

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation PERSONAL CONNECTIONS AND CAREER
REFLECTIONS: EXAMINING SOCIAL NETWORKS
AND CAREER CHOICES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS

Deborah K. Peoples, EdD

Dissertation Chair: Rosemary Gillett-Karam, PhD
Community College Leadership Doctoral Program

The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to examine the role of social networks in the career decisions and leadership of female African American community college senior leaders. The underrepresentation of women and people of color in leadership is not a new issue, and higher education has acknowledged this lack of representation as both a challenge and an opportunity. Networking is one of many strategies that successful leaders have identified as contributing to their success. This research explored how networks of African American women community college senior leaders are constructed and how they used the resultant resources for professional growth and career progression. Social capital theory provided the framework to characterize the lived experiences of African American women community college leaders as their careers evolved, with particular focus on network characteristics and networking behaviors, and to examine and draw conclusions about one grand tour question and three sub-questions. While social capital researchers used different models to explain the interaction that builds resources, there is agreement that social networks have value. For study participants, social networks provided access to social capital that influenced their career choices and outcomes.

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has been approved

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DISSERTATION COMMITTEE APPROVAL:

_____, Chair
Rosemary Gillett-Karam, PhD

Charles Moorer, PhD

Robin Spaid, EdD

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, my siblings, and the extended family who have supported me throughout this process. Family is not defined by blood ties but rather by the meaningful and lasting connections that sustain you and encourage you to persist. And to my always-faithful companion Raz: Thank you for coming along on this journey.

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List of Abbreviations

AACC	American Association of Community Colleges
ACCT	Association of Community College Trustees
ACE	American Council on Education
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CAO	Chief Academic Officer
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Institutional bias occurs in the form of informal networks. Because of the importance of informal contacts, recommendations, and referrals as sources of information for occupational advancement, individuals such as women, non-White men, persons with disabilities, and others who are not majority group members will struggle to participate in informal communications and social networks, thus helping their careers (Guillory, 2001 p. 114).

For the past three decades, scholars and researchers on community colleges have been predicting an increase in senior leadership opportunities for women and minorities (Boggs, 2003; Eddy, 2010; Shults, 2001; Vaughan, 1990; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). In the decade between the early 1990s and the early 2000s, the number of women in presidencies increased significantly. The number of women in community college leadership positions increased from 11% to 28% between 1991 and 2001, appearing to support researchers' beliefs that leadership opportunities for women and people of color would continue to increase (Vaughan & Weisman, 2007). However, by 2006, the progress women were making in attaining community college presidencies had almost halted. The number of women in a presidency increased by only 1%, bringing the percentage of women presidents to 29% (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Reports as late as 2011 indicated that the number of community colleges with women presidents remained at 29% (Moltz, 2011).

Historically, the number of people of color among college presidents lagged significantly behind that of women. In the late 1980s, minorities held 8% of college and university presidencies. By 2001 people of color experienced a modest increase in presidencies to 13% (Holmes, 2004). Almost ten years later, people of color represented less than 14% of all presidents in higher education (Eddy, 2010; Hernandez, 2010; King & Gomez, 2008).

In the 1990s African Americans accounted for 5% of all community college presidents (Phelps, Taber, & Smith, 1994). Approximately one-third of those African American presidents were women (1.6%). In a later study examining preparation for community college leadership, Schmitz (2008) reported a 3% increase in African American community college presidents and an overall increase of approximately 2% in minority presidents. In 2010, African American women accounted for less than 5% of community college presidents (Gonzalez, 2010). A more positive fact is that community colleges have outpaced four-year colleges and universities in selecting women and minorities to lead their institutions, hiring more than half of all women senior administrators in higher education (King & Gomez, 2008). Many industries are similarly challenged by the dearth of women and people of color in senior leadership positions. Women represent almost 46% of the workforce, yet they head only 4% of the top-performing companies (Howard, 2012). African Americans comprise less than 1% of executive-level positions in Fortune 500 companies (Burns, Barton, & Kirby, 2012).

The underrepresentation of women and people of color in leadership is not a new issue, and higher education has acknowledged this lack of representation as both a challenge and an opportunity (Eddy, 2010; Gillett-Karam, 1994; Vaughan & Weisman,

1998). Gillett-Karam, Roueche, & Roueche (1991) suggested that “community colleges have not met their responsibilities to minorities as students, faculty, and administrators” (p. 5) if these institutions value making the representation of these groups on college campuses proportional to their representation in society as critical to the mission of the community college. In 2008, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) issued a joint statement supporting the importance of diversity in leadership and asserting that representation of leaders in community colleges should be aligned with the demographics of the students and communities they serve (AACC/ACCT, 2008). “[A] large percentage of African American students enrolled in community colleges will not benefit from diversity efforts until significant progress is made in presenting them with more mentors who are similar in background, race, and sex” (Logan, 2006, p. 16).

The number of women in the workforce continues to grow, and it is predicted that the number of men and women will soon be equal. Women comprise more than 40% of the workforce globally yet hold only 24% of senior management positions (Tapias, 2009). Similarly, in higher education, women occupy only 23% of all CEO positions (King & Gomez, 2008). The number of women CEOs at two-year institutions is slightly higher, with almost 29% of community colleges being led by women (Eddy, 2010). Although women have made significant gains as faculty and senior administrators, they have made minimal gains in attaining presidencies since the beginning of the millennium (Eckel, Cook, & King, 2009; Eddy, 2010; Townsend, 1995).

The literature suggests that women’s career preparation or leadership styles are not the barriers to leadership success: women typically follow the same career paths and

undergo the same preparation as men do (Amey & Van Der Linden, 2002; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). The position of Chief Academic Officer (CAO) is most often reported as the one that precedes presidencies, followed by a presidency at another institution (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). The most common path to a presidency, regardless of race or gender, begins in academics and leads to administrative leadership. The classroom is considered “the primary point of entry to the presidential career pathway” (p. 1) for the nearly 70% of college and university presidents who report having faculty experience (King & Gomez, 2008). Educational attainment for community college presidents is similar, with 86% of community college presidents holding a doctoral degree (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007).

The literature on community college leadership observes that women and men demonstrate contrasting styles and behaviors (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Men’s leadership styles are often characterized as direct, assertive, and task oriented; women, on the other hand, are described as exhibiting interpersonal, communal, and consensus building behaviors in their leadership. In other words, males tend toward agentic traits in their values and leadership whereas women are more inclined toward communal behaviors (Abele, 2003; Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). Gillett-Karam (1994) asserted that behavior—both interpersonal and organizational—rather than gender is a better indicator of successful leadership.

If given the opportunity, women are as likely as men to emerge and achieve success in a leadership role (Richie et al., 1997). “Women demonstrate the ability to alter their leadership style to fit the situation” (Waring, 2003, p. 24). However, male-oriented characteristics are often the benchmark in the discussion of leadership, giving little

credibility to the leadership styles most often attributed to women (Eddy, 2008; Gilligan, 1994). The issue, then, is that if women are as effective and as prepared as their male counterparts, what explains the significant disparity between women and men in their attainment of community college presidencies?

Numerous studies conducted with African American community college women presidents focused on leadership style, socialization, career paths, and perceived barriers to success (Bowles, 1999; Dixon, 2005; Green, 2009). Many studies identified critical career experiences and reported the perceived importance of mentoring relationships as critical to career attainment. However, these studies did not offer insights into how the structure and characteristics of those relationships influenced career decisions or career attainment among African American women. Instead, they merely identified that these relationships exist without presenting a discussion that might reveal the depth, complexity, and influence of these relationships on African American women's career attainment.

This study is driven by the lack of research that identifies the network creation qualities and characteristics of African American women. Much of the literature on women's leadership did not distinguish how being an African American woman factors into how leaders perceive their careers (Benjamin et al., 2010; Waring, 2004). The current literature demonstrated that much has been written about the pathway to the presidency, leadership, and many elements of career development and career decision making for women in higher education. However, a cursory examination of the digital dissertations database for the past ten years identified only one dissertation that spoke to

the impact of professional socialization (e. g., mentoring, support, and networking) on career attainment for African American women in higher education (Dixon, 2009).

Conceptual Framework

The researcher chose to frame this multiple case study using social capital theory. “Social capital is a broad term that encompasses the ‘norms’ and networks facilitating collective actions for mutual benefits” (Woolcock, 1998, p. 155). The complex relationships within networks are assigned values based on the benefit they bring to the individuals (actors) who participate (Lin, 2001). The key assertion of social capital theory is that networks bring value to both the individual and the entire network (Coleman, 1998). Social capital theory assumes that affiliations can be leveraged for capital gain or for the comfort and feeling of well-being human interaction provides (Alfred, 2009). Social capital is not just a tangible asset (e.g. the network). Instead, social capital is the opportunity that an individual or groups of individuals are afforded because of their affiliations. Lin (2008) suggested that such embedded resources as wealth, power, status, and information create social capital. “Thus, social capital is analyzed by the amount or variety of such characteristics in others with whom an individual had direct or indirect ties” (p. 13). Opportunities to acquire social capital exist in both personal and professional networks. Personal networks (e.g. friends and family) are most often associated with expressive social capital tend to have close bonds based on intimacy and trust. These affiliations help individuals to build self-efficacy and a sense of belonging. Professional networks are said to provide instrumental social capital that lends itself to improved career outcomes (Ibarra, 1995). In terms of career path, an individual’s proximity to those with influence or decision authority can have an impact

on career advancement. Social capital can be examined by focusing on the location of individuals within a network or the perceived value of the embedded resources within the network (Burt, 2001; Granovetter, 1973). Networking and relationship building have become important concepts in research on how leaders emerge (Van De Valk, 2008).

Although many discussions of social capital focus on the collective assets of the network (Coleman, 1988; Woolcock, 1998), this study will focus on the personal value of networks for an individual. A more detailed discussion of social capital theory is included in the literature review.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and recalled experiences of African American women in community college senior leadership positions—two aspiring leaders, two non-aspiring leaders, two current presidents, and two retired presidents—as they relate to their social networks, career attainment, and leadership. While the literature in African American women community college presidents has affirmed the value these women place on relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and community members (Bowles, 1999; Dixon, 2005; Green, 2009; Newman, 2007), few studies shed light on how the structure and characteristics of personal and professional relationships influence the acquisition of social capital. “Social capital has emerged as an important theme in leadership research; and networking and relationship building are important steps in enhancing social capital” (Van De Valk, 2008, p. 47). Researchers have endeavored to understand either race-based or gender-based differences in network structure and networking behaviors. However, attempting

to understand these patterns for African American women was often ignored (Nkomo & Cox, 1989).

Ibarra (1993) suggested that women and minorities struggle with access to networks that create career opportunities and suggested that exclusion from certain networks is the result of individuals' preference to form bonds with other others of the same sex or race. Moore (1990) found that women's networks comprised more relatives than non-relatives and attributed this structure to the greater perception of familial and household obligation for women than for men.

Similarly, van Emmerik (2006) found that women are more adept at creating ties that offer such social-emotional support as those with family members. On the other hand, men are more likely to have diverse networks that benefit the development of career paths and job promotion opportunities (Ibarra, 1993; Moore, 1990). Nkomo and Cox (1989) studied networking structure and behaviors among African American managers and found that the ability to leverage social networks was a better predictor of career mobility for women, particularly in large companies. Men's career advancement was predicated on their relevant experience regardless of such organizational factors as number of employees, percentage of Black employees, or number of levels in the organization's hierarchy.

Understanding the networking behaviors and network structures of these African American women may reveal distinctions that warrant further study and attention (Combs, 2003; Karambayya, 1997). "With the increasing numbers of Black women in higher education administration, there is opportunity for a more robust inquiry into the complexities of their lives and the nature of their work" (Glover, 2012, p. 14).

Research Questions

Using a qualitative multi-case study to examine experiences of a small group of African American women in community college leadership roles, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. How does access to social capital influence career attainment?
2. What strategies do senior leaders use to access social capital?
3. How do social networks influence career choices?
4. How do social networks influence leadership?

Qualitative research allows for attention to context and the opportunity for in-depth exploration (Bryman, 1984; Conger, 1988). Qualitative research is also a favored methodology for the examination of leadership (Bryman, Stephen, & Campo, 1986). This study was not designed to produce findings that will be generalized to a broader audience; rather, the intent was to understand network characteristics and networking behaviors by recounting the experiences of a small group of African American women in community college leadership. The sample size in a multi-case study is intentionally small to allow for comparisons among participants that highlight the uniqueness of their experiences and analyses across the group of participants to determine how their experiences may be similar (Merriam, 1998b; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2008, 2011)

Methods and Procedures

This study used a qualitative multi-case study to examine perceptions of career attainment, leadership, and social networks of eight African American women who hold senior leadership positions in community colleges. More specifically, study participants were recruited and selected to obtain two participants in each of these categories:

1. Currently serves as a President/Chief Executive Officer
2. Holds a senior leadership position and aspires to a presidency
3. Holds a senior leadership position but does not aspire to a presidency
4. Past President/Chief Executive Officer.

Participants were asked open-ended questions during a recorded interview, using the same sequence of questions for each participant. The researcher was flexible during the interview process, permitting participants to revisit questions as additional thoughts came to mind. When appropriate, the researcher asked follow-up questions to allow participants to expand on their initial answers. Each interview was recorded and transcribed, with the interview transcripts analyzed using an iterative process that allowed themes and concepts to emerge. Consistent with the qualitative research philosophy of conveying meaning in the participants' own voices, words and phrases captured during the interview process were used to describe the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2011). Prior to analyzing the data, the researcher employed a member checking procedure by providing study participants with a copy of their respective transcripts to validate that their responses were captured accurately (Creswell, 2007). Consistent with best practices in qualitative research, the researcher employed strategies to mitigate bias. The researcher's thoughts and reflections were presented in the *Personal Reflections* section of Chapter 5.

Significance of the Study

This study aimed to expand the literature that describes the networking patterns and behaviors of African American women in the creation of social capital. The findings from this study will provide additional direction for African American women who may

aspire to community college senior leadership positions by offering guidance on recognizing critical decision points and the personal and professional connections that can shape career outcomes and expectations.

Networking is one of many strategies that successful leaders have identified as contributing to their success. However, for African American women, this strategy is often purported to present the greatest challenge. African American women often report having limited access to information that could increase career opportunities (Patitu & Hinton, 2002; Wang, 2009). This study provides insight into how African American women view their career attainment in relation to how they characterize their social networks. This researcher undertook this study with the belief that discerning networking behaviors and perceptions of social networks is important for understanding the careers of African American women and how they create social capital.

Assumptions and Limitations

The assumptions and limitations of this study and data collection were as follows:

Assumptions

- Disaggregating African American women from the larger group of women and people of color provides additional clarity about how they perceive this phenomenon
- Perceptions of the study participants are important to understand given the foreshadowing of community college leadership opportunities for women and people of color
- Recollections of the study participants are an accurate account of the events they describe

- Participants' perceptions are personal and influenced by their own world views.
- Limitations
- The intentionally small study population does not lend itself to generalizing the findings beyond the study participants (Yin, 2011)
 - In qualitative research, the role distinction between the researcher and the participant is less rigid than in quantitative research (Patton, 2002)
 - As the "primary source of data collection" (Creswell, 2009), the researcher's perceptions and viewpoints may play a role in how the data are interpreted.

Definitions of Key Terms

Terms defined below are germane to the study because they will assist the reader in developing a deeper understanding of the study's purpose.

Networking. Engaging in behaviors to "develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career" (Forret & Dougherty, 2004, p. 420).

Senior Leaders. Individuals who serve as or report directly to an institution's highest-ranking administrator. Titles include Chief Executive Officer, President, Chancellor, Academic Vice President/Provost, Administrative Vice President, and Dean (Twombly & Rosser, 2002).

Social Capital. The benefits (tangible and intangible) that result from relationships within one's social network (Baron, Field, & Schuller, 2001).

Social Network. An individual's ties within a social system that "offer valuable support, acquaintances, and resources" (Moore, 1990, p. 726).

Chapter Summary

For the past several decades, researchers have been predicting increased opportunities for women and people of color to lead community colleges. With the exception of the significant increase in the 1990s, women and people of color remain underrepresented in community college leadership. Literature on higher education leadership has suggested that academic preparation and leadership competency are not the barriers to attaining leadership; instead, access to information, sponsorship, and networking opportunities may differentiate career attainment for men and women. Because most research on career attainment and mobility focused on either race *or* gender, it is difficult to discern the experiences and perceptions of African American women. Literature aggregates women and people of color and then compares these groups to their White male counterparts, making it difficult to distinguish the voice of African American women.

This qualitative multi-case study examined the role of social networks in the career decisions and leadership of female African American community college senior leaders. Social capital theory was the framework that described the phenomenon that was being investigated: the network characteristics and networking behaviors of African American women who are in senior leadership positions in community colleges. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on career preparation, career attainment, social networks, and social capital theory. Chapter 3 includes an overview of research methods including research design, data collection strategies, and the process to be used for data analysis and reporting. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the data analysis using the participants'

own words. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings and the researcher's reflections on the qualitative study experience.

Suggestions on how the findings may inform career practices and preparation for African American women were also provided. This researcher believes that increasing the understanding of the impact of networks and networking on attaining career goals provides an opportunity to inform and enhance career guidance practices and professional development policies that are currently in place in educational institutions and professional associations.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This study examines the perceptions and recalled experiences of African American women in community college senior leadership positions that relate to their career attainment, social networks, and leadership. It is important to examine the career decisions of community college leaders, particularly those factors that influenced their decision to pursue a presidency. If higher education is truly committed to increasing the number of women and minority presidents, understanding how these leaders prepare and what they perceive as obstacles and facilitators to success could reveal root causes of the relative lack of progress over the past decade (Eddy, 2010; Hernandez, 2010; King & Gomez, 2008).

The following discussion reviews the literature on career preparation, career attainment, and leadership and provides an overview of the strategies used and advantages gained from developing social networks. Each topic is introduced with a broad view of the literature and is then presented, where possible, in the context of gender, race, and the intersection of gender *and* race, specifically related to African American women. A discussion of social capital theory, the theoretical framework for this study, is also included in this Chapter.

Career Preparation

For most community college leaders, career preparation includes a combination of academic degree attainment, professional development, and guidance from trusted leaders and advisors (AACC, 2005; Amey, 2006a; Ottenritter, 2006). “The career trajectories of incumbent presidents reflect traditional academic administrative backgrounds, including past presidencies, as well as a growing proportion of background

in nonacademic college administration” (Amey & Van Der Linden, 2002, p. 3).

Community college researchers and leaders recognized the need to prepare people at all levels of the career pipeline to step into impending vacancies by making them aware of the critical developmental experiences and professional expectations for leadership.

Degree Attainment and Professional Development

The learning and development process provides benefits to both the person and the institution. Organizations invest in formal and experiential learning to build leadership capacity, and individuals pursue formal degrees and learning experience in preparation for leadership positions (Day 2001). Leader development is an agency’s investment in formal learning and development in order to build leadership capabilities (human capital). Leadership development is a person’s structural, relational, and cognitive development through networks and relations. “Leadership development can be thought of as an integration strategy by helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives” (Day, 2000, p. 586).

Over the past several decades, literature on higher education leadership has elaborated on the requisite skills and experiences needed for success in a leadership position. Academic achievement and prior leadership positions are critical to preparing for increased leadership responsibility. McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers (1999) identified nine background factors associated with outstanding community college presidents: possession of an earned doctorate, the specific study of community college leadership as an academic major, an active personal research and publication agenda,

preparation as a change agent, previous career position, relationship with a mentor, development of a peer network, previous participation in a leadership preparation activity, and knowledge of technology (p. 21).

By the mid-2000s, more than 80% of presidents in higher education had earned doctorate degrees (Madsen, 2007). In community colleges, the number of presidents with earned doctorates was close to 90% (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). “These high rates of participation in education seem to suggest that educational attainment may have little explanatory power when looking at career attainment between men and women” (Van Der Linden, 2004, p. 4). However, the support of a mentor for women of color does differentiate whether women of color are successful in attaining the academic credentials that can be a springboard to career success (Dedrick & Watson, 2002).

Van Der Linden (2005) suggested that possessing the academic credentials required for leadership positions provides women access to and support for career development opportunities. While most successful leaders report similar preparation strategies, Van Der Linden (2004) did note two gender-based differences in career preparation: women were more likely to participate in internally-sponsored professional development events and engage in formal career assessment activities than were men. Conversely, men have a higher participation rate in selective leadership development programs (e. g., W. K. Kellogg Leadership Program and League for Innovation Leadership Program).

People of color leverage the same career preparation strategies as their White male counterparts, particularly in obtaining the appropriate academic credentials and pursuing and attaining promotions to those senior leadership roles that most often lead to

a presidency; however, their representation in the leadership pipeline is considerably lower. Identifying a diverse pool of potential leaders is critical to ensuring that enough qualified candidates are available to fill vacancies at all levels: “Without a pipeline of racially and ethnically diverse faculty who view the ranks as ascendable, and the culture as supportive, community colleges will be left without a pool of candidates to consider when hiring senior administrators” (Perrakis, Campbell, & Antonaros, 2009, p. 10).

Currently, African Americans lag behind their White counterparts in doctoral degree attainment. The 2012 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report on doctoral degree attainment by race reveals that between 2009 and 2010, men earned more than 75% of all earned degrees. Women accounted for the majority (69%) of degrees awarded in education, whereas African Americans were awarded just over 14% of the education degrees awarded and less than 7% of the doctorate degrees across all disciplines.

Given the current path to a community college presidency, African Americans’ representation in pipeline positions will need to increase significantly if they aspire to lead institutions. Hartley and Godin (2010) reported that people of color comprise approximately 12% of chief academic officers in public two-year institutions. Flowers and Moore (2008) suggested that while some progress has been made toward increasing the representation of people of color among academic leaders, institutions need to implement sustainable strategies to diversify their leadership. “Generally, increasing the presence of racial and ethnic minority academic leaders on campus is mitigated by several factors, including poor and failed job searches as well as diminishing and erratic interest in diversifying the administrative ranks of higher education”

(p. 72). Perrakis et al. (2009) recommended that institutions examine the career pipeline from the entry point to faculty positions to identify determinants of career progression and promotion.

Competencies and Skills

Amey (2006a) suggested that “leaders across higher education are best served by learning to think critically about their roles rather than by relying on “how-to” writings (p. 55). In other words, developing competencies is best achieved by gathering new information through experiences and guidance from more experienced leaders.

Generally, community college leaders report similar experiences in their academic preparation and career path regardless of race or gender. In addition to academic preparation and rising through the traditional ranks in higher education, the expectation is that leaders should be equipped with competencies that will aid them in addressing the ongoing challenges associated with the institutions they serve. The concern as far back as the late 1980s about the forecast dearth of higher education leaders sparked the discussion about where future leaders would come from, what they will need to know, and how they will prepare (Boggs, 2003; Perrakis et al., 2009).

In 2004, the AACC conducted a survey to determine critical competencies for community college professionals. The findings determined that mastery of organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism are critical to effective community college leadership (AACC, 2005). While survey participants unanimously agreed that these six competencies were critical for community college leaders, they also reported that formal preparation was only minimally effective in helping to acquire these skills. In light of

these findings, ACCC recommended strategies for addressing inefficiencies and inadequacies of existing formal training programs including “state system programs, residential institutes, coaching, mentoring, and on-line and blended approaches” (AACC, 2005, p. 2).

In 2001, the American Council on Education (ACE) convened a diverse group of educational leaders to identify and document best practices of effective senior educational leaders. The Commission agreed that “[t]he best leadership development blends job experience, educational initiatives, guided practical experience, and targeted performance feedback into a systemic process for ongoing leadership development” (p. 81). As a result of its discussion, the ACE Leadership Commission developed a list of more than fifty competencies organized into four categories: context, content, process, and communication (McDaniel, 2002). These competencies are now at the core of the learning and development engagements for the ACE Fellows Program.

In addition to the competencies, there is a complex set of expectations for community college presidents:

Presidents have been advised to choose their priorities judiciously, to develop a good working relationship with the governing board, to ensure campus wide consultation but to prevent the disruption of vetoes by special interests, to provide full information to important community members but to avoid the interference of those groups, to create an institutional vision and to speak out on important social issues, and, quite simply, to be lucky. On a more personal level, they have been advised to

be risk takers and to show a preference for individualism rather than affiliation. (Bensimon, 1989, p. 5)

In his research with community college chancellors, trustees, and presidents, Turner (2006) administered a survey to determine which qualities they perceived as most important for community college presidents. While survey respondents' rankings varied, Turner identified sixteen characteristics that were ranked as extremely important by the survey respondents. Personal code of ethics and ability to build trust ranked in the top five among all respondents. However, when asked if they thought characteristics could be learned, responses were varied: there was significant disagreement on ability to learn for six characteristics including cultivating coaching relationships and maintaining informal relationships. Turner concluded that developing consistent expectations across the three constituent groups could assist in providing objective feedback for current presidents and consistent criteria for hiring new presidents.

Mentoring and Support

As their careers evolve, many college presidents are supported by mentors and sponsors who have taken an interest in their career development and by institutions that support professional development as an integral part of their talent development strategy. Both agency and social support affect how people develop as leaders and how they progress in their careers (Day, 2000). Mentoring relationships are established in order to facilitate learning (McDade, 2005). Formal mentoring involves assigning more experienced people to serve as role models, lend support, and provide feedback to those with less experience (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Noe, 1988). Informal mentoring

relationships are spontaneous and typically not managed or sanctioned by an organization (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992).

Ragins and Cotton (1999) compared differences in formal and informal mentoring in a study that explored the career development and psychosocial functions of mentoring. They characterized the career development aspect of the mentoring relationship as the “learn the ropes” function of mentoring whereas the psychosocial function is the interpersonal aspect of the relationship that allows protégés to build self-efficacy and competency. In their study, protégés with informal mentors yielded better career outcomes than for those with formal mentors. They found no significant difference in outcomes between those with formal mentors and those who were without mentors.

In a study exploring the mentoring relationships, Dunlap (1990) found that formal mentorships “were frequently described as not as intense as informal mentorships, but were described as positive if a sufficient level of relational traits were developed in the dyad” (p. 6). Those relational traits included trust, mutual respect, and openness. Mentoring, whether formal or informal, was perceived by mentees to benefit professional development, career attainment, and job satisfaction as the relationship provided a greater sense of connection to the organization (Fagenson, 1989).

Van Der Linden (2005) surveyed community college administrators and asked about the role mentors played in their careers. The primary themes that emerged from her study concerned the psychosocial support that mentors provide—career advice, encouragement, coaching, exposure to professional development opportunities, and guidance on developing a professional network. Van Der Linden’s findings illustrated the presence of social capital benefits in the mentor/protégé relationship.

Men and women are equally likely to be in mentoring relationships; yet mentoring has greater career benefits for men. Ibarra, Carter, and Silva (2010) conducted interviews with men and women who were identified as high-potential by their organizations and compared their responses with the results of the 2008 Catalyst survey on the impact of mentoring. Similar to the results of Catalyst survey, more men reported that their mentoring relationships had a great impact on their career advancement. Although men and women were equally likely to receive opportunities for lateral career moves, men reported more subsequent promotions while women continued to be offered lateral positions. They concluded that the results “suggest that high potential women are over-mentored and under-sponsored relative to the male peers” (p. 82). They also recommended that new strategies were needed to raise developmental relationships for women beyond mentoring to sponsorship.

The reported experiences of people of color suggested that developing mentoring relationships for the purpose of career progression can be challenging. They often perceived that the amount of attention and the outcomes of their relationships with mentors lacked the quality of the mentoring relationships of their White peers (Ensher & Murphy, 1997). African Americans also pointed to limited availability of African American mentors (Harris, Wright, & Msengi, 2011). Given the low representation of people of color in leadership positions, it was likely that people of color would be involved in cross-race mentoring relationships. Thomas (2001) asserted that the lack of shared identity created a barrier to cultivating productive and lasting cross-race mentoring relationships. “Close mentoring relationships are much more likely to form when both parties see parts of themselves in the other person” (p. 102).

Nkomo and Cox (1989) examined the career mobility indicators for African American managers and found that while upward mobility rates were the same for African Americans regardless of gender, assistance from a mentor was a greater predictor of promotion for women than for men. The data also suggested that Black women managers advanced more in large organizations where they have some mentor help. James (2000) found no difference in rates of promotion or career-related support for African Americans and Whites. Instead, African Americans perceived a lower level of psychosocial support from their managers. The level of psychosocial support was found to be linked to perceptions about access to resources. A person's perception of the level of psychosocial support can indicate how that person believes he/she is being supported by a mentor or the organization and can also inform his/her decision to seek outside opportunities (Thomas, 2001). The inability to create and sustain a pipeline of future leaders that includes women and people of color puts organizations at risk:

Thus, the issue of race and mentoring may not just be an outcome of shifting workforce demographics or a process for altering interracial dynamics in the workplace, but may also be a predictor of the overall health and strength of the organization. (Blake-Beard, Murrell, & Thomas, 2007, p. 7)

Moore-Brown (2005) asserted that mentoring is an important tool for recruiting women who may not have considered pursuing academic leadership positions and for developing women college presidents since they have less exposure to sponsorship or promotion opportunities than males. She suggested that "preparation for higher education administrative positions usually does not happen serendipitously" (p. 600).

Her study of African American women college presidents revealed that many were sought-out by their mentors, suggesting a general acknowledgement of women's potential as leaders. Moore-Brown's research also revealed the importance that women presidents placed on the mentoring relationship, often choosing to mentor future leaders themselves. She noted the prevalence of cross-gender mentoring relationships but suggested that female/female mentoring relationships were equally important in the development of women leaders. Moore-Brown suggested that the consequences of the lack of women of color in leadership roles means limited outreach to other women of color who demonstrate leadership potential since there is a general tendency for individuals to connect with others based on such obvious similarities as race and gender.

African American women community college presidents cited sponsorship opportunities as critical to career mobility (Bowles, 1999; Dixon, 2005; Green, 2009). Without access to these developmental relationships, many leaders reported that their careers quite possibly would have been derailed. In a study conducted with women of color college presidents who were "firsts" in their respective institutions, Turner (2007) explored factors that contributed to their decision to pursue a presidency. For all the participants, Turner found that mentoring and validation of leadership potential were critical factors that enabled them to persist in seeking leadership positions. Turner suggested that policies and practice at some institutions also played an important role in attracting, retaining, and developing women of color.

Mentoring and sponsorship are equally important experiences for career development. Although sponsorship can develop from mentoring relationships, particularly if the mentor has influence and positional power, the relationships serve

distinct functions in helping people move forward in their careers (Foust-Cummings, Dinolfo, & Kohler, 2011). Sponsorship is intentionally focused on facilitating promotion and career progression with the important benefit that the sponsor “goes beyond giving advice and uses his or her influence with senior executives to advocate for the mentee” (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010, p. 82). Sponsorship is said to be directly related to the creation of social capital (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Yet, women and minorities do not always have the same opportunities for sponsorship as their White male counterparts. James (2000) attributed the difference in outcomes to “social closure” practices that tend to exclude some individuals from acquiring the social capital that results from sponsorship. Similar to prejudicial practices, the result of social closure practices is likely discrimination against individuals outside the predominant group. However, social closure requires “two or more people to collude against the out-group whereas a single individual can act prejudicially” (p. 494).

Additionally, James (2000) asserted that psychosocial support was as critical for most individuals as access to social capital. In her study of managers in a large financial corporation, she found no significant difference in the creation of social capital, such as promotions and career progressions. However, White managers perceived greater psychosocial support than did their Black counterparts. Psychosocial support is related to the sense of belonging and inclusiveness. Real or perceived, Black managers were more inclined to report feeling the impact of social closure practices in the workplace.

Career Attainment

Understanding how career paths evolve requires viewing experiences through the multiple factors which influence how people emerge as leaders and how institutions

sponsor and sustain these leaders during their careers. The interactions between personal and professional circumstances along with timing are powerful influences on how one's career evolves (Hartung, 2002). This research is an opportunity to explore the personal and professional experiences and relationships that impel African American women forward in their careers.

Leadership

Although men and women differ in how they lead, their emergence as leaders does not appear to be gender-related. Women are as likely as men to achieve success in leadership roles. Eddy (2005) asserted that a person's self-perception of leadership is not a fixed position and that "college presidents are constantly adjusting and learning their conceptions of leadership" (p. 705).

Kolb (1999) suggested that attitude towards leadership is a greater determinant of leadership success than is gender perception. Similarly, Gillett-Karam (1994) found that both interpersonal and organizational behaviors were more appropriate indicators of successful leadership than was gender. Many discussions of leadership view the male perspective as the norm, not accounting for differences that emerge for women and people of color. "To the extent that leadership is masculinized, the leadership styles of women and ethnic minorities are seen as problems, rather than as offering diverse strengths, and this limits access to leadership positions" (Madden, 2011, p. 67).

Eddy (2005) used Weick's model of sense-making as a framework to explain how college presidents characterize their leadership. Weick's model suggested that people possess a mental map that assists them in navigating both personal and professional experiences. The map provides a blueprint for interpreting experiences and using

feedback and social experiences to set future expectations (Harris, 1994). Eddy found that people's awareness of the mapping process allows potential leaders to be "more reflective about the choices they make in professional development and consider how they should approach new leadership opportunities" (p. 724).

Women differ from their male counterparts in their development, value systems, and decision-making style. In the workplace, women are guided by intuition and empathy and stress inclusion and connection. Gilligan (1982) characterized the decision-making process of women and men as a web and a hierarchy respectively, pointing out that women respond "contextually rather than categorically" (p. 37) to abstract moral problems, emphasizing collaboration, connectedness, and social responsibility. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) also affirmed the importance of relationships and belonging in women's development as scholars and as professionals: "For women, confirmation and community are prerequisites rather than consequences of development" (p. 194).

In a study of high-achieving women, Richie et al. (1997) explored factors which influenced attainment of success among the participants. Their research was conducted as part of a larger program which intended to examine career development among demographically diverse women. The women in the study reported achieving career results similar to their male counterparts, and they were more likely to acknowledge that having a support network in-place was critical to their success. Common threads in their stories, which were often absent from male accounts of career development, were the importance of relationships and connecting with others:

The most salient properties and dimensions of the core story told by these women are their strength and perseverance in facing challenges, their reliance on internal standards and judgment, their strong passion for their work, and a relational orientation that focuses on interconnectedness with others and the balancing of tasks and relationships. (Richie et al., 1997, p. 138)

Women leaders face unique challenges as a result of perceived gender-related limitations (Twombly & Rosser, 2002). Many women in leadership roles are confronted with stressors that stem from stereotypes and biases assigned to women in leadership positions (Hoyt, 2007). Unfortunately, these beliefs lead to the perception by many that women are not fit for leadership roles. Women need to develop strong self-perception and self-awareness in order to persist in the face of stereotyping and bias. The development of these coping tools is often referred to as 'leadership efficacy.' Hoyt suggested that belief in one's own abilities "moderates responses to stereotype activation" (p. 4).

