No Crystal Stair:  
Narratives of Female Community College Presidents of Color

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Narratives of Female Community College Presidents of Color

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Abstract

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Drexel University, May 2013

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The California Community College system is the largest system of higher education in the nation, with 2.6 million students attending 112 colleges. Community colleges are integral to workforce development, economic recovery, and an accessible and affordable gateway for transfer to four-year universities. While community college student population is very diverse, executive leadership is not necessarily representative of these shifting demographics. Organizations and aspiring leaders may not be prepared for the mass vacancies created by impending retirements of executive leadership positions (ELP) at community colleges.

This study sought, through the counterstories of female community college presidents of color, to identify challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to develop representative and sustainable executive leadership and organizational cultures inclusive and supportive of aspiring female community college presidents of color. Specifically, this study sought to illuminate various career paths of female leaders of color in higher education, as well as unique personal, professional, and organizational challenges that may hinder their ascension. Setting the context for this study are the shifting demographics of community college campuses, impending mass retirements of community college presidents in the next five years, and organizational culture and practices that may impede the ascension of female administrators of color that could present a challenge for organizations to foster sustainable and representative leadership.

Within a conceptual context of Critical Race Theory, narrative counterstories illustrate the career paths and experiences of female community college presidents of color and allow the analysis of organizational culture factors to understand if and how organizational and cultural systems at California community colleges may exist that hinder the recruitment, support, and professional ascension of female community college presidents of color.
Dedication

To the Heavenly Father, and my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you for blessing me with the intellect and wherewithal to keep on pressing toward the mark. There were so many times when there was only one set of footprints along this journey.

To my Wise Guys…Jalen, Canaan, and Kennedy. This process has been no crystal stair for me, but I kept climbing because of you. You were always my inspiration; I hope I will be yours. For the great sacrifices you made so that I could achieve my dream, I am indebted. I love you.

To my husband, Aron…thank you for supporting me and pushing me. I love you.

To my mother, Helen…thank you for believing in me and for instilling in me the importance of education, but most of all for being my role model for resilience. I love you.

To my Sister Circle…thank you for being my cheerleaders and accountability partners. I love you.

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To Langston Hughes…thank you for so eloquently capturing the art of the Black existence in America, and for inspiring my love of literature.

To all the aspiring female leaders of color…assume your rightful place at the helm.

“Where a woman rules, streams run uphill.” Ethiopian Proverb
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Katrina Jackson, we’ve come this far by faith. You are my sister, support system, and fellow scholar. I couldn’t have picked a better person to conquer this monumental task with. Let’s get it!

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Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
   It's had tacks in it,
   And splinters,
   And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
   Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
   And reachin' landin's,
   And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So, boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps.
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Langston Hughes, 1922
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. iv 

LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................................... x 

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................................ xi 

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH ................................................................................. 1
   Introduction to the Problem ........................................................................................................ 1 
   Statement of the Problem to be Researched ........................................................................... 10 
   Purpose and Significance of the Problem .............................................................................. 10 
   Research Questions Focused on Solution Finding ............................................................... 11 
   The Conceptual Framework ................................................................................................. 11 
   Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................. 14 
   Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations ....................................................................... 15 
   Summary .............................................................................................................................. 18 

2. LITERATURE REVIEW .......................................................................................................... 19 
   Introduction ........................................................................................................................... 19 
   The Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 19 
   Summary .............................................................................................................................. 39 

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................ 40 
   Introduction ........................................................................................................................... 40 
   Research Design and Rationale ......................................................................................... 40 
   Site and Population ............................................................................................................. 43
List of Tables

1. Participant Demographics ........................................................................................................43

2. Participant Demographics Compared to Their Respective Colleges .................................45
List of Figures

1. Conceptual framework for study .................................................................12
2. Participants’ career paths by ethnicity ..........................................................111
3. Form of racial microaggressions experienced by participants.........................113
4. Participant’s perceived organizational factors impeding career ascension ..........119
5. Where participants acquired competencies for community college leadership ....121
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

**Introduction to the Problem**

This study sought, through the counterstories of female community college presidents of color, to identify challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to develop representative and sustainable executive leadership and organizational cultures inclusive and supportive of aspiring female community college presidents of color. Setting the context for this study are the shifting demographics of community college campuses, impending mass retirements of community college presidents in the next five years, and organizational culture and practices that may impede the ascension of female administrators of color possibly presenting a challenge for organizations to foster sustainable and representative leadership.

Review of relevant literature on the national community college successive leadership void nationally illustrates the “brain drain” of “Baby Boomer” retirements in higher education and underscores the critical need for sustainable leadership planning and development (Evelyn, 2001; Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). With regard to representative leadership and shifting demographics, the numbers of women and minorities in presidential and other executive leadership positions at colleges and universities have not increased significantly since 1986, greatly disproportionate to the vast diversity of the student body (American Council on Education [ACE], 2007). In addition, a similar report released in 2013 that studied higher education institutions between 2008 and 2013 showed “slight increases in the age and gender diversity of senior administrators holding positions that often lead to the presidency but no change in the
share of racial and ethnic minorities in these roles” (ACE, 2013, para. 1). While community colleges tend to have more women administrators than any other type of higher education institution, they still make up only 29% of presidencies. According to the California Community Chancellor’s Office Data Mart, women make up 54% of the student population, with 64% of these female students being people of color, yet female administrators of color make up only 37% of educational administrators at California community colleges (California Community College Chancellor’s Office [CCCCO], 2013). The alchemy of these conditions presents both challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to fill impending executive leadership vacancies with female presidents of color and to support their ascension to these ranks.

History and Evolution of Community Colleges

To understand the importance of this study’s focus on sustainability and representation of community college leadership, one must first understand the organization and its intended purpose. The community college has a long and formidable history in the United States. The original title of junior colleges speaks to the purpose of early community colleges; to serve as the primary source for adult and remedial education, a pathway to trade or vocational training; and/or to provide access to higher education for those aspiring to attend a four-year university, but perhaps could not afford to, were not academically prepared to, or could not get in to overflowing universities. As of 1850, no institutions existed “designed to furnish the agriculturist, the manufacturer, the mechanic, or the merchant with the education that will prepare him for the profession to which his life is to be devoted” (Hofstadter & Hardy, 1952, pp. 7-8). Recognizing the need for formal technical training, Henry Tappan, President of University of Michigan, is
credited with the first idea of junior colleges in 1859. It was this societal need that community colleges sought to address, and as society’s needs evolved, so did community colleges. Ultimately, “these colleges stood pre-eminently for the principle, increasingly so important in the twentieth century, that every American is entitled to receive some form of higher education” (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997, p. 64).

Legislation has been integral to the development of community colleges moving from the Morrill Land Act of 1862 emphasizing agricultural training on land granted to such institutions to the 2nd Morrill Act of 1890 that barred race as an exclusion to admittance and ensured federal funding. Additionally, the 2nd Morrill Act funded the creation of many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and Native American colleges. Junior Colleges, as they were then named, were intended to provide higher educational opportunities by opening enrollment to a more varied socioeconomic group than in the years past (Altbach, Berdahl, & Gumport, 2005; Brubacher & Rudy, 1997). Joliet Junior College in Chicago, Illinois was the first of its kind established in 1901. The “Brain child” of J. Stanley Brown, Superintendent of Joliet Township High School, and William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago, the college's initial enrollment was six students and focused on agriculture and mechanics (Altbach et al., 2005).

As the importance of community colleges expanded, so did policymakers’ interest in legislating their purpose and scope. Altbach et al. (2005) expressed this best when they stated, “Early federal policy was crucial in promoting higher education as an adjunct of western migration and public land development in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (p. 164). The notion of public service through higher education was
introduced with the Hatch Act of 1887 and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. In response to other societal changes and needs, it was the Serviceman’s Act of 1944 that established government subsidy of tuition, fees, books, and educational materials for veterans and contributed to living expenses incurred while attending college or other approved institutions (Duderstadt, 2000). This legislation was in response to the droves of servicemen returning home from the war with little or no marketable civilian skills and education.

As the social and political landscape changed rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, community colleges remained nimble and responsive, and more policymakers supported the idea of making higher education as accessible as possible to diverse students. The Carnegie Commission urged higher education to adopt open-door policies to admit all high school graduates, and be inclusive rather than selective. In addition, due to the turbulent Civil Rights Era in which the ills of institutionalized racism and discrimination were widely contested, there was a social shift in youth perception of a college education from a privilege to a right or even an obligation to obtain equality. For women, and particularly women of color, it was an advantageous time in which to enter higher education, as 1972 educational amendment Title IX declared equal distribution of federal financial assistance between both sexes (Weidenthal, 1967).

From the inception of the junior college concept, “California was an early leader in forming the colleges. In 1930, California boasted one-third of all the public junior college students in the nation” (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 120). Today, the California community college system is the largest higher education system in the nation with 112 colleges and more than 2 million students. The demographics of community college
students span a broad range and include almost half of first-time college students, nontraditional students such as older adults returning to school for job-related training, newcomer immigrants, and vocational trainees for the service and construction industries. In addition to various academic functions, community colleges are now viewed as workforce development engines.

In the eyes of a growing number of policymakers, community colleges are on the front lines of the nation’s push to further educate its populace. Their position as a pathway to both baccalaureate and to regionally in-demand careers will only cement their importance in the nation’s educational system in years to come” (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 449)

For these reasons, the diversity and sustainability of the leadership of community colleges is of paramount importance.

**Governance in Community Colleges**

An organization’s purpose alone does not make up its total history or its relevance. To understand the dynamics and forces that shape the California community college and the sustainability of its leadership, it is important to first understand community college governance. Schuetz (1999) posited that both historic and contextual influences shape governance in higher education. As such, in 1988, the California Legislature and Governor approved AB 1725 (Vasconcellos, 1988) that charged the California Community College Board of Governors to ensure:

faculty, staff, and students have the opportunity to express their opinions at the campus level, and to ensure that these opinions are given every reasonable consideration, and the right to participate effectively in district and college governance, and the right of Academic Senates to assume primary responsibility for making recommendations in the areas of curriculum and academic standards. (Vasconcellos, 1988, section 70900.5)
AB 1725 made sweeping changes to the organization and governance of community colleges that have bearing on executive leadership career paths and responsibilities. It has been asserted that mandated shared governance serves to slow down productivity and innovation in higher education as they are necessarily influenced by conflicting special interest groups that include unions and governing officials (Healy, 1997). It is also commonly believed by professor/teacher unions that the increased accountability and scrutiny of shared governance may hinder, rather than encourage, participation of faculty and administrators (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.). This possible reluctance to engage in shared governance opportunities within the community college system, especially by women and people of color, could serve as a hindrance to creating a pipeline for the development of a diverse and sustainable executive leadership position pipeline.

**Leadership Gap: Crisis or Opportunity?**

The American Council for Education provides a diagnosis of the shortage of future academic leaders and attributes this to “an aging professoriate, rising numbers of part-time and non-tenure-line faculty, and students completing doctoral education and entering the professoriate later in life” (ACE, 2007, para. 1). Additionally, it is predicted, “there will be at least a 50-percent turnover among senior administrators in the next five to 10 years” (Leubsdorf, 2006, p. A51). An even more compelling statistic is:

Approximately 50% of the current community college presidents will retire over the next 3 to 7 years and in the next few years, 700 new community college presidents and campus heads, 1800 new upper level administrators, and 30,000 new faculty members will be needed. (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005, p. 235)

Bolduc and Reilly (2010) best underscore the succession planning crisis:
As the baby boomer generation continues to leave the workforce, both public and private sector organizations have the potential to experience capital loss of unprecedented proportions…most organizations do not have the luxury of time to consider developing and acting on a plan to ensure that the talent and skills torch will be passed along to younger employees. (p. 8)

Conversely, a 2007 report entitled *The American College President*, published by the American Council on Education predicted that these impending vacancies, while posing a threat to sustainable leadership, offers a unique opportunity to increase the diversity of higher education’s leaders (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002).

An empirical research piece published in *Academic Leadership* authored by Betts, Urias, Chavez, and Betts (2009) addressed the issue of representative leadership. “Higher Education and Shifting U.S. Demographics: Need for Visible Administrative Career Paths, Professional Development, Succession Planning & Commitment to Diversity” provides ample recommendations with regard to seizing opportunities for effective succession management strategies. Among these recommendations are that organizations revisit their succession management plans to include developing internal candidates and attracting candidates outside higher education (Betts et al., 2009). It is within this crucial and most vulnerable time that community colleges must examine their succession planning strategies and practices to ensure continuity of leadership (Evelyn, 2001). At the same time, while there is a dire need for successors, the researcher opines this may be the most opportune time for female leaders of color to enter and advance through the presidential pipeline.

**Women in Academe**

To say the advances and triumphs of women in higher education far predate this study is a gross understatement. It begins with the Seven Sister colleges founded by and
for women who found themselves disenfranchised from post-secondary academic pursuits dating back to the 1800s. Pioneer women “founded secular and religious women’s colleges, helped students in coeducational campuses find opportunity and acceptance, and demanded that colleges enforce gender equity in policy” (Wardell, 2010, p. 26). In their book studying three generations of women leaders in higher education, Astin and Leland (1991) offered three main categories in which to capture women’s leadership in higher education: Predecessors, Instigators, and Inheritors. Predecessors were female leaders who established the earliest efforts for the pursuit of higher education to be accessible to women, primarily in the depression and World War II era. Instigators, aptly named, pushed for women’s political and societal rights, as well as inclusion in curricula such as gender studies and advocated for women to enter and excel in fields that were traditionally all male. Inheritors, as the participants of this study can be described, are women who succeeded in assuming leadership roles in higher education. “Inheritors were reportedly keenly aware of the role of mentors in their personal and professional development, particularly the women ‘instigators’ who had educated them about issues of power, negotiation, and political savvy in higher education administration” (Wardell, 2010, p. 27).

With regard to female leaders of color, the intersectionality of race and gender for women of color “places them in a unique position to be continuously misunderstood” and they continue to be marginalized in higher education (Miles, 2012, p. 12). While women of color have made strides in achieving executive leadership positions in higher education, “many elements – such as curricular issues, the climate of the environment, the need for a supportive peer culture, the need for mentorships and role models, among
others – still serve as obstacles to full development within many institutions” (Miles, 2012, p. 14). Consider the following poignant description the precarious position that women of color in academe often find themselves in:

At the intersection of race and gender stand women of color, torn by the lines of bias that currently divide white from nonwhite in our society, and male from female. The worlds these women negotiate demand different and often wrenching allegiances. As a result, women of color face significant obstacles to their full participation in and contribution to higher education. In their professional roles, women of color are expected to meet performance standards set for the most part by white males…At the same time, they must struggle with their own identity as women in society where “thinking like a woman” is still considered a questionable activity. At times, they can even experience pressure to choose between their racial identity and their womanhood. (Carter, Pearson, & Shavlik, 1988, p. 460)

**Importance of Representative Leadership**

With the diversity of the American community college landscape becoming more and more diverse each year, there is not one institution that “will escape the necessity of addressing the particular needs of a diversifying student body” (Hoover, 2013, para. 1). Additionally, Hurtado (2007) offered that the “practical rationale for advancing research and practice that will link diversity with the central educational and civic mission in higher education emerges from the needs of society where economic, racial, and religious differences are prevalent and inevitable” (p. 186). Pluralism in both governance and administrative structures of colleges must reflect the students they serve or risk their ability to serve and prepare these groups for success in a diverse society (Santiago, 1996).

As community colleges are the gateway to success for so many seeking opportunities through higher education, many researchers assert that it is important they have models for success that look like them and share their demographics. One such researcher is Daniel Solórzano, key researcher on critical race theory in the field of
education, who documented the necessity of representative leadership in a diverse society. Citing one of his research participants in a study on Chicano/a scholars regarding the value of having faculty that is diverse in ethnicity and gender, he stated, “role models are important because you need to see someone like you in the position that you hope to attain. Otherwise you begin to wonder, to doubt, to second guess yourself” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 128). According to Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education’s report, California will see increases in both Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups’ high school graduation rates, while non-Hispanic Whites and African Americans will see a slight decrease in high school graduates (WICHE, 2012). Given this forecast, it is becoming increasingly imperative community college leadership be diverse and representative of the community it serves.

**Statement of the Problem to be Researched**

Organizational and cultural systems at California community colleges may exist that hinder the recruitment, support, and professional ascension of female community college presidents of color, thus contributing to their disenfranchisement and jeopardizing the representativeness of the organization’s leadership.

**Purpose and Significance of the Problem**

The purpose of this proposed research was to identify challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to develop representative and sustainable executive leadership and organizational culture that are inclusive and supportive of female community college presidents of color.
Research Questions Focused on Solution Finding

Within the conceptual framework of Critical Race Theory, Career Paths, and Organizational Culture, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the paths to the presidency for female community college presidents of color, including academic and professional preparation?
2. What are the unique personal, professional, and organizational challenges and opportunities for female community college presidents of color?

The Conceptual Framework

Researcher’s Stances

The researcher’s philosophical stance is grounded in social constructivism; thus, the study is axiological, methodological, and ontological in design. An axiological stance is centered in and committed to social justice. A methodological stance focuses the researcher on describing and analyzing the context of participants’ stories and the cultural norms of their environment. Lastly, an ontological stance validates the use of participant narratives to describe their experiences as their reality from their points of view as women of color in leadership positions. This study reflects the researcher’s worldviews based in social constructivism and an advocate/participatory methodology involving collaboration between the researcher and participant. The researcher chose to immerse herself in her interpretive community anchored by critical race and feminist/equitist theory and philosophy through action research that sought to address disparate representation by women of color in the community college presidency.
Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual framework for the research is composed of three main areas of focus as illustrated in Figure 1. They are: a) Critical Race Theory, b) Career Paths, and c) Organizational Culture. Prevalent theorists and researchers in each respective area are listed.

**Critical Race Theory**

- Solorzano & Yosso, 2002
- Brown, 2003
- Parker, 2005
- Delgado, 1998

**Career Paths**

- Turner, 2007
- Waring, 2003
- Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001
- Gonzalez, 2010

**Organizational Culture**

- Ballinger, 2007
- Rothwell & Wallum, 1994
- Clunies, 2007
- Carey, Ogden & Roland, 2000

*Figure 1. Conceptual framework for study.*

**Critical Race Theory (CRT).** Having origins in legal history, analysis, and applications, Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is a theory that states as its premise that racism is inherent and inevitable in American society and must be actively confronted and redressed to affect racial equality. Audre Lorde, renowned researcher, offered a concise and poignant definition of racism, “the belief in the inherent superiority of one
race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (Lorde, 1992, p. 496).

Building upon this definition of racism, Derrick Bell's (1992b) theory of racism realism is founded on the belief that society is racialized, and argued, “although race may be a social construct, the social outcomes produce concrete forms of hierarchically structured inequality” (p. 375). Through this lens, scholars such as Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, and Richard Delgado underscore the importance of race as central to not only a commitment to social justice, but to equal application of and protection under the law. Brown asserted, “all our institutions of education and information – political and civic, religious and creative – either knowingly or unknowingly provide the public rationale to justify, explain, legitimize, or tolerate racism” (Brown, 2003, pp. 3-4).

**Career paths.** This researcher asserts that examining ways institutions and individuals can prepare for executive leadership can help forge a path for other women of color aspiring to be leaders. Turner (2007) attributes the lack of women in executive leadership positions (ELPs) to disparate academic and professional preparation, lack of opportunity for advancement, and the unique challenges women face in striking a personal and professional balance. Additionally, unique cultural standards and mores present a challenge to some women of color to conform and/or confront barriers to promotion.

**Organizational culture.** Developing an inclusive succession planning strategy and appropriate career paths for female leaders of color requires an assessment of current organizational culture and needs, as well as determining changing needs of an organization and emerging external trends affecting the organization (Rothwell, 1994). To this end, an examination of an organization’s culture and systems through participant
counterstories illuminating ways in which aspiring female leaders of color are impeded can help create actionable recommendations to remedy said impediments.

**Definition of Terms**

**Academic Senate**

Normative organizational structure through which faculty exercise their role in college and university governance at the institutional level. (Birnbaum, 2001)

**Associate Vice Chancellor**

Assists Chancellor in serving as chief executive for a specialized division

**Associate Vice President**

Assists vice president and serves as executive in charge of specific operational functions/divisions at community colleges (such as instruction and curriculum, workforce development, etc.)

**Chancellor**

Serves as system-wide chief executive for the District having authority over all colleges in the system

**Counter-transgressive grace**

A form of emotional intelligence demonstrated by women of color in which unrequited gracious behavior, which is not necessarily merited, is granted to the transgressor(s) by the recipient in light of dysconscious microaggressions of a racial or gender bias nature.

**Dean**

Has significant authority over a specific academic unit, or over a specific area of concern, or both.
Executive Leadership Positions (ELPs)

Vary by institution, but may include: president, vice president, associate vice president, chancellor, vice chancellor, deputy chancellor, associate vice chancellor, and dean as an “ELP Gateway position”

Mental Models

“Deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (Senge, 1990, p. 8)

President

Chief executive governor of a specific campus within the community college system

Succession Planning

The planned or unplanned change of the formal leader of a group or organization (Gordon & Rosen, 1981).

Vice Chancellor

Serves as the day-to-day system-wide chief executive

Vice President

Assists chief executive governor (President)

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Creswell (2007) warned that researchers must be mindful of how their own bias can adversely affect the validity and reliability of the study. Thus, as a female of color, the researcher took caution to be as objective as possible in interpreting and reporting
results from interviews, surveys, and other data collection instruments. Various risks to the validity and reliability of the research included:

1. Subjective interpretation of data and results by researcher

2. The Hawthorne effect may have influenced respondents’ participation in that participants may have been wary to share information they deemed harmful to the institution, or to themselves.

3. While the intent was to illustrate the experiences of presidents of color at California community colleges, the focus of the research may be too limited to be generalized to the experiences of female administrators across the system.

4. The campuses comprising the California community college system are very unique, and an attempt at developing a universal recommendation or finding may not be tailored to the specific needs and organizational culture of all college campuses.

The researcher addressed these risks by ensuring and protecting the participants’ anonymity, being transparent in sharing the researcher’s philosophical stance, and taking into account the individuality of various campus cultures when making generalizations in the analysis and reporting of findings. Furthermore, the researcher is transparent about her theoretical sensitivity, cultural intuition, and subjectivity. Theoretical sensitivity refers to “the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 33). Delgado describes cultural intuition as an innate skill attributed to ancestral and community histories and memories, along with personal experiences of the researcher of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). The researcher mitigated subjectivity
by being transparent to both participants and readers. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) posited that rather than avoid subjectivity altogether, in a narrative counterstory the researcher may “add our own professional and personal experiences related to the concepts and ideas [of the study]” (p. 34). Furthermore, Peshkin (1988) posited that rather than merely acknowledge subjectivity, a researcher should embrace it. Peshkin suggested in moments when the researcher is emotionally moved, or intellectually provoked through the shared experiences of participants, the researcher should make note of these incidences in the researcher journal and incorporate them in the study as appropriate and relevant.

With regard to issues of validity in narrative research, Polkinghorne (2007) detailed four limits accounting for the disjunction between a participant’s actual experience and their recollection or restorying of that experience. They include:

(a) the limits of language to capture the complexity and depth of experienced meaning, (b) the limits of reflection to bring notice to the layers of meaning that are present outside of awareness, (c) the resistance of people because of social desirability to reveal fully the entire complexities of the felt meanings of which they are aware, and (d) the complexity caused by the fact that texts are often a co-creation of the interviewer and participant. (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 10)

Rather than the literature necessarily confirming or confounding the findings of participants’ narratives, the literature adds auxiliary information about a particular phenomenon in narrative research.

Narrative research issues claims about the meaning life events hold for people. It makes claims about how people understand situations, others, and themselves. Validity judgments do not yield simple acceptance or non-acceptance responses. Instead, they are about the likelihood or probability that the claim is so. (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 6)

Lastly, with regard to generalizability in narrative inquiry, Lincoln and Guba asserted, “the aim of inquiry is to develop an idiographic body of knowledge in the form of
“working hypotheses” describing the individual case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37).
In essence, while this study’s narratives are derived from a diverse, random, and representative sample of community college presidents, the findings of this study are not necessarily generalizable to all female community college presidents within California.

Summary

This chapter introduced the research problem and purpose of this research that was to identify challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to develop representative and sustainable executive leadership and organizational culture that are inclusive and supportive of female community college presidents of color. Through providing a context and history of community colleges and their unique governance and leadership issues; the statement and relevance of the problem; the conceptual framework for the research; research questions; definition of terms; and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, the researcher sets the stage for the study’s boundaries and environment.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

A recent report by the American Council on Education indicated that while demographic data suggest a very diverse student body, with minorities making up more than 43% of students, and 53% of all community college students being female, the representation of this diversity of culture and gender is not as prevalent in faculty, presidents, and high-level administrative posts within higher education (ACE, 2012a; Community College League of California [CCLC], 2012). The numbers of women and minorities in presidential and other executive leadership positions at colleges and universities have not increased significantly since 1986 (ACE, 2007). The demographic profile of university presidents in the United States has not changed to reflect its student body further underscoring the need for expanded recruitment efforts and professional development opportunities for a diverse and representative pool of highly qualified candidates. A literature review herein includes Critical Race Theory, career paths of women of color presidents, and organizational culture of community colleges to provide a lens through which the narratives of female community college administrators can be examined.

The Literature Review

Critical Race Theory

Origins and application of CRT. CRT is an appropriate lens through which this study was conducted in that the methodology by which CRT is applied to remedy disparities in legal proceedings also applies to the disenfranchisement of female leaders
of color. It gives voice and credence to previously silenced and ignored experiences of people of color, and the value such experiences have for the production of knowledge beyond the shared cultural group (Parker, 2005). The two-pronged inquiry of CRT asks:

1) whether a rule of law or legal doctrine, practice or custom subordinates important interests and concerns of racial minorities and 2) if so, how is this problem best remedied? This subordination question seeks to deconstruct the existing legal order to reveal the ways in which it invalidates or handicaps the claims of people of color. (Brown, 2003, p. 3)

Furthermore, Solórzano (1997) asserted the existence of five primary components of CRT relevant to educational research that were applied to this study:

1. *Intercentricity of Race and Racism.* In educational research, CRT is founded on the premise that the concepts of race and racism are permanent, and are “a central rather than marginal factor in defining and explaining individual experiences” (Russell, 1992, pp. 762-763). Additionally, racism is interconnected and intersects with other forms of discrimination and systematic subordination including that based on gender, immigration status, sexual orientation, culture, and any other status protected by law.

2. *The Challenge of Dominant Ideology.* CRT rejects the notion that society is neutral, color-blind, or strictly a meritocracy in which all are treated equal and have equal opportunities and consequences (Solórzano & Delgado, 2001). Rather, “critical race theorists argue that these traditional paradigms act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society” (Yosso, 2005, p. 73).

3. *The Commitment to Social Justice.* The commitment to social justice seeks, as its primary purpose, to not only uncover the stronghold institutional racism has on
society, but to offer transformative response to oppression (Matsuda, 1991), and progresses toward the elimination of “isms” in society such as racism, classism, and sexism, as well as “empowerment of people of color and other subordinated groups” (Yosso, 2005, p. 74).

4. **The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge.** CRT acknowledges the legitimacy and appropriateness of counterstories and lived experiences of people of color in researching and analyzing racial subordination, and society’s role in the perpetuation of said subordination, either by presumption of neutrality or denial of the assumed privileges of majoritarian culture (Carrasco, 1996; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001a; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).

5. **The Interdisciplinary Perspective.** CRT “extends beyond disciplinary boundaries to analyze race and racism both within historical and contemporary contexts” (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 663). CRT, although originally born out of legal inequalities against people of color, can and should be applied to various disciplines including higher education and this study’s research on women of color assuming and aspiring to the presidency of community colleges.

Furthermore, it is important to deconstruct the race and gender-neutral myth governing most of society to affect systems change that recognizes the value of diversity beyond tokenism (Parker, 2005). Although experiences related to race, class, and culture in disenfranchised groups of color might be appropriately generalized using CRT, the researcher is careful to be thorough in the application of CRT to include specific areas of critical race theory literature and research as it applies to the demographics of the participants in this study. Thus, AsianCrit, LatCrit, and BlackCrit are used as lenses
through which to interpret and restory the narratives of respective participants who self-identify with these ethnicities.

**BlackCrit.** Within this study, multiple examples of resilience are illustrated through participant counterstories consistent with CRT literature as it relates to African American women. “Throughout history, in order for Black women to survive their multiple marginality and the resulting tight spaces of their oppression they relied upon faith, social support, body ownership, and unique defense mechanisms” (Ricks, 2011 p. 6). These examples may be generalizable to other African American women in higher education leadership as their experiences converge at oppression and resilience (Smith, 2012). Black women in academia are also caught in what Evans (2007) termed the “politics of respectability.” “Black women often feel additional pressure to prove themselves worthy or better than their colleagues” (Ricks, 2011, p. 46).

Cantey captured this succinctly through a participant’s narrative in his study of African American women in academe, “I understand as an African-American woman in corporate America that my Caucasian male counterparts can do things that I will get fired from” (Cantey, 2010, p. 94). The “politics of respectability” were further confirmed in a phenomenological, narrative study of 12 African American college presidents. Participants were polled for their views on the importance of social class, educational backgrounds, race and gender issues, and their conceptions of leadership in their attainment of an executive leadership position. Educational and social class varied within this respondent group and did not appear to play a major factor in determining their ascent to leadership. This study sought to examine how personal histories of leaders
influence not only their pathways to the presidency but also their conceptions of what a leader does and how they should lead.

In a study seeking to understand how women of African descent with intersecting marginalized identities negotiate their space in academia, Cantey (2010) found:

In an effort to create choices and adapt strategies of resistance, oppressed groups learn how to cope, negotiate their space, and define their own identity. Negotiating one’s space is a mechanism used to cope with these experiences. Moreover, negotiating space is a mechanism used to achieve a personal freedom. (p. 31)

Rather than simply expound on myriad “isms” that women of color face (racism, classism, sexism, etc.), the researcher illustrated, through an asset-based lens, the resilience of female leaders of color, their gender and race-based experiences, and supports that have supported them in their professional pursuits and illuminated organizational culture systems supporting or impeding their progress. As cited by Ricks (2011), Hill Collins asserted, “all African American women share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent. This commonality of experience suggests that certain characteristic themes will be prominent in a Black women’s standpoint” (p. 22). This is further confirmed by Fong-Batkin’s (2011) dissertation research that African American higher education administrators were often marginalized as women of color through the racism and sexism they experienced. The ecological perspective was also useful because it looks at what happens from the individual’s and society’s standpoints—ranging from some participants growing up in segregation, lacking a mentor, and experiencing racism. (pp. 154-155)

According to the renowned feminist, activist, and author bell hooks (1994), being oppressed means the absence of choices. The researcher sought to use CRT to examine,
through the counterstories of participants, the overt and covert systems in place impeding or propelling the careers of female leaders of color by denying them choices as they ascend the leadership ladder in higher education.

**AsianCrit.** In understanding anyone’s life story as expressed through critical race theory research narratives, it is important to create a baseline understanding of the individual’s ethnic and cultural history and influences. While this study does not provide an extensive chronology of each participant’s cultural background and history, context of cultural influence, racism, specific race, language, physical characteristics, and gender provide a context within which to understand each individual’s experiences sufficiently. Asian Americans, much like most other ethnic groups, have a history of discrimination and perseverance in the United States. However,

Asian Americans occupy an ambiguous racial position in the construction of the racial identity spectrum in the United States: between Black and White”, that requires specific detail to their plight in the pursuit of executive leadership positions in higher education. (Li-Bugg, 2011, p. 127)

With regard to the proverbial “Glass Ceiling” in higher education, a real or perceived barrier to ultimate, pinnacle success that allows minimal or marginal success to the comfort of the majoritarian society, Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) are in the vast minority with a meager 1% of all community college presidents (ACE, 2012b).

According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Report of 2010, APAs and issues of discrimination affecting them are overlooked. Indeed, it was not until 1977 that the first Asian American was appointed to the presidency of a community college. M. Jack Fujimoto, of Japanese descent and the first APA president at Sacramento City College in 1977, published his experience with this glass ceiling, and offered recommendations on
how community colleges might identify and promote highly qualified Asian candidates to the presidency. In his research and writings, he lamented the most prevalent barriers continue to be perpetuation of stereotypes that falsely depict APAs as “passive, unassertive, indirect, more equipped for technical than people-oriented work, and not leadership material” (Fujimoto, 1996, p. 50). For APA women, there are the additional burdensome stereotypes that include being perceived as “content with the status quo, inflexible, lack of interpersonal skills and political savvy, obedient and motherly, as well as exotic and fragile” (Fujimoto, 1996, p. 50). Kobayashi added that obstacles for Asian American women higher education administrators include: stature, perception of female Asian administrators, personal biases held by trustee members, and lack of community pressure for Asian American chief executive officers (Kobayashi, 2009).

In addition to barriers created by stereotypes, APAs apparently face other racial biases and are less likely to hold managerial positions than their white, male counterparts. According to U.S. Census data research on Asian Americans with doctorate degrees, “being Asian will reduce the chance of holding a managerial position by 26-29 percent” when compared to their white male colleagues of equal education (Yamane, 2012, p. 30). Suzuki’s (2002) study reached the conclusion that not only do Asian Americans look different, they are perceived to act and talk differently as well. In addition, they are perceived to be “perfidious foreigners,” even as second- or third-generation Americans. Thus, “Asian Americans are perceived to lack English language skills, and therefore, they are not qualified to be part of senior management” (Li-Bugg, 2011, p. 128). This type of “othering,” in other words racist beliefs, that cause some Asian Americans to be viewed as not completely American, but rather a foreigner or newcomer, was explored in

With regard to educational preparation for the presidency, APA men tend to have more formal education than APA women, with the exception of Filipina women who tend to have more formal education than Filipino men (Yamane, 2012). While one cannot make assumptions that race and gender discrimination are the sole source in the disparity of APAs in executive leadership, the data are consistent with the assertion that a glass ceiling may exist for Asian Americans aspiring to the presidency. Findings from Li-Bugg’s (2011) research on Asian American administrators has found the following to be true for many Asian Americans seeking executive leadership positions in higher education:

(a) Asian American leaders in the community colleges travel a non-traditional career path to leadership positions; (b) community college boards seem to have a tendency to “re-tread” presidents, and thereby contributing indirectly and tangentially to a lack of Asian Americans in leadership positions in the community colleges; and (c) Asian American leaders seem to possess a rebelliousness that enables them to buck a trend, and not bow to parental or social pressures. (p. iii)

Research in the area of AsianCrit is expanding, but has been relatively less robust than that of BlackCrit and LatCrit. Partly to blame for this deficit in research is the myth of the Model Minority characterizing the almost magical perseverance of Asian Americans in light of discrimination and difficult assimilation to American culture, most notably for first-generation Asian Americans. The term “Model Minority,” coined in 1966 by sociologist William Petersen, referred to Japanese Americans who, in spite of discrimination and even internment during World War II, still rose to financial and
educational success comparable to white Americans. Rather than report the true status of APAs in America, it appeared Petersen, and the plethora authors after him who perpetuated the Model Minority, created the myth as a result of perceived rather than real characteristics of minorities (Sue & Kitano, 1973). Nonetheless, the adverse outcomes of this myth are two-fold. First, the APA Diaspora includes approximately 25 ethnic groups with diverse histories and experiences in America (Escueta & O’Brien, 1995; Siu, 1996), grouping them into a monolithic group ignores the challenges and adversities they face and relinquishes society from addressing those adversities. Secondly, establishing a model minority adds additional layers of in-fighting among ethnic minorities, and has historically been used to diminish other minority groups’ claims of disparate treatment (Museus, 2009; Suzuki, 2002).

Two of this study’s participants who self-identified as Asian American represented two different ethnicities, Chinese American and Filipino American. Due to the majoritarian views of Asian Americans as one monolithic group that recognizes primarily people of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean descent, it is important to differentiate the unique experiences of Filipino Americans. In fact, Filipino Americans are described as experiencing liminality referring to the

Literal and figurative position of being between two states that are characterized by ambiguity...between status as foreigners and colonial subjects, being second generation college students but not having the benefits of parents who understand how to navigate the U.S. educational system, and status as racialized people of color who are often marginalized by other people of color and Whites. (Buena Vista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009, p. 75)

This distinct invisibility persists even though Filipino Americans are “characterized by a variety of immigration histories, citizenship status, class differences,
generational status, and language and regional distinctions” (Buena Vista et al., 2009, p. 76). In this liminality, Filipino Americans are lumped into the monolithic Asian Model Minority Myth and are not afforded the same specific outreach and services other people of color may enjoy. In this sense, Filipino Americans are not fully treated as people of color, while at the same time do not enjoy the same privileges to which their White counterparts are privy in a race-conscious society.

**LatCrit.** LatCrit discusses specific aspects of subordination Latinos and Hispanics experience in addition to race and ethnicity that includes language, accent, and immigration status (Espinoza, 1990). With regard to Latinas, LatCrit is relevant for this study of female presidents of color in that it “can address the concerns of Latinas in light of both our internal and external relationships in and with the worlds that have marginalized us” (Hernandez-Truyol, 1997, p. 885). While LatCrit is specific to the Latino and Hispanic experience, it should not be viewed as in opposition to CRT. To the contrary, LatCrit is “supplementary, complementary, to critical race theory” (Valdes, 1996, p. 26), as African Americans, for instance, are not commonly discriminated against for language or accent differences. Narrative research of Latina women in higher education illuminates the feelings of isolation, lack of support, and inter/intracultural conflict they experience, even as well accomplished professionals and scholars (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Nieves-Squires, 1991; Padilla & Chavez, 1995). Latinas may face adversity in higher education because they feel tokenized, immersed in an unsupportive environment, and they struggle to find ways to claim their own “voice” in academe (Medina & Luna, 2000).
Additionally, for some Latina community college scholars and administrators, the perils of tokenism include invalidation and lack of respect from colleagues and subordinates. This is especially damaging to the leadership effectiveness of Latina presidents as “their ability to carry out their jobs is largely dependent on the extent to which they have the respect of those they seek to lead” (Santiago, 1996, p. 32). Finally, Aguirre (1995) offered that Latinas in higher education may be saddled with burdensome and distracting assignments and expectations that their white male colleagues are not asked to undertake. These include requests to translate official documents and/or serve as liaison to the entire Latino community and serve on minority/diversity-based committees (Padilla, 1994). Furthermore, "Brown-on-Brown" research, or research focused on the Latino community by Latino scholars is “often considered nonacademic, narrow in scope, and nonobjective” (Medina & Luna, 2000, p. 49). This can be particularly damaging for Latinas aspiring to the presidency if they are not viewed as legitimate scholars and leaders in academe.

**Racial microaggressions.** Racial microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Most often, these may be unconscious acts by the perpetrators, but they are hurtful nonetheless both personally and professionally in the workplace. Racial microaggressions “when appraised by racial minority targets as being relevant to their racial group membership…are related to increasingly negative emotions” (Wang, 2012, p. iii). Consider the story of Taunya
Lovell Banks, an African American female law professor, whose narrative was included in a publication on critical race theory:

One Saturday afternoon I entered an elevator in a luxury condominium in downtown Philadelphia with four other black women law professors…The elevator was large and spacious. A few floors later, the door opened and a white woman in her late fifties peered in, let out a muffled cry of surprise, stepped back and let the door close without getting on. Several floors later, the elevator stopped again, and the doors opened to reveal yet another white middle-aged woman, who also decided not to get on…Following the first incident, we looked at each other puzzled; after the second incident we laughed in disbelief…Our laughter, the nervous laugh blacks often express when faced with blatant or unconscious racism of white America, masked our shock and hurt. (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 331)

This study sought to delve into the racial microaggressions that may have been experienced by female community college presidents of color for the purpose of illuminating the quiet injustices they suffer, but more importantly to illuminate the supports and resilience upon which they rely to overcome such insults and to advance professionally to become the highest-level leaders of their organizations.

**Intersectionality of gender and race.** While CRT is the dominant theory used in this study, one would be remiss to ignore the relevance and impact of gender on the life experiences of female leaders of color. Crenshaw (1995) cautioned, “because of the intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (p. 358). To the contrary, the racial and cultural identities, in addition to participant gender, were explored for influence on their personal and professional experiences. That is not to say race and gender are the only factors having influence on one’s experience, but rather the “focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw,
As the purpose of this study was to not only illuminate the issues of race and gender that compound the barriers to the ascension of women of color, but to recommend actionable solutions, CRT is appropriate in connecting theory to practice for real social justice change (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

**Career Paths**

In a narrative biographical sketch of women of color in leadership positions, Turner compared and contrasted the career paths of three women of color college presidents (Mexican American, Native American, Asian American) for the purpose of illuminating a possible “pathway to the presidency” and demonstrating the value of diversity in leadership. Major findings of this study shed light on how to support and empower women of color leaders including early educational career success, mentorship/interpersonal connections, and the organization being accepting of alternate styles of leadership as compared to traditional, Eurocