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The Impact Of Leadership Development Programming On The Career Pathways Of Females In Higher Education

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THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING ON THE CAREER
PATHWAYS OF FEMALES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

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PATHWAYS OF FEMALES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

In an era of women running fortune 500 companies and holding some of the highest political offices, there is no denying that progress has been made in addressing gender diversity in leadership. In the 21st Century there is still a considerable gap in the representation of females in high level leadership positions across all major industries, illustrating that there is still considerable work still left to be done. Higher education is entering a time when a significant number of presidents will be retiring, offering an unprecedented number of vacancies in these and other executive level leadership positions. Understanding these circumstances, this phenomenological qualitative study was developed to look at the role that leadership development programming has on the career pathways of females in higher education, preparing them to compete for these types of openings in the future. This study looks at an internal leadership development program at a community college to understand the lived experiences of the females who participated. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and related artifacts identified by the participants. The research found that participation in the program was a positive experience and it impacted the alumnae professionally and/or personally. The program had the most bearing on the alumnae self-esteem and self-actualization, causing them to see themselves more clearly as leaders. Further, the study identified that the relationships created and interactions experienced during the program significantly influenced the participants and proved to be a considerable benefit. Ultimately, the research showed this program is a strategy that greatly supported the development of female leaders in higher education.

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all the female leaders who have paved the way and provided inspiration to me and so many others. Regardless of being defined by a title, there are so many women throughout my life who have had a role in shaping who I am today, where I am personally and professionally, and where I will go in the future. This work is built on the efforts of those pioneers and silent warriors, who have persevered and supported other women along the way. It is because of these strong female examples that I and so many others will continue to pursue greatness in our future, without questioning how far we can go.

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I would also like to acknowledge the work of those who commit to developing other leaders, through leadership development programming. Your role in my professional career, and that of so many others, is enacted often without understanding its true impact. Through your work, you offer a vehicle for people to understand their ability to lead and to remove the beliefs that there is a limit to what they can accomplish.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 2016 U.S. Presidential election brought forth a spirited, often contentious, debate about women in leadership roles. While many found it perplexing that in this day and age there is still apprehension and disbelief about a woman's ability to lead, it seemed undeniable that gender played a factor in the choice of many voters (McCall & Orloff, 2017; Pate & Fox, 2018). Although at a record high, the number of females occupying the positions of Chief Executive Officer (CEO), President, and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at Fortune 500 companies continues to be disproportionately low, a trend echoed throughout higher education (McGregor, 2017). A 2018 study by the American Council on Education (ACE) found that only 3 in 10 college presidents are females (American Council on Education, ACE, 2018c). The lack of gender diversity is not limited to the role of a college president, with gender inequality evident across senior-level leadership positions in higher education (Chin, 2011; DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Reed, & Wheatly, 2014; Diehl, 2015).

Attaining gender diversity in leadership is a challenge that has a tendency to be overlooked in higher education or deemed addressed by the addition of a handful of female executives. "The presence, or absence, of female academic leaders can have far-reaching influences not only on the institutions themselves, but beyond that, on the scope of research and knowledge that affects us all" (The White House Project, 2009, p. 16). Changing the current landscape becomes even more challenging as the lack of female leaders currently in higher education sends a negative message to women aspiring to move into these positions that these opportunities are unattainable (Airini et al., 2011). The dynamic of this environment makes it

imperative that colleges seek solutions to increase the number of female leaders prepared for and occupying these positions (Gill & Jones, 2013; The White House Project, 2009).

Highlighting the urgency of this matter is the significant number of post-secondary institution presidential and senior-level vacancies anticipated in the coming years (Baltodano, Carlson, Jackson, & Mitchell, 2012; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; DeFrank-Cole, et al., 2014; Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014; Eddy, 2008). According to a report by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), it is estimated that 80% of community college leaders will retire in the next decade (Smith, 2016).

The impact of this dynamic in higher education is not only on the women seeking to further their careers, but speaks volumes to students, both male and female, who are witnessing gender inequities within the institution intended to prepare them for the *real world* (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017; Madsen & White, 2012). “Today’s rapidly changing and diverse global society is mirrored in our institutions of higher education, and present challenges to how we prepare and educate students today to be the leaders of tomorrow” (Chin, 2011, p. 8). Experts suggest “that the academic success of underserved students is enhanced by increased opportunities to identify with faculty and staff who represent ethnic, racial, gender, and cultural diversity” (Strum, Eatman, Saltmarch, & Bush, 2011, p. 10). Increasing the number of female leaders in higher education not only impacts the individual organization and field of education, it has implications for the students and community as it demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Organizations across professional sectors have begun to openly and aggressively address the lack of diversity in prominent positions through the use of leadership development programming, as they seek ways to grow human capital and produce the next generation of

leaders (Braun et al., 2009; Harvard Business, 2016). The use of this strategy is a reminder that organizations are striving to increase the number of females that apply and are qualified for leadership positions (Madsen & White, 2012; The White House Project, 2009). Experts recognize that the lack of females in leadership positions is not due to the absence of motivation, ambition, or desire, and therefore promote an intentional approach to the encouragement and development of women for these opportunities (Baltodano et al., 2012). A 2017 survey by the American Council on Education indicated that close to 75% of women presidents participated in a formal leadership development program and 85% moved into the role having previously served as a senior institutional leader (ACE, 2017c). This data validates leadership development programming as a way to increase the number of females both entering and moving up the leadership pipeline.

As the first two-year institution in the state and one of the few to offer baccalaureate degrees in the county, State College (SC, a pseudonym for the site of this study) is viewed as a leader in higher education. SC is a multi-campus institution, which serves the needs of approximately 37,000 students a year. The College's diverse student population includes a significant portion of underrepresented, financially needy, and first-time-in-college students. SC offers more than 100 degree and certificate programs, including about two dozen bachelor's degrees and many high-demand, high-skill, industry-recognized workforce certifications.

While a progressive institution, it was not until recently, after 90 years, that SC hired its seventh and first female president. Although this appointment demonstrated an openness to and acceptance of female leaders, more work is left to continue this progression of diversity at the leadership level. Kotter (1996) implored organizations to be cognizant of this need when stating:

While celebrating a win is fine, any suggestion that the job is mostly done is generally a terrible mistake. Until changes sink down deeply into the culture, which for an entire company can take three to ten years, new approaches are fragile and subject to regression. (p. 11)

On the surface, the representation of females in leadership positions at SC may not demonstrate a significant need for programming that prepares future female leaders, but the representation of women in these positions does not remove the institution's responsibility to support continued growth in this area. The benefit of leadership development programming should not solely be viewed through the lens of SC's future; rather, it needs to be noted that an increased number of women participating in these activities will strengthen gender diversity throughout the profession, as many of these individuals leave SC to work at other colleges, government entities, and educational foundations, for example. To address the social injustice related to gender inequality in higher education leadership, experts express the need to develop equity-mindedness (Bortz, 2014; Nica, 2013). Attaining this level of gender equality necessitates SC finding ways to prepare women for other leadership roles and address barriers that have historically kept females from occupying these positions (Madsen, 2012).

In 2015, SC launched its first internal leadership development program, Leadership SC (LSC), to support the development of current and emerging leaders within the organization. Each year roughly 24 participants are selected through a formal application process for this structured 6-month program. Although the demographics of those in each cohort (length of time at the college, position, experience, for example) vary based on the applicant pool, in order to be chosen the selection committee must agree that the applicant demonstrated they are a current or emerging leader at the institution and motivated to grow as a leader.

There is a notable move towards growing leaders internally, such as the inclusion of programs that intentionally can or do impact women as they enter and progress through the leadership pipeline, yet it is not an explicit goal of LSC. In order to properly identify how strategies such as leadership development programming can influence gender diversity amongst senior leadership, there needs to be an active approach that identifies what aspects most influence female participants (Harvard Business, 2016; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011). “For increased numbers of women at the top levels of academia, there needs to be a commitment to it and accountability for it. This requires specific targets for gender representation at all levels of the institution” (The White House Project, 2009, p. 25). This researcher sought to understand the impact the LSC program had on the leadership development, career aspirations, sense of self, and connectivity of the female participants.

Statement of Problem

While progress has been made both at SC and across the country, the representation of women in high-level leadership positions does not irrefutably confirm an institutional cultural shift or increased gender diversity in leadership. Moore (2003) summarized this dichotomy, stating:

Many successful organizations, led by effective leaders, are often the most resistant to change simply because they are convinced they already represent the avant-garde element within their arena, having boldly introduced innovative initiatives before others did, leading to profit, prestige, and other benefits. (p. 477)

The shortage of female presidents is a prominent statistic, with estimates of less than a quarter of college presidents being women (ACE, 2018c). Many experts attribute the lack of gender diversity amongst college presidents to the larger pattern of the underrepresentation of females

across the various leadership positions in higher education (Chin, 2011; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Diehl, 2015). To address this concern, it is important to look at the effect of current strategies to grow leaders, such as LSC, had on female participants. It is clear there are numerous strategies for increasing gender diversity, but experts agree on leadership development programming as an effective tool for pipeline development (Baltodano et al., 2012).

The efforts made toward developing future leaders, particularly those underrepresented in leadership roles, still leave uncertainty as to what it is about leadership development programs that truly impacts the career trajectory of participants (McNair et al., 2011; Nica, 2013). This challenge is compounded by the varying backgrounds, needs, and personal circumstances of each participant, which greatly influences their experience (Braun et al., 2009; McNair et al., 2011; Smith & Hughey, 2006). Adding to this situation is the lack of understanding as to what aspects of leadership program curriculum impact pipeline development, since each organization and program varies considerably (Harvard Business; 2016McNair et al., 2011).

The need to understand the effectiveness and impact of leadership development programming, particularly in higher education, is still an under-investigated field of research and application (Braun et al., 2009; Hauser, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2018; Knipfe, Shaughnessy, Hentschel, & Schmid, 2017). Those that have begun to dig into this area of study implore researchers to continue to explore how leadership development programming can support succession planning and pipeline development for underrepresented populations, including women and minorities (Bortz, 2014; Krause, 2017; Luzebetak, 2010).

Purpose of Study

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of female LSC alumnae to understand the impact the leadership development program had on these emerging professionals

and their career pathways. This study considered the perceptions of female participants to help identify what aspects of the program have the most potential to strengthen the leadership skills, sense of community and belonging, and confidence of female LSC participants. Exploring the perspectives and experiences of women who have completed the program provides an understanding as to how their engagement impacted their sense of self and belonging along their career pathway. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge that supports targeted and intentional leadership development programming as an approach to increasing gender diversity in higher education leadership by preparing individuals for leadership positions, especially women.

Research Questions

Acknowledging the general support for leadership development programming, while varying in degree, the research questions reflect the theory of leadership development as an established strategy for the training and progression of professionals. Therefore, the core two questions probed in this study are:

1. What are the lived experiences of female employees who participated in the LSC program?
2. How do the LSC alumnae perceive program impact on their sense of belonging to a community and/or group?

Conceptual Framework

To understand the impact leadership development programming had on female LSC alumnae, this study was viewed through a conceptual framework comprised of two key components: individualized consideration and the sense of belonging aspect of *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* (Marion & Gonzales, 2016). Leadership development programming is

inherently infused with the concept of individualized consideration, which involves employees engaging in learning opportunities in a supportive environment through the provision of mentorship, coaching, and related professional development strategies (McCleskey, 2014).

Individualized consideration is a type of leadership, often connected with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as it provides mentoring and coaching to "not only educate the next generation of leaders, but also fulfill the individual's need for self-actualization, self-fulfillment, and self-worth" (Covey, 2007, p. 5). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs incorporates various levels of basic human needs such as sustenance, security, connections, accomplishment, and self-fulfillment, which when reasonably satisfied can propel individuals to reach higher levels (Marion & Gonzales, 2016). This structure is strengthened by the supportive environment often provided through leadership development programming, which in turn promotes the sense of belonging and affiliation noted in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Marion & Gonzales, 2016). Maslow offers a framework that aligns employee development and potential for success in the workforce (Jerome, 2013). Focusing specifically on the belonging level within Maslow's Theory afforded two strong concepts as a conceptual foundation for this study. This aspect of the framework also helped identify a gap that this study examined, as the majority of the research related to an individual's need to belong tends to focus on their family and social groups, rather than the workplace.

Assumptions, Limitations & Scope

While studying the impact of LSC, it was presumed that general leadership development programming is an overall effective strategy in the professional setting, and that the program thus far has had a positive impact, while acknowledging that leadership success can happen in varying degrees based on the individual. Additionally, it must be disclosed that the research was

conducted by an individual who was both employed at SC and was a former participant of LSC. These circumstances required a substantial level of awareness and transparency during the research process to ensure that appropriate processes and methods were employed, while being mindful of potential preconceptions and personal biases.

The scope of this study was limited to former LSC alumnae. At the time of the study, 96 individuals had completed the program, with 80 still working at the college. Of those who completed the program, 60 were female. Focused on a specific post-secondary community college that has an established and structured leadership development program may limit the transferability of the findings of the study to differing organizations.

Significance

Albertine (2017) urged raising the level of awareness related to racial, ethnic, and gender disparities through developing “evidence-based thinking about disparities and stratification ... toward fair and informed collective action” (para. 6). The results of this study strengthen the knowledge base and research on this topic, through the provision of informed and constructive insights to apply to program and policy development in higher education, as it relates to supporting the progression of women into leadership positions. Promotion of gender diversity in higher education leadership enhances the ethical, intellectual, and professional foundation of an organization (Charan, Drotter, & Noel, 2011; Nica, 2013). This exploration of how leadership development programming impacted this population allows organizations to better implement and sustain the changes required to successfully increase the number of female leaders in post-secondary settings. Moreover, having made some progress in this area, it is important that the lessons and experiences of leadership development program participants are utilized for program enhancement, duplication, and expansion (Airini et al., 2011; Hotho & Dowling, 2010).

Understanding and applying strategies that strive to increase the representation of females in leadership roles has the potential for generational impact. “Colleges and universities must integrate into their cultures the conditions and practices that enable these students to enter and succeed in college if they are to fulfill their stated public mission” (Strum et al., 2011, p. 8). The ripple effects of an increase in female leaders in higher education will be multiplied to a degree hard to quantify, as students will receive an experience from an institution that not only teaches, but also demonstrates a commitment to diversified leadership (Nica, 2013; Strum et al., 2011).

Definition of Terms

- Community College – Higher education institutions that traditionally focus on workforce programs and typically do not confer higher than an associate degree (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017)
- Gender Diversity – The equitable or fair representation between genders in quality positions (Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, & Haslam, 2014)
- Gender Inequality – The unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals wholly or partly due to their gender (Parziale, 2008)
- Higher Education/Post-Secondary Institutions – A formal education organization, beyond high school, including universities, four-year colleges, and community colleges (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017)
- Internal Leadership Development – A program or activity produced within an organization for the purpose of strengthening the leadership skills of current employees (Harvard Business, 2016)

- Leadership Development – A program or activity taking place over a period of time, with multiple individuals, that promotes participants becoming stronger leaders, developing skills, and expanding their capacity to lead effectively (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017)
- Leadership Pipeline – A pool of candidates who are qualified to assume key positions of prominence when they are created or vacated through retirement, promotion, or someone leaving the organization (ACE, 2017b)
- Professional Development – Formalized learning related to an individual’s chosen profession, focused on growing their skills and knowledge related to their position (Madsen & White, 2012)
- Senior Leadership – A level of managers and executives who typically oversee a team of individuals at the highest level of management in an organization, in higher education these positions are typically Presidents, Vice Presidents, Chief Academic Officers, Deans, and Provosts (ACE, 2017b)

Conclusion

Strong and diverse leadership is imperative for the future of higher education, a demonstration that those leading and making decisions are representative of those attending the institution and in the surrounding community (Strum et al., 2011). The number of high-level retirements expected in the coming years is not limited to college presidents, with some experts estimating 75% of senior administrators also making this move in the next 10 years (Smith, 2016). With these expected vacancies looming, post-secondary institutions are encouraged to actively and aggressively address the barriers and challenges faced by females, which have impeded their equal representation at the highest levels of the organization. Two strategies to address these problems are suggested:

First, effective leadership development programs are needed to better prepare women for the complexity of challenges faced by leaders of modern institutions of higher education.

Second, women need organizations and systems in place to support and encourage their candidacies for top administrative positions. (Baltodano et al., 2012, p. 63)

Currently, many leadership development programs seek to evolve and grow established high-level leaders, but this research study focused on a specific program and the experiences of its female alumnae. Engaging and analyzing the experiences of females who participated in a leadership development program, based at an institution of higher education, provides insights applicable to the creation and implementation of effective strategies within other organization.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Playing a key role in educating tomorrow's workforce and shaping the minds of young adults, it is important that community colleges examine and promote the representation of women in leadership (ACE, 2017c; ACE, 2018c; The White House Project, 2009). Tasked with the ever-increasing responsibility to meet the needs of the U.S. workforce, community colleges are faced with mounting internal disruptions brought on by dwindling resources for higher education, a fractured pipeline for leadership prospects, and absent or flawed succession planning (ACE, 2018; Smith, 2018). These distractions hinder many colleges from remaining focused on their primary missions of educating and preparing students for successful careers and rewarding, productive lives. Institutions of higher education can no longer assume that the leaders they need to move their organizations forward and traverse these challenging times will simply appear, rather they need to put forth effort to develop a qualified and diverse candidate pool (Duree & Ebbers, 2012). Often those in the minority have experienced various challenges or life circumstance that have placed them behind their majority peers in areas of experience, connections, preparation, mentoring, education, and/or self-confidence (Baltodano et al., 2012; Bruckmüller et al., 2014).

The purpose of this study was to explore the role leadership development programming had on the career pathways of women moving up the leadership pipeline in higher education. This study sought to capture the experiences of current and emerging leaders who participated in an internal leadership development program at a community college and understand how it affected the professional evolution and progression of female participants. Specifically, this

study identified the elements of the program that were perceived to be most beneficial in preparing women for their future career aspirations.

The role of women in higher education has evolved considerably in the last several decades, culminating in a notable increase of women in senior-level positions, yet recent studies are now indicating this momentum has plateaued (ACE, 2017b; ACE, 2018b). Although the aim of this movement is to see greater representation of women in college leadership positions, the hiring of female college presidents or senior-level leaders does not constitute a victory (ACE, 2017b; ACE, 2018b; Eddy, 2008; Gill & Jones, 2013; Johnson, 2017; Nica, 2013). To truly change the fabric of this field, experts encourage the delivery of initiatives to increase the number of qualified females entering the career pipeline, ready to compete for and fill leadership positions as they become available (ACE, 2017b; The White House Project, 2009). Several experts suggest that professional development programming is a highly effective approach for organizations to demonstrate their commitment in this area (Baltodano et al., 2012; Hassan, Dellow, & Jackson, 2009). To ensure that this progress continues beyond the current pace, it is important to understand how leadership development strategies impact women and contribute to their career progression. This literature review analyzed the current state of higher education leadership; the representation of women in the field; the skills, knowledge, and experiences recommended for individuals seeking to lead at the college level; and the role leadership development programming plays in pipeline development.

Review of Literature

The search process for this literature review began with gathering an array of perspectives related to the current gender composition of leaders in higher education, with particular emphasis on community college presidents and senior-level positions. This

background information was critical to developing the basis for the research and included search terms such as “college leadership,” “history of women in higher education leadership”, “female community college leaders”, and “female college presidents.” This search produced a wealth of information on the representation of women in college leadership positions, the lack of gender diversity at this leadership level, and the departure of college presidents and senior administrators due to retirements in the near future (Smith, 2016). Being mindful that incremental progress has been made towards increasing the number of females in college presidencies and high-level administration, the literature review efforts were propelled toward understanding the scope of this growth and what is needed to continue this progression. This information led to a desire to understand the role leadership development programs have played in supporting the advancement that has been made in this arena, and more importantly, could play in continuing to increase the number of females entering executive leadership positions at community colleges.

It became apparent that, while the exact focus of this study had not been heavily researched, there is considerable interest in the promotion of gender diversity in higher education leadership, specifically women in the position of president and other high-level positions such as Vice President, Dean, Provost, and Chief Financial Officer. Many of these studies were focused on aspects related to the career pathways of current presidents and executive leaders and what similarities could be identified across their journeys related to previous positions, mentors, trainings, professional development, skills, knowledge, education, and so forth. The other aspect of the research focused on leadership development programming and its place in career progression. Keywords included “professional development programming” and “leadership development programs.” Results included studies that analyzed the use of leadership

development programs across industries, with some that specifically looked at higher education and community colleges.

The results of this extensive search are detailed below, beginning with an environmental scan of leadership in higher education on a large scale, followed by a focus on the representation of women in college leadership positions. This information led to research related to the career pathways of college leaders and what elements had been identified as playing a role in or hindering the progression of individuals into these executive positions. From this point, the topical research concentrated specifically on the characteristics and trainings identified as necessary or highly recommended for community colleges leaders. The researcher synthesized findings about how leadership development programming has played a role in supporting emerging community college leaders, and more specifically females, as they progress along their career pathway.

Higher Education Leadership

Higher education is entering a time of significant change, with experts estimating that up to 80% of the current institutional presidents will retire over the next decade, as well as a large number of senior-level administrators exiting the field during the same timeframe (Baltodano et al., 2012; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Dunn et al., 2014; Eddy, 2008). This situation presents a challenge for the institutions seeking to identify the right candidate, but also offers an extraordinary opportunity for emerging leaders to prepare for and seek out these roles. At many institutions, these changes will incite a ripple effect, with other high-level leadership positions becoming vacant when a current staff member moves up in the organization or moves on (McNair et al., 2011). DeFrank-Cole et al. (2014) summarized this challenge stating, “most

institutions lack an “intentional” process for preparing future leaders and thus they are woefully unprepared to deal with a retirement induced leadership vacuum” (p. 52).

Move towards Diversity

There is no denying that the landscape of higher education has changed significantly over the last 50 years. Affirmative action, Title V, Title IX, and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have prompted colleges to embrace and promote diversity at their institutions in a way that is intentional and answerable. The promotion of diversity and inclusion goes well beyond the student body with the impact being realized within administration and leadership. The call for leadership diversity has been at the forefront of research and literature for some time now with an acknowledgment that it is not only the right thing to do, but very often is shown as the best decision for an institution (Coder & Spiller, 2013; Gill & Jones, 2013; Seymour & Wairepo, 2013). “To promote diversity in academic leadership, the college or university should be a microcosm of the total society” (Nica, 2013, p. 192). This stance is critical for the continued success and progression of higher education as an institution that is an inclusive and progressive place that prepares students for the *real world* (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017; Madsen & White, 2012).

The value of diverse leadership has been studied across industries as the advantages of varied backgrounds, opinions, viewpoints, experiences, and knowledge can enrich an organization and increase the bottom line (Coder & Spiller, 2013, p. 34). Organizational leadership practices related to diversity and equity should permeate all aspects of an educational institution, from hiring practices to the composition of the student body (Seymour & Wairepo, 2013). The impact of diversity on organizations was highlighted in a study by Ernst and Young (2009) that led them to remind organizations to see the promotion and inclusion of female

leaders as a way to “attain strategic advantage” (p. 9). While some may call for organizations to encourage diversity in leadership for purely altruistic reasons, it is critical that there is also an understanding of the positive impact it can have on a company’s profits and capacity (Harvard Business, 2016). Research supports the connection between stronger and more diversified leadership with increased profits (Noldand, Moran, & Kotschwar, 2016). This understanding also applies to colleges, but the impact goes further, as underrepresented students have been found to have higher success rates at institutions that have leaders they can relate to, driving enrollments, persistence, graduation, and alumni giving (Strum et al., 2011).

Female Representation

Tasked with educating the future leaders of this world, colleges are being called to be a reflection of the diversity present in the student body and community they serve (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, 2017; Madsen & White, 2012). While progressive in many ways, institutions of higher education still lag behind in leadership diversity, particularly when it comes to female leaders (ACE, 2018c). Over the last 10 years, female students continue to be the majority gender attending college, while the number of female leaders continues to lag by half (ACE, 2018c; Johnson, 2017). “Nationally, women are 57 percent of all college students but only...23 percent of university presidents and 14 percent of presidents at the doctoral degree-granting institutions. (The White House Project, 2009, p. 10). As a wave of high-level retirements begins to hit higher education there is a great opportunity for women to increase their representation at the leadership level (ACE, 2017b; ACE, 2017c).

A unique environment, community colleges are often viewed as more welcoming and progressive when it comes to females in leadership positions (Gill & Jones, 2013). Some experts point to women’s tendency to have a more collaborative leadership style, as highly conducive to

the shared governance approach of many community colleges and therefore a likely reason that females have a higher representation at these organizations (Gill & Jones, 2013). Additionally, women have been shown to apply more of a networking and empowerment approach as leaders, which tends to perpetuate more female leaders, as they often take leadership positions and then encourage others to enter and progress up the pipeline (Gill & Jones, 2013). The increasing number of women in college leadership positions is undeniable, but their advancement has begun to plateau (Eddy, 2008; Gill & Jones, 2013). The current gender difference shows roughly 30% of college presidents are women, a statistic that has increased very little over the last decade (ACE, 2017c). The growth of women in leadership positions at community colleges does not denote a solution to the gender gap, but rather offers an opportunity to study what has caused this gap to start narrowing and what has led to this changing landscape (Gill & Jones, 2013). Many current or recently retired female college presidents represent the first ever women in this role (Dunn et al., 2014; Hertneky, 2012; Hill & Wheat, 2017). The relative newness of females in these positions produces a shortage of knowledge related to the “characteristics and experiences of effective female leaders in higher education” (Dunn et al., 2014, p. 9).

While the representation of female leaders within colleges and universities has shown some growth, many would argue that there is still a considerable gender gap, particularly in high-level administrative positions (ACE, 2017; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Eddy, 2008). A 2018 survey of community college presidents noted respondents overwhelmingly expressed their concern over the absence of diversity, both in race and gender, amongst candidates for executive leadership positions (ACE, 2018). The potential to change this condition was not met with confidence, as the presidents surveyed noted they felt, regardless of demographics, the current talent pool of aspiring college leaders was lacking (ACE, 2018c).

Career Pathway for College Leadership

While individuals have a responsibility for their own career pathways, organizations can make changes in order to support the growth and evolution of their emerging leaders and improve the culture of their institution. Research has shown that organizations are seeking to increase leadership diversity, yet there are still considerable challenges to getting qualified individuals to enter and move up the pipeline. The leadership path to becoming a college executive is no longer a predictable linear path from faculty to Dean to Senior Administrator to President (Beardsley, 2017). More and more search firms and boards are looking beyond previous position titles to focus on the specific skills, knowledge, and experiences of a candidate (American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC), 2013).

This divergence from tradition has hiring committees considering candidates with no or limited experience in higher education (Beardsley, 2017). Echoing the need to consider non-traditional candidates, The White House Project (2009) encouraged institutions to “look beyond sitting presidents and CAOs in order to increase the pool of potential presidential selections. Because women are more likely to have followed a nontraditional career path, the best candidates may come from another field” (p. 26). The nonlinear career pathway, both in and out of higher education, is often highlighted when discussing women who leave the workforce for a time or make a non-vertical career move (Hertneky, 2012; Johnson, 2017). The most common reference to women and their non-traditional pathways relates to instances when they leave or alter their position to raise a family or care for a family member (ACE, 2017b). Women often express the intense struggle between wanting to concentrate on raising children and staying on their desired career path (Dunn et al., 2014). For some women the choice to enter and exit the

workforce could happen several times, inserting considerable career disruptions and challenges to reaching their career goals.

The *grow your own* philosophy that has taken shape in higher education is somewhat contradictory to the desire for non-traditional candidates. While not all experts specifically tie this movement to filling presidential and executive positions, it is important to note that, for leadership development and succession planning overall, it is highly encouraged (AACC, 2013; McNair et al., 2011). “Colleges and universities should offer relevant yet effective preparation programs to meet changing societal demands” (Nica, 2013, p. 189-190). This model allows organizations to cultivate future leaders based on the organization’s specific mission and culture, while also filling perceived gaps and identified needs (Hassan et al., 2009). Internal leadership and development programs have long been a common practice in the for-profit sector, with a study conducted by Harvard Business (2016) indicating that the vast majority of the 700 respondents host leadership development programs.

Barriers and Challenges of Female Leaders

Descriptive phrases related to the plight of professional women are abundant and often colorful, including glass ceiling, sticky floors, playing with the boys, and glass cliffs (Bruckmüller et al., 2014; Coder & Spiller, 2013; Eddy, 2008). Each of these phrases is a reminder of the many barriers that women climbing the ranks in an organization often navigate related to gender stereotypes and equity. Literature focused on the value female leaders bring to an organization ranges from their personal experience to their leadership styles, which are validated as contributing to the diversity within an organization (Ernst & Young, 2009; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007; Seymour & Wairepo, 2013).

Environmental factors. Gender stereotypes and issues of equity too often bleed into an institution's culture, creating an environment that limits a female's sense of confidence and comfort when seeking advancement (Bartel, 2018; Rabas, 2013). This type of atmosphere fails to provide the support women need as they navigate a particular career pathway (often as the first female) and limits the likelihood of success of the women that do enter executive-level leadership positions (Bruckmüller et al., 2014). Many institutions have made notable attempts at moving women into leadership positions, but without intentionally preparing these leaders and/or addressing toxic elements within the internal culture, little change will be sustained (Gill & Jones, 2013). Change does not happen overnight, requiring women to learn to navigate long-standing institutional challenges, while identifying areas where they can produce the needed change (Hill & Wheat, 2017).

Self-efficacy. Research concentrated on both community college and university leaders highlights self-efficacy as a key characteristic in an individual's professional journey and success. Researchers Hoyt and Blaschovich (2007) sought to understand the impact self-efficacy has on female leaders and their ability to counter gender stereotypes. Through their work the researchers determined that women with a strong sense of self-efficacy were able to circumvent the effects of negative stereotypes, further indicating the importance of developing and encouraging this trait in female leaders (Hoyt & Blaschovich, 2007). Related characteristics of successful leaders such as self-awareness, self-confidence, and a sense-of-self have also been major themes derived from research. Dunn et al. (2014) conducted a self-study that identified self-knowledge and confidence as highly useful personal traits for college administrators. Hertneky (2012) also highlighted self-awareness and personal identity as key meta-competencies important for leaders. Looking at the role of self-identity in the career pathway of female college

presidents, Hertneky (2012) stated, “The presidents’ ability to assess themselves and their leadership included a willingness to question themselves, accept their own imperfection, recognize the relationship between self-confidence and making mistakes, and the importance of relying on others” (p. 147). Research further indicates that women in leadership positions not only possess a strong sense of who they are and their value but are willing to self-reflect and grow as leaders and individuals (Dunn et al., 2014; Hertneky, 2012).

Vision. A barrier that has both personal and organizational roots arises as women fail to envision themselves in leadership positions and lack preparation for the next career opportunity on their pathway (Dunn et al., 2014). A study focused on women leaders at community colleges showed that many female leaders were often in the ‘right place at the right time’ when they attained their leadership role and expressed that they never saw themselves in their current position of president (Eddy, 2008). A lack of intentionality related to career decisions is also a pervasive theme across much of the research focused on women and their career progression, suggesting that too often women fail to advocate and prepare themselves for leadership positions. Also highlighted is how many organizations miss the mark on pushing opportunities for additional training geared to women and leadership development (Eddy, 2008; Hertneky, 2012). Many current female leaders have identified the role of someone else in their lives as helping them see their potential and encouraging them to progress beyond how they saw themselves (Hertneky, 2012).

Charan et al. (2011) presented a strategic progression model for creating a leadership pipeline. The authors acknowledged that, too often organizations assume that if an individual is able to perform successfully at their current position, they will then be successful at the next level. Focusing on leadership development will also strengthen the organization’s foundation

and future, providing an equipped base of trained and motivated employees who can aid beyond their current job description through solid leadership.

Support. The lack of personal vision is highlighted in other studies, as the researchers underscore the influence and encouragement role models have on a woman's desire to progress on their career pathway (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Many women who are currently in positions of leadership at colleges cited that they have mostly male role models, an indication that they have few female predecessors to look toward when seeking advice and guidance (Gill & Jones, 2013). A lack of formal and/or traditional role models in higher education was also expressed in a study looking at the career path to university presidency, with several respondents tying this deficit specifically to the lack of focus on developing females during the early and middle parts of their careers (Hill & Wheat, 2017).

Donohue-Mendoza (2012) looked at the role supervisors have on the career progression of women at community colleges, as many institutions see mentorship as a default role of this position. The research indicated that supervisors were failing to support the career pathway of their subordinates by not providing the types of support associated with a role model or mentor (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). For women, in particular, the role of other female leaders provides critical guidance for navigating the personal/professional balance women often struggle through as they achieve more demanding and prominent positions.

Leadership Development Strategies

It is not enough to assume that professionals will simply progress and become the leaders an organization is seeking without intentionally and mindfully filling this pipeline with strong and qualified candidates (Charan et al., 2011; Madsen & White, 2012). These strategies should also reflect the needs and nuances of the particular industry, organization, and individuals that

will engage in and/or benefit from leadership development (Harvard Business, 2016).

Leadership development strategies that address the need for gender diversity in the field of education ought to be cognizant of the type of leaders called for within community colleges, those strategies that have had the greatest impact on females, and the role targeted leadership development programs can play in addressing this industry need (ACE, 2017c; ACE, 2018b).

AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders

Understanding the unique environment of 2-year institutions as well as the leadership challenges currently facing these organizations, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) created the Core Competencies for Community College Leaders. This framework outlines the elements emerging leaders need to acquire and deepen as they move through the leadership pipeline. “To ensure that the leadership pipeline is flush with competent individuals, institutions must develop and support grow-your-own programs and invest in sending their employees to national programs for emerging leaders” (AACC, 2013, p. 3). Listed below are the five key competencies that make up this framework.

1. Organizational strategy
2. Institutional finance, research, fundraising, and resource management
3. Communication
4. Collaboration
5. Community College Advocacy

For each of the competencies, the structure looks at how individuals should manifest them as they move through the stages of the leadership pipeline: Emerging Leaders; New CEOs within the first 3 years on the job; and New CEOs that have been in their position for 3 or more years.

Reinforcing the movement away from the idea that college leaders must follow a prescribed pathway, the AACC Core Competencies for Community College Leaders captures the skills and characteristics deemed essential for successful community college leaders, regardless of their experiences and previous positions. Studying the importance of these particular skills in community college leaders in Texas and Florida, Hassan et al. (2009) found that there is considerable alignment between the expectations board members and presidents have for their leaders and the AACC competencies (p. 188). The agreement between these two organizational governing positions indicates that AACC has successfully identified core leadership characteristics that are critical for the specific venue that is the community college. Studying the application of these competencies in a more rural institutional setting found similar results to the Hassan et al. (2009) study. Cejda and Jolley (2013) noted that the development and possession of these competencies were perceived as highly important for career advancement. In the study by Hassan et al. (2009) it was determined that the mentor/mentee relationship is significant in developing the skill of advocacy, one of the AACC competencies that are “regarded as the most important competency and a competency set that is not readily developed by a general set of professional experiences” (p. 194). While not studied within the full context of a leadership development program, aspects of the AACC Core Competencies have been shown as important for community college presidents and leaders.

Developing Female Leaders

As the field braces for a considerable number of senior-level retirements in higher education, and the plight of professional women gains more attention, the level of research in this area has also increased. Studies focusing on strategies that progress this subset of aspiring leaders in higher education speak to how both the organization and the emerging leader can

tackle these challenges (Airini et al., 2011; Baltodano et al., 2012; DeFrank-Cole et al.; Donohue-Mendoza, 2012; Gil & Jones, 2013; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Madsen & White, 2012; Rabas, 2013). For the purpose of succession planning and meaningful leadership development, it is critical that tactics are initiated early and are ongoing (Hassan et al., 2009). The need is not about simply placing women in leadership positions, but rather creating opportunities that increase the number of skilled, capable, and prepared females in the selection pool for hiring managers (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Nica, 2013). If organizations do not take responsibility for preparing females for leadership positions, there will continue to be a lack of women entering and succeeding in key leadership roles in higher education (Madsen & White, 2012). “The strength and success of a client organization’s leadership development system shape that organization’s present and future. For this reason, leadership development is a key organizational component and legitimate point of entry for intervention” (Bolman & Deal, in Gallos, 2006, p. 544).

Leadership Development Programming

Many leaders point to critical relationships, training, and encouragement from the early and middle stages of their career as having a great impact on their ultimate success and helping them as they moved to the next level (Dunn et al., 2014). Leadership development programming that does not have some focus on supporting women, as they prepare for executive level and presidential positions, will fail to fill the leadership pipeline and neglect a key opportunity to strengthen an organization (Seymour & Wairepo, 2013). The concept of developing a leadership pipeline within an organization has also been shown to reduce turnover, which is more cost-effective than bringing in and training new employees (Shenkman & Gorbaty, 2007).

Though a common term, leadership development programming varies considerably across organizations. Key aspects that are shown to be consistent across what are identified as formal leadership development programs include: 1) a selection process for participants; 2) a set length of time for the program; 3) regular engagement with participants; and 4) a structured curriculum (Baltodano et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2009; Harvard Business, 2016). To meet the needs of the sponsoring organization these key elements can differ considerably, such as programs running from 3-months to 1-year or a focus on only a certain level of employees such as Vice Presidents (Baltodano et al., 2012).

A possible area for additional investment by institutions is in internal leadership development programs, which the data suggest are helping to position women for future opportunities. Further supporting the argument for these programs, a report by the American Council on Education (2018b) determined that female presidents were more likely than their male counterparts to have participated in leadership development programs, as well as having been at the same institution or system immediately prior to taking the role. An additional study by this organization found that prior to becoming president 72% of women had participated in a formal leadership development training program (ACE, 2017c). This data supports the call from industry associations and experts to promote leadership development strategies, particularly as a way to increase the number of women entering institutional leadership positions (ACE, 2018b; Johnson, 2017).

Kotter (1996) emphasized the theory behind leadership development programming, stating “In an ever-changing world, we can never learn it all, even if we keep growing into our nineties, and the development of leadership skills becomes relevant to an ever-increasing number of people” (p. 177). The challenge to leadership development programming is understanding

that every participant and organization possesses different needs, ideals, and experiences, and the path to becoming and developing leaders will look different for every individual (Kotter, 1996; Smith & Hughey, 2006).

Additionally, several recent studies have indicated that peer-to-peer interactions and networking, essential parts of leadership development programming, are vital particularly for women seeking advancement in higher education. These systems provide support, broaden available opportunities, generate ideas, create cross-functional teams, and fulfill some of the benefits that also come from a mentor (Hassan et al., 2009; Madsen & White, 2012). “An important goal of networking is to develop leaders beyond merely knowing what and knowing how, to knowing who in terms of problem-solving resources” (Hassan et al., 2009, p. 193). Networking, particularly with other females, provides women with an opportunity to engage with other professionals who are experiencing many of the challenges that often come with being women, from motherhood to gender stereotypes to discrimination.

The opportunity to interact and network with peers was also found to support the development of the AACC competencies for community college leaders, specifically the Resource Management and Advocacy competencies (Hassan et al., 2009). Similar to mentoring, networking and network development are highly rated as elements that help leaders progress in higher education, but few leaders clearly identify formal opportunities related to these leadership development strategies (Hassan et al., 2009). Peer relationship development often fulfills a leader’s need to have a system of individuals that they can connect with and reach out to for personal and professional support, as well as engage with during times when their personal and professional needs intersect (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014). The type of feedback and encouragement that can arise from deep and meaningful professional relationships has been

shown to be highly beneficial for women as it often pushes them to see themselves through a different lens.

“The strength and success of a client organization’s leadership development system shape that organization’s present and future” (Bolman & Deal, in Gallos, 2006, p. 544). Often including elements of mentorship, networking, self-promotion, and peer-to-peer interactions, formalized leadership developmental programs are highly regarded by researchers and experts in the field as a strategy to develop future leaders. Documenting the experiences of females in higher education leadership, Baltodano et al. (2012) found that the need for leadership development programming is essential for the advancement of women along their career pathway. Beyond programs that focus on professionals across all industries, there are a large number of programs specifically focused on emerging leaders in higher education. These offerings range in design including national, state, regional, local, and internal leadership trainings, as well as programs that focus specifically on females, while others target individuals in particular roles such as senior leaders.

National leadership development programs. While many leadership programs have been around for some time, more national offerings have materialized in the field of higher education with the realization that the field may not be prepared for the sheer number of upcoming high-level vacancies (ACE, 2017b; DeFrank et al., 2014). Several premier organizations within the field have developed programs that engage emergent educational leaders from across the country. Examples of these programs include The Harvard Institute of Higher Education, Aspen Presidential Fellowship for Community College Excellence, and the League of Innovation in the Community College – Executive Leadership Institute, to name a few. While it has been determined that many high-level community college leaders have

participated in these programs, no one program emerges as the most prominent as far as having the highest level of participation (Hull & Keim, 2007). When speaking of these national offerings, it is often noted that the cost and time commitment required is often unrealistic, especially considering the size of many community colleges.

State and regional leadership development programs. Understanding the budgetary implications and other commitments required by national programs, many experts recommend a focus on more localized state and regional leadership development programming. These programs can often offer the same level of training and high-level networking, yet the localization and decreased cost allow an institution to increase the number that participate (Hull & Keim, 2007).

Identifying the common national framework as a critical component, the state-based model is seen as important to meet the localized needs. Part of the longstanding American Council on Education (ACE), the Office of Women in Higher Education (OWHE) was established in the early 1970. The OWHE focused on efforts in establishing state networks to promote the development of women in higher education leadership. Withstanding the test of time, an analysis of this model highlights an important consideration in the formation and execution of leadership development programming, one-size does not fit all (Baltodano et al., 2012). Programming content and structure benefit from the broader understanding of leadership development and research, but it is important to consider variances based on the needs of a specific population (Baltodano et al., 2012; McNair et al., 2011). A study of the OWHE training efforts highlighted three key implications administrators need to consider related to professional development programming, including the need for women to receive information related to advancement, encouragement, and mentorship. Additionally, these efforts echoed other

literature that supported female-focused professional development programming (Baltodano et al., 2012; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Dunn et al., 2014; Gill & Jones, 2013; Madsen & White, 2012; Seymour & Wairepo, 2013).

Internal leadership development programs. Internal leadership development programs are often promoted, as they support the concept of homegrown leaders and have a lower cost per participant, eliminating travel and registration. The variety and specificity of on-campus or internal leadership programs, along with the relative newness of this movement at community colleges, have led to a limited amount of comprehensive research. This concept is supported by AACC and was part of the stimulus for the development of the Core Competencies for Community College Leaders. The popularity of using internal leadership development programs extends well beyond higher education, as the Harvard Business Review (2016) found that these programs were effective in creating strong internal pools of talent across a variety of industries.

An internal study of the women's leadership development initiative at West Virginia University demonstrated positive short-term impacts on the participant's ability to think strategically, influence peers, and understand advocating for themselves (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014). In a study seeking to understand the needs of leaders at Utah Valley University and how to contribute to the advancement of women in leadership, researchers Seymour and Wairepo, (2013) found that respondents expressed a strong desire for leadership development programming. Although not studied, the discussion and recommendations were based on the perceived connection between the need to help prepare women for leadership positions and the capacity for leadership development programs to fill this void.

Conceptual Framework

When applied together, leadership development theory, coupled with the AACC Core Competencies for Community College Leaders, can play a significant role in guiding an individual employee's sense of belonging. The influence this structure has on an individual within an organization, particularly emerging female leaders, can stimulate an increased number of qualified candidates entering the leadership pipeline and promote employee retention.

Leadership development. Conceptually, leadership development and leadership development programming have been identified as a highly effective strategy for organizations in both the public and private sector (Baltodano et al., 2012; Harvard Business, 2016; Hotho & Dowling, 2010; Nica, 2013). While the content of and strategies used within leadership development programs can vary considerably, there is clear support for the belief that leaders need to be developed and the process of doing so should include intentionality and focus.

Individual consideration, a leadership theory, is directly tied to the basis of this research, pinpointing different ways that professionals gain and contribute to motivation, guidance, and influence (Marion & Gonzales, 2016). This theory also connects to how people engage in professional development and will influence, motivate, and support individuals differently based on their personality, gender, place in life, personal experiences, and enthusiasm.

AACC core competencies for community college leaders. In an attempt to neutralize the vast and varied landscape that is professional development for the field of community colleges, the AACC framework focuses on the skills and knowledge necessary in this specific niche of higher education. Placed into leadership development programming, this competency framework supports current and emerging leaders in their career advancement efforts. This framework provides a basis for professional development programs and the areas that emerging

leaders need to become proficient in as they seek advancement (Hassan, 2008). The need to structure these competencies within a strong leadership development program is emphasized by Eddy and Garza Mitchell (2017) who stated, “While the AACC competencies provide a baseline for learning about the duties of leadership in a community college that are easily taught in leadership programs, they do not adequately address the concepts of what it means to be a leader or what it means to lead a community college” (p. 130).

Maslow’s sense of belonging. Combining focused leadership development with AACC Core Competencies has a strong likelihood of improving an employee’s sense of belonging, the third level of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. This theory contends that “humans have five types of needs: physical needs, safety needs, love/belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs” (Marion & Gonzales, 2016, p. 36). Professional development can be a significant motivator for employees and directly supports the fulfillment of several of the needs identified by Maslow (Jerome, 2013, p. 42). While leadership development is often associated with supporting the final two levels of Maslow’s pyramid, esteem and self-actualization, this conceptual framework strongly supports that it is the third level, sense of belonging or love, that is impacted the most. Creating leadership development programming that intentionally seeks to create a sense of belonging assists individuals as they progress through the subsequent levels of esteem and self-actualization.

The sense of belonging theory has often been applied to students, particularly those in higher education, as a way to increase outcomes such as course success, persistence, and completion. Focused on students, one author noted that *sense of belonging* has many meanings including “belongingness, relatedness, membership, community, acceptance, support, and affiliation” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 8). Regardless of the term used, Strayhorn (2012) contends,

“they all deal with students’ physiological experience and, importantly, their subjective evaluation of the level of integration in a particular context” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 8). This analysis of belonging crosses over to leadership development programming as a way to help understand how these developed connections impact the career pathways of individuals that have traditionally been disenfranchised or underrepresented. Applying this theoretical framework in this instance also increased the understanding as to how internal leadership development programming can fortify an individual’s career, while supporting their career progression to higher levels of leadership.

Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) research on the sense of belonging theory demonstrates how the need to belong is an element that guides a considerable amount of human behavior (p. 498). One of the fundamental elements of this theory is the development of relationships, which these authors note can be a challenge for individuals as the “formation of new relationships takes time, such as in the gradual accumulation of intimacy and shared experience” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 500). Professional relationships are often time- or task-specific, created on a basis of a shared experience such as project or deadline. The external influences that shape these experiences often limit the development of genuine intimate connections between employees, thus creating a short-term or fleeting sense of belonging. Leadership development programming has the capacity to act as the conduit to create these connections outside the confines of a given task or specific set of outcomes.

Pipeline development and employee retention. As the sense of belonging is created, individuals begin to grow as professionals, increasing their sense of self, as well as their connection to and loyalty towards the organization (Miller, Erickson, & Yust, 2001). It is important to note that the benefit of leadership development programming is multifaceted, with

the individual participant achieving valuable professional growth that will likely lead to career advancement. At the same time, the organization itself benefits from the employee's enhanced skillset, connection to the college, and preparation for future opportunities. Although employees leave colleges for a variety of reasons, building an individual's sense of connection and belonging through leadership development is likely to increase employee retention and fill the leadership pipeline with more skilled, trained, and committed leaders.

Converging Concepts

As depicted in Figure 1 below, the framework discussed in this section involves several interrelated elements. Understanding that each individual is unique and requires different support as they enter the leadership pipeline, these broader theories and concepts allow for the development of larger scale strategies, such as leadership development programming, to be considered as a way to increase the representation of women in senior level position in higher education.

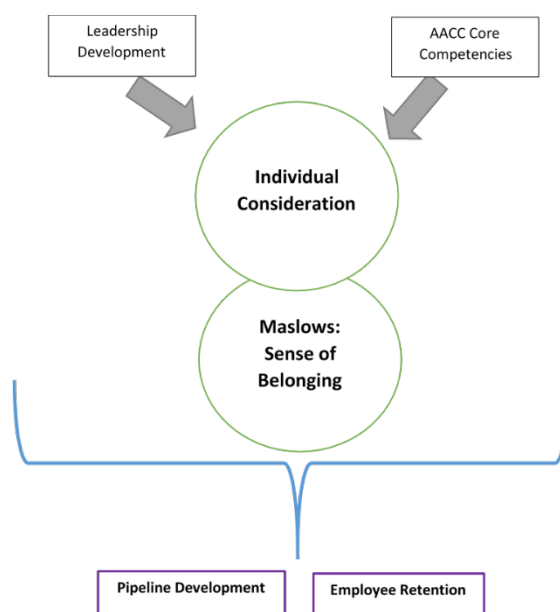


Figure 1. Leadership Development: A framework for increasing the professional pipeline and improving employee retention

While each component of this framework is significant on its own, it is important to recognize how each piece connected to the others and how together they supported this study. Reinforced by literature, the various components described in this section and depicted in Figure 1 demonstrate how the use of leadership development programming, utilizing the AACCC Core Competencies should be considered as a strong and valid strategy for increasing the representation of women in higher education leadership. This framework was reinforced by individual consideration theory, which reminds the researcher that there are many personal elements and organizational factors to be contemplated, although ultimately the need for this programming remains the same (Marion & Gonzales, 2016). Further, many aspects noted by experts are embedded in leadership development programming, such as mentoring and networking, and can lead to an increased sense of belonging to an organization (Hassan et al., 2009; Madsen & White, 2012). Exploring how females are impacted by leadership development programming, inclusive of these elements, provided considerable insight into how organizations can incorporate supports and programs that will not only help in retaining their employees, but begin to fill the leadership pipeline with a diverse, motivated, and qualified group of emerging leaders.

Conclusion

Evident throughout the literature were three key elements that underscore the role of leadership development programming in promoting women in higher education leadership, including: (a) the significant increase of presidential and executive level vacancies in the coming decade (ACE, 2017b; Baltodano et al., 2012; Cejda & Jolley, 2013; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Dunn et al., 2014; Eddy, 2008; The White House Project, 2009); (b) only recent representation of women in these positions (ACE, 2017; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Eddy, 2008); and (c) the call

for leadership diversity to support organizational culture (ACE, 2018; Nica, 2013). Coupling these findings with the impact leadership development programming has had on professionals, more specifically women, informs this key strategy that directly addresses the governance needs of postsecondary institutions (AACC, 2013; Hassan et al., 2009; McNair et al., 2011). Although limited, the negative findings identified in the literature are related to the potential cost of professional development but are countered by numerous suggestions in support of internal or localized programming (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Harvard Business, 2016). Overall, the research demonstrated that there is a valid return on an institution's investment of offering programming that helps fill the leadership pipeline with well-qualified and highly motivated females (Seymour & Wairepo, 2013; Shenkman & Gorbaty, 2007).

While decidedly beneficial, it is key to consider that when exploring, developing, and implementing programming that supports the growth of female leaders, as researchers agree one-size does not fit all (Baltodano et al., 2012; Kotter, 1996; McNair et al., 2011; Smith & Hughey, 2006). Potential program designs are subjective and are based on the needs of the individual and organization, as well as the desired outcomes. That being said, AACC created a framework for emerging community college leaders that is well-supported by experts in this field and related research (AACC, 2013; Cejda & Jolley 2013; Hassan et al., 2009). The culmination of this review suggests the need to further understand the direct impact that leadership development programming, using the AACC framework, has had on participants, particularly females, as they seek to enter or move up the leadership pipeline within a community college.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

With the anticipated rise in the number of college presidents and executives retiring in the next decade and the challenges faced by post-secondary institutions, there is an increased need for more qualified candidates to enter the leadership pipeline to fill these vacancies (ACE, 2018; Smith, 2018). Playing a key role in educating tomorrow's workforce and shaping the minds of young adults, it is important that community colleges examine and promote the representation of women in a variety of leadership roles to ensure diversity amongst those leading these institutions (ACE, 2017c; ACE, 2018b; The White House Project, 2009). Many colleges are turning to internal leadership development programs as a way of increasing the skills and knowledge of emerging leaders, a proactive approach to filling the pipeline leading to senior-level roles (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Hull & Keim, 2007).

State College (SC) chose to implement a personnel advancement strategy by launching an internal leadership development program, Leadership State College (LSC). After five iterations, this program has supported SC's efforts toward developing future leaders, particularly those underrepresented in leadership roles. However, there had been a lack of understanding related to what it is about the program that was the most impactful for participants, particularly female alumnae. To this end, this phenomenological study was designed to explore the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of female employees who participated in the LSC program?
2. How do the LSC alumnae perceive program impact on their sense of belonging to a community and/or group?

Research Design

Targeting females who have shared a particular experience, LSC, the researcher conducted a qualitative study to explore the commonalities amongst this group of participants. “Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). This approach allowed for a level of subjectivity, which comes from providing individuals the opportunity to freely describe their personal experiences from their own perspective (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005).

Analyzing the varying types of qualitative designs, it became evident that a phenomenological study was the most appropriate to achieve the purpose of this study, as it supported the researcher’s desire to investigate and understand the program from the perspective of the female alumnae and identify the parallels amongst their shared experience. The chosen structure for this study was a descriptive design “intended to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of a given phenomenon or the relationships between events and phenomena” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). This approach is designed to capture the perspectives of multiple individuals, identifies commonalities, and reflects on essential themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). “A researcher applying phenomenology is concerned with the lived experiences of the people” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 44). In this study, data was collected from female alumnae of LSC to document and interpret their shared experience. The use of this process is further supported by Creswell & Poth (2018) who stated that “the inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals” (p. 158).

Within this genus of research, the researcher utilized Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which accounts for the subjectivity that comes with reflective analysis of an individual's experience (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). The use of this method allowed the researcher to extract information related to the research questions based on the individual's lived experiences. This design aided the researcher in understanding how the LSC program met the individual needs of each participant, with specific emphasis on the elements of the conceptual framework – individualized consideration and sense of belonging within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Both of these concepts center on the individual and therefore should be explored through a process that seeks to understand each person's experience, while finding commonalities across these experiences.

Setting

The setting of this study was a large 2-year state institution, classified as a community college. Established as a junior college, State College (SC) was the first of its kind in the state seeking to provide post-secondary education to residents who could not afford to travel long distances out of the area or the cost of a university. After almost 90 years, SC had grown to be a comprehensive state college with eight campuses and 37,000 students. As an open-access community college, SC enrolled a diverse population in both race/ethnicity as well as age and economic status. Female students represented the majority gender at 60.4%. Meeting the needs of these students were over 2,895 staff, 52% of whom were classified as faculty.

An employee of SC, the researcher worked in the administrative offices of the College, which were situated in the central part of the county. While some of the research participants were located at the same site, others were located at different campuses, within a 15-20-minute drive of the researcher's office. To reduce interruptions and offer a quiet space where

participants could feel free to express their thoughts and feelings, the face-to-face interviews took place in a private office or conference room. Though not ideal, it was necessary to conduct two of the interviews over the phone with LSC alumnae who were no longer working at the institution, as face-to-face meetings were not possible.

Participant Sample

To attain access to current and former employees, the researcher secured the support of SC's president, as well as the Vice President of Business Services who oversaw the LSC program. Using this support, the LSC administrator provided the researcher with a comprehensive list of all former participants. The College's employee directory was used to contact current employees that were LSC alumnae, while social media sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, were used to contact those that were no longer working at SC. The researcher gained written approval to proceed from the research review committee at SC, in order to ensure all communications to the participant group were aligned with the College's policies and procedures.

Using a phenomenological design, the purpose of this study was to understand the shared experiences of those that participated in the LSC program. After its 5th cycle, LSC had a total of 96 participants, all of whom successfully completed and graduated from the program. Of the 96 participants, 62.5% (60) were female. For the purpose of this study, the researcher sought to interview 8-15 alumnae. This sample size followed the recommendation of Groenwald (2004) of between 2 and 10 participants for phenomenological research. Focusing this study on female alumnae was grounded in the literature review, which demonstrated the need to understand and promote strategies that support women along their career pathway. An email invitation to

participate (Appendix A) was sent to all female alumnae of LSC explaining the study and its voluntary nature, and requested a response if they were willing to participate.

To document the shared experiences of the participants, the researcher used semi-structured interviews (Appendix C). Researchers should first determine the selection criteria for interview participants, which in this instance was that the individual had indicated that they were willing to be interviewed, via their response to the initial email communication (Merriam, 2009). The criteria for the interview participants directly tied to the purpose of the study, which was to understand the experience of a specific gender, female, who had successfully completed an internal leadership development program (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). The responses received were separated into those currently working at SC and those no longer working at SC.

From the pool of those who volunteered to be interviewed, the researcher used purposeful sampling to ultimately select those to be interviewed. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 96). Seeking to incorporate interviews with those who were no longer employed at SC supported maximum variation, by including a variety of characteristics related to those who were a part of the study (Merriam, 2009). The researcher sought to conduct half of the interviews from each group, employees at SC and those no longer employed at SC, to offer a stronger sample size of the subgrouping (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The 4-6 interviews with employees no longer working at SC was attempted to the greatest extent possible but was limited to 3 due to the smaller pool of individuals in this category who offered to participate.

After the non-SC employed alumnae were separated, the remaining respondents were assigned a number and randomly selected. Those chosen were contacted via email to confirm their willingness to participate and identify the best time(s) for the interview, utilizing the researcher's provided schedule. Interviews were conducted face-to-face to the extent possible, with phone interviews offered for those no longer working at SC.

Participant Rights

To ensure that participant rights were upheld, participation in this study was entirely voluntary with the opportunity for an individual to opt-out at any time. While those contacted to be interviewed were those who responded to the initial communication indicating that they were willing to participate, they were still offered the opportunity to alter their decision at any time. In addition to choosing whether to participate, individuals were allowed to refuse to answer any questions or end their participation at any time. Participant rights were expressed in the invitation to participate through the informed consent information, as well as verbally communicated before the start of the interview and their understanding was documented through the signed consent form.

The identity of each participant and their corresponding responses and insights were kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of each participant and identifying information that could lead to them being named was extracted, such as their current place of employment, job title, or length of time at the College. Confidential information was kept securely on the researcher's password-protected computer with additional back-up systems, such as a thumb drive, also password protected.

Prior to the interviews, the participants were provided the purpose of the study, their rights, and possible implications of their participation, in writing. In addition to signing the

consent form (Appendix B), at the beginning of each interview, the participant's understanding of their rights and consent was captured verbally, as the recording began (Marion, 2009). This information was presented using clear and concise statements, with limited jargon, to ensure comprehension by all parties involved. Upon completion of each interview a debriefing took place. This step allowed the participant to "make comments or ask questions, and to ensure that no harm has occurred" (Merriam, 2009, p. 188). This approach, coupled with the use of member checking, further validated the data and ensured that the participant's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs were accurate and confirmed by the participant (Merriam, 2009).

Data

Semi-Structured Interviews

To get a deep and descriptive portrayal of the experience of female LSC participants the researcher used semi-structured interviews (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016) (Appendix C). Citing multiple sources, Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) validate this method stating "that a major benefit of collecting data through individual, in-depth interviews is that they offer the potential to capture a person's perspective of an event or experience" (p. 154-155). This method provided a level of uniformity to the interviews, allowing the researcher to identify commonalities across the responses, as well as the opportunity to dig deeper into particular responses, when the researcher felt it was beneficial. To validate the tool, the researcher piloted the interview questions with two former LSC participants not participating in the study, in order to review the interview protocol and identify possible leading, biased or confusing questions (Merriam, 2009). In addition to their connection to the LSC program, the individuals reviewing the tool also had expertise in evaluation and assessment. These two individuals were not a part of the candidate pool, one because of his gender and the other due to her role in the study as the Affiliate

committee member. The researcher made changes to the protocol based on the feedback received.

The researcher conducted all of the interviews. As an LSC alumna herself, the researcher utilized the bracketing process and engaged in reflective journaling prior to conducting each interview, to document, expose, and recognize any potential bias. Developed by philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), this concept is applied to phenomenological studies, “in which investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158). Throughout the interviewing process, the researcher intentionally and aggressively sought to extract all personal feelings, so that the questions presented, and dialog between the interviewer and interviewee, was solely focused on the participant’s experience and not influenced by the experience of the researcher (Bailey, 1996, p. 72). Citing Creswell (2013), Bloomberg & Volpe (2016) further supported this point by suggesting the researcher actively and openly address personal connections to the study and analysis, as a way to promote the rigor and quality of the research (p. 49).

Referencing Moustakas (1994), Creswell & Poth (2018) summarized the elements of the researcher’s chosen structure as, “identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one’s experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 159). The researcher followed this method by using an analysis process that identified common themes, ultimately determining the core aspects of the shared experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Groenewald, 2004).

At the start of each interview, the interviewee was told that the interview was going to be recorded and after completion transcribed by a professional transcription service. Additionally,

the interviewer reviewed the participant's rights, obtained their consent verbally and in writing, and the individual was given an opportunity to ask questions. The researcher used the VoiceRecorder app to record each of the interviews and upload them to a password protected dropbox. Once the recording began, the researcher confirmed that all participant rights had been reviewed and asked the participant to express their consent and that they were aware the interview was being recorded. Rev.com, a professional service, was used to transcribe each of the interviews. To ensure the validity of the process, member checking was also incorporated, by requesting that each interviewee reviewed the transcript of her interview and communicate any changes or clarifications she felt were necessary (Merriam, 2009). In instances where changes were requested, notations were made on the transcripts. In total, 10 interviews were conducted, each lasting an average of 30-40 minutes. All but two interviews took place in-person. The interview protocol and structured questions used for each interview can be found in Appendix C.

Artifacts

Prior to each interview, the participant was contacted and asked to identify and bring with them an item that had some significance or meaning to them, in relation to their experience in the LSC program. In this instance, the artifacts helped the researcher to further understand the experience of the participant through a physical representation of their lived experience, while also supplementing the other data elements. These artifacts were discussed during the interview process and used as a way to gain additional insights and validate the data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All of the artifacts identified were unable to be collected by the researcher, therefore pictures were taken to catalog the items and detailed descriptions were written in the researcher's interview notes.

Analysis

Within the genre of phenomenological research, the researcher implemented Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which “is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experiences” (Smith & Eatough, 2012, p. 193). This approach was important to the analysis process, as with IPA the researcher “aims to grasp the texture and qualities of an experience as it is lived by an experiencing subject” (Smith & Eatough, 2012, p. 194). Further, this approach supported the analysis of and reflection on specific life events that each individual engaged in, but may not have processed (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Support for the data analysis process began during the collection phase with a focus on organization and note-taking infused along the way. This intentionality helped ensure the information was easy to find as the research progressed (Merriam, 2016). The first step in this process was for the researcher to take a full inventory of all relevant data points, including literature, interview recordings and transcripts, artifacts, reflective journal entries, and notes. The cataloging of these items supported each subsequent step, with a paper and electronic versions kept of each item (Merriam, 2016). All documents were kept in a locked document box in the researcher’s home office.

After the transcripts were approved by the alumna, the researcher read each data source line-by-line, multiple times, meticulously reviewing, and began manually coding. As suggested by Saldana (2009), manual coding provides researchers more “control over and ownership of the work” (p. 22). The researcher employed an open coding process using the research questions as a guide. Following Saldana’s (2009) process of two-cycle coding, the initial cycle was focused on breaking down the information, while the second was a more thorough analysis.

Recommended by Saldana (2009), the researcher utilized the ‘generic’ coding approach listed below (p. 48).

Table 1	
<i>Coding Methods</i>	
<u>First Cycle</u>	<u>Second Cycle</u>
Attribute Coding	Pattern Coding/Focused Coding
Structural Coding	
Descriptive Coding	
In Vivo Coding	

From this process, the researcher was able to identify common themes, topics, and insights presented in the data. Data were broken down into smaller units and labeled based on commonalities across participant experiences and in relation to the research questions. This process is supported by Merriam (2016) who noted “as you collect your data it is important to code it according to whatever scheme is relevant to your study, and according to the theoretical framework that informs the study” (p. 200). The researcher’s reflective journal entries were also considered, as it is not only part of the bracketing process, but also reminded the researcher of various thoughts, feelings, and hunches that arose during the data collection process (Merriam, 2016).

Once the coding was complete, the researcher began to group together common patterns and themes that were shared by participants. This process involved narrowing down the information into units of data relevant to the research questions and conceptual framework. The interview questions targeted themes within the conceptual framework, including aspects of individualized consideration and sense of belonging theory. The questions were intended to extract from the respondents how, through their leadership development experience, they may or

may not have been impacted, as it related to self-actualization, self-fulfillment, sense of belonging, and self-worth. “Making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 2016, p. 202). The process of identifying units of data followed the guidance from Lincoln and Guba (1985), who suggested each unit should be: 1) related to the study and entice the reader’s thought process beyond the specific piece of information; and 2) narrowed down as much as possible, while still being able to be understood on its own.

To support the validity of the data analysis process, the researcher employed triangulation. “Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals ...types of data..., or methods of data collection...in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (Creswell, 2015, p. 259). By drawing on multiple data sources, the researcher was able to ensure integrity of the data gathered and conclusions drawn. For this study the main data sources included the transcribed interviews, collected artifacts, and the researcher’s field notes and reflective journals.

Potential Limitations of Study

Though a widely-used strategy, leadership development programs vary significantly by organization, and therefore it could be difficult to translate how the experiences and phenomena related to LSC would apply to another organization (Baltodano et al., 2012; Harvard Business, 2016). The LSC curriculum was based on the AACCC Core Competencies for Community College Leaders, which were infused into the program, and contained other related aspects unique to LSC. Though categorically, SC was connected to other institutions as a community college, all colleges are distinctive, based on their size, community served, programs offered, and so forth.

Additionally, the size of the study was limited to the number of participants available to be interviewed. At the time of the study, there were 96 graduates of the LSC program, 60 who were female, and 50 of these female alumnae were still working at SC. While these numbers give a reasonable sample size, this pool did pose a limitation on the study.

The researcher's employment at SC, participation in LSC, and relationship to many engaged in the study was considered when processing the study results. The choice of the phenomenological study was purposeful in order to mitigate the influence of these variables, as the design allowed the interviewees to describe their experience from their perspective and the researcher to seek a deeper understanding of that personal experience, rather than explaining it (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). As a colleague of the study participants, the researcher applied *epoche*, also known as bracketing, throughout the process, presenting awareness of potential predispositions and setting personal experiences aside in order to preserve the reliability of the study. The awareness and transparency related to the researcher's connection to this study infused awareness throughout the course of the research (Giorgi, 2012).

Using a phenomenological study provided a point in time for the expression of a person's experience, but it should be noted that this interpretation could change over time. An individual may reflect differently on their participation in LSC immediately after their experience versus several years out. Also, how they related their time in LSC to their career pathway experience could also change based on other circumstances, such as a promotion within the institution, leaving SC, a change in responsibilities, or other factors.

Conclusion

Exploring the lived experiences of those that had participated in leadership development programming, with a focus on females, informed leadership how particular activities can impact

attainment of the gender diversity goals at the leadership level in higher education. Conducting a phenomenological study with alumnae of the LSC program allowed for the gathering and processing of information related to these lived experiences. The coding and analysis of semi-structured interviews, coupled with the collection of artifacts and reflective journaling, provided data tying program participation and its implications to the conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of females who have participated in State College's (SC) leadership program, Leadership State College (LSC). As the program concluded its 5th cohort and with close to 100 employees having participated, 60 of whom are female, it is important to understand the lived experiences of alumnae and the impact the program has had on them. The collection and analysis of this data will benefit individuals and organizations alike that seek to support the professional development of employees. As women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions across key industries, including higher education, this research was specific to the experiences of female participants. This study sought to identify what elements of the LSC program most significantly impacted the alumnae, on both a personal and professional level, and identified the commonalities across their experiences. This chapter will detail the study participants, data collected and analysis methods, and information gathered. Guiding this process were the study research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of female employees who participated in the LSC program?
2. How do the LSC alumnae perceive program impact on their sense of belonging to a community and/or group?

To address these questions, the researcher conducted ten semi-structured recorded interviews with LSC alumnae. The alumnae were randomly chosen from those participants who responded to an email inquiry and agreed to an interview. After completing the interview, each recording was professionally transcribed and coded to identify common themes across participant experiences, as detailed further in this chapter. Supporting the data validation

process and to collect additional qualitative data elements, the participants were also asked to identify an artifact that they felt represented their experience in the LSC program.

Study Demographics

The study recruitment email was sent to 54 former female participants, based on the available email addresses. The researcher received 21 responses, 19 indicating they were willing to be interviewed. Of the respondents that were willing to be interviewed, 14 were randomly selected and 10 interviews were conducted. Of the four selected but not interviewed, two were not conducted due to scheduling conflicts and two potential participants did not respond to follow-up communications until after the research had concluded. As indicated in Table 2, three of the ten interview participants were individuals who no longer worked at the College, while the other seven were still employed at SC. Those that were interviewed represented a cross-section of the overall alumnae population with three faculty, three student services staff, and four individuals in administrative positions. Two of the three faculty were also considered partly administrative, holding a department chair position or similar position. The range of time that these individuals had been employed at the College was between 2 and 30 years, with the majority having been at the college between 5-9 years. The age range of participants also varied with five between 31-40, one between 41-50, and four of the women 51 or older. Two of the ten participants held terminal degrees, two of the six women with Master's degrees were in doctoral programs, and two of the alumnae held Bachelor's degrees. Of those interviewed, three noted that they were accepted into the program the second time they applied for LSC.

While most of the alumnae noted that they had taken on additional leadership roles (i.e. joined committees or led a special project) subsequent to their time in the program, four of those interviewed were employed in different positions than they had held while in the program. Three

of these four women had taken these promotions at other organizations. Several participants noted that their participation on internal committees was something they viewed as a work-related recognition that they had received after completing the program, as these roles were selective in nature.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant Code	Length of time @ SC	Currently Employed at SC	Length of Time Since leaving SC	Age Range	Highest Degree	Classification	Accepted first time applying LSC
1	over 20 years	yes	N/A	51 or older	Masters	Administration	yes
2	15-20 years	no	2 years	51 or older	B.A.	Student Services	yes
3	5-9 years	yes	N/A	31-40	Ph.D	Faculty	yes
4	5-9 years	no	6 months	41-50	Masters	Administration	yes
5	1-4 years	no	1 year	31-40	B.A.	Administration	yes
6	over 20 years	yes	N/A	51 or older	Masters	Administration	no
7	5-9 years	yes	N/A	31-40	Masters	Admin./Faculty	yes
8	15-20 years	yes	N/A	51 or older	Masters	Student Services	no
9	5-9 years	yes	N/A	31-40	Masters	Student Services	yes
10	5-9 years	yes	N/A	31-40	Ph.D	Admin./Faculty	no

The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in the participant's or researcher's office, with two taking place over the phone, as requested by the participant. The interviews lasted an average of 30-40 minutes. All participants consented to being recorded and were provided the professionally transcribed document afterward to modify, as they felt necessary, and approve. All but one participant identified an artifact and provided it at the time of the interview, the other alumna expressed confusion related to the artifact and therefore did not identify an item. Two of the alumnae felt they could not identify just one artifact and therefore chose two. The alumnae artifacts were used to validate the information being provided during the interviews, as detailed further below.

Analysis Method

The data collected and analyzed included interview recordings, interview transcripts, artifacts, notes taken by the researcher during the interviews, and the researcher's journal entries from before and after the interviews. The researcher's notes, taken during the interviews, highlighted participant responses and documented observations related to facial expressions and visual cues that were important to consider in relation to the responses. The use of multiple data sources was for the purpose of triangulation, adding credibility and a level of validation to the research findings.

To analyze the collected data, the researcher hand-coded the transcripts using a two-phase method, as identified by Saldana (2009). The first phase included descriptive coding of the artifacts identified by participants, followed by initial coding of the interview transcripts and the researcher's reflective journal and notes. This phase focused on "breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences" (Saldana, 2009, p. 81). Once these data elements were coded, the researcher then moved to the second phase using pattern coding to identify common themes.

After asking the initial set of questions related to participant demographics, as detailed in the above section, the interview questions collected data related to the alumna's time in the program. While a few participants expressed being self-motivated to apply for LSC, most indicated that they were encouraged by a supervisor or colleague to apply. The role of this influence was universal for those that were not accepted the first time they applied, all indicating they would not have reapplied had it not been for outside influence. Once accepted into the program, the majority of alumnae vacillated between feelings of excitement and nervousness, while also unanimously seeing their selection as a considerable honor. Participants' expectations

when entering the program varied considerably, with a few indicating they had no expectations and several indicating that they thought it would be traditional professional development training. In general, across all demographic categories, the participants based their expectations on what they had heard from previous participants, so they felt they entered the program with realistic expectations. Regardless of where participants fell with their expectations, there was an overwhelming sense of their anticipations being met or exceeded, with all expressing that the program was a highly beneficial experience. Those that had been at the institution the longest were most vocal about the program exceeding their expectations and were surprised about how much the experience impacted them.

The third set of interview questions were post-program reflection questions, specifically looking at what aspects of the program each alumna felt impacted her the most, both professionally and personally. In varying degrees, each alumna indicated that the program did impact them in some way, with most indicating that it positively affected them both personally and professionally. Of the few that experienced the least impact, each still noted that the program did change how they interacted with people, increased their appreciation for what others did, and helped them to better understand the inner workings of the institution. Inclusive of these expressions, the majority of those interviewed felt the program experience had had a considerable, and in many ways profound, impact on them both personally and professionally. The data showed that the majority of alumnae saw a considerable boost in their self-perception, voicing increased confidence and courage. The aspects of the program that were associated with these changes were primarily their interactions with a diverse group of colleagues, the time spent with executive leadership at the institution, and the program trip to the State capital.

All alumnae interviewed noted that their time in the program provided them an expanded network of individuals across the institutions that they continue to connect with professionally and/or personally. This sentiment was further reinforced with the participants' artifacts. During this part of the interview, the participants were asked to identify an item (artifact) they felt was a physical representation of their time in the program. The items provided support for the information being expressed by each participant in a tangible and in-depth manner. Over half of the participants identified an item that connected back to their LSC classmates, either a class picture or the brochure created during the team project. Although the remaining items varied, three participants selected artifacts that represented their personal growth and discussed how the program supported this process.

From the analysis process, the participant experience was broken down into three major themes: 1) Feelings of empowerment; 2) Increased motivation; and 3) A newfound and increased sense of connection. These themes, along with the related keywords and sub-themes, are detailed in Table 3. It was anticipated by the researcher that participants would reflect on how they felt getting into the program, their connections to their cohort, and how the program impacted them, as there were specific questions that related to these aspects of their time in the program, such as: What led you to apply for the LSC program? How did it feel to be selected? Explain how your experience in LSC impacted your sense of connection or community. How did the experience impact you personally/professionally? Themes related to the participant's increased connection to the College/executive leadership (sub-theme) and desiring more after the program ended, were not topics explicitly solicited from the interview questions, but were identified as a pattern throughout the interviews. The themes related to each aspect of the participant experience are detailed below.

Table 3: Coding Results			
Connection to Research Questions	Key Words	Theme	Sub-theme
Q1: Lived Experience of the Program	-honored -valued -flattered -excited -nervous	Feelings of Empowerment	Being selected
	-increased confidence -increased courage -felt more prepared for 'next steps' -started seeking other opportunities and looking at future		Participation
Q1: Lived Experience of the Program Ending	-desire to stay connected -feeling 'let down' -no outlet for motivation -recommended program to other -alumni programming -want to do more	Increased Motivation	Desire for Continued Professional Development and Networking
			Motivation for Career Advancement
Q2: Sense of Belonging/ Community	-sense of community -deep bonds -friendship -accountability partners -value of relationships -diverse group of professional -sense of community -gained appreciation for what others do -developed a network	Newfound and Increased Sense of Connection	Connections to Colleagues
	-understanding the decision making process -saw executive leaders as 'human' -understanding the impact of state government on the institution -developed understanding of how different departments impact each other		Connections to Executive Leadership/ College

Presentation of Results

Connected to the first research question: *What are the lived experiences of female employees who participated in the LSC program?*, the initial theme that emerged was participants expressing feelings of empowerment based on their experience. Each respondent, either explicitly or implicitly, noted how some aspect of the program increased their sense of empowerment. The empowerment theme was broken into two sub-themes, as this theme primarily came from being selected for the program and/or their overall time in the program.

Feelings of Empowerment

Empowerment through selection for LSC. When asked about what led them to apply for the program, several participants emphasized the highly competitive nature of the program. There was a sense that they were making themselves vulnerable by applying because admission was not guaranteed.

It feels good because it's hard to put your name out there because you think about, there's people looking at names and they're talking about them. So, you know, obviously you feel like kind of validated when that happens (being chosen). Like somebody appreciates your work. (Participant 8)

This experience of vulnerability increased for the three participants not selected when they initially applied. All expressed their hesitation to apply a second time, noting that encouragement from other former participants and colleagues ultimately pushed them to reapply. One participant noted:

I actually had several different individuals encourage me to apply. I had applied the year previous, and did not get it, so I was not planning on applying again. But given my new

role ... and multiple people encouraging me to run or to apply that, I went ahead and decided to apply. (Participant 10)

The exclusivity of the program heightened the sense of empowerment participants expressed. When asked how they felt being selected for the program, the majority of participants articulated being proud that they were chosen by executive leadership and noted that they were chosen to be in a cohort with highly admired peers. The participant's age, job classification, or length of time at the institution did not have any bearing on this aspect of their experience. Because of the level of 'prestige' associated with the program a few alumnae also had feelings of excitement and nervousness.

I was excited to have been selected, and then as it got closer to the first night, I was terrified. I didn't know anyone. (Participant 3)

I was nervous because I didn't know what it would entail. (Participant 7)

There was also a prevalent expression of feeling honored to have been selected and that their inclusion in the program was a declaration of how the institution valued them. The researcher noted that each participant's body language adjusted when responding to the question of how they felt when accepted, showing a sense of pride and happiness and in several cases elation.

I was flattered. I was very flattered. (Participant 2)

Responses also demonstrated how the participants felt they were perceived and how their self-perception was impacted from the point that they were accepted into the program.

I was just thrilled, it made me feel like SC's leadership was investing in me. It was like a big pat on the back. I felt really honored to be selected...It just really made me feel like

the leadership there at the college saw the potential in me and was willing to invest in me.

(Participant 4)

I think the way that it was presented was that it was an honor to be selected and that you're involved with a group of people that are respected by and chosen specifically by leadership. It kind of helps with feeling like a valued employee. (Participant 9)

It is important to point out that one participant related an experience that countered these expressions of pride and honor, with her response of:

I was initially glad, but I had also heard that anybody gets into it (LSC), so I didn't feel super excited, just kind of in between...it didn't seem like a prestigious thing.

(Participant 5)

While unable to make a full correlation, a differentiating characteristic of this participant that should be considered is she is the only alumnae interviewed that had been at the College for less than 5 years.

Empowerment Gained through Participation. Throughout the interviews, participants talked about how being a part of the program changed how they saw themselves and their ability to contribute. This impact varied based on their self-perceptions when they entered the program but was evident regardless. Self-perception upon entering the program was not directly solicited during the interviews but deduced based on each participant bringing up indicators when responding to questions about how they were changed either professionally and/or personally. One major theme that emerged was how the program increased self-confidence and courage, with 8 of the participants using those specific words in their responses, related to how the program changed them, personally and/or professionally.

I think I see myself as a leader more since the program. Before then, I was always a hard worker. I was one of the team. I would speak up with my ideas, but not very confidently.

(Participant 2)

It gave me self-confidence. ... and helped me realize that I did have a really good grasp on how I could grow, and improve, and really hone some of the skills that I was developing or had already developed. (Participant 4)

Participant 8 emphasized this part of her experience when explaining her artifact, a framed quote:

(The quote) "Everything you want is just on the other side of fear." So as I said, I'm a little bit shy, so I find it hard to put myself out there sometimes... I felt stronger and then I had the courage to do more things... Just giving me the sense of confidence to really be all that I can be.

In several interviews, the participants connected this increased sense of empowerment to their choice to seek out other professional opportunities after the program ended. Participants felt their time in the program gave them the courage to explore or accept opportunities that they otherwise might not.

I am looking forward to different opportunities. I think I'm more confident in my abilities, and I'm not as hesitant to talk to people who've maybe been at the college a little bit longer than I have. (Participant 3)

I never really felt that kind of confidence... And I think the leadership program gave me confidence to go outside my comfort zone, and try things I hadn't done, and to just open my eyes to new opportunities. (Participant 2)

Additionally, several participants still employed at SC expressed seeking a different position at the College and feeling empowered to do so because of their LSC experience.

I think that was what gave me the bug to want to start preparing for that next level, for that next opportunity. Definitely, definitely that was a direct result of being a participant in the program. Sometimes you tend to get very stagnant in a role, and you just need that spark. The leadership program was that spark for me. It inspired me. It motivated me. It got me thinking about possibilities that I hadn't really thought of or just hadn't even humored in a really long time. (Participant 4)

An increased sense of empowerment was also articulated by participants who noted they felt more confident speaking up in meetings and expressing their opinion due to their participation in the program.

I'm a little bit more bold and willing to step out and share my ideas, whereas before perhaps I might have been a little bit timid and thought perhaps they weren't as valuable. I feel a little bit more confident about putting my ideas forward, even if they're not received necessarily, but I feel confident enough to do that, so I think that's probably something that's changed. (Participant 1)

Further articulating this point Participant 10 indicated:

Instead of just saying, "It is what it is, and I'm not going to say anything about it, I'm not going to do anything about it." I started having, I think, a little bit more backbone, to speak up about it with (executive leader) and then also, in other realms of leadership.

Motivation

Motivation for Career Advancement. Feeling the need to advance their career was something shared by most all of the participants. Some indicated that this desire was what had

driven them to apply for the program, while several noted that it was not until they were going through the program that they started to think beyond their current position. One of the three women who were furthest in their career and had been at SC the longest expressed that she was not seeking advancement at this point in her career, while the other two did indicate that they were motivated to look for other opportunities.

Several alumnae noted concern or sadness that other alumnae had since left the College and wondered if there was a connection between program participation and employees being motivated to seek advancement outside the College, because similar opportunities did not exist at SC.

How can leadership change in a way to make people really consider their next steps at the college because, you know, I noticed that people will go through the program and some people have left. It makes me wonder why and it makes me wonder whether or not they were able to envision their next steps here at SC. (Participant 7)

One thing that has been a little sad for me is that so many people it seems like have left the college after they went through Leadership. And again, just like me, maybe it built their confidence to the point where they thought "Hey, I'll go do something else." Not that that's a bad thing, I think that can be good. But losing people like (colleague/alumnae) was crushing. (Participant 5)

The common expression of the experience motivating participants to try something new was mentioned by two of the three participants who since left the College, recognizing that their engagement in the program, in part or in total, motivated them to explore what was next in their career.

I never really was looking for the next step on the ladder or things like that. So I didn't really look at leadership training or programs too much because I thought that was always to just prep you to get an advancement or something like that. But it really opened my eyes to just see that it was a learning experience, and it helped me explore what I did want to do next. (Participant 2)

Current SC employees echoed that the program left them reassessing where they might go professionally and attributed it to their time in the program. Expressed by several current SC employees, it is important to note that each of the three alumnae that were either solely or partially categorized as faculty shared this experience. The following interview excerpts are from two of these women:

I feel like I need to stop and reassess my five-year plan, and even 10-year plan, because I don't really know where I want it to go now. Had I not done (LSC), I probably would've said, "Oh, my five-year plan is to teach forever and ever." But now, I'm thinking more about where I might be able to help out the college and thinking more about what that will look like for me. (Participant 10)

I don't know that I ever saw myself doing anything beyond a faculty role... And I don't have a clear answer, but it's encouraged me to start thinking about what five or 10 years looks like, and what else I'm capable of besides what I do now. (Participant 3)

Desire for Continued Professional Development and Networking. The post-program experience was an unexpected theme that came up in several interviews, particularly when participants were asked if there was anything else they wanted to talk about or if they have additional comments. Participants, including those that were no longer at the institution,

expressed a desire to stay connected and/or have an outlet for the motivation they had gained in the program.

When the post-program topic arose, the researcher noted that the mood of the interview went from excitement, when speaking of their time in the program, to sadness or disenchantment. Speaking of her after-program experience Participant 2 stated:

At first it was actually kind of disappointing. It's like coming home from a vacation and then you have to go back to work. The people around me hadn't been through the leadership program. Some people on campus almost saw it as, "Well, where have you been? We've needed you here," type of thing. So it was... It was a little sad and then almost that feeling of, "well I learned so much and we came up with this great idea, what do I do with it?"

This sentiment was further echoed:

I feel like you do feel like you're left hanging at the end. It's like, okay, it's over, we've graduated, I have all this momentum, and then you just go back. (Participant 5)

It was so good, and we all came out so energized, and then there was nothing to do with that. (Participant 2)

Another emergent theme, as it related to the post-program experience, was a desire to remain connected to fellow participants and cultivate these relationships, which speaks to both research questions.

I would love to still have some venue to stay connected. I would still love to keep that connection going. I just think it was so valuable. Just because I've moved to a different institution doesn't mean that those relationships have to go away. (Participant 4)

While many participants were disappointed at the lack of transition as the program ended, it is important to note that this did not impact their support of the overall program.

Overwhelmingly, participants conveyed that they touted the program to other colleagues and encouraged others to apply. Related to this theme, participants mentioned how they often shared the program's value and felt it could be beneficial to others. This theme carried across both those that remained at the institution and those that had since left.

I encouraged several people on campus to apply because it gave them a chance to get outside of their normal routine, learn about all aspects of the college. (Participant 2)

Actually, I recommended that a colleague apply, so I remember telling him that it's a nice ... I think I stressed the importance of feeling valued and being able to get out and it makes you feel like you have a sense of purpose in your work a little bit and that your opinion is actually respected and that you have something of value to contribute, which can sometimes not happen on a day-to-day basis from where we're working right now.

(Participant 9)

The desire to stay connected and continue the LSC experience is a representation of the deep connections and sense of community that was developed during the program. These elements of the experience bleed into the third theme of a newfound and increased sense of connection and the second research question: How do the LSC alumnae perceive program impact on their sense of belonging to a community and/or group?

Newfound and Increased Sense of Connection

Experience in Connection to the College/Executive Leadership. Throughout the interviews, participants indicated that their time in the program linked them to aspects of the College that they had not otherwise been engaged in, such as college operations, the budget,

various departments outside of their own, and the political process. This theme was communicated by the alumnae that had only been at the College for a short amount of time (<5 years), as well as those that had been at SC for 15 or more years. Additionally, this theme was not specific to participants from a particular job classification (administration/faculty/student services). Part of this increased connection to the College was linked to their exposure to executive leaders in a setting different than they may have interacted with them before. Participants expressed that the experience changed their view of how the College was run, developing a greater appreciation for the decision-making process, what others do, as well as how it humanized top level leadership.

I think of it as a great way to get involved, and to gain knowledge, and to really understand how this giant organization works and your role in that. I think once you have that understanding, you have a greater appreciation for the job you do have, as well as it's very easy to judge and criticize other people. So once you have that perspective, you sort of can understand decision-making, even when it doesn't come out in your favor.

(Participant 3)

An aspect of the program that was brought up in the majority of the interviews was the trip to the State capital. Each year of the program, participants were taken to the State capital to observe the legislative process and meet with elected officials and representatives from various state agencies, such as the Department of Education. When asked about aspects of the LSC program that were particularly impactful to participants on a professional level or when detailing an element of the program they felt was of significant value, several respondents connected this trip to an increased awareness about how the College operated. When referring to the trip to the State capital, one person stated:

To understand why some of the decisions are made at the college level and the politics that are involved behind...it just gave me a better understanding, so when I do see things that I don't agree with, or I have conflict, instead of just reacting to it, it really makes me think, "Okay, what's involved in this decision?" And yeah, I think it just made me a little more thoughtful person as far as leading. (Participant 2)

That was my favorite part of Leadership. It was because even though I've been with the college a little while my thought process never really much extended ... I knew what went on there but not seeing it firsthand, it wasn't like I didn't think that it existed, but I really wasn't sure of the ins and outs or how that was truly going to impact my job. I think that's one of the things that was for me most valuable about Leadership SC. (Participant 7)

This trip was also noted by several participants as a time when they were able to connect with each other on a deeper level and expand their relationships, because they were taken out of their day-to-day environment and there was considerable time to socialize on the bus and during meals. Participant 10 described the bonding that happened on the trip in her response:

I think we had to open up as a group, and I think that gave us the opportunity to talk about ourselves, in ways that we might not normally in a day-to-day working atmosphere, going to (State capital), spending time, having a few cocktails at dinner, spending a lot of time together, being on the bus together, also, you have to make small talk. It just gave the opportunity for that. I think that we were able to develop friendships because of that.

Throughout their experience in the program, participants noted times when they had the opportunity to engage with senior and executive leaders at the College (Vice President/President). These events varied from the President joining the cohort during the trip to the State capital, to a Vice President speaking during one of the class sessions, to casually interacting with

the Vice President who oversees the program. Regardless of the type of engagement, participants voiced that they were grateful to get to know these individuals in a less structured setting and that they began to see executive leadership as more approachable.

(Vice President) was our speaker and she talked from the heart about leadership and driving student success, and just hearing her story ... how she just broke leadership down into what seemed like very natural pieces...hearing her personal story ...Just looking at how her career developed and progressed and having her share those personal details, it just really made her very human...It made me realize that at the end of the day, strong leaders are just humans... It just motivated me to realize, "You know what? My journey is not over. It's just starting". (Participant 4)

Giving people the opportunity to hear the President speak about her vision for the college and her concerns and to see her as the human being that she is was valuable to me and to everyone. (Participant 8)

Connection to Colleagues/Network Development. While expressed in varying degrees, from an increased network to close friendships, each participant talked at length about the connections they formed in the program with their fellow participants and how these relationships impacted them. Beyond their verbal responses, the researcher noted the participants were more animated when discussing new relationships, with many sharing specific stories about individuals they had connected to. Building relationships with fellow cohort members, who they would not normally have the opportunity to get to know, was a key theme articulated throughout the interviews.

Just to be able to work with people in different departments across different campuses because I do not get a lot of opportunity to be able to leave my immediate area.

(Participant 9)

That part was just nice because it was building relationships with people I normally would not have a chance to...that was very beneficial to me in the sense of getting out of my niche, interacting with people across the spectrum of the jobs in the college, that was very helpful. I learned a lot about what everybody else did and that, when you're siloed, is very helpful so that you can understand what people are going through. (Participant 5)

What it's done is enable me to feel comfortable networking with people in all sorts of, you know, different departments ...So I think for me it was just the comfort level of communicating freely with other leaders and feeling comfortable in that process. Because I'm a little shy. (Participant 8)

Participants also noted the value of this new or expanded network. Several participants indicated that it was beneficial to connect with people who had different perspectives. Further, there was a sense that the participants now had people they could seek guidance from and/or that could help them in their current position, that were outside their customary circle of influence.

...it's really nice to have people outside of my department, to sort of bounce ideas off with and vent a little bit. But also, some of the people I've become friends with have also been great mentors and can give me objective advice about my own career path, that I hadn't even necessarily thought of, or wouldn't know who to ask otherwise. (Participant 3)

I find that I now have additional resources. If I don't know something I feel like ... There was somebody in my leadership group who works somewhere so it's like I now know

who to call who is going to know the answer for something. Yeah, I think it just broadened my resources. (Participant 7)

I definitely I feel like I have more people that I can contact, like that I know can give me information or help me with things or that I can bounce ideas off of.... So I have more sounding boards whose focus is different than mine, who can give me a different perspective, who can talk to me about things outside what my narrow focus might be and give me things that either add to or help me better refine what I'm doing. (Participant 6)

The depth of these relationships was also articulated by multiple participants, referring to the sense of community they experienced and friendships that were created. Participants, both those still at SC and those that no longer work at the College, referred to friendships that were maintained post-program. This experience was consistent across all job classifications, age ranges, and tenure at the institution. Participants noted that these connections varied as far as intensity, but there was an overwhelming sense of assurance that they could call upon anyone in their class if necessary, at any time.

To be able to work so closely with some of these colleagues in that kind of setting, it really, really built that sense of community. It's a connection that I feel was really important, really valuable. (Participant 4)

I've maintained some of the relationships. Mostly I would say probably purely friendship, at this point in time, less professional-based, but still it's just nice to have people in different areas. (Participant 5)

Well definitely I made some friends there that I still have lunch with and talk to on a regular basis outside of work topics...it's harder to find new friends and people that you

connect to, and I felt like I connected in a deeper way with several people that I got to know during that process. (Participant 6)

The bonds and relationships that were established during their time in the program were affirmed by six of the participants' artifacts, which related back to their cohort or team members, such as pictures of the group. One participant explained why she chose the group photo:

I look back on it and I think about events that went on after the program was completed, and almost everybody in the photo I've worked with in some capacity, which I don't think I would have if I hadn't gone through (LSC)...it's really nice to know that I could reach out to any of these people and be perfectly comfortable to talk with them. And you know, vice versa. (Participant 2)

It's a group photo, so it really represents those connections that I made and the relationships that I built. A lot of these people have, either in big or small ways, helped me over the last year in a variety of capacities. (Participant 3)

Another participant referring to cohort picture noted:

Matter of fact, I was looking at it today, and I was remembering that cohort of 24 colleagues there at SC and how we had a moment in time, those six months that were so precious to not only learn and develop but get to know each other better and push each other. (Participant 4)

The development of connections and feeling a part of something were expressed to some degree by all of the 10 participants during their interviews. An increased sense of connection/community was a prominent part of the lived experience for those that participated in the LSC program.

Summary

This chapter summarized the lived experiences of the 10 LSC alumnae who were randomly selected from those who were open to participating in the research study. Although randomly selected, the group represented a diverse cross-section of the overall program alumnae based on age, length of time at the College, those no longer employed at the College, and type of position. Each individual participated in a semi-structured interview comprised of questions and prompts developed to extract information related to their lived experience in the program and their sense of how the program impacted them both personally and professionally, specifically looking at a sense of connection/community.

Conducting a phenomenological research study, the researcher applied a two-phase coding process to analyze the data elements including the transcripts, interview notes, the researcher's journal, and collected artifacts. From this examination, core themes began to emerge that were shared across many, and in some cases all, of the participants. Commonalities were evident during each phase of the program, including their experience leading up to and being accepted into the program, during the program, and after the program. As discussed in this chapter the key words and phrases extracted from the data were broken down into three major themes: 1) Feelings of empowerment; 2) Increased motivation; and 3) A newfound and increased sense of connection. The subsequent chapter will look at each of the themes and sub-themes to discuss the implications of these findings, opportunities for action, study limitations, and possible additional research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION/SUMMARY

There is currently a national dialog around increasing gender diversity in leadership positions. Coupling this movement with the number of higher education presidential vacancies anticipated in the next 10 years has created an opportunity for change. It is important to apply an intentional approach to preparing females to compete for these roles (ACE, 2017c; ACE, 2018c; The White House Project, 2009). As affirmed by the literature review, women often struggle to see themselves in or pursuing higher level leadership positions and therefore are ill-prepared when these opportunities arise (Dunn et al., 2014; Eddy, 2008). This study was based on literature that identifies leadership development programming as an effective strategy for filling the leadership pipeline and in particular, preparing female leaders (Baltodano et al., 2012; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Dunn et al., 2014; Gill & Jones, 2013; Madsen & White, 2012; Seymour & Wairepo, 2013). The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of females working in higher education who participated in an internal leadership development program to determine how the program impacted them both personally and professionally. Exploring and analyzing the experiences of these females will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on strategies that can increase the number of women entering the leadership pipeline better prepared for future opportunities.

Guided by two main research questions (below), this phenomenological study looked at the lived experiences of 10 females who had participated in State College's (SC) leadership development program, Leadership SC (LSC).

1. What are the lived experiences of female employees who participated in the LSC program?

2. How do the LSC alumnae perceive program impact on their sense of belonging to a community and/or group?

To understand, document, and interpret their experiences, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, which included the participant identifying an artifact that they felt was a physical representation of their experience. The qualitative data detailed in Chapter 4 was analyzed and three major themes were identified: 1) Feelings of empowerment; 2) Increased motivation; and 3) A newfound and increased sense of connection. The analysis of the gathered data will be viewed through the lens of the conceptual framework, a structure that considers leadership development programming contributing to the sense of belonging level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, with the application of individual consideration theory. This chapter will detail the researcher's interpretation of these findings and make related recommendations for action and further research.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of female employees who participated in the LSC program?

Essence of the Experience

By the nature of the program's design, those that are selected are at an assumed point in their career – a current or emerging leader. Though this characteristic has been identified by the selection committee, across those selected, the participants' motivations to apply for the program differed and therefore, so did their experience. Some participants were looking for advancement opportunities; others were encouraged by their supervisor to participate. Regardless of why they entered the program or where they were on their career pathway, the researcher found that there were considerable commonalities across the experience of female participants. This overall

positive experience supports the extensive research that promotes the general concept of leadership development as a considerable benefit for both the organization and the participant (Baltodano et al., 2012; Harvard Business, 2016; Hotho & Dowling, 2010; Nica, 2013).

The lived experiences of those in the LSC program was a highly positive one that, although varied, was of considerable benefit for all, especially as they related to participants envisioning or exploring what is next for their career. As research indicates, women often lack a solid vision for themselves professionally, and often end up developing a foresight after being pushed out of their comfort zone or receiving encouragement from others (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012; Hill & Wheat, 2017). Although LSC may not be designed specifically to solicit this experience, the environment it created precipitated engagement and learning that had the alumnae seeing themselves differently and questioning what was next for them professionally.

The research also demonstrated that the increased desire for career advancement was tied to women engaging in an experience that increased their overall self-confidence and self-perception. As stated earlier, one might assume that their selection for the program indicates that they already perceived themselves as a strong leader, but this was not the case. One of the most beneficial aspects of the program was that the participants began to see themselves through the lens of their colleagues and executive leadership, which in turn had them feeling valued and further believing in themselves. The increased self-esteem experienced by participants demonstrated the interrelated nature of Maslow's Hierarchy of Need and how the program truly addressed the top three elements of the pyramid (Figure 2). The research found that it was not *if* the participants made gains in each of these sectors (self-actualization, esteem, and belonging), but rather it was *to what level* these advances were made. The level of variance is understood to

be based on the participant's sense of self upon entry into the program and their expectation, not other factors such as their age range, position, length of time at the college, etc.

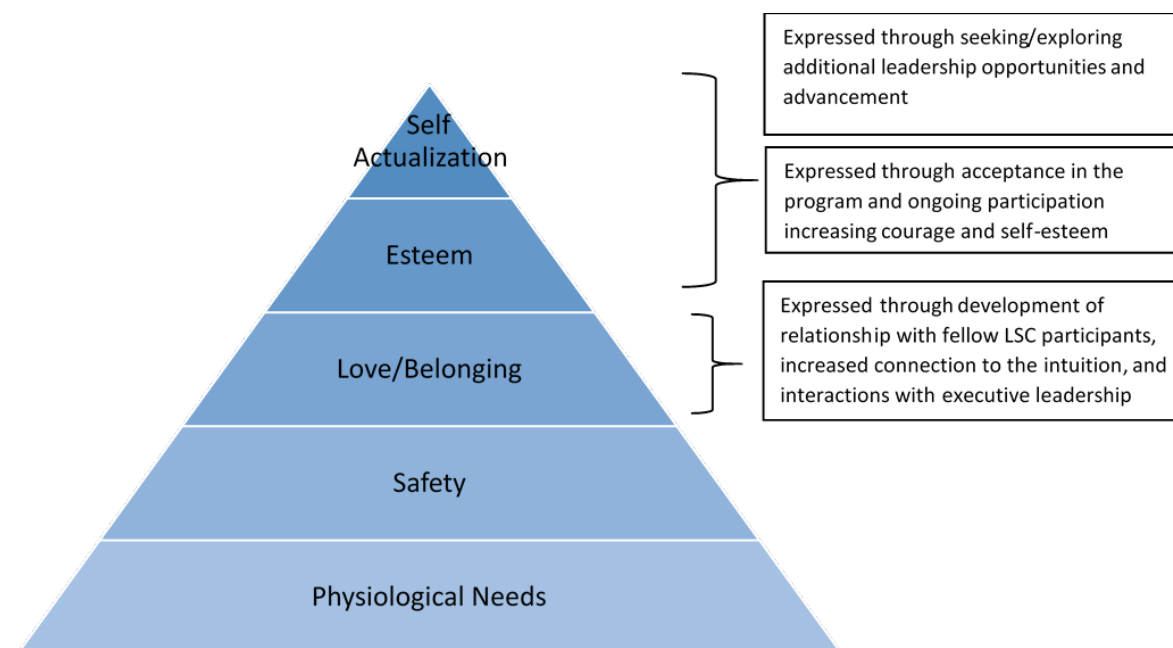


Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Need

Impact on Leadership Pipeline

Another significant finding was related to the potential influence the program can have on the leadership pipeline at SC. The LSC experience undoubtedly increased the motivation of participants to give more of themselves, professionally, to the institution and further their career. This desire was spurred by aspects of the LSC program that had alumnae feeling more confident and better prepared for whatever came next, including positive interactions with colleagues and executive leaders along with exposure to the inner workings of the institution. This motivation was perplexing for several alumnae, as they did not feel they had a clear outlet for it after completing the program with a lack of promotional or leadership opportunities. It was found that this program was a strong feeder for the overall leadership pipeline, but not exclusively SC's

leadership's pipeline. With several alumnae leaving and others indicating they may seek positions outside of the institution if opportunities did not arise, it is apparent that if the College is not prepared to keep those entering the pipeline motivated and progressing, the length of time these skilled and inspired leaders remain at SC will likely be finite. Internal leadership development programming is touted by researchers as a support for the highly effective 'grow your own' leadership strategy, but without tying this program to clear and intentional succession planning, retention of alumni will be a challenge (AACC, 2013; McNair et al., 2011).

This program has the making of an intervention that can fill the leadership pipeline with more skilled and confident women, but the metaphorical pipeline is not necessarily inclusive to positions SC. Additionally, while filling the leadership pipeline may not be the intent of the program, those completing it are too motivated to remain stagnant and therefore may become frustrated without an outlet. That being said, it was also clear that this program was an impetus for those participants that remained at the College to continue to seek other leadership opportunities, therefore continuing to increase and apply their skills, knowledge, and experience. Further, as the participants encouraged other colleagues to apply for the program, they themselves are supporting the institution to further grow this pipeline.

Continued Programming

LSC follows the structure described in literature for leadership development programming. A key element to this framework is the program having a set timeframe for the experience (Baltodano et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2009; Harvard Business, 2016). Understanding that a set timeframe is essential to this type of programming, it is important to note that participants overwhelmingly expressed their desire for the program to continue on some level. It should be clear that the participants did not indicate they wanted to continue the LSC program in

its entirety, as the time the commitment required was too significant for the long-term. Rather the desire was to have some level of ongoing professional development, as well as an outlet to further cultivate the relationships that were formed.

Interpersonal engagement and comradery were a shared experience across all participants, along with a collective expression of wanting to continue to connect with each other. These individuals experienced 6 months of intense motivation, encouragement, and validation, which made the program's ending almost jarring, because they had to go back to environments where they were not experiencing this level of support and engagement. While many of these women may not have felt they 'needed' validation, it was evident that they responded to it and it changed how they viewed themselves and their future. What these participants experienced and longed to have continue is what research has shown that is lacking in most traditional supervisory-employee relationships, which is that of a mentor or role model to provide inspiration, guidance, and validation (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012).

Research Question #2: How do the LSC alumnae perceive program impact on their sense of belonging to a community and/or group?

For each individual, regardless of how long they were employed at SC, it was clear from the research and supported by the artifacts selected, that one of the most impactful elements of the program was the relationships they developed. This evidence would lead one to believe that few, if any, participants had prior opportunities at SC that facilitated these types of relationships. This finding was significant considering several participants had been at the College for over 15 years, yet it was only after their time in LSC that they felt they had developed a strong network of people to call on and connect with, both personally and professionally.

Sense of Belonging

Based on the findings of this study, it was shown that participation in the LSC program increased the sense of belonging aspect of Maslow's Hierarchy of Need (Figure 2). At the crux of these relationships was each participant feeling that others cared about her and shared a mutual goal of completing the program, as well as improving the organization and becoming stronger leaders. LSC participants communicated that there was a reciprocal link between them and their classmates, providing each other guidance, support and accountability, which researchers connect to the sense of belonging level of Maslow's pyramid (Covey, 2007 Jerome, 2013).

Feeling this sense of belonging and connection was not limited to their relationships with fellow LSC members but extended to a deeper affiliation to the College and executive leadership. The emphasis on this part of their experience demonstrates in-depth and authentic interactions that were experienced with individuals across the College, beyond those they engage in their day-to-day role. This sense of connection and belonging did not dissipate the longer the participants had been out of the program, as they continued to interact with others after the program ended and/or were confident they could reach out to their classmates at any time. This finding strongly implies that the depth of these relationships goes well beyond traditional work-colleague interactions. It should be noted that the length of time of this program was a factor in the development of these deep relationships and expanded networks, since over the course of 6-month program the participants were able to share a variety of experiences, learn together and become vulnerable.

Self-Actualization and Esteem

Beyond feeling as though they belonged to a group, this program helped participants feel they belonged at a higher level as a professional. For females this outcome is of considerable importance, as research shows that those who hold high level leadership positions have a clear understanding of who they are and their value (Dunn et al., 2014; Hertneky, 2012). This research shows that participation in the program assisted the female participants in seeing themselves as leaders and helped them believe they not only could do more than they had previously thought but had considerable abilities to contribute.

Following Maslow's Theory, the findings show that the sense of belonging felt by participants spurred them in reaching the subsequent levels of esteem and self-actualization (Figure 2). The amplified sense of confidence that was expressed throughout the interviews was notable, as it implies that although the females were selected for the program as a recognition of their skills, abilities, and potential, they did not fully view themselves as 'worthy' or of the level that others might view them. The research showed that the women thrived on the validation they felt when selected for the program and throughout the course of the program. This bolstered self-esteem indicates that regardless of where the individual's level of self-confidence was prior to entering the program, they thrived on the encouragement and support experience during the program. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that over the course of the 6-month program, the journey of these women was one of self-discovery, initially feeling as if they did not belong and should feel honored to be selected, whereas at the end of the program they were empowered to seek out additional opportunities and had a new-found or increased confidence. The program helps develop the self-efficacy that scholars indicate leaders need to possess in order to progress in their career (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007).

The self-discovery and empowerment experienced by these participants was often tied to seeing themselves as others do. The program gave alumnae an opportunity to contribute their opinions and skills outside of their traditional work roles, which helped them to realize they had more to give. This finding supports literature related to women often not seeing themselves in higher positions and needing others to encourage them to get outside of their comfort zone and see themselves as others see them (Gill & Jones, 2013; Hill & Wheat, 2017).

Implications

The findings of this research complement the body of research that identifies leadership development programs as an effective approach for preparing individuals, particularly those in the minority, for executive-level opportunities (ACE, 2018b; Johnson, 2017). Leadership development programming, based on findings from this program and others, is a powerful strategy to provide women with the confidence and self-actualization they often lack as they proceed up the leadership pipeline (Baltodano et al., 2012; Bruckmüller et al., 2014).

Leadership Development Programming

Organizational Benefit. The research findings supported the notion that internal leadership development programs help to grow female leaders within organizations, which is an immediate internal benefit. As the participants evolve over the course of the program, the organization receives a considerable return on the investment including the relationships that are developed, the enhanced appreciation for the institution, and employees that are more skilled and motivated than before entering the program (Seymour & Wairepo, 2013; Shenkman & Gorbaty, 2007).

This being said, leadership development programming may also result in employees leaving an organization over time to pursue other opportunities. The advancement of the alumnae

may, and in comes cases has, contributed to individuals leaving the organization as a way to professionally express the sense of empowerment they gained in the program by obtaining another position. Although staff turnover is often seen as negative, the research indicates that even after alumnae left the College they were still highly supportive of both the program and organization and therefore continue to be a positive representative for SC within the community. Conversely, the heightened connections experienced as a result of participating in LSC, will also result in some employees staying at the organization when they might have otherwise left. This implication is supported by research that correlates sense of belonging theory with retention (Strayhorn, 2012).

Encouragement. The findings of this study suggested that organizations can not simply assume that individuals in the minority, in this instance women, will be self-motivated to seek out advancement opportunities, but rather organizations need to support females through preparation and encouragement. As noted in the literature review, without encouragement, many females fail to see themselves as leaders or visualize themselves in a higher-level position, a concept reinforced by this study (Gill & Jones, 2013). In this study, the support experienced by participants came in different forms, from being selected for the program to having peers affirm their ideas or being able to contribute to ideas outside of their work routine. The part of the program that had the greatest impact on how the individuals viewed themselves was two-fold: 1) being selected for a competitive program; and 2) interacting with peers and executive leadership. In both instances, the implication is that these experiences provided the alumnae with validation that they had not previously been experiencing. This finding indicated that, while often seen by peers as highly qualified and moving up the leadership pipeline, they do not see themselves the same way. It behooves an organization to apply intentional support and

validation to females to reinforce and enhance their self-confidence and help them see themselves as others likely already see them.

Building Community. The results of this study showed that employees at SC struggle to experience a sense of community. The network and relationships that were created through the program were identified by the participants as significantly impacting them on both a personal and professional level. These findings indicate that organizations should find ways to foster these connections, especially in instances when there may not be an obvious connection between particular positions, departments or individuals within an organization, as the diversity of these relationships were shown to be the most impactful. Beyond the capacity these networks have to support an individual's role at the institution, there was a clear connection between these relationships and the increased confidence and courage participants felt. This was particularly telling as even the employees that had been at SC the longest (>15 years) still lacked connections with the depth and breadth of those that were cultivated during LSC.

The value of these relationships was undeniable, but it is also important to highlight that they did not happen immediately. The length of the LSC program is important to consider, as noted by Baumeister and Leary's (1995), relationships take significant time to develop, particularly in the work setting. Leadership development programs are experiences where professionals begin to interact on a personal level (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014). While this personal/professional intersection can not be manufactured by organizations, this research strongly implies that leadership development programming is a vehicle that can facilitate these types of connections, which ultimately benefit both the organization and individual.

Recommendations for Action

Understanding the experiences of the participants in the LSC program, supported by the literature review, champions the continued use of professional development programming as a vehicle to prepare women to seek and succeed in obtaining leadership positions. Based on this knowledge, the following recommendations are being offered for both SC and other organizations that have, or are considering, an internal leadership development program:

Design Elements. The overall designs of these programs may vary, but based on the themes that emerged from this research there are key elements that should be included: 1) subtle and intentional validation of participants through a competitive selection process; 2) opportunities for participants to explore their abilities and interests outside of their day-to-day role; 3) the cultivation of relationships with a diverse group of individuals; and 4) time to engage with executive leadership and learn about the inner workings of the institution. As several experts suggest, leadership development programming can change how individuals perceive themselves (Baltodano et al., 2012; Bruckmüller et al., 2014; Gill & Jones, 2013; Hill & Wheat, 2017). The above-mentioned variables were elements that either intentionally or unintentionally were included in the LSC program, which were shown from the research to affect the participants in positive ways, leading to the alumnae feeling valued, gaining courage and confidence, and developing enhanced connection to the institution and colleagues.

Retention and Succession Planning. Although the intent of leadership development programs is not always for the purpose of employee retention and/or succession planning, the participant experience does have influence on these aspects of an organization (AACC, 2013; Bortz, 2014; Krause, 2017; Luzebetak, 2010). It is recommended that organizations take a look at the connection between the program and how to fulfill the alumni's desire to *do more* after

completing the program. As demonstrated in this research, participants that completed the program were motivated, on some level, to either immediately or in the future further their career. Organizations must consider how these experiences will impact employee retention, and either prepare for the potential turnover or find ways to circumvent it to some degree.

Organizations with leadership programs should have an awareness that, although the program does impact an employee's sense of belonging, this is not a static connection and is surpassed by their desire to continue to progress on their career pathway. If opportunities are not available within the organization for participants to engage and progress, they are likely to leave.

Post-Program Plan. As indicated in the literature review, a common characteristic of leadership development programming is a set timeframe (Baltodano et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2009; Harvard Business, 2016). Understanding that this is an important component of the design, the research suggests that consideration should be made to support alumni after the program's conclusion. Hassan et. al. (2009) appeals to organizations to make professional development for their employees ongoing. Based on the feedback of participants, it is recommended that in the design of leadership development programming, administrators include a transition plan for when the formal aspect of the program ends. This plan should include clear goals and expectations of the participants during the post-program phase and be made clear from the onset of the full program. Determining how or if to continue engagement with alumnae that no longer work at the institution, is also an important consideration as the post-program component is designed, as there was an overwhelming expression from those that had left SC that they still wished to be connected on some level.

General Professional Development. Although the information gathered was related to how a specific population of professionals experienced an intensive leadership development

program, much of the findings are applicable to general employee development and should be considered for such. The impact that networking and the developed relationships had on how these employees saw themselves is of benefit to all employees and should be fostered within organizations intentionally. This information should encourage administrators to find ways to bring together diverse groups of professionals from across the organization and facilitate interactions that would not have happened otherwise.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study provided a focused look at the experience of a sample of female participants in the LSC program. The structure and findings of this study offer the opportunity to conduct further research, which will continue the exploration of the research questions, as well as other related topics that arose from the analysis. The researcher recommends the following areas for further research:

1. This phenomenological study focused specifically on female participants and their shared experiences. It is recommended that future studies look at the experiences of all participants. While looking across all participants, it will still be important to disaggregate the data in order to determine the program's impact on various demographics and sub-groups of the target population. Understanding how the lived experiences are parallel or vary based on gender, age, ethnicity, and/or job classification will allow for the College to make programming changes based on the needs of particular groups. Further, this level of data will allow programming to be designed or altered to support the needs of a particular organization's leadership pipeline, such as increasing ethnic diversity and enhancing faculty transitioning into leadership.

2. To deepen the application and interpretation of the interview data, future research should include an in-depth survey component. It is suggested that this survey be based on an existing tool, such as the Leadership Program Outcome Measure (LPOM) by Black and Earnest (2009). The LPOM uses a Likert Scale to measure the degree of change of leadership program alumni. Using a survey will allow data to be gathered from a larger group, as it can be sent out to all program completers. Questions would capture key data elements in a uniform manner related to topics such as the degree that the participant's feel their confidence increased or how the program changed the direction of their career. Other information to be added to this survey and considered during the data analysis process would be when the participant entered the program and where they were in their career at that time.
3. Considerable research has been done related to how a sense of belonging can support student retention. It is recommended that further research be done related to understanding how this theory can be applied in the workplace, connected to employee retention and the impact of leadership development programming. Further research is required to understand how applicable Strayhorn's (2012) research related to student retention is to employees. This research will inform understanding about how the empowerment and motivation that participants derive from the leadership development program has the potential to circumvent their sense of belonging to the institution, if the employees are left without the ability to see their next professional opportunity. This level of research will inform the conversation related to how leadership development programs interplay with succession planning.

Conclusion

As the leadership landscape continues to evolve so must the way that organizations and individuals prepare for the imminent vacancies in leadership. Though gender does not play a role in whether or not someone is capable of leading an organization, it can be a factor in whether or not an individual is prepared to do so. For a variety of reasons, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions at institutions of higher education (Chin, 2011; DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Reed, & Wheatly, 2014; Diehl, 2015). Through this phenomenological study, leadership development programming was shown as a resource that can be used to help address the challenges faced by females that often impede them from progressing into leadership positions. Although they did not all enter the program at the same time, the experience of participating in the LSC program, across all the women in this study, showed that they were similarly impacted in a positive way and that there are commonalities amongst the aspects of the program that were most influential. The data from this study demonstrated the significant impact that leadership development programming can have on the self-confidence and self-perceptions of participants, two characteristics that are present in highly effective leaders, but have also been shown to be lacking in women (Baltodano et al., 2012; Bruckmüller et al., 2014). Further, the research showed the considerable impact that the relationships and connections created through this program had on the individual participants, both personally and professionally. This deduction supports the use of this type of programming to increase an employee's sense of belonging and community, a strategy which offers much needed role models and inspiration to women in or entering leadership positions (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Overall, data collected from this research indicated that leadership development programs, such as LSC, are an effective way for organizations to intentionally support women along their career pathway.

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APPENDIX A – Invitation to Participate

Dear Leadership SPC Alumna,

I am reaching out to request your participation in my doctoral research project. For my dissertation, I am seeking to learn more about the experiences of female participants of the College's Leadership program and the impact the program has had on them, both personally and professionally.

For this study, I am looking interview 8-15 program alumnae. Participants will be asked to:

1. Participate in a face-to-face or phone interview, which will take roughly 60-75 minutes.
2. Identify and bring to the interview an item that you feel symbolizes and/or expresses some aspect of your experience in the program, what you got from the program and/or what the program meant to you.

If you are willing to participate, please review the attached Informed Consent and respond "YES" (to me only) by Wednesday 6/12/19. Please know, your participation in any aspect of this research, or decision not to participate, is completely voluntary and will not be shared.

Of those respondents willing to participate, 8-15 will be randomly selected. **If you are selected,** I will email you in the coming weeks to schedule your interview.

This project has been approved by my dissertation committee at the University of New England (UNE). Additionally, my research has been approved by the UNE Institutional Research Review Board on 5/21/19, as well as SPC's Research Review Committee on 6/2/19.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 856-261-2730 or katieshultz16@yahoo.com. Thank you in advance for considering this request.

Regards,

Katie Shultz

APPENDIX B- Consent to Participate in Research

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: The Impact of Leadership Development Programming on the Career Pathways of Females in Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Katie Shultz; Doctoral Candidate; University of New England

Introduction:

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form be read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.
- For this study, the pseudonym State College (SC) will be used to refer to the college where you attended the leadership training, and Leadership State College (LSC) will be used to identify the program.

Why is this research study being done?

The information collected for this study will support the completion of the research component of a doctoral dissertation at the University of New England. The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of female LSC alumnae and to understand the impact the leadership development program has on emerging professionals and their career pathways. This study will look at what specific aspects of the program have the most potential to strengthen the leadership skills, knowledge, and confidence of female participants.

Who will be in this study?

This research will engage all females who have completed the LSC program, who agree to participate.

What will I be asked to do?

If you indicate that you are willing to be interviewed, and if you are selected, you will be contacted for a 1:1 interview with the researcher. This semi-structured interview will consist of open-ended questions to further explore your experience with LSC. Interviews will be professionally transcribed and you will be provided the opportunity to clarify and/or change your responses.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study. In the event you feel uncomfortable, please inform the researcher and every attempt will be made to ease the discomfort. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose to end your participation in this study at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

There is no direct benefit to you related to this study. On a larger scale, the study may help in shaping the design of the LSC program, as well as understand the impact it has on participants.

What will it cost me?

There is no cost to you to participate in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your identity and your responses and insights will be kept confidential. Names will be changed to protect your identity, and any identifying information that could lead to you being identified will not be utilized, such as your place of employment, job title, or length of time at the College. Confidential information will be kept securely on the researcher's password-protected computer with additional back-up system, such as a thumb drive, also password-protected.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the College.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with the Researcher.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?

- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study is Katie Shultz. For more information regarding this study, please contact her at (856)261-2730 or katieshultz16@yahoo.com.
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research-related injury, please contact the researcher's advisor at the University of New England, Dr. Bill Boozang at wboozang@une.edu.

- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form, if you request.

Your consent will also be obtained verbally during the interview, based on your verbally recorded response. By consenting you are agreeing to the following:

I certify that I have read and understand the statement of procedures and agree to participate as a subject in the research described above. My participation is given voluntarily and without influence. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or prejudice. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

Print Name

Date

Signature

APPENDIX C – Interview Protocol

LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Detail

Interviewer: Katie Shultz

Interviewee:

Job Title:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Organization:

Interview Logistics:

- **Date:**
- **Time:**
- **Location:**

Interview Background

Intent for Interview: The purpose of this interview is to engage in a dialog with a female participant of the Leadership State College (LSC) program.

The information gained will support a research study that will explore the experiences of female LSC alumnae and to understand the impact the leadership development program has on emerging professionals and their career pathways.

Interview Structure

Opening: Thank you for meeting with me today.

It's important to know, *for this study, the pseudonym State College (SC) will be used to refer to the college where you attended the leadership training and Leadership State College (LSC) will be used to identify the program.*

In order to ensure what you share is accurately conveyed, this interview needs to be recorded. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Begin Recording

Now that we are recording, can you confirm that you consent to be recorded?

Participant's Response

Before we dive into the questions I have prepared, I wanted to provide you some context for this interview. The purpose of this study is to understand your experience in the LSC program. To this end, I'm seeking to document the experience of female LSC participants, as a way to further understand how the program impacts participants.

It is also important that you understand you have the following rights:

- You have the right to refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to
- You have the right to end the interview at any time
- After the interview is complete, the recording will be professionally transcribed. Once the recording has been transcribed, it will be sent to you via email, and you will be asked to review and approve the transcription and make any clarifications or changes you feel necessary.

Do you understand your rights?

Participant's Response

Do you have any questions?

Participant's Response

Great! Let's get started.

Transition 1: The first set of questions is intended to gather some background information on you as an individual.

Transition 2: The second set of questions will seek to gather the feelings you experienced through the stages of the program.

Transition 3: For the final set of questions, we will focus on what aspects of your experience you feel impacted you the most, both professionally and personally.

Interview Questions

Part A: Personal Background

1) Please answer the following questions:

a) What is your age range?

- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51 or older

b) What are your educational credentials (i.e. – degree, credentials, etc.?)

c) Where are you currently employed?

- State College (*the pseudonym State College (SC) will be used to refer to the college where you attended the leadership training*)
- Other: _____

- d) **How many years have you worked (*or did you work*) at the College?**
- 1-5
 - 6-10
 - 11-20
 - 21-30
 - 31 or more
- e) **How would you best classify your position (*or previous position*) at the College?**
- Senior Administration
 - General Administration
 - Faculty
 - Student Services
 - Career Services
 - Other: _____
- f) **Do you have a different position and/or title now than you did while you were in the LSC program? If so, please explain.**
- g) **Have you received a promotion and/or any work related recognitions since participating in the LSC program?**

2) **Briefly explain your current position. Title, Roles & Responsibilities.**

Probe – leadership role in current position; leadership aspirations

Part B: Overall Program Experience

- 1) **What led you to applying for the LSC program?**

Probe – how many times did you apply for the program, before you got in? Outside encouragement? Seeking advancement? Observing previous alumni?

1a.) If you were not selected initially, tell me about that experience. What led you to reapply?

2) How did it feel to be selected for the LSC program?

Probe – *who did you tell first? Were you excited? Nervous?*

3) What expectations about your experience did you have as you entered the program?

Probe – *expectations related to the others selected? The curriculum? The level of work?*

4) What expectations related to your experience in the LSC program did not occur?

Probe – *Feelings – Pride? Community? Engagement with SC Leadership? Learning?*

5) What were some of the experiences you had in the program that were unexpected?

Probe – *In relation to your expectations? Positive (unexpected experiences); Negative (unexpected experiences)*

6) Explain how your experience in LSC impacted your sense of connection or community?

Probe: Meeting others; networking & relationship development; understanding of other departments; commitment to the cause

Part C: Post-Program Experience

1) How would you describe your overall experience in the LSC program?

2) Can you please describe the item you brought to represent your experience?

Probe: How does this connect to what was described in the previous question? More detail.

3) Do you feel your LSC experience changed you as a professional? If so, how?

Probe: How you view yourself? How you view others?; Career aspirations

4) What aspects of the program experience do you feel impacted you the most on a personal level?

Probe: believing in yourself; development of relationships; self-confidence

5) What aspect of the program experience do you feel impacted you the most on a professional level?

Probe: mentorship; professional relationships; connections to the College

6) Do you feel differently about yourself as a leader, based on your experience in LSC? How? If so, what part of the program do you attribute that to?

Closing: Is there anything else you would like to add? Do you have questions?

I cannot thank you enough for taking the time to speak with me today. I appreciate your willingness to share your past experiences as a participant of LSC and how it affected you. As I mentioned earlier, following this the interview will be professionally transcribed, and I will provide you a copy for your review and approval. If you have any additional questions or comments you would like to share after reviewing the transcript, please do not hesitate to contact me.