborate on
your answer. Probing/follow-up questions:

o What was the formal ‘instruction,’ if any, that you received?

o What was an informal ‘instruction,’ if any, that you received?

o How did these instructional messages make you feel about your decision to move
  into leadership?

o What were most valuable instructional messages? Which ones were least
  valuable and why?

12. Regarding the change in your official professional status from faculty to leader, what
  were your thoughts and emotions about that change when it occurred? Were there any
  pivotal moments that you can recall? If so, then what were they? In other words, what
  was it like to have a faculty title relinquished for the sake of a leadership one? Please
  elaborate on your answer.

IV. Completing the Rite of Passage: The Emergence of a Leader:

13. When you think about yourself—as a person, a woman, a leader, a…?—what comes to
  mind first? Probing/follow-up questions:

o What does it mean to you to be a leader?

o Have you ever had thoughts or experiences that have led you to consider yourself
  specifically as a female leader? If so, then what were they? Please elaborate on your
  answer.

o Given that you are a female leader, would you say that it makes you different from the
  male leaders? If so, then how and why? If not, then why not?
o When it comes to the professional status that we hold in a society, does being a female leader mean and/or imply different expectations than those of being a male leader? If so, then what are these expectations? If not, why not?

o Have you ever experienced a backlash against you being a female leader? If so, they what were your experiences?

o Have you ever experienced being discriminated against as a woman and/or as a professional woman? If so, then what were these experiences?

14. Could you, please, elaborate on your expectations and experiences of leadership position? Have you ever experienced any discrepancies between your expectations of the leadership role and the actual experiences of it? If so, what were they? How did you deal with them? Please elaborate on your answer.

VI. Concluding Questions:

15. Suppose that you can now address the largest audience in higher education, what would you like to recommend in terms of the advancement of women?

16. If you were to address a group of women aspiring for academic leadership, what would you like to say?

17. What are the pivotal experiences of your professional life transitioning from faculty to leadership role that you would like to emphasize in terms of being most meaningful and rewarding?

18. Is there anything that I have not asked you that you think you would like to tell me?
Informed Consent Form

Dear prospective participant:

You are invited to be part of the study, *Community College Female Faculty Transitioning to Leadership Positions: A Phenomenological Study of ‘Liminality’ of Professional Lifeworlds and Identities*, conducted by Laura Yannuzzi, a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education and Organizational Change (HEOC) program at Benedictine University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of women advancing professionally in community colleges. Specifically, the advancement of women who have moved from faculty into academic dean positions within a community college setting will be explored with regard to their personal experiences. I seek to address the following research questions: How do women experience the transition from their academic to leadership positions in the community college? How do these women make sense of their role as a faculty? Given the transition, the liminal spaces, of their experiences, how do these women perceive the shifting sense of their identity? What does liminality mean to them? How do they understand the changing status of their professional roles? Having gone through the transitional experience, how do these women perceive their identity as a leader?

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any time with no penalty to you. The study does not have any known or potential risks. You are invited to participate in an individual interview, which will last approximately two hours at a location of your choice. You will be asked to respond to a series of questions about your experiences transitioning from a faculty role into academic leadership. These questions will include topics of expectations, status, identity and motivations concerning your professional advancement. Follow-up interviews may be requested depending on the research needs and purposes. The interview will be audio- or video-recorded (pending your consent) and transcribed. The transcription of the interview will be presented to you for verification of accuracy.

For confidentiality purposes, the interview transcripts and all files pertaining to your participation in this study will be stored in a locked cabinet for ten years and destroyed afterwards if no longer needed. All computer files will be kept on a secure server. I will also maintain a copy of the data on a password-protected computer. Your actual name will be known only to the principal researcher (me). The interview will be given a secure code and a pseudonym will be assigned to your name to keep all the information fully confidential. Excerpts from the interview may be included in the final dissertation report or other later publications. However, under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics appear in these writings. If, at a subsequent date, biographical data were relevant to a publication, a separate release form would be sent to you.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Benedictine University. The Chair of the IRB is Dr. Alandra Weller-Clarke who can be reached at aclarke@ben.edu; or at (630) 829 – 6295.
This study is being conducted in part to fulfill requirements for my EdD degree in HEOC at the graduate school of Benedictine University in Lisle, IL. I would be grateful if you would sign this form on the line provided below to show that you have read and agree with the contents.

If you have questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at laura.yannuzzi@gmail.com or (336) 596-5131. You can also contact my dissertation director Dr. Antonina Lukenchuk at antoninalukenchuk@gmail.com; alukenchuk@ben.edu; or at (630) 310-6382.

You will be tendered a copy of your signed consent form. Please acknowledge with your signatures below your consent to participate in this study and to record your interview.

Thank you.

I consent to participate in this study

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

[Signature]

I give my permission to video-tape this interview

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

[Signature]
APPENDIX C

Research Questions with Corresponding Initial Codes and Themes

The main research question that will guide this study is: *How do women experience the transition from their academic to leadership positions in the community college?* Additionally, I pose the following questions:

- How do these women make sense of their role as a faculty?
  - **Early Influences**
    - Influence of Early Role models in education
    - Expression of early interest in teaching/education
    - Parental expectations
    - Family value on education
    - Intimidated by authority figures
    - Role of gender in this influence (career guidance, one of the boys)
    - ‘One of the Boys’ is standard for success
  - **Role of ‘School’**
    - Provided safe harbor from difficult home life
    - Provided structure, order, a place to feel in control
    - A source of confidence/ success/ pride
  - **Sense of purpose**
    - Helping others
    - Making a difference
    - Desire to connect/ relate to all people
    - Helping the underdogs, the marginalized
- Do what’s ‘right’
  - Drive/ hunger for more
    - Motivation to learn more/ do more
    - Understanding and discovering new connections (seeing bigger and bigger picture)
    - Frustration with status quo- not having an impact
    - Always looking for new challenges
    - Always looking for areas to ‘fix’ or bring order to
    - Always seeking/ open to opportunities to make a difference & improve things
    - Romanticized/ Idealistic drive to make the world a better place
    - Always looking for ways to have bigger influence/ status
    - Following passions & interests into new opportunities
    - Strong desire to advance- always looking ahead
    - Intrinsic motivation or pull
    - “Natural Born Gifts” provide an innate specialness that she must tend to
    - Assumed roles & responsibilities prior to a title being given (engaged, motivated, committed)
    - Avoids attention/ works behind the scenes

- Given the transition, the liminal spaces, of their experiences, how do these women perceive the shifting sense of their identity?
  - Change in relationships & boundaries
    - Do what’s ‘right’ vs be liked
• Becoming OK with the change in colleague relationships

• Relationships/support systems are both important and a challenge

• Advocacy vs authority – do my people work with me or for me

• Detachment – my people are struggling with the change, I am not

• Struggling with the change in relationships

• Struggling to find new/appropriate boundaries

• Support is sometimes known, sometimes assumed, sometimes source of concern

• Struggle to handle criticism about administration’s job when she can’t defend herself and she values relationships

• Concern that actions are perceived differently based on gender

• Concern that struggles/conflicts are result of gender

• Fear of backlash

• Being judged based on other women’s performance (expectations)

  o Struggle between External and Internal validation

    • Results (Success) take priority over people (relationships)

    • Struggle between need for recognition (approval) and doing what is ‘right’ regardless

    • Desire to please (self & others)

    • I will work hard to prove my worth (whose standard?)

    • Trying to meet others expectations - Success/failure are externally defined

    • Learning to say no

    • Struggle between drive to get ahead at all costs and integrity
Developing a Persona

- Playing a game/ developing a persona
- Shaping the message to get the desired result
- Developing thick skin

Struggle to fit into ‘leader’ structure

- Compromising parts of self to ‘fit’ the role
- Negotiation between values & opportunity for larger influence/ status
- I am a nurturing leader (in words, not actions)
- Struggle to find intrinsic value in her leadership skills
- The tough times define you
- Awareness of her gender status & altering behavior in specific situations

Advocate versus Parent (how she ‘cares’ for her people)

- Father figure (teach, protect, provide)
- Need to model and set the tone
- Becoming a ‘grown up’ (protect & develop/ raise your people)

Struggle for Balance between personal and professional goals

- Need to balance/ choose between work or family
- Need to wait her turn- husband’s career comes first
- Need to take/ pass opportunities based family’s needs

- What does liminality mean to them?

- Long & Winding Path
  - Indirect Path
  - Sense of stumbling into positions along the way
• Need to reinvent herself along the way
• Committing to the whole role, not just the ‘fun’ parts

  o Opportunities to Learn (Sacra)

  • The importance of guides (role models, mentors)
    • Need guides
    • Need good guides
    • Seeking out guides
    • Intentionally seeking out good guides (those who are doing things well)
    • Need for female guides
    • Need to be a female guide
    • Seeking help from those with higher status

  • Formal instruction
    • Shapes definition of leader/leadership
    • Provides validation

  • Observational Learning
    • Shows what to do
    • Shows what not to do/ how not to be
    • Involves self-reflection
    • Navigating politics
    • Witnessing backlash against female leaders
    • Double standard for gender (roles, perceptions, expectations) with higher standards for women
• Being ‘one of the boys’ & ‘passing the test’

  o Finding your place
    - Finding home
    - Importance of timing
    - Natural Progression (various definitions)
    - Accepting vs. taking control over your fate
    - Importance of fit

• How do they understand the changing status of their professional roles?

  o Sense of authority
    - “earned” by waiting my turn
    - Appointed and need to prove myself worthy
    - I control, I fix, I make sure…
    - Struggle with the changes in authority

  o Sense of Responsibility
    - Shifting sense of responsibility (from students to faculty to institution to herself?) Related to who she is trying to please..
    - Do the ‘right’ thing- according to whom?
    - Empowerment- wanting to grow & help others
    - Need to ‘pave the way’ for others

  o Uses of Status
    - Private enjoyment/validation
    - A tool- mechanism which allows her to have bigger impact
    - Motivation- wanted for influence and visibility
• Provides influence= ability to make things happen
• Embracing its power for her people not on her people

• Having gone through the transitional experience, how do these women perceive their identity as a leader?
  o Awareness of Leadership skills
    • Becoming less certain in some areas
    • Learning to channel/ temper traits
    • Moving from a list of traits to a holistic view of yourself as a leader
    • Openness to others perspectives
    • Realizing limitations of your control/ influence
    • Understanding you have value even when you make a mistake
    • Internal vs External perception (others say I am a leader vs I feel that I am a leader)
  o Sense of Self Strength
    • Ability to stand up for myself
    • Change in risk taking (some more, some less)
    • Change in perspective (small to big picture)
    • Facing/ decreasing the fear of failing
    • Turn challenges into successes/ learning opportunities (Persistence in the face of adversity)
    • Facing/ enduring discomfort to achieve goals (stepping out of comfort zone to do what you think is ‘right’)
- Adapting her skills/style to the people around her to make her group successful
- Identifies herself as a motherly leader—only possible once she attained higher status
- Behavior changed as she increased in status
- Need for additional status (stay one step ahead)
- Extra status gives you leeway with the ‘rules’
- Don’t ‘buy into’ gender bias for herself— but sees it in other situations

  - Transitions never stop
    - Draw on previous lessons learned
    - Serve as a guide to others
    - Still transitioning— the transition is the rite of passage
    - Enjoys/handles fast paced change well
    - Learning never stops
    - Trailblazer— no path, there is no ‘finish line’
APPENDIX D

Visual Representation of Imaginative Variation

Driving Forces

Early Influences

Role of School

Drive/Hunger for More

Sense of Purpose

Sense of Authority

Selecting a Compass

Sense of Responsibility

Opp to Learn

Int or Ext Validation

Advocate or Parent

Why am I taking this journey?

Edge of Separation

Faculty Homeworld

Whose directions will I follow?

Whose expectations will I rise to?

Liminality Pt 1 Receiving the Sacra
Sacrifice

Struggle to 'fit' role

Long, Winding Path

Home/Work Balance

Dev a Persona

Change in Relationships

What sacrifices will I make?
Liminality Pt 2 Transformation

Discovering Yourself

Sense of Strength

Finding your place

Use of Status

Awareness of Skills

What will I reap? How will I emerge?
Beginning of Aggregation
Establishing Leader Homeworld