Lip (2009) found that people respond differently to men and women leaders, thus affecting the development of women's leadership styles. Her research revealed that subordinates and stakeholders expect women to combine leadership with compassion and suggested they are disliked if they don't, think people are more inclined to listen to or take direction from men, disapprove of women who promote their own abilities, and require more external validation for women before accepting them as leaders. Lip suggested that resistance to women in leadership positions is particularly evident in male-dominated fields and recommended that organizations should be more supportive of

women seeking leadership positions, particularly as those fields become more populated by women.

Women in Academic Leadership

While women have risen to the rank of president in community colleges and have made great gains as leaders among faculty and senior administrators, institutions have yet to eliminate the persisting gender inequities made apparent by the under-representation of women in CEO positions (Townsend, 2008). Eddy and Van Der Linden (2006) observed that new ways of understanding leadership are needed in order to understand such new demands of community colleges as shared governance, community engagement, and competency expectations. The “great man” leadership style may no longer be appropriate. Eddy (2010) suggested that community colleges, despite their reputation for access, still have not provided equal opportunity for leadership, especially for women who “are measured against the male norm.” (p. 63).

Transforming environments calls for leadership styles that are more aligned with those attributes that are generally associated with the leadership style of women. Hartley and Godin (2010) reported that women have made significant gains in attaining the ranks of CAO, accounting for half of all chief academic officers in public two-year institutions. Chief Academic Officer and Provost are among the immediate prior positions most often reported by presidents (Holmes, 2004; King & Gomez, 2008). Amey and Van Der Linden (2002) asserted that the aging of community college presidents and anticipated retirements will likely bring a surge in the representation of women among college presidents: “Because the prime pathway to the community college presidency remains

through the provost or the senior academic affairs administrator, it is likely that the future will show more women heading community colleges” (p. 10).

Despite the need for a woman’s style of leadership, women occupy only 23% of all presidencies in higher education (King & Gomez, 2008). Many women do not apply for presidencies because they lack the support that encourages them to propel their careers forward (Bornstein, 2008; Harris, Wright, & Msengi, 2011). “Women in particular suffer from a lack of support, encouragement, mentoring, training and visibility” (Harris et al., 2011, p. 165). Researchers cite the “glass ceiling” as a hindrance to women’s leadership (Jakobsh, 2012; Terosky, Phife, & Neumann, 2008). Women and minorities are often overlooked for leadership because of the misconception that they are less qualified than their White male counterparts. However, there are many women who do not enter academic careers with presidency in-mind (Switzer, 2006). Many women report that they don’t find the work of the president appealing and are satisfied with their current roles (Eckel, Cook, & King, 2009). Others made the decision to delay career advancement, putting family first. Once familial obligations and other demands were satisfied, with the encouragement of a mentor, prior academic preparation and career experiences, and often the support of a spouse, these women pursued a presidency. Eddy’s (2008) interviews with “accidental” presidents revealed that many of these women observed the prior leadership and thought they could make a difference in their institutions. For some, “[t]he presidential office was not the sought after destination, rather the only position left within the college for promotion” (Eddy, 2008, p. 53).

While there is significant research on gender and leadership (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Gillett-Karam, 1994; Twombly & Rosser, 2002), there have been limited attempts

to understand the interaction of race and gender on leader self-perception. “Black women managers are subsumed alternately under the category ‘women or blacks’ while the combined category of ‘black women’ is often ignored” (Nkomo & Cox, 1989, p. 825).

The representation of women of color in pipeline positions such as Chief Academic Officer, Chief Student Affairs Officer, and Provost has increased over the past two decades. Opp and Gosetti (2002) suggested that this increase is a natural extension of women of color faculty being promoted into administrative leadership positions. The most significant increase for women of color has been in the Chief Student Affairs Officer position (Turrentine & Conley, 2001). By 2000, this position was predominately female (Shults, 2001); by 2007, 25% of Student Affairs Officers were people of color, predominately African Americans (King & Gomez, 2008). Amey and Van Der Linden (2002) speculated that this shift in representation “may reflect an intentional effort to increase leadership diversity over the last 20 years, but women do not yet advance to the presidency at the same rate as men” (p. 15). However, women of color as a group have seen an increase in their representation among community college presidents. “[A] higher proportion of minority than non-minority presidents are women: more than one-third of Hispanic and nearly one-third of African American presidents, compared with 22 percent of White presidents, are women” (Bornstein, 2008, p. 163). In 2008, the AACC and the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) released the AACC/ACCT Joint Statement on Leadership and Diversity, which acknowledged that while community colleges served the largest segment of minority students and students with disabilities, they “have been slow in identifying and employing presidents who are representative of the student bodies and communities served by their colleges” (p. 7).

Women in the Community College Presidency

The path to the presidency for community college people has been well-documented in the literature on leadership and career attainment. The path for most community college presidents began with a faculty position followed by a rise through the ranks of academic administration (Amey & Van Der Linden, 2002; Eddy, 2010; Weisman & Vaughan, 2006). Throughout their careers, presidents had mentors and advisors who supported them and provided access to information and professional growth opportunities (Eddy, 2010; Waring, 2004). Additionally, presidents earned terminal degrees and participated in professional development activities to increase leadership competencies (Bates, 2007).

Presidents are acutely aware of the issues that challenge the way they are able to deliver on the promises of their institutional missions (Mullin, 2010; Shannon & Smith, 2006). Community college presidents, regardless of race or gender, characterize the challenges of their institutions similarly, citing increasing enrollments and declining resources as pressing concerns (Bailey, 2002; Dembicki, 2011; Keener, Carrier, & Meaders, 2002). Presidents understand that a productive working relationship with the institution's governing board and the support of stakeholders and constituents are critical to their success.

Despite the similarities in preparing to lead and understanding the institutional issues, women are still insufficiently represented in the position of community college president. Scholars have anticipated increased diversity among community college presidents, yet the demographic profile of a community college president has not changed

over the past three decades. Currently, the majority of community college presidents are still White men nearing retirement age (Eddy, 2010).

The literature is limited on African American women community college presidents' leadership (Benjamin et al., 2010; Mishra, 2007; Waring, 2004). African American women are included in the research on gender-related leadership and career attainment (Bornstein, 2009; Stout-Stewart, 2005; Tarule, Applegate, Early, & Blackwell, 2009); however, the focus is usually on gender distinctions. African American women are also included in studies on the impact of race on leadership and career attainment, yet the unique characteristics of these women are rarely discussed (Holmes, 2004; Perrakis et al., 2009; Phelps, Taber, & Smith, 2004).

African American women community college administrators' focus on leadership style, socialization, career patterns, and perceived barriers to leadership have been discussed extensively in dissertations (Bowles, 1999; DeVaux, 2000; Dixon, 2005; Gooch, 2009; Green, 2009; Jackson, 2003). However, within the body of literature on African American female leadership, little has been written about how their personal and professional relationships informed their decision-making or career aspirations. The literature simply acknowledged that these connections exist. The relationships that African American women often highlight are family, mentors, and community connections (Bower & Wolverton, 2009; Newman, 2007; Waring, 2003), but little is known about the structure of these support systems or the degree to which they influence careers.

Some African American women reported that they made the decision to pursue a presidency after a period of self-selection. In interviews with three African American

women presidents, Cole, Loston, and Moses (2004) asked interviewees when they realized they were on the path to leadership. One respondent indicated she was aware at an early age that she would be in a leadership position and credited the examples of leadership and service that were present from a very young age for her ascent to the presidency: “I had to be of service and I had to lead...” (p. 62). Two interviewees indicated that their pursuit of leadership positions began as a result of the realization that they were just as qualified as the person they had served under in previous positions: “And I suddenly thought, ‘I can do that.’ That’s the day I realized the presidency was attainable” (p. 62). Yet African American presidents still report lack of sponsorship and opportunity as among the greatest obstacles to a presidency (James, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

The researcher’s choice of theoretical framework provides an explicit link between the research problem and the significance of the study. The theoretical framework provides a high-level architecture (visual or narrative) which identifies relationships among key concepts, informs the organization and interpretation of the study findings, and reveals how the researcher has come to understand the topic through the review of literature, personal experiences, beliefs, and expectations (Maxwell, 2005). The discussion in this section of the literature review describes the key concepts from social capital theory that were used to organize and interpret data reported by the study participants concerning the impact of social networks on their career attainment and leadership.

Social Capital Theory

This section presents an overview of how social capital theory was introduced through the work of four social scientists who advanced the discourse on the role networks play in the creation of resources. The following discussion illustrates how social capital research has evolved from the categorization of types of capital to a multifaceted theory that offers an explanation for the complex social interactions that occur within and among networks (social capital) and resources that are created as a result of those interactions. A description of social capital theory's significant constructs (e. g., network structure, location, and trust) is embedded in the discussion of how each theorist contributed to the theory. Since the intent of this study was to examine each of the African American community college senior leader's perceptions of the impact of networks on career attainment, the aspects of the theory that relate to individual behaviors will be used to frame the data collected from the study participants. However, a discussion of the theory's aspects that focus on creating social capital for the entire network is included because it provides a context for discussing the behaviors of and benefits to individuals within a network. The creation of social capital for individuals and entire networks is dependent on a person's ability to build relationships.

Early Theories of Social Capital

Researchers often credit Bourdieu, Coleman, Putnam, and Granovetter with the pioneering modern concepts of social capital (Burt, 2001; James, 2000; Lin, 2008; Timberlake, 2005; Van De Valk, 2008). Social capital theory explains how relationships and connections are the basis for individuals or groups to obtain tangible and intangible assets:

[S]ocial capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors...social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors. It is not lodged either in the actors themselves or in physical implements of production (Coleman, 1998).

Bourdieu's interest in exploring social capital was in understanding how the prevailing social classes were able to reinforce and maintain their status, which in turn gave them access to increased wealth and credibility (Lin, 1999). Bourdieu's theory differentiated types of capital, giving economic capital precedence over both social capital and cultural capital and held that economic capital was essential to the creation of the other types of capital. Bourdieu's treatise laid a framework for the discussion of social capital, yet his discussion of social capital "remains curiously underdeveloped" (Baron, Field, & Schuller, 2000).

Coleman's theory enhanced Bourdieu's definition of social capital by differentiating three forms of social capital, each with its own unique benefits (Van De Valk, 2008). Coleman's (1988) first form of social capital was based on obligation, expectation, and trustworthiness: "If *A* does something for *B* and trusts *B* to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in *A* and an obligation on the part of *B*" (p. 102). The second form of social capital is information channels. In this form, social capital is in the information that can be acquired through using social relations that are maintained for other purposes (p. 104). Essentially, an actor can acquire information from others in his/her personal or professional network without having to invest the

personal time or energy into keeping abreast of that information. Conversely, when that actor has new information, he/she will reciprocate by informing members of the network, thus creating a social bond.

The third form of social capital is characterized by norms and sanctions, the rules that govern a network and are in themselves the social capital. Sanctions are the prescribed consequences for behavior outside the established norms; norms “should forego self-interest and act in the interest of the collectivity” (p. 104). Critics of Coleman’s theory argued that he overemphasized the strength of ties within a network, thus neglecting the diverse social capital available through maintaining loose associations with a variety of networks.

Putnam’s (1995) work in *Bowling alone: America’s declining social capital* brought attention to the importance of civic engagement as a means to acquiring social capital. According to Putnam, building and sustaining social networks was critical to achieving “shared objectives” (p. 56) that raised the social capital of the collective. Putnam “sees social capital as incompatible with high levels of inequality; it is a complement, not an alternative, to egalitarian policies” (Baron, Field, & Schuller, 2000, p. 10). Similar to Coleman’s work, critics suggested, Putnam’s theory was too focused on network density and did not acknowledge the purposeful action of individuals within a network to obtain social capital that was relevant to their personal goals (Lin, 2001).

Granovetter’s construct of social capital theory highlighted the location of actors within a network. In his seminal work *The strength of weak ties*, Granovetter (1973) suggested that actors who are not centrally located in a network (marginal) have the opportunity to access other networks. While strong ties are beneficial within the

network, they require a greater commitment on the part of the actors. “[T]he strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (p. 1361). Actors with weak ties to many networks have access to more diverse resources without the sense of obligation that is characterized by strong ties (embeddedness). The weak ties benefit each of the networks through the exchange of resources due to the bridging effect of the actor’s behavior. The bridging behavior also creates social capital for the individual who performs the function (e. g., reputation for resourcefulness/innovation) in that the actor is a conduit who controls the flow of information between networks.

Network Proximity

Social capital researchers have taken an interest in how individuals create social capital for their personal benefit. Social capital can be examined by focusing on the location of individuals within a network or the perceived value of the embedded resources within the network. In his positional explanation of social capital, Burt (2008) argued that structural holes and network closure are the elements that create social capital. Structural holes represent locations in the network where there is no critical mass of resources (Baron, Field, & Schuller, 2000). These holes represent an opportunity for an actor to connect with others located elsewhere within the network, thus filling the hole and establishing positional power.

Holes are buffers, like insulators in electric circuits. People on either side of a structural hole circulate in different flows of information. “Structural holes are thus an opportunity to broker the flow of information between people, and control the projects

that bring people together from opposite sides of the hole” (Burt, 2008, p. 35). Network closure, on the other hand, creates social capital by affecting access to information for those within the network. In a closed network, there are established norms and “everyone is connected such that no one can escape the notice of others, which in operational terms usually means a dense network” (Burt, 2008, p. 37). Therefore, the power and control within the network are distributed, although not always equally.

Lin (2008) asserted that such embedded resources as wealth, power, and status create social capital. “Thus, social capital is analyzed by the amount or variety of such characteristics in others with whom and individual had direct or indirect ties” (p. 13). In other words, embeddedness is reflected in an individual’s ability to leverage a network relationship (create social capital) in order to accumulate personal resources; e. g., access, sponsorship, and promotion. The embedded quality of relationship or multiplexity is related to the multiple dimensions of ties and exchanges within networks. The connection between two people can result in the exchange of many types of resources, such as job advice, friendship, and career support (Ibarra, 1993). The “multiplex approach allows exploration of and insight into the complexity and interactivity of group interactions” (Haythornwaite, 2001, p. 214). Granovetter (1973) showed that relationships with multiple functions have strong ties: since the actors have several roles simultaneously, the overlapping functions contribute to the strength of the bonds. The benefit to the actors is that they are in close proximity to resources. Greater association or closer proximity to the valued source creates an “in” that others on the periphery of a network may not experience.

While social capital researchers used different models to explain the interaction that builds resources, they agreed that social networks have value. Social networks provide access to social capital and can influence choices and outcomes. Social capital is “[t]he collection of resources owned by the members of an individual’s personal social network, which may become available to the individual as a result of the history of these relationships” (Van Der Gaag & Snijders, 2003, p. 201). The effectiveness of social networks is determined by the established norms and level of trust within the structure (Baron, Field, & Schuller, 2000; Burt, 2008; Coleman, 1998; Lin, 2008). Trust in a social network is characterized as “a collective attribute that can be drawn upon to achieve organizational goals” (Fu, 2004, p. 14). Social norms govern standards for appropriate behaviors and interactions within a social network. Deviating from social norms can result in the destruction of the social network. Norms are maintained through consistent communication of expectations within the network (Coleman, 1998).

Social Capital Resources

“Social capital theory assumes that a person’s family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset that can be capitalized in times of need, leveraged for capital gain, or enjoyed purely for the human interaction it affords” (Alfred, 2009, p. 5). Lin (2008) viewed the activity itself as the social capital and categorized the results of creating social capital as instrumental and expressive. Instrumental social capital is associated with career gains such as promotions or access to formal developmental opportunities (Ibarra, 1995). Van Emmerik (2006) used the term ‘hard social capital’ for this category of resources. “Hard social capital refers to the accumulated task-oriented resources that can be used to achieve valued career outcomes” (p. 25). Expressive, or

soft, social capital, on the other hand, provides psychosocial support including friendship and counseling. Relationships that provide access to expressive social capital “are characterized by higher levels of closeness and trust” (Ibarra, 1995, p. 59).

Social Networks

In order to understand the impact of social networks on career mobility, it is important to understand the context in which networks are characterized and how social capital is created. Since the intent of this research was to explore the career experiences and outcomes for the African American women who participated in this study, the discussion of network structure focuses on the benefits to the individual of social networking. The network structure from individual perspective is known as the ‘ego-network’ (Burt, 2008; Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 1999).

Network Characteristics

Within a network, individuals do not always create social capital in the same way or for the same purpose. Ibarra and Hunter (2007) differentiated network creation strategies as operational, personal, and strategic (see Figure 1).

	Operational	Personal	Strategic
Purpose	Getting work done efficiently; maintaining the capacities and functions required of the group.	Enhancing personal and professional development; providing referrals to useful information and contacts.	Figuring out future priorities and challenges; getting stakeholder support for them.
Location and temporal orientation	Contacts are mostly internal and oriented toward current demands.	Contacts are mostly external and oriented toward current interests and future potential interests.	Contacts are internal and external and oriented toward the future.
Players and recruitment	Key contacts are relatively nondiscretionary; they are prescribed mostly by the task and organizational structure, so it is very clear who is relevant.	Key contacts are mostly discretionary; it is not always clear who is relevant.	Key contacts follow from the strategic context and the organizational environment, but specific membership is discretionary; it is not always clear who is relevant.
Network attributes and key behaviors	Depth: building strong working relationships.	Breadth: reaching out to contacts who can make referrals.	Leverage: creating inside-outside links.

Figure 1. The Three Forms of Networking. Reprinted from *How leaders create and use networks* by Hermina Ibarra and Mark Hunter. Retrieved June 14, 2014, from <http://gvillage.org/gv/images/stories/how-leaders-create-use-networks.pdf>.

Operational networks are developed for the purpose of collaboration as seen in the work of project teams. “The purpose of this network is to ensure coordination and cooperation among people who have to know and trust one another in order to accomplish their immediate tasks” (p. 41). Inter-dependency exists among network members because their success is tied to their ability to work together. Personal networks provide access to contacts outside their professional circle of contacts. “[T]hese contacts provide important referrals, information, and, often, developmental support such as coaching and mentoring” (p. 42). Strategic networks allow peoples to create links to internal and external contacts that can be leveraged for future support and career progression. Ibarra and Hunter suggested that personal networks can be a foundation for strategic networks. “[S]trategic networking plugs the aspiring leader into a set of relationships and information sources that collectively embody the power to achieve personal and organizational goals” (p. 43). The relationships within the networks are complex and are assigned values based on the benefit they bring to the people (actors)

who participate and to the network as a whole (Coleman, 1998; Lin, 2008; Putnam, 1995). The network itself is not equivalent to social capital; instead, networks are the means to creating capital (Lin, 1999).

Another view of network composition characterizes the degree of diversity within the network. Networks that comprise actors who share such similarities as work function, beliefs, or demographic characteristics are considered 'homophilous' (Ibarra, 1993). "Homophily is the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001, p. 416). Van Emmerik (2006) pointed-out that the similarities of actors within a network provide benefit by fostering reciprocal relationships and producing closer ties. Close ties also facilitate the development of a strong group identity (Adler & Kwon, 2002); however, within closely bound networks, the similarities between actors can also limit the diversity of social capital because of the inherent redundancies that exist between actors. Additionally, strongly tied networks may discourage new ways of thinking or innovation (Krackhardt & Brass, 1994).

The concept of 'range' speaks to the diversity within a person's network. "It differs from homophily in that it refers to a difference among contacts within a local actor's network instead of difference or similarity between local actors and those to whom they are tied" (Ibarra, 1993, p. 61). In other words, 'range' allows for the inter-dependent creation of social capital whereas homophily suggests that social capital creation is tied to group norms. Granovetter (1973) posited that variety in a network benefits an individual since it creates greater opportunity to accumulate diverse resources

without the significant time and trust commitments required to maintain strong bonds, and the social capital created is germane to the individual actor's needs.

Network Development Strategies

Similarly to their White male counterparts, women and people of color tend to form networks that are predominately same-gender and same-race, respectively. The homophily within the network provides the critical psychosocial support that is derived from shared identity of group members, but the instrumental support is often missing (Thomas, 2001). The networks for women and people of color are often limited by their lack of representation within an organization (James, 2000). An additional limitation to network size is the difficulty these individuals experience with forming relations across gender or race. Ibarra (1993) suggested that the choice to remain within one's own identity group rather than exclusion significantly influences network structure.

"Women's and minorities' purported exclusion from or limited access to interaction networks is often attributed to a universal preference for homophily or interaction with others of the same sex or race" (p. 66). Additionally, she found that these closed networks may not yield the same outcomes as those formed by White males because of the concentration of women and people of color in positions without organizational power and influence.

When people of color do seek support from same-race people, they often need to employ strategies that are outside the generally accepted norms for networking within their organization, having to cross departmental or hierarchical lines to find support (Ibarra, 1993; Thomas, 2001). People of color may also experience peer rejection or face public scrutiny because cross-race relationships are so rare in most organizations

(Thomas, 2001). Unfortunately, gaining access to resources will continue to be a challenge for people of color until organizations embrace diversity and inclusion and implement strategies that make it acceptable to seek support across color lines. “Denial and suppression are avoidance strategies that can emerge because of negative relationship characteristics driven by individual racial identity, or contextual factors” (Blake-Beard, Murrell, & Thomas, 2007, p. 35).

“Literature strongly suggests that women do not have equal access to social capital because they are often excluded from the social networks most important for power acquisition and career success” (Wang, 2009, p. 33). Alfred (2009) supposed that the difference in network composition for women resulted from the power structure within organizations: “The overall view of feminist scholars is that social divisions of gender, age, and class are closely related to unequal distributions of resources and access to networks with critical information that can enhance women’s development and career and life transitions” (p. 9). When women are allowed access to the same networks that create social capital for men, they rarely yield the same results.

Although some strides have been made to bring women into parity with men in the workplace, a majority of women continue to be concentrated in low opportunity positions with little access to the networks and contacts that lead to power and advancement. (Timberlake, 2005, p. 38)

Moore (1990) said that women’s network structures comprised more interpersonal ties, including relatives and community members. She attributed this networking pattern to the greater sense of familial responsibility for women and their inclination to nurture relationships closer to home. Moore suggested that while men have the same familial ties

as women, although not as close, they have more instrumental ties in their networks and are better at leveraging their networks for professional gains. This finding suggested that it will be important for women to develop strategies that lead to acquiring greater social capital. To gain access to resources, women often need to develop cross-gender mentoring and support relationships.

Network Access and Career Advancement

The adage “it’s not what you know; it’s who you know” is a simple but effective explanation of why networking and access to resources are powerful tools in career attainment (Alfred, 2009). The term ‘old boys’ network’ speaks to the success that White males have enjoyed in securing and sustaining power positions by enacting closed network structures (Eddy, 2008; Jakobsh, 2004). That White males continue to outnumber women and minorities in positions of power and influence is a testament to the strength of leveraging network resources to create social capital. Bornstein (2009) suggested that the proliferation of White males in academic leadership is the result of search and selection processes based on the generally accepted practice of using the characteristics of the predecessor as a basis for hiring the successor. Women often have “the added burden of overcoming expectations derived from a history of male presidents” when they succeed men in the presidency (Bornstein, 2009, p. 215).

According to Elliott and Smith (2004), women and minorities do not leverage networks in the same way as White males. Instead, they often feel the need “to ‘out-credential’ White-male counterparts to compensate for the relative lack of network assistance” (p. 368). Rather than leverage contacts and resources that could lead to promotion, they rely on their experience and achievements. In the process, they miss

opportunities for self-promotion and visibility. On the contrary, other studies have suggested that women and people of color are equally capable as White males in creating network structures, yet they are still excluded from organizational power and influence (Foust-Cummings, Dinolfo, & Kohler, 2011). Exclusion from access is more a product of organizational culture than the ability of actors to develop relationships that provide instrumental and psychosocial support. While both aspects of networking relationships serve important developmental functions, resources accumulated through instrumental rapport are directly related to career outcomes (Ibarra, 1993). To ensure the development and progression of women and people of color, organizations must embrace a culture that encourages depth and breadth in the creation of networks. Ideally, networks will have functional diversity, variety with respect to hierarchical position, and opportunities for cross-race, and cross-gender interaction (Thomas, 2001).

Chapter Summary

The current literature on African American women community college presidents documented that feeling connected and nurturing relationships are important factors in their lives. However, no discussion was offered about the strategies used to leverage those networks and relationships for career advice and promotional opportunities. This research study was an opportunity to explore how networks of African American women community college senior leaders are constructed and how they use the resultant resources for professional growth and career progression. Scholars have demonstrated that race and gender do not differentiate career preparation strategies. The majority of leaders prepare for the challenges of community college leadership through degree attainment, competency development, and seeking supportive relationships. The

literature also supported the idea that leadership success is dependent on ability and behaviors, not race or gender.

Social capital theory provided the framework to characterize the lived experiences of African American women community college leaders as their careers evolved, with particular focus on network characteristics and networking behaviors. The literature suggested that the strategies enacted by women and people of color differ from those used by their White male counterparts and that the challenges they face in acquiring sponsorship and support are related to their lack of representation in leadership roles and their tendency to develop affinities with others with similar identities. However, the literature did not discern the experiences for African American women in the development of networks and sponsorship opportunities. This study proposed to examine the strategies used by eight African American women leaders to understand how their perceptions of network creation and acquiring social capital resources have impacted their careers. If African American women are to have increased opportunities for promotion and leadership in community colleges, it is important to understand how their networking strategies impact their career attainment. The study findings may lead to recommendations that organizations might use to create and sustain environments that promote leader development regardless of race or gender.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In choosing a research method, the researcher must have a clear understanding of the goals of the study (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher endeavors to match the approach to the problem, fit the approach to the intended audience, and relate the approach to his/her own experiences (Creswell, 2007).

In considering the choices of methodology, Creswell (2009) recommended that the researcher's personal worldview be taken into account as "beliefs held by individual researchers will often lead to embracing a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method approach in their research" (p. 6). These biases may also influence the way the researcher interprets data and should be disclosed immediately and acknowledged throughout the process. This Chapter characterizes the benefits of qualitative research for capturing the experiences and perceptions of the study participants. The discussion that follows provides an overview of the research design, sampling and selection, data collection and analysis, and reporting strategies that were used to examine how African American women in community college senior leadership roles perceive the impact of their personal networks on their career attainment and leadership.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is often used for studies that endeavors to understand the perspective and the meanings constructed by study participants (Patton, 2002). In this study, the researcher selected a qualitative approach in order to document participants' personal insights into how their careers have been shaped and influenced by their personal networks. Qualitative methodology provided a vehicle for study participants to tell their stories in their own words. "The strengths of qualitative research derive

primarily from its inductive approach--it focuses on the specific situations of people, and its emphasis [is] on words rather than numbers” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22).

This qualitative research was not intended to produce findings that will be generalized to a broader audience; rather, the purpose was to provide “a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2008, p. 51). The meanings resulting from this study were intended to generate a deeper understanding of career decisions, leadership style, and networking behaviors among the study participants. This research focused on the reported experiences of eight participants, creating a multi-case study. Since the researcher endeavored to understand the meanings assigned and the viewpoints of each study participant, using a qualitative approach, specifically a multi-case study, was the appropriate choice (Parry & Bryman, 2006). If the intent of the research had been to understand the shared cultural perspective among the participants, ethnography would have been the preferred research design. Qualitative inquiry typically utilizes relatively small samples selected purposely to permit in-depth inquiry and understanding into a phenomenon. The sample size was not driven by the need to generalize to a larger population but rather to increase the scope of data that uncover the deeper understandings and the multiple realities of the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Research Design

The qualitative approach helped to bring meaning and significance to a study by “sensitizing the reader to the viewpoint of a particular group” (Knafl & Howard, 1984, p. 20). Bryman (1984) noted that the attraction of the qualitative approach for the researcher is an opportunity to become immersed in the research and gain direct access to participants. This research design allowed the researcher “to probe at great levels of

depth and nuance in addition to offering researchers not only the flexibility to explore the unexpected but [also] to see the unexpected” (Conger, 1998, p. 216). The inductive nature of qualitative research allowed the researcher to become highly engaged in the process and to construct concepts and theories from the experiences shared during the interactions with participants (Merriam, 1998a; Stake, 1995). Understanding how African American women have navigated their leadership journey was of personal interest to this researcher: as an African American woman, this researcher learned as much about herself as she did about the phenomenon she studied.

The Multi-Case Study

Qualitative case studies have been used extensively in social science and education research (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1998b; Tellis, 1997). Ospina (2004) suggested that most research on leadership uses qualitative methodology, with case studies used about half the time. In case study research, the sample size is intentionally small and the sampling methodology is often purposeful (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998a; Creswell, 2008; Yin, 2008). The intended outcome of a case study determines whether it is characterized as descriptive, interpretive, or evaluative (Merriam, 1998a). This case-study was descriptive in that it presented an account that was thorough and detailed about a subject on which research was limited (Merriam, 1998b).

Like single-case studies, the multi-case study is used to study an issue “within a bounded system; (i.e., a setting, a context)” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The bounded system is the unit of analysis that comprises each case. The researcher made the choice to use a multi-case studies provided a larger pool from which a richer understanding of the data was drawn and cross-case generalizations were identified (Tellis, 1997; Yin 2008).

Merriam (1998b) said that using multiple cases may enhance the external validity of a study and perhaps make the findings more generalizable. Yin (2008) thought that multiple-case studies may present an opportunity for replication if two or more cases are believed to be similar: “The more similar the findings from the case, the more replication might be claimed” (Yin, 2011, p. 226). However, Yin cautioned that replication in qualitative design may be more difficult since the number of participants is most likely too small to suggest there can be any statistical generalization, yet Stake and Trumbull (1982) thought that naturalistic generalization is possible in qualitative research. The audience can make generalizations about a study by relating its findings to their own knowledge or experience. “These raw data provide the reader with vicarious experience which interacts with her existing naturalistic generalizations, formed previously from her particular experience” (p. 3). Multi-case study was used in this research to make comparisons between, among, and within the groups of participants—two aspiring leaders, two non-aspiring leaders, two current presidents, and two retired presidents—and allowed the researcher to infer generalizations about the network characteristics and networking behaviors of the participants based on the experiences and reflections they shared during the interview process.

Sampling and Selection

Using purposive sampling, this researcher identified eight participants who met one of the specified criteria (Patton, 2002), allowing the researcher to gain multiple perspectives on the impact of social networks on career attainment and leadership. The researcher generated an initial list of three-to-four candidates per criterion, with the

expectation that an adequate number of participants could be identified in each of the following categories:

1. Serving as a President/Chief Executive Officer
2. In a senior leadership position and aspiring to a presidency
3. In a senior leadership position but not aspiring to a presidency
4. Past President/Chief Executive Officer.

Working with the Committee Chair, and her own personal and professional networks, the researcher gathered names and contact information of viable candidates for the study.

The researcher also reviewed resources such as the Presidents Roundtable of the National Council on Black American Affairs Directory of African American CEOs, press releases, news stories, and referrals/recommendations to determine potential candidates.

Potential candidates were discussed with the Committee Chair and committee members to determine their suitability for study participation and to determine the best strategy for inviting them to participate. The study examined the perceptions of these African American women in community college senior leadership positions in order to address the following research questions:

1. How does access to social capital influence career attainment?
2. What strategies do senior leaders use to access social capital?
3. How do social networks influence career choices?
4. How do social networks influence leadership?

Study participants were contacted so that the researcher could introduce herself, explain the purpose of the study, and request their participation. Candidates were asked to confirm their participation within two weeks of receiving a communication from the

researcher. Potential participants for each of the four study criteria were solicited until two participants per category affirmed their willingness to participate. Once the required number of candidates was confirmed, participants were contacted to schedule interview dates and times. Prior to the interview, the candidates were contacted again to confirm the interview schedule.

Data Collection

Prior to initiating a study, the researcher developed a detailed data collection plan which included a list of potential data sources and an initial set of interviews (Stake, 1995; Yin 2008). Creswell (2009) explained that in case study data collection, the researcher uses a wide array of procedures to build an in-depth picture of the case. The researcher used multiple data sources during the study in order to develop a deep understanding of each participant's story (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2008). Multiple data sources ensure triangulation of data and that the breadth of perspectives on the phenomenon is being examined (Conger, 1998). Study participants were asked to provide their most current resume/curriculum vitae prior to interview. In addition to reviewing the background information provided by the participant, the researcher also searched a variety of media sources for details about career milestones and events. The multiple sources of data added dimension that helped the audience understand how study participants found meaning in the phenomenon. "Qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering information: (a) participating in the setting, (b) observing directly, (c) interviewing in depth, and (d) analyzing documents and material culture" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 97). Multiple sources of data also add to the validity of the findings (Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995).

Interviews

Interviews provided “an effective way of ‘getting inside’ the thoughts of a number of subjects and so examining how they each see the reality under discussion and the meaning that they construe around that perceived reality” (Whiteley et al.; 2003, p. 5). Using predetermined open-ended questions during the interview and using the same sequence for each participant (Yin, 2008), the researcher solicited responses about participants’ perceptions of their leadership, career path, and career decisions. The researcher permitted participants to revisit questions if additional thoughts on previous questions came to mind (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002; Merriam, 1998b). The researcher asked follow-up questions, as necessary, so that participants could expand on their initial answers if the researcher believed probing for greater detail would add depth to the participants’ responses. In qualitative research, the researcher is perceived as a collaborator and participant in understanding the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002; Creswell, 2009). The role distinction between the researcher and the participant is less rigid than in quantitative research. Because the researcher was a “primary instrument of data collection” (Creswell, 2009, p. 195), the researcher was positioned inside the research.

This researcher aimed to build rapport with participants, putting them at ease to freely disclose their perceptions (Creswell, 2007; Knafl & Marion, 1984; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). While the researcher prepared a detailed map of how she intended to proceed with the interview, there was flexibility in the process. During the course of the research, a researcher may recognize concepts that were not in the original scope of the

plan but warrant further exploration (Creswell, 2009). The researcher asked follow-up questions based on concepts that emerged during the interview process.

Linguistic Anthropologist Kenneth Pike coined the terms *emic* and *etic* from analogies with the terms *phonemic* and *phonetic* (Patton, 2002). Following the tradition of anthropology, *emic* perspective strives to understand from the point-of-view of those who are informants for a specific group; *etic* perspective, on the other hand, is associated with scientific observation (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999). Another distinction is that *etic* takes a broader view in suggesting that behaviors must be understood universally while an *emic* view stresses group-specific understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). The emic viewpoint allowed the researcher to experience the environment in a manner similar to that of the participants. According to Patton (2002), emic constructs should be expressed in terms of the understanding and meanings of the participants.

Each interview did not exceed sixty minutes. While there is no hard-and-fast rule for the duration of an interview (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), the researcher was mindful and respectful of the time each participant volunteered to this study. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and each participant had the opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy, a validation technique known as ‘member checking’ (Creswell, 2008). Participants also had an opportunity to provide additional comments in writing if they thought the information would aid the researcher’s understanding.

Documents

“Documents represent a good source for text (word) data for a qualitative study. They provide the advantage of being in the language and words of the participants, who have usually given thoughtful attention to them” (Creswell, 2008, p. 231). A variety of

documents was reviewed as part of the validation strategy to ensure the accuracy of findings (Maxwell, 1995). Prior to the interview, the researcher reviewed the documentation provided by study participants and other biographical resources. The researcher also conducted internet searches to gather other such relevant documents as press releases, photos, journal articles, and newspaper articles to increase her familiarity with the study participants (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2008). At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher looked for background information on organizations, people, and events participants referenced during their interviews.

Interview Notes

Creswell (2009) recommended detailed notes to supplement recorded interviews. The researcher “should have explicit note-organizing and note-management strategies” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 99). Interview notes allowed the researcher to make a record of any non-verbal or environmental details—background noises or disruptions—that contributed to capturing the interview experience. Interview notes also allowed the researcher to organize and capture thoughts during the interview process and during the time spent reflecting after the interview.

Among qualitative researchers, there are many opportunities to introduce bias into the study particularly if they feel they have an affinity with the group being studied. As a result, “investigators may limit their curiosities so that they discover only what they think they don’t know, rather than opening up their inquiries to encompass also what they don’t know they don’t know” (Chenail, 2011). “Most qualitative researchers will attempt to be aware of their role in the (co)-construction of knowledge--in an effort to enhance the trustworthiness, transparency and accountability of their research” (Finlay, 2002, p.

211). To guard against this occurrence, the researcher's notes included both descriptive and reflexive documentation. Descriptive field notes summarized data as reported by study participants and were considered more objective. Reflexive field notes were the researcher's account of thoughts, feelings, and reactions she experienced while engaged in the research process. Consistent with recommended practices, this researcher made notes during the interview and documented questions, thoughts, and reactions to what participants shared for further exploration during post-interview journaling.

Data Analysis and Reporting

“Analyzing qualitative data requires understanding how to make sense of text and images so that you can form answers to your research questions” (Creswell, 2008, p. 243). Once the interview tapes were transcribed, the researcher reviewed the data to determine if certain categories or themes emerged within each case and across the eight cases (Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The analytic process was iterative, requiring the researcher to make several passes at reviewing and interpreting the data and making adjustments as necessary to account for patterns and themes that evolved and emerged. Maxwell (2005) proposed that qualitative research “does not begin from a predetermined starting point or proceed through a fixed sequence of steps, but involves interconnection and interaction among the different design components” (p. 3). “This process is best articulated through the use of a decision or ‘audit’ trail, which tracks decisions made during the process including the development of rules for transforming the data into categories or codes” (Law et. al, 1998, p. 8). The reporting, rich in description, allows the intended audience to view the phenomenon through the informant's lens.

The production of participant accounts through interviewing involves the transfer of recalled experiences into languaged discourse. These accounts are given in prose form, that is, as ordinary spoken language. They are presented as sentences linked together into paragraphs and as paragraphs linked together into a text. The produced account may consist of a loosely linked collection of descriptions, explanations, and stories. (Polkinghorne, 2009, p. 142)

The strategies the researcher chose to code the interview transcript were in vivo coding and descriptive coding. In vivo coding was useful in early stages of data analysis when themes and categories were being developed. This method of coding preserved the connection to the unique vernacular and phrases participants use in describing their experiences (King, 2008). Using in vivo coding allowed the researcher to “honor the participant’s voice” (Saldana, 2013, p. 91) and to identify the unique phrases that were targeted for deeper exploration. Once the in vivo codes were identified descriptive coding was used to organize and sequence the participants’ responses into categories that were aligned to the research questions and were subsequently used as subheadings for the reported results. Descriptive coding helped the researcher discern patterns that were “clustered by similarity of topic, then revised and edited to eventually become substantive portion of the final report” (Saldana, 2011, p. 103).

Researcher Bias

Prior to the interview data-collection process, researchers should reflect on their own experiences to become aware of their own prejudices, biases, and assumptions (Merriam, 1998a; Patton, 2002). The researcher must “bracket” her judgments and

perceptions to avoid influencing the process or the outcomes (Ahern, 1999). Because of the race and gender connection the researcher felt with the study participants, she acknowledged that engaging the participants during the interview process presented an opportunity to gain perspective on her own career. The researcher had her own perceptions of the nature and value of networks and understood how they could play a role in how she interpreted the data, thereby positioning her in this research not only as the interpreter but also as someone who can personally benefit from being in contact with the study participants. Examining the points-of-view of the study participants provided the researcher an opportunity to understand others' perceptions about the opportunity for leadership and promotion that has been forecast for more than two decades and the strategies participants have used to further their careers.

From the outset of the study, this researcher acknowledged and disclosed any biases or opinions she brought to the research and distinguished in the analysis and findings between her perceptions and those of the participants. As an additional validity check, the researcher vetted findings with Committee members who provided notification and guidance if researcher biases were detected (Merriam, 1998b). The researcher's insertion of her voice into the research experience has been reserved for personal reflections that are included in Chapter 5.

Ethical Assurances

The protocols to safeguard participants from breaches in ethics and confidentiality were first reviewed by the dissertation committee and subsequently reviewed and approved by Morgan State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB#13/09-0079). Study participants were also advised, orally and in writing, that all information they

shared would be reported in a manner that would ensure anonymity. Measures taken to protect confidentiality included separating signed consent forms and interview transcripts, assigning numbers to the written transcripts, creating pseudonyms for the study participants, respecting the wishes of individuals if they chose not to participate, limiting access to recorded interviews and printed transcripts, and keeping the interview questions in a secured file. The audio recordings, written notes, and transcripts have also been retained in a secure location and will be destroyed using a secure method (e.g., shredding) upon meeting institutional requirements for document retention.

Chapter Summary

The researcher's personal worldview led her to select qualitative research methodology to examine how social networks influence career decisions and leadership by African American women community college senior leaders; the qualitative design selected for this study is multiple-case. Multiple-case studies allowed for analysis across cases, which may lead to the discovery of commonalities among the informants in the bound system (Yin, 2008). The intent of this study was to understand a phenomenon among a small group of African American women in community college leadership. Participants were identified using purposive sampling (Merriam, 1998a; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2008) which was accomplished by leveraging personal contacts and affiliations with higher education administrators. As the primary data collection instrument, the researcher used a number of strategies such as member-checking, triangulation, reflexivity, and peer examination (Merriam, 1998b) to guard against injecting personal bias into the study findings. Because the researcher is an African American woman who aspires to a senior leadership position in a community college, there was a reasonable

expectation that she would gain insight into her own career choices and leadership through this experience. The researcher made the choice to disclose her personal thoughts and experiences related to the research in a personal reflections section in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

Eight African American women community college leaders were recruited through personal contacts, recommendations, and referrals to participate in this qualitative multi-case study. Participants were invited into this study because they met one of the four study criteria:

1. Currently serves as a President/Chief Executive Officer
2. Holds a senior leadership position and aspires to a presidency
3. Holds a senior leadership position but does not aspire to a presidency
4. Past President/Chief Executive Officer.

Participants were contacted via email and given an overview of the study goals and pertinent details about the interview format. Over the course of three months, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with each study participants using a semi-structured format. Seven of the eight interviews were conducted over the telephone using a conference bridge with a recording feature. For one interview, the researcher had an opportunity to be face-to-face with a participant. Each participant was asked to provide a copy of her resume or curriculum vitae prior to the interview. Each participant was also asked to sign a written consent form (see Appendix A) allowing the interviews to be recorded and then transcribed and to provide assurances of confidentiality and ethical practices. Interview transcripts were sent to each participant as a member-checking technique to ensure that the data collected were an accurate account of what was shared during the interview. The researcher emailed their interview transcript to the participants and asked them to review the transcript, identify any portion they did want to include,

and provide, if applicable, additional reflections they thought would contribute to the study.

The researcher used in vivo coding and descriptive coding to analyze the interview transcripts. In vivo coding preserved the connection to the unique choice of words participants used to describe their experiences and perceptions. Once the in vivo codes were identified descriptive coding was used to organize and sequence the participants' responses into categories that were aligned to the research questions. Descriptive coding helped the researcher discern the patterns that became the basis for how the study results were organized. Figure 2 illustrates the process that was used to code the interview transcripts and the categories and themes that emerged.

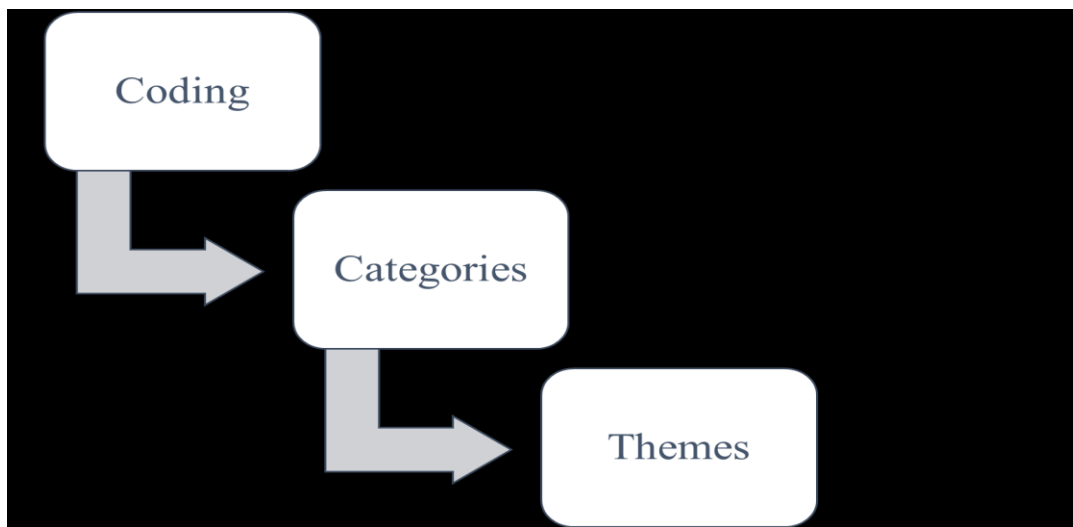


Figure 2. Analysis and Coding Process

Following are the findings that resulted from the analysis of the participant-approved transcripts. The subsequent section titles assist in providing a sequential account of the perceptions and events as recounted by the study participants. The Overview of the Participants section illustrates career progression from early preparation to current roles. The sections that follow describe career preparation, career decisions,

and leadership using the stories/perceptions shared by the study participants. These sections are organized to illuminate the strategies used to gain sponsorship and support, and describe the critical experiences that effected their careers and shaped their leadership styles. Embedded in each section is a discussion of the influence each participant's personal and professional networks had on their career attainment, which is the primary focus of this research.

Overview of the Participants

The eight African American women who agreed to lend their voices to this study are current or past senior leaders in community colleges in the eastern United States. One past president began her community college career as a counselor in student services. During her career, she held presidencies at two community colleges. Although this participant has retired from the presidency, she continues her affiliation with higher education through her service on the boards of national and regional organizations. The other past president also held two presidencies during her community college career. This past president ascended from faculty to the presidency in less than ten years and continues her career in higher education through the leadership she provides for a higher education credentialing agency. One president began her career working for a grant-funded program that was a partnership between a public school and a community college. Eventually, she took a position as a counselor in the community college. This president reported that in her career progression she “didn’t skip steps” on the path to the presidency. The other president in this study is serving in an interim capacity at a community college. This president has worked for community colleges during her entire career. While pursuing her Bachelor’s degree, she was assigned to a community college

for her student-teaching experience. Upon completing her undergraduate degree, she began to work for that community college as an instructor. This president's career path provided opportunities to work in a wide range of positions which included working in academic affairs, student services, and continuing education. This president remarked that her transition from teaching to administration allowed her to influence policies and practices and extend her positive impact to a greater number of students.

One participant, who aspires to be a president, acquired much of her early experience by working in positions on her campus while she pursued her education. Her first position in higher education was as a director in a four-year institution. Subsequently, she began her community college career as the director for a federally-funded grant program. Her path to community college administrator led to her current vice presidency. The other participant who aspires to be a president began her career in clinical healthcare, where she had her first teaching experiences. Eventually, with the encouragement of one of her supervisors, she transitioned to higher education so that she could focus on teaching. She transitioned to an administrative role and was subsequently promoted to vice president.

One participant who is not aspiring to be a president considered her path to higher education leadership divergent in that her development and career progression occurred outside higher education: she served as a senior executive in for-profit and non-profit organizations before transitioning to higher education. Her first position in higher education was as an administrative dean. She currently serves as executive vice president for her institution. The other participant who is not aspiring to a presidency began her career in higher education as a lecturer for a four-year institution, later serving as an

administrator for a higher education governance agency. This participant indicated she discovered her passion for teaching as a child and knew that she would pursue a career that would allow her to create opportunities for students. In her first role in a community college, she provided executive-level support to a vice president. She currently serves as the associate vice president/campus provost at her institution.

All the leaders have participated in post-graduate studies, and seven obtained doctorates. Five of the participants considered their career paths as non-traditional in that they did not begin as faculty and progress through academic affairs. Two of these “non-traditional” participants indicated that their paths to leadership were gradual, beginning their careers in entry-level positions and rising through the ranks to senior leadership. Four participants attained their leadership positions by progressing through student services. However, all of these participants indicated that their experience allowed them to collaborate with academic affairs, which provided greater breadth of knowledge about the functions of the institutions they serve. Table 1 which follows, provides a brief overview of the study participants’ academic preparation and the career path that led to their current roles.

Table 1

Participant Education and Career Path

Participant	Highest Degree	Area of Study	First Community College Position	Current Position
Candace	Master's	Business Administration	Dean	Executive Vice President
Ella	Doctorate	Adult and Community College Education	Lecturer	Interim President
Gloria	Doctorate	Educational Psychology	Assistant to the Vice President	Associate Vice President/Campus Provost
Juanita	Doctorate	Higher Education	Counselor	Past President
Lauren	Doctorate	Educational Leadership	Director	Vice President
Olivia	Doctorate	Education Administration	Faculty	Past President
Pamela	Doctorate	Urban Education Leadership	Department Chair	Vice President
Sarita	Doctorate	Counseling and Personnel Services	Counselor	President

Preparation and Professional Development

Without exception, these leaders acknowledged that early encouragement from family, friends, and colleagues gave them the confidence to pursue college degrees.

Three study participants indicated they were first-generation college students and that their going to college was an expectation set by their parents. Throughout their academic and career preparation, all study participants had support systems that included family

members, childhood friends, and individuals they met in the early stages of their development.

Both past presidents in this study were employed by community colleges prior to pursuing their doctorates. One of the past presidents remarked that she did not envision a career in higher education let alone a community college presidency, as part of her career path. She indicated that someone she met through her community outreach work for the local public school district encouraged her to apply for a counseling position at the community college where he was the board chair. At the time she was hired by the community college, she held a Master's in urban planning. While her higher education career was progressing, she pursued her doctorate in higher education. The encouragement she received while earning her doctorate and preparing for higher-level leadership came from her husband, who had a thriving career of his own, and her child, who was in the early stages of preparing for a career. Her first presidency required that she live apart from her family; however, her ability to balance her commitment to her family with the demands of her career allowed her to achieve both personal and professional success.

I was there for six years. It was a wonderful experience. I learned a lot. I was separated from my family for the very first time. I commuted. My family and my husband and my daughter stayed [at home], and I commuted to [another state] probably getting home once a month or once every six weeks, but my husband came in every three weeks. (Juanita, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

For the other past president, the pursuit of a doctorate was always a part of her plan. However, familial obligations postponed her completion of the program. While teaching at a community college a colleague recommended another doctoral program to her.

I decided it was time that I went back and finished the doctorate I had started before. I had a colleague who had just finished the community college leadership program at [a university]. He came back and said ‘I don’t know you well because I’ve been gone while you’ve been here, but what I’ve heard about you, you’d be a great administrator. This is a program that I think you should consider.’ I said okay and read up on it. I applied, and they accepted me. (Olivia, personal communication, March 21, 2014)

While she was enrolled in the doctoral program, this participant decided she wanted to be a college president. Within five years of earning her doctorate, she was a community college president.

One participant, who is currently a president, said that she had a life-long network of friends with the same goals, although they may be in different fields, who have helped and supported her throughout her education and her career. She also recalled that the president of her institution, a White male, urged her to pursue her doctorate and approved funding for her participation in a doctoral fellowship program. Prior to earning her doctorate, she was encouraged by an experienced faculty member in her department to obtain another Master’s. They enrolled in the program together and supported each other

as they worked full-time and pursued their studies; their collegial relationship grew into a friendship as a result of their shared experience.

I think everything actually is about relationships, about personal and professional networks. When I was a young teacher here, a Jewish woman—took me under her wing in the English Department and insisted that we should get these degrees together. Well, I was perfectly satisfied my education. So she mentored me in a very special and meaningful way. And we acquired two degrees at the same time at [the university]. And she just pushed me. And then I had another great mentor, who was president of the institution at that time. He kicked me into [a fellowship program]. By then I had become the chair of the English Department. I went to that doctoral program for a couple of years and worked on that.

(Ella, personal communication, March 10, 2014)

Another participant who is currently serving as a president credited her family, especially her husband, with providing the support she needed as she pursued her education and navigated her career. She emphasized that the decisions she made throughout her career journey were made in partnership with her spouse.

My personal support was family—my brothers and sisters in terms of their continuing to encourage me. They knew this was my vision; this was my dream—and doing the best they can to just be true to that. The most significant support I've had personally has been my husband. We have been together for 30 years. When we decided that this was the path, it was

a decision we made jointly. (Sarita, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

A participant who aspires to be a president commented that strong family support allowed her to balance her academic pursuits with her family obligations:

Our children spent so much time together and in each other's houses that it didn't really matter where they were. They felt at home whether they were in my house or my sister's home or my mother's home. They were equally comfortable. They had what they needed in those places. No one was ever worried about when were you coming back to get me. It was just an extended sort of home, family situation. So that makes it possible for you to concentrate and do what you need to do without worrying about the other people who you love and care for. You know that they are well and are being cared for. And you are doing the same thing for others. (Pamela, personal communication, February 5, 2014)

The other participant who aspires to be a president highlighted the importance of support from her personal network but also identified that her own persistence was just as important to her success:

It was a very small close-knit group of people that I had to personally support me. Most of my support came from within me—if that makes any sense. I always knew that if I didn't push myself, no one else would push me. (Lauren, personal communication, February 14, 2014)

A study participant who is not aspiring to be a president created a support system by developing relationships with a group of women with whom she entered graduate school. The connections this group of friends developed and nurtured have lasted over

several decades, and they continue to provide personal and professional support to each other:

They had never had a significant enrolling class of African Americans as they did [that fall]. Of the group that entered, there was a 50% enrollment of black women. Many of those folk could not cut it because the school was not the place for them. But folk that I sought out were folk that I felt were as smart—in most instances were smarter than me. They became my best professional support and my best personal friends. And today they happen to all stay [here]. And we created a family of folk that supported each other from the day we started to work until today. (Candace, personal communication, January 30, 2014)

While this participant credits these long-lasting supportive relationships with assisting her as she progressed through her career, she felt that the lack of support from her graduate school institution and academic advisors during her doctoral studies is the reason she never completed her doctorate.

The other participant, who is not aspiring to be a president, said she recognized her passion for teaching at an early age and understood that having the appropriate academic credentials would be critical to her success. She recalled that the encouragement from her family gave her the confidence to pursue her goal of a career in education. She indicated that once she had the appropriate academic credentials, she had great success securing support for professional development from her institution, that it was simply a matter of asking:

When I was in the chancellor's office—I think my immediate supervisor was very supportive of me and very encouraging of me, would always give me extra assignments to do, send me to conferences. That's showing their support because when you go to a conference, that's all professional development. I can again remember my supervisors always being very supportive if I wanted to go to workshops. I think also just giving me extra work to do—work that wasn't a part of my job description, but they saw that I could do the job, and they would give me extra work. That to me was a vote of confidence—'She can get this job done.' (Gloria, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

However, this participant also pointed-out that it would have been advantageous to have more formal training for some of the more technical aspects of her job. In lieu of formal training, she was able to reach-out to her network contacts with expertise for support and assistance as she mastered the new skills that allowed her to advance her career.

For three study participants, it was important to be surrounded by people with similar goals and values. For all the participants in this study, career preparation was more than attaining appropriate credentials: it was also about professional development opportunities and expanding skills through "stretch assignments" that provided breadth of experience. For all participants, seeking professional development opportunities outside their institutions served two primary purposes—skills development and networking opportunities. All participants identified national events and organizations that were instrumental in developing their careers and their professional networks. None of these

women had difficulty securing institutional support for external professional development. All suggested that their immediate supervisors and other senior leaders at their institutions encouraged their participation in events that would help them grow as professionals.

Career Attainment, Decisions, and Opportunities

Being exposed to opportunities along with possessing the requisite skills and competencies are critical factors for career advancement. The women in this study reported that opportunities for advancement have been available to them throughout their careers. Both past presidents reported that the support they received by belonging to a national organization heightened their visibility in the higher education community, exposed them to career promotions, and subsequently led to their achieving presidencies. These past presidents credited their broad external networks with presenting career opportunities and with endorsing their capabilities. Neither of these past presidents perceived that race or gender was a barrier to her career attainment. Instead, one past president reported that critical to her career advancement was her willingness to be visible during a time when there were even fewer women and people of color in community college presidencies.

I think that I am kind of pre-all of that in retrospect. First of all, I was a woman, but that never clouded my picture. But I was also a minority woman. To take that stage, I must have been crazy. It was risky, but I never viewed it that way because I didn't even know that it was risky. It was what you did. (Juanita, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

The other past president acknowledged that many of the opportunities she received were the result of demonstrating her qualifications and credibility to influential White leaders. She also suggested that her willingness to relocate gave her access to leadership opportunities that were not available to others who were tied to specific locations. Once she was positioned to leverage her own influence and provide support to others, she created opportunities for other African Americans.

We were only able to make strides because of Whites of goodwill who opened doors to recognize our quality. We've kind of gotten beyond that in some instances, but it was very important at that particular time because we didn't have a critical mass we needed for hiring folks on our own.

(Olivia, personal communication, March 21, 2014)

Similarly, one of the current presidents observed that opportunity came from unlikely places and credits men and Whites in leadership positions for supporting her as she ascended to her leadership position. This president lamented that while she would have liked to receive more support from other women and African Americans, she reported that was not her experience. Instead, sponsorship and opportunities came from a diverse network of supporters:

We'd like to think that people who look like us will be supportive; that's not always the case. Professionally, there's always been a little nexus of folk who encourage me along the way. And they haven't always been people who look like me. I think that it's important to hear this as a black professional. If there's any other message to get out there, particularly to us, that is not to close ourselves off—not to believe that only someone

who looks like us will help us but also to believe that we're worth it no matter what environment. (Sarita, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

The other current president in this study felt that most of her opportunities for promotion were presented to her by people in her professional network who knew her personally, knew of her work, and trusted her loyalty and her ability to be an effective leader. This president believed that her promotion to senior leadership was the result of seeking a position outside her institution, with encouragement from one her mentors:

He said, 'These folks are always going to see you as that young girl who came here as a student teacher. If you really want to do some other things and you need to do some other things, you're going to have to consider doing something different.' He did assure me that I could keep that job as long as I wanted. He wasn't kicking me out. He was kicking me up.

(Ella, personal communication, March 10, 2014)

One participant who aspires to be a president recalled that her role and responsibilities changed frequently because her supervisors encouraged her to expand her expertise through exposure to projects and programs outside of her scope of responsibility. This participant remarked that the nurturing environment enabled her to take calculated risks without fear of repercussions for failing or not meeting expectations. According to this participant, the goal of her activities was focused more on the experience than the outcome. And with each success, the diversity of her assignments increased.

The person that I was working for was the type of supervisor who was collaborative, was interested in your goals, what you wanted to do next, and who supported you and pushed you outside of your comfort zone. And she often encouraged me to present at conferences. She supported me when I went back to school to get my doctorate in terms of helping me negotiate a schedule, she supported my sabbatical and she gave me additional responsibilities always. I don't think I did exactly the same thing two years in a row ever while she was here. (Pamela, personal communication, February 5, 2014)

The other participant who aspires to be a president used a variety of strategies to assess her readiness for promotion and make career decisions. She relied significantly on her own assessment of her skills and experiences when deciding to seek new opportunities.

I had this thing called business cards. When you get down to about 25 or 30 business cards, then it's time to look for another job because you should be good in your position. You should know your position.

Everything should be going smoothly. (Lauren, personal communication, February 14, 2014)

However, her network also gave her information about available opportunities based on what they knew about her personally and professionally and what seemed to fit her career aspirations:

I stayed there from 2005 to 2009. And then my business cards got low.

But this time, I didn't have to go through the *Chronicle* and pick three jobs

because my girlfriend called me and said, '[A community college] has a vice presidency open and you need to go look at it.' (Lauren, personal communication, February 14, 2014)

A participant who is not aspiring to be a president began her career in the community college in a senior leadership position. While her preparation for leadership occurred outside higher education, the strategies she used to acquire the requisite skills and experiences were similar to those used by other study participants. Like the other participants, this woman engaged in professional development activities and sought diverse work assignments that would add to her breadth of experience.

I was a woman fully grown before I actually took the leap into higher education. And while it may seem that my choices were circuitous—my route was circuitous—it was not accidental—while you might say it was not intentional either. Every role that I took, I took a real pause. I embraced where I was at the time. We talk about in higher education, providing students with stackable credentials—that ultimately, every academic experience they have will move them forward to some kind of degree. I saw my life as every experience being a stackable experience.

(Candace, personal communication, January 30, 2014)

Another participant who does not aspire a presidency made deliberate choices that led her to a career in higher education. She realized at an early age that education was her calling. She had been successful in her transition to administration; however, the decision to pursue higher level leadership was made after much encouragement from her colleagues.

I never really planned to become a provost. I think sometimes people see something in you that you don't see in yourself, and I had been a dean of academic and student services at another college. A friend of mine called me and said 'Did you see that ad for provost?'—so she faxed it to me, and I didn't really pay any attention. I looked at the job description and said 'Oh my gosh! The provost title!'—I found it very intimidating. I said that's a real big job. I don't think I can do that. She called me back and said 'You've done budget. You've worked with faculty. You've done facilities.' She went through everything point by point. I said I think I've done all those things. She said 'You can do that job.' I was lacking confidence in myself to do the job. (Gloria, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

This participant observed that the complexity and level of responsibility in her current position have continued to expand. While she was not aspiring to a presidency at the time she participated in this study, she suggested that she might reconsider at a later date since many of her new responsibilities are aligned with the expectations of the president's role.

Leadership Style

The participants in this study arrived at their reported leadership styles by taking lessons learned from personal experiences, gleaning wisdom from the literature, and modeling behaviors of those whom they deemed effective leaders. All participants suggested that early familial influences helped shape who they are as leaders. For these

study participants, how they judged their leadership was not based solely on their position in the organization: they also considered how others perceived them.

One past president in this study suggested that her inclusive style informed how she led others. She believed that being an effective decision-maker required gathering the best information from a variety of trusted sources. She reflected on the lessons her parents taught her about the difference between knowing and doing. While she was always reminded by her parents that she was capable, she was also cautioned that no one could ever be expert in everything. Her early influences led her to believe that working with others to broaden her scope of knowledge and giving equal consideration to all points of view contributed to her leadership success.

I would say that I'm open and inclusive. I include, I acknowledge good work. I am a team player. Even though you're the leader of the team, you don't always have to be out in front to lead. I don't lead from behind, but I am not the 'I' person. I am more—we will do. *We* will attempt. It's not 'this is *my* plan'. I never totally trusted my single judgment, so I would bring in the collection of folks, especially my administrative staff once I kind of put it together. I would work very closely with them to help finalize and make it workable, but the ideas would come collectively from all of the input from my network. And their input was not weighted.

(Juanita, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

The other past president in this study suggested that her leadership style was developed through her observation of those she wanted to model and those she didn't want to be like. She credited her ability to empower those whom she led as critical to her

success. This past president also emphasized that she encouraged those whom she led to seek-out fit and balance in their lives:

I'm very much an empowering kind of person. I provide professional development opportunities for folks. I see things in people—skill sets they have. I have not fired many people, but I have helped people find jobs in other places because they would be better suited either someplace else or in another job. Family is most important because family is going to be there when the jobs are gone. I try to get people to nurture their family. I try to nurture the people with whom I work as though they are my family. (Olivia, personal communication, March 21, 2014)

This participant believed, in retrospect, that she would have sought a better work/life balance. She said she often wondered whether, if she had less high-profile positions, her personal life might have been different. Nonetheless, she was satisfied with her accomplishments and has no regrets about her career.

One current president indicated that her personal philosophy was at the core of how she led. She suggested that her style was flexible and adaptable and described having a call-to-service as a significant factor in her decision to take greater leadership responsibility. This calling influenced her decision to go into academic administration rather than remain in the classroom. She also indicated that family members, particularly her sons, suggested to her that she needed to pursue opportunities with increased leadership responsibility because they recognized her potential to have a greater impact on the students she served if she were in a position of influence.

I believe that I have servant's heart. I want to believe that. And I hope that's how I act. I just want to see every person do better and be the very best person they can be, make the greatest contribution they can make. It's all about helping the next and the next and the next. I loved teaching and I continue to love teaching. That's what I tell all you young guys now is that you can make an impact for a greater number of people if you do something more. If you do as much as you can, you can make a greater impact for a greater number of students. I see that now. I didn't see it then. (Ella, personal communication, March 10, 2014)

This current president emphasized that her leadership style and strategies were rather simplistic. For this president, leadership required being assertive but respectful and always acting with the intention of improving the situation for those one is charged with serving.

Similarly, the other current president professed that making positive changes for those she leads and those she serves compelled her decision to become a leader. This president suggested that her ethic of care and kindness, for which she gives credit to her mother, has shaped her leadership. She explained that studying and synthesizing elements of various leadership styles allowed her to develop her personal style which she described as inspirational.

[My mother] was the smartest person—even to this day, the smartest person I knew. The reason she was so smart is that she understood how to talk to, deal with, relate to and help people. So I turned that into kind of how I lead. Professionally it would probably be—the strategies that they

talk about in terms of servant leadership—it's those strategies that really connect to me. Someone might say are you transformational? Are you transactional? I believe in inspirational leadership. Because I believe that part of the leader's role is to inspire people to reach beyond where they are. (Sarita, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

When describing the influences on their leadership style, both participants who aspire to be presidents suggested that literature on leadership made a significant contribution to how they define their leadership styles. One participant suggested that her leadership style can be attributed to experiences during her academic preparation and gleaning best practices from professional development.

I've done a lot of reading and a lot of studying and looking at my style and what I'm comfortable with and the skills that I needed to add or that were missing. So I think the combination of watching other people model their approach, reading and learning and studying leadership roles and theories of leadership, and incorporating those, and also taking the time to reflect on my leadership style, and my leadership successes and failures--being able to talk about that with people has influenced my leadership style in a big way. (Pamela, personal communication, February 5, 2014)

The other participant who aspires to be a president suggested that the opportunity to observe those she considered great leaders and reading literature on leadership were equally influential on her leadership style. For this participant, watching leadership in practice was just as valuable as understanding the theories.

. So for me, there are a few presidents that I follow--and it's interesting that most of the presidents that I follow are men. So I tend to read and study them. But then I also study and learn from my surroundings and from the failures of other people. (Lauren, personal communication, February 14, 2014)

For a I read somewhere early on if you want to be a great leader you need to study great leaders participant who was not aspiring to be a president, her leadership style was based on a combination of personal values, observation, and reading the literature. This participant suggested that her upbringing and belief in fair treatment were evident in her leadership style.

I have been in situations where I see people treated so badly, people thrown under the bus in public. I would never do that. It's not my style. I think it comes from how I was raised, and that's really influenced me. I was raised in a home that emphasized respect and consideration for other people. I tend to treat people the same way that I want to be treated.

There's so much information out there. For me, I've learned a lot about leadership through professional development because the organization I work for has always supported me going to conferences on leadership.

(Gloria, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

The other study participant who does not aspire to be a president suggested that leadership should be judged by the ability to execute a plan of action or a vision. This participant said that she was fluid in her leadership style, adjusting her behaviors to fit the situation. She attributes her style to her childhood experiences of watching how cautious

and careful her parents were with their words and actions to ensure the well-being of their family in a time of civil and social unrest.

This may sound pejorative, but it's not intended. I found my mother to be a chameleon—which is what she had to be in mid-'50s Mississippi to make sure that she and my father, who didn't graduate from high school, could put four kids through college based on their ability to show the face that was required of them to show. To live a life in a way that allowed them to be who they were and to encourage us to be more than they were in terms of material things but to be equally who they were in terms of living a life of grace and goodness. I do see myself as a situational—and I won't say manager. I try and adjust my style to the circumstance, the situation, and the people with whom I am working. Everyone is not like you because everybody might not have your work ethic. So you've got to work through those circumstances and basically say here's the job that's got to get done. Who am I working with? And what does my style have to be to make sure we get to the right place. (Candace, personal communication, January 30, 2014)

This participant also evaluated her leadership in terms of her ability to deliver on her promise of quality. For this participant, the ability to inspire and influence the people she led was one of the measures of her leadership success:

You can only be a good leader and judge yourself as being a good leader if you look behind you and see people standing there ready to work with you. If you look behind you, and nobody's there, what are you doing?

You're not even a drum major. (Candace, personal communication, January 30, 2014)

Networks and Support

While the leadership journey sometimes seemed lonely and full of uncertainty, the study participants acknowledged that the relationships in their lives, personal and professional, played a role in helping them to evaluate and navigate their careers

A past president in this study believed that her family's support and encouragement were at the center of her decision to pursue higher education leadership positions. She told how her family's awareness of her professional activities led them to believe she was capable of greater accomplishments. She also suggested that her professional accomplishments and her visibility in national organizations garnered the attention of leaders who provided counsel and access to opportunities that ultimately resulted in two presidencies. Throughout her pursuit of leadership, she weighed the impact on her personal life against the decision to take on new professional challenges. She was able to leverage both personal and professional support in order to achieve her professional goals. This past president reported that she was very satisfied with how her career evolved and expressed great appreciation for the relationships that sustained her throughout her career.

I would say that my family—my husband and my daughter—have been my greatest strength. It was a sacrifice for all of us, but they helped to make it seamless. My husband kept saying 'You know, you're doing all this work, and you're not being paid for it. You might as well go on and do it under your leadership.' They have been my greatest support. I've

also been able to succeed because of my external network, and I can't say enough about the importance of networking, you know. I have always had that kind of external network to kind of help me through. Being that it was kind of a national network, it was safer for me anyway than having to just rely on the people who were a part of whatever the situation was. It's as though you were getting opinions from people who had to construct the situation and be totally objective because they didn't know the players. I've always tried to be a part of the higher education community and not just the community college community. (Juanita, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

The other past president in this study had a different approach to developing her personal and professional networks: she reported that being a single parent influenced how she engaged people personally and professionally. The people she included in her personal network were there to help balance her parental obligations with her professional responsibilities. For this participant, the personal connections, particularly family, were of greater importance to her than any professional achievement. As she progressed in her career she always considered her child's well-being prior to making a decision about her next career move:

I had to depend upon people to help me get through the day. I'm an only child. So I didn't have [family] on which to fall back. Every time I moved, I had to introduce myself to the people that we could barter child care services, or they would let [my child] stay there while I went to a meeting. I tried very hard to keep my personal and professional lives

separate. I really do. I think everybody needs a personal life. You need time when you don't have to think about the job. Even if it's an hour a day to read trash or listen to music or do yoga or whatever it is. You need time for your brain to just reshape itself into a different direction. I have always tried to keep family as family. So the connections that I had with that—very seldom did they spill over into my professional life. (Olivia, personal communication, March 21, 2014)

Professionally, this past president took advantage of her out-going disposition to develop a vast professional network that gave her access to career experiences which were instrumental in her rapid ascent to her first presidency. Many of her professional relationships did however lead to enduring friendships.

As I moved up the ranks—once I became provost, I joined the [national organization], which is all the African-American CEOs in community colleges in this country. We've been both personal and professional friends. While I have friends outside of the academy in my sphere of work, there are probably fewer and farther between because I spent all of my life working. We kind of depended on each other. They started out as colleagues, and—as I said—they've now retired, but we remained friends. When I was looking for jobs, I would always call and say 'I'm thinking about this. Have I lost my mind? Do you know anything about this one? Do you know anybody who works there? Help me figure it out. You know me well. Tell me what I should or shouldn't say, or how should I prepare for this job?' I think that many times—when you asked about my

personal and professional connections—personal life is not something most presidents have. A lot of times my professional life did spillover into my personal life because sometimes it was the people with whom I work that said ‘Why don’t you leave [your child] at my house while you go to that dinner, and then you can pick him up on the way home?’ That was less intentional than it was opportunistic, I guess. (Olivia, personal communication, March 21, 2014)

Similar to the past presidents, both current presidents highlighted the personal connections in their lives that gave them the courage to pursue their aspirations. They indicated they were surrounded with positive reinforcement from family, friends, and their respective community members. One current president reflected on the importance of having a supportive spouse who understood the path to the presidency could require relocating their family.

We came up with the parameters for where in terms of location and all that together. And it was really important for me. I said is this a place you could live? I don’t want to apply to any institution in any state where you’re going to have a difficult time adjusting. Those conversations have to be done on the front end. And I’d certainly say it to any couples that are considering this path to make sure that both of them are committed to it. It’s harder to do if you have someone who is not so much into that pathway and it becomes a hindrance. That’s where I think I got my most support and continued encouragement. (Sarita, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

This current president also spoke of the support and sponsorship she received from men in higher education leadership positions who helped in her decision-making process by sharing their experiences and ensuring that this participant's self-assessment of her readiness to lead an institution was thorough and thoughtful:

One of the most significant supporters has been a Hispanic male, who has been in my life for many, many years. [He] was a reference not only for this job but when I had questions about the path, he was already doing it. I could ask questions very specifically about that experience. He opened himself to that. I think the other significant support beyond that was [an African American male], who I've known about 12 years now. He's also a president. He opened himself to being a part of encouraging me—I guess part of who I am is this spiritual person who relates very well to people who understand that and see these jobs as bigger than themselves. [He] was that person, who came from a very spiritual place and said to make sure your heart is in it and to know that you're carrying your whole self to work every day. And you want to make sure that you are true to that. And the other, I guess, would be [a White male]. I've written with him. He's written with me. He did some work for me in terms of the foreword for my book. I would say for last 15 years that he's someone who said the right opportunity will come. Just stay focused. So, those were the messages that I kept getting from folks: be clear who you are, where you're going and what you want to do. (Sarita, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

The other current president was also supported and encouraged by influential male leaders. She remarked that with the exception of one leadership position early in her career, the sponsorship she received from her professional network created advancement opportunities. This current president emphasized the importance of trust in those professional relationships:

I had an email from the president of [a community college]—call me now. This was someone I worked with when I was at [a previous institution] and had been in [a national organization] together and known him over the years. But I had not talked to him in many years. He said, 'What are you doing?' He offered me an opportunity. He said, 'I need you'—[a senior administrator] was his executive vice president at the time—she's leaving and I need someone I can trust in this position. Would you consider it?' And I retired from there. When I retired, [a higher education leader]—as soon as she heard that I was leaving, recruited me to teach in a doctoral program. I did that for about a year. And then, as you know, she became the chair of the board of trustees at [a community college]. And she said, 'Can you do this for me?' And that's how I got here, actually. She said the same thing as [the community college president]. I never thought about that sI need someone I can trust to do this. I had the right skill set. (Ella, personal communication, February 10, 2014)

Unlike the other current president, this participant's ascent to the presidency was not intentional. However, her academic preparation, her previous experience, and the

recognition of her ability and trustworthiness among her network of peers made her a viable candidate when an opportunity was presented to her.

A participant who aspired to be a president believed that career success often requires a demanding schedule. She expressed her gratitude for her husband's appreciation of the need to work beyond the traditional work day in order to achieve success:

And then my husband is extremely supportive. My husband is retired military. He's very supportive and he's supportive of me spending twelve hours at work, fourteen hours at work, whatever I need to do. He's had those types of jobs where he's been out in the field for two hundred and twenty-five days out of three hundred and sixty-five, and worked twenty hours out of twenty-four. So he gets it. (Pamela, personal communication, February 5, 2014)

This participant considered the institution's leadership team and the team she was charged with leading as integral to her professional network. She suggested that teams' ability to collaborate and support one another was critical to their personal success as well as the institution's success. This participant viewed members of the college community with whom she did not have a direct working relationship as part of her external network. Although she spoke about networking outside the institution and the need for visibility, her examples of breadth of network were more area- or state-wide than regional or national:

I have colleagues in other areas of the college who aren't in my area, don't report to me, aren't part of the team but who I think are great resources,

resources in terms of expertise as well as just a support system in terms of believing in you, you know, and just being supportive of your ideas and goals and being able to speak to that to other audiences that you may not necessarily interact with. There are other folks who are not at the college who are extremely supportive and who play a role in my professional life. These are chief academic officers at other institutions, presidents at other institutions that I meet with on a regular basis to exchange ideas to talk about what we're doing, what's working, what's not working, what's going on across the state, and what's happening nationally. (Pamela, personal communication, February 5, 2014)

The other study participant who aspires a presidency reported that her network creation was strategic and selective. She limited her personal network to only those who encouraged her in her preparation or supported her in the pursuit of her personal goals.

I've had a very small network. When I was in [college], I had my mentors there. We were all going through our education process together. And [they] were actually my mentors in undergrad. I happened to catch up to where they were while they were still working and getting their doctorates. I had my paternal grandmother, who was my support system. And then I had my husband. (Lauren, personal communication, February 14, 2014)

The people included in her professional network were purposefully chosen for how she perceived they could add value to her career pursuits and current work challenges:

I call that whole system [of] my professional friends a council. And they're all on subcommittees. There are just certain people that you click with and you know that you click with them. And then there are certain people that you click with that you know that you're only going to get so far and you're only going to tell them so much just because of who they are or how they interact with you. Professionally, I have different types of circles. I have this—we call ourselves the sister circle. We all met at a [higher education] Institute. Because we were the only four women of color there out of 50, we sort of created our own little network. I also have another support group of people who work for the college but are not in my area—if that makes any sense. These are the people who know what's going on at the college. And we can commiserate and talk about what's going on and how we support one another through what we're dealing with. But then I have another group of professional colleagues, who don't work for the college, don't live in [the state]. Some, who are not even in higher education, also serve as a support network. It's important for me to have a different perspective from someone 'on the outside' because they will see it differently than how you see it. Because I am close so close to it, I can often be biased. Or I can be so attached to it that I'm missing something about what's going on. (Lauren, personal communication, February 14, 2014)

This participant who does not aspire to be a president also suggested that network creation needs to be strategic and that relationships need to be nurtured. This participant

said that she often found no discernible difference between how she treated her personal and professional networks. Having moved a considerable distance away from home to attend graduate school, this participant formed very close bonds with a group of her classmates who shared her values and had similar aspirations for career success.

Although she and her network of friends chose very different career paths, they continued to support each other personally and professionally, essentially creating a support system that functioned like a familial unit:

I had three siblings. They all stayed home. I'm the only one that left. We created a family of folk that supported each other from the day we started to work until today. We've provided advice and counsel. And we provided a lot of Kleenex tissues. (Candace, personal communication, January 30, 2014)

This participant maintained that relationships in professional networks need to be mutually beneficial and undergirded by similar values and the same level of trust that can be found in personal relationships

Early in my life, I understood that not only do you have to have good professional relationships; you have to have good personal relationships. That doesn't mean you necessarily have friendships, but you have really good personal relationships that will allow somebody to say 'Yeah, I know [Participant]'. I know [Participant] to be someone of her word, someone who represents our institution well and someone who is there to be counted on and who can deliver good product. So it was building on old relationships that I had been involved with—and working off of the

relationships of other people, which is something you always have to keep in mind--it's a mutual support. If it's not mutual, it's not sustainable.

Everybody ultimately asks the question, what's in it for me? And if you can't answer that question, then you know you got a problem. (Candace, personal communication, January 30, 2014)

Another participant who does not aspire to be a president relied on her family and a few close friends who encouraged her toward greater leadership challenges. Although this participant confirmed she had no aspirations for a presidency, with encouragement from those who know her best, she suggested she would be open to considering a presidency:

I think sometimes people see something in you that you don't see in yourself. I have probably been preparing for this kind of leadership role, but I didn't know it. Somebody had to tell me that I was ready, and I didn't think I was ready. My husband is very supportive of me in moving forward. He's very encouraging. Right now he is encouraging me to think about a president somewhere. I don't know about that job. (Gloria, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

This participant also shared that her professional network was based on the personal connections she liked to maintain with current and former colleagues and co-workers. Her strategies for developing and sustaining her network included utilizing more personal means of communication in lieu of technology.

My professional support has always come from my colleagues, through my supervisors. I have a very strong support network through the

organizations that I am involved with. I have become friends with a couple of those people. Two in particular—we meet once a month just to talk about how we are doing and supporting each other. That's been very helpful. I saw somebody I haven't seen in a couple of years. We met, we hugged. We lost contact because she changed jobs. I keep these little blank note cards. I wrote her a little note saying 'So great to see you. I wish you a lot of success in your new position. Let's meet for lunch one day.' Just a little note—that's how I keep that network going. (Gloria, personal communication, February 19, 2014)

Self-efficacy and competence were as much a part of the critical factors for success as fit and opportunity. Without confidence and the appropriate qualifications, the chances of career success may be diminished. Personal relationships provided the reassurance and encouragement that inspire people to persevere as they prepared for their career journeys. These relationships also served as reminders of the personal values and principles that helped shape one's leadership. Professional relationships provided valuable insights into breadth of experience and readiness to take on new challenge for these participants. It is through professional support that these leaders found role models for leadership behaviors and access to career advancement opportunities. For some participants, there was no distinction between personal and professional networks. As professional relationships were cultivated, they evolved and became more personal, including connections unrelated to work. On the other hand, personal relationships also provided these participants with the push to do more professionally or the sponsorship that made the next career move possible.

Dominant themes in the preceding discussion included the importance of encouragement and support at all stages of career preparation and development, self-reflection and validation to assess preparedness for the next career move, counsel while making career decisions, leveraging opportunities afforded through personal and professional networks, using personal values, observing behaviors, and studying the literature to inform one's leadership style. A detailed discussion comparing these themes with findings in the broader literature is included in Chapter 5.

Chapter Summary

The goal of this qualitative multi-case study was to understand the strategies these senior leaders use to access social capital resources. Social capital resources are the benefits gained from personal and professional affiliation. Social capital theory suggests that access to networks brings personal and professional value to people by providing psychosocial and instrumental support. Social capital is not just a tangible asset such as wealth; instead, social capital is the collective influence of the network itself, the value of the network. This researcher presented the personal reflections on career attainment and leadership of eight African American women who currently serve or have served in senior leadership positions in community colleges. The personal accounts shared in this Chapter offered insights into the strategies these women have used to access career resources and rise to leadership in community colleges, how they have navigated their careers, and how support, sponsorship, and encouragement have been critical to their success.

While personal and professional networks played a significant role in each participant's career journey, knowing they had the right credentials and appropriate

experiences provided the confidence for these leaders to advance their careers. When preparation and experience were not enough, having a network of friends, family, and colleagues who believed in them provided the push these African American women needed to pursue more challenging leadership roles.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

This qualitative multi-case study focused on one overriding question: How does access to social capital influence career attainment? Three sub-questions were also addressed:

- What strategies do senior leaders use to access social capital?
- How do social networks influence career choices?
- How do social networks influence leadership?

A purposive sample was used to identify eight African American women community college leaders, two of whom met each criterion. Participants were asked to provide copies of their resumes or curriculum vitas prior to the interview. Additional documents and background information on the participants were gathered through internet searches for news articles and reviewing literature on African American women in community college leadership.

Social capital theory, which has emerged as an important theme in leadership research (Van De Valk, 2008), provides the constructs for examining each study question and drawing conclusions. Individuals benefit by their association with a network, and likewise the network benefits from the status and influence of its members (Burt, 2001; Coleman, 1998; Lin, 2008). For the purpose of this discussion, the constructs of social capital theory that explain how individuals benefit from group membership were the focus. Describing the study findings in these terms created a platform on which to discuss the perceived influences of personal and professional networks on these study participants. The individual aspects of social capital theory also allowed for a discussion of how these findings could inform organizational policies and practices in the support

and growth of a leadership talent pool. The reported findings were based on a comprehensive analysis of participants' responses to eleven interview questions (see Appendix B).

Scholars suggested the preparation for leadership among community college leaders is similar regardless of race or gender. The literature also revealed that behaviors rather than gender dictate successful leadership. However, access to social capital through network formation was thought to differentiate career mobility. Studies asserted that women and people of color had limited opportunities for sponsorship because their networks structures do not allow them access to the power structure that influences career promotion and progression. Instead, women and people of color were more likely to build networks that provide psychosocial support. While the self-efficacy of women and people of color is enhanced by the personal and professional connections in their lives, the literature suggested that they experience limited career impact as a result of their connections.

The researcher undertook this study believing it important to discern the voice of African American women in the discourse on the impact of personal and professional networks on career attainment. Although the number of African American women who lead community colleges is relatively small, their success demonstrates their capacity for such leadership and that they can and do leverage sponsorship opportunities. If community colleges and other higher education institutions are committed to increasing diversity, understanding how successful women and people of color create social capital could lead to changes in how higher education identifies and develops its future leaders.

Similarities and variations in participant responses along with a comparison to findings in the bodies of literature on networking behavior, career development, and leadership are found in the subsequent discussion. The importance of support and the need to be connected to others in all aspects of their lives provided the over-arching framework for the summaries and conclusions presented. This Chapter was organized to examine the research questions through a discussion of the themes related to career preparation and attainment, networking strategies, career choices, and leadership that were revealed in study participants' reflections. Table 2 displays these themes and categories in a format that allows for comparison among participants' responses. Recommendations for future research and implications for institutional policies and procedures follow the summaries and conclusions.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Responses

Participant	RQ1: Strategies to access social capital resources	RQ2: Social network influence on career attainment	RQ3: Social network influence on leadership	Overall perception of network influence
Candace	Credentials Experience Membership Visibility	Encouragement Counsel Sponsorship	Family Values Role Models Validation	"Don't waste your time with people who can't contribute to your life and who don't share your values"
Ella	Credentials Experience Membership	Affirmation Encouragement Sponsorship	Personal Beliefs Validation	"In order to have a good friend you have to be a good friend"
Gloria	Credentials Experience Mentors Membership	Affirmation Encouragement Referrals	Family Values Role Models	"I've been pretty well supported, pretty well mentored"
Juanita	Credentials Memberships Mentors Visibility	Encouragement Counsel Sponsorship	Family Values Validation	"I did some high profile things"
Lauren	Credentials Memberships Self-Reliance	Encouragement Counsel Referrals	Personal Beliefs Role Models	"I take it all into consideration when I decide who I want to bring into my circle"

Participant	RQ1: Strategies to access social capital resources	RQ2: Social network influence on career attainment	RQ3: Social network influence on leadership	Overall perception of network influence
Olivia	Credentials Memberships Mentors Visibility	Encouragement Counsel Sponsorship	Personal Beliefs Role Models Validation	"I want a job like yours"
Pamela	Credentials Experience Membership Mentors	Affirmation Encouragement Sponsorship	Personal Beliefs Role Models	"Be open to challenges and realize that there are so many people who can mentor you and support you who you might not expect to do that."
Sarita	Credentials Membership Mentors	Encouragement Sponsorship	Family Values Role Models	"The biggest influence is knowing that I was influenced"

Networking Strategy

It has been suggested that women and people of color have limited sponsorship opportunity as a result of their lack of representation in the organizational power structure and their inherent preference for homophily (Ibarra, 1993; James, 2000; Madden, 2011). Contrary to this assertion in the literature, the African American women leaders in this study demonstrated an ability to create diverse professional networks that offered a variety of career resources. Study participants were able create direct ties to those with influence as demonstrated by their acknowledgement that White males and others who did not share their race or gender identity had an impact on their career success. Six of the eight indicated that they were able to be aggressive in their pursuit of resources that could help them achieve their career goals because they met the perceived minimum requirement for gaining access to social capital—a doctorate and breadth of experience. Meeting this condition for academic leadership gave them the confidence and assurance to direct their careers. Two of the women reported being less assertive in their career progression: although they met the generally accepted minimum requirements, they relied more on validation and affirmation from mentors and supporters (Eddy, 2010; Waring, 2004) as an indicator that they were prepared for career progression. One participant was able to acquire sponsorship with this passive approach. The other participant was able to realize referrals for job opportunities and recommendations for assignments that increased her breadth of experience.

As their careers evolved, many study participants were able to position themselves within their network structure so that they could influence outcomes for others. Developing productive working relationships enhanced participants' ability to

implement institutional priorities, often resulting in increased organizational responsibilities. Strategies participants used to develop a wide range of contacts within their institution and across the higher education community provided the visibility that positioned them for future sponsorship and career mobility. Giving back to the networks that supported them and pulling others forward in their careers by mentoring others who aspire to lead (Moore-Brown, 2005) became a priority for most study participants as they began to realize career success. The suggestion that women, while equally likely to be in mentoring relationships as men, do not realize the same career benefits as men (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva 2010) does not apply to this study's participants. These leaders suggested that they sought-out influential people who initially served as mentors and nurtured the relationships to ensure that they would provide instrumental support as their careers progressed.

Although sponsor relationships often evolve from mentoring relationships, the relationships are distinct in how they impact career progression (Foust-Cummings, Dinolfo, & Kohler, 2011). Sponsors use of influence to advocate for the mentee allows for the creation of social capital (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). While researchers suggested that women and minorities do not always have the same opportunities for sponsorship as their White male counterparts (James, 2000), these women of color suggested that many of their relationships with mentors evolved into sponsorship. Participants often sought relationships outside their race and gender (Ibarra, 1993; Thomas, 2001), accessing the same networks that create social capital for White men. As a result, they were afforded the same promotional opportunities, thus yielding career success similar to that of their White male counterparts.

Career Choices

Assets in one's personal and professional networks can be leveraged for both instrumental and psychosocial social capital gains (Alfred, 2009; Ibarra, 1995, Van Emmerik, 2006). Psychosocial support is often cited as an important benefit of mentoring relationships and familial bonds (James, 2000). Through psychosocial support, people develop self-confidence and empowerment related to their personal and professional choices. Such instrumental support as sponsorship and advocacy affects access to career opportunities and resources. Literature on social networks suggested that both types of support are critical as leaders attempt to navigate and control how their careers evolve (James, 2000; Day 2000).

For women, having a support network in-place was critical to their career success (Richie et al., 1997). Research suggests that the relationships women and people of color most often leverage are such psychosocial ties as family, friends, and mentors. The literature implied that women and people of color are deficient compared to their White male counterparts in securing instrumental support (Combs, 2003; Ibarra, 1995). However, the women in this study were able to secure support, guidance, and sponsorship and valued them equally in their decision-making. The strategies they used for making career choices were more complex than those used by males, who are more likely to prioritize career ahead of family. Participants intimated that when considering career choices, parity between career aspirations and personal relationship was a priority (Eddy, 2008; Cole, Loston, & Moses, 2004).f

Like many women, three of the eight participants in this study chose to postpone their careers to ensure that familial obligations were satisfied. Once these participants

resumed their career pursuits, mitigating the impact of career aspirations on their personal ties remained a priority. Similar to findings in studies focusing on African American women leaders, these participants chose not to alter or sacrifice community ties and family relations (Abele, 2003; Bowles, 1999; Newman, 2007) in pursuit of career goals. Mentors and supporters were beneficial for re-affirming for these women that they were still capable of leadership despite delaying their careers. For the five study participants who did not defer their careers, personal networks were important for providing counseling and feedback focused on their best interest rather than that of an employer. Personal networks provided the needed “reality check” that allowed participants to make decisions that were a good fit for their personal career goals.

The importance women place on collaboration, consensus, and feedback in their decision-making (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Gilligan, 1982) is demonstrated in the efforts the study participants made to ensure that deeper personal connections were not neglected in favor of focusing on career gains. Although their decision-making process and strategies differed from those of their male colleagues, the women in this study were able to realize the same career success as their male counterparts.

Leadership

Women call on intuition and empathy to guide their leadership in the workplace; they respond contextually when addressing challenges and making decisions (Gilligan, 1982). Although each of these African American leaders expressed her leadership style differently, at the heart of how they characterized their leadership was the need to include others in the process in order to affirm that they were thoughtful and thorough in their

decision-making. Similarly to their White male counterparts, these leaders acknowledged that assertiveness and accountability were critical to successful leadership (Abele, 2003).

Although women and men possess the same potential for leadership success, they differ in characteristics associated with leadership style (Eddy, 2005). Women emphasize inclusion and connection, involving others whose opinions they value and trust in their decision-making. For women, evidence of their preference for connection can also be found in how they describe how their way of leading evolved. The African American women in this study indicated that values ingrained in them through family interactions and the belief in service to others have shaped their leadership. Like many African American women leaders, two study participants understood at an early age their passion to lead and serve others. Other participants discovered their calling for leadership through support from mentors and relationships with personal and professional role models. For all participants, observing and studying failed leaders played a part in informing their leadership style. Study participants considered the inability to connect and instill trust in others as barriers to successful leadership. This finding was consistent with the assertion that creating and sustaining productive relationships within the institution and with other stakeholders is critical to leadership success (Lip, 2009).

Career Attainment

Social capital theory, which has emerged as an important theme in leadership research (Van De Valk, 2008), provided the constructs for examining each study question and drawing conclusions. Individuals benefit by their association with a network, and likewise the network benefits from the status and influence of its members (Burt, 2001; Coleman, 1998; Lin, 2008). Early encouragement from family and other community

members and later support from professional affiliations helped these study participants create strategies that allowed them to persist and navigate challenges while preparing for professional aspirations. As they characterized their personal networks, participants reported being motivated by families' and friends' expressions of belief in their ability. All participants noted that having a network in-place while preparing academically and experientially for leadership was critical to their ability to obtain the appropriate credentials and competencies. For women of color, mentoring, which provides psychosocial support, is critical to the completion of doctoral studies (Dedrick & Watson, 2002). The perceptions of the study participants also affirm the findings of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), who suggested that validation and belonging are critical success factors as women develop academically and professionally.

Interestingly, study participants reported that sources of instrumental and psychosocial support were not always mutually exclusive. Literature suggested that network creation for successful leaders is somewhat compartmentalized, with little overlap between personal and professional networks (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007). However, study participants affirmed that achieving complete separation between their personal and professional lives was nearly impossible given the required social responsibilities of their roles and their belief that creating meaningful connections was an important contributor to their career success. Relationships that began as professional affiliations for these women often evolved into personal relationships. The blending of psychosocial and instrumental support assisted these leaders as they balanced personal obligations with professional aspirations.

Literature on career attainment suggested that women and people of color rely more heavily on their credentials as an indicator of their competency than do their White male counterparts. While this assertion may hold true when generalized across all working professionals, in higher education only rarely does a person achieve senior leadership without a doctoral degree or breadth of experience. In community colleges, close to 90% of presidents have an earned doctorate (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Seven study participants with doctorates perceived the appropriate credentials as the gateway to accessing career resources. The study participant who was able to attain a senior leadership position without a doctorate placed the same emphasis on the importance of the credential and suggested that not completing her doctorate is one of her few career regrets. The sentiments of the study participants were consistent with Ibarra's (1995) finding that credentials and experience provide access to social capital resources that are instrumental in career progression and promotions.

Contrary to reports from earlier studies that suggested that lack of opportunity and support presented obstacles that slowed career progress for African American women leaders (Dixon, 2005; Gooch, 2009; Green, 2009, Jackson, 2003), this study's participants suggested that support was abundant and readily available as their careers progressed. Participants were consistent in how they perceived the value of their networks. While some participants preferred smaller networks with closer ties, all were able to affiliate with potential sponsors through their membership in local, regional, and national organizations. Showcasing their abilities and sharing their career aspirations with members led to recommendations for and referrals to career opportunities. Literature suggested that network creation at its most basic is based on such superficial

likenesses as race and gender (Elliott & Smith, 2004; James, 2000). However, the participants in this study belonged to networks whose similarities transcended visible characteristics. Instead, the bonds they formed in their membership organizations were based on a shared desire to have a positive impact on higher education outcomes and leadership practices. Three women disclosed that some of their greatest supporters were neither African American nor women. Findings suggested that within the larger higher education community, there are leaders who regard behavior and accomplishments as better indicators of leadership potential than shared superficial similarities.

Affiliations with membership organizations provide access to professional development resources and the opportunity to expand one's network (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Without exception, study participants acknowledged the value of professional membership for advancing their careers. Eddy (2004) suggested that women were more likely than men to leverage professional development opportunities that were internal to their institution. However, these women described only externally-sponsored professional development in their discussion of career preparation. While one participant did describe using internal resources to acquire technical skills, the study findings suggested that regional and national events were the preferred method for building competency. The benefits of externally-sponsored professional development activities included discovering new ways of thinking about issues and identifying solutions that were immediately applicable at their institutions, accumulating resources for future innovation, and expanding one's network to create career mobility possibilities.

Recommendations for Research, Policy, and Practice

This study relied on a purposive sample to examine the perceptions of African American community college leaders related to the impact of personal and professional networks on career choices, career attainment, and leadership. One limitation of a small study sample is the inability to generalize findings to a larger audience. However, the small sample size allowed for in-depth discussions with each participant. Since the literature addressing how African American women create social capital is limited, the findings of this study may provide encouragement for future researchers to extend the literature and further discern the voice of African American women in the discourse on social capital. The participants in this study have achieved leadership success as demonstrated by the positions they hold at their respective institutions. The strategies they used to create social capital were not identical to the characteristics that were generally ascribed to women of color: many of the strategies they used were more like those more often associated with White males. It might be more insightful if the discussion on social capital creation shifted to examining what successful leaders do rather than categorizing behaviors and characteristics along the lines of race and gender. Future research with successful leaders from other minority groups may further support the suggestion that successful network creation is predicated on behavior rather than race or gender.

The data suggested the need for more women and people of color in the pipeline if community colleges are to realize increased diversity among its leaders. A potential area for future research should be focused on women of color not so far along in the pipeline, who are currently in faculty or lower-level administrator positions.

Understanding how their network creation strategies may differ from African American women leaders who have attained senior leadership could be insightful for these women and the institutions that want to support them in their career development. Since the traditional path to leadership begins with faculty, future research with faculty members can be valuable for informing institutional practices aimed at providing the mentoring support that is critical as women and people color prepare for leadership.

Personal Reflections

One of the greatest challenges of qualitative research is mitigating the bias that may result from the researcher's location within the study. Admittedly, this researcher chose to do this study because she knew she could benefit personally and professionally by adding breadth and depth to what she thought she knew about the ascent to leadership for African American women based on her own experiences. This researcher acknowledges the need to be vigilant in assuring that her exposure to leadership would not taint the research process or the analysis of the transcripts. Attempting to put words into the mouths of the participants' would have threatened the credibility of the research. And, after all, the participants had their own words. The researcher should be part of the conversation only in as much as she developed the list of interview questions and asked them with the goal of documenting others' perceptions. Therefore, the researcher used a somewhat unconventional approach to hold-back her own opinions and avoid the temptation to weigh-in as an 'invited' study participant. The interview questions were purposely developed to get the most complete information to address the proposed research questions within the limited time spent with each participant. However, the last interview question was introduced for the researcher's personal edification but would be

asked only if time allowed and if it were clear that the study participants were amenable to sharing their wisdom. Engaging these African American women community college leaders in a discourse on how their networks have served them revealed their passion for pulling others forward. I was able to ask these women “What advice do you have for an African American woman who aspires to lead?” Consistent with best practices for conducting qualitative interviews, extensive notes were taken during the interview and a few reflections were recorded. However, for the researcher’s personal interest question, she decided to go back and listen to the recordings and let these leaders speak to her as an aspiring leader rather than for the scholarly purpose of adding to a body of literature. From participants’ responses, six important tenets emerged that will inform this researcher’s leadership:

1. Know you are prepared—developing your skills through professional development and attaining the requisite academic credentials puts you in the same sphere as other potential leaders. “Stand on your credentials.”
2. Be brave—know that you are capable even when faced with challenges. “[A]fter you’ve done your homework and you made a decision, follow it through”
3. Be authentic—choose your leadership based on who you are, not on an ideal or who others think you should be. Your personal values and beliefs should be evident in all that you do.
4. Go with your calling—recognize your desire to lead and develop yourself toward that goal. One study participant summed it up best: “don’t question it; go with it.”

5. Stay current and relevant—actively engaging your curiosity by seeking out new knowledge and sharing your expertise. “If you don’t have the exposure, nobody knows what you’re doing.”
6. Be an asset to others—your commitment to service should be at the heart of your leadership “[O]nly when you sit at the table, can you advocate for the people you want to serve.

Participating in this study deepened the researcher’s appreciation of the personal and professional support received during coursework, while conducting research, and, for that matter, throughout her career. In a way, the researcher’s experiences were similar to those stories of trust and support told by the participants. The importance of strong network connections became apparent in moments when the researcher struggled with this process. The trust built allowed the researcher to share her frustrations, fears, and discouragement. Like many women of color, this researcher has come to understand that there are people genuinely interested in others’ achieving goals and aspirations. Many professional affiliations evolved into personal relationships. As connection with these women grew, we bonded in our interest in seeing each other succeed—and through this process, we became friends. In retrospect, one of the most remarkable experiences was the opportunity to leverage the influence and connections of several members of the researcher’s network in order to get commitments from study participants. Recognizing that support was available during this process and in the future inspires this researcher to lend the same kind of support to others who choose to embark on the dissertation journey. Like the women in this study, this researcher looks forward to the opportunity to be influenced and to be influential in the service of others.

Chapter Summary

The African American women who participated in this study affirmed that personal and professional networks helped them to grow and persist throughout their careers. All participants were ambitious in their pursuit of leadership positions that would allow them to make a positive impact on the community college students and stakeholders they served and on the people they were charged with leading. Relationships were as important to their career success as having the appropriate academic preparation, competencies, and skills. Personal networks aided these leaders in increasing the self-efficacy that would enable them to persist in the face of challenges. Professional relationships provided a gateway to opportunity and sponsorship. Because these leaders understood that all relationships worth keeping needed to be nurtured and sustained, they suggested that often there was no distinction between their personal and professional networks. Just as they were supported by a vast network at all stages of their development, these leaders expressed the need to mentor and support others so that they might realize their career aspirations. The African American women in this study did not limit their networks to those who shared their race and gender. Instead, they took advantage of all available avenues of support and sponsorship. However, if it was available, the leaders in this study suggested, support by others who shared their identity was a source of inspiration and affirmation of their own leadership potential. The study findings suggest that race and gender do not determine ability to acquire social capital. Instead, network creation strategies that provide access to influence and sponsorship are critical to leadership success. It is recommended that future research examine the

networking behaviors of other non-majority women leaders to understand if they perceive race and gender as a barrier to leadership.

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Appendix A: Written Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE: Personal Connections and Career Reflections: An Examination of the Influence of Social Networks on the Career Decisions of African American Female Community College Leaders

Purpose of the Research

You are invited to participate in a study of the influence of social networks on the careers and leadership of African American women community college leaders. This is a research project that seeks to understand the effect of access to social capital resources on the career attainment of eight African American women community college leaders. Social capital resources are benefits (tangible and intangible) that result from relationships within one's social network. You have been invited to participate in this study because you meet one of the study qualifications listed below:

An African-American woman who is

- Currently serving as a President/Chief Executive Officer
- In a senior leadership position and aspiring to a presidency
- In a senior leadership position but not pursuing a presidency

Procedures

Participation in this study will require no more than three hours of your time, including follow-up contacts. You will be contacted to determine if you are available to conduct a one-hour face to face or telephone interview with me consisting of open-ended questions with probes. During the interview, you will be asked to share a copy of your most recent resume/curriculum vitae. This interview will be audiotaped with your permission. Following the initial interview, a follow-up interview may be requested for clarification on the part of the researcher and participant. Afterwards, your audiotaped interview will be transcribed and sent to you to check for accuracy. The first meeting will take place at the location of your choice. The follow-up will most likely occur by telephone and at your convenience.

Risks and/or Discomforts

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits

The hope is that your participation in this study will be rewarding, and the information may stimulate your thinking about the influences on your leadership, career attainment, and career decisions. The information gained from this study may help us to better understand strategies that may benefit other African American women by increasing the understanding of the impact of networks on attaining career goals. The information gleaned from your participation could also inform and enhance professional development policies and guidelines that are currently in-place for educational institutions and professional associations.

Confidentiality

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's residence and will be seen only by the investigators and Committee Chair. Transcripts and audiotapes created during the study will be kept secure for three years after the study is completed. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings, but the data will be aggregated before it is reported. The audiotapes will be erased once the study is approved for use in the dissertation.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

Opportunity to Ask Questions

The researcher invites questions concerning this research before you agree to participate or during the study. You may call the investigator at any time at 410-276-1586 or 410-456-8415.

If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact Morgan State University's IRB Administrator at 443-885-3447.

Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator or Morgan State University.

Consent/Right to Receive a Copy

You are voluntarily deciding whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate and have read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ Check if you agree to be audiotaped during the interview.

Signature of Participant

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Name and Phone number of investigator

Deborah K. Peoples 410-276-1586 or 410-456-8415

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. Icebreaker: can you tell a little bit about your current/past role as _____
2. Can you tell me about your career path? Follow up: When you think about your career, how did these opportunities to advance come about?
3. Can you tell me about personal support network?
4. Can you tell me about your professional support network?
5. Can you tell me about the strategies you used to your networks?
6. Can you tell me about the influences on your career choices? Follow up: Who are the people who have been supportive of you during your career? Please give examples of how this support has influenced your career attainment and career choices.
7. Can you tell me about the influences on your leadership style?
8. Can you tell me about the experiences or relationships most influenced your ability to attain a senior leadership position?
9. In retrospect, are there any other experiences or relationships that would have helpful to attaining this position?
10. Do you have any additional reflections about your career or the people who have influenced your career choices you'd like to share?
11. As you think about what we've been talking about, is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences and the decisions you made?
12. Is there any advice you would like to share with African American women who are aspiring to lead community colleges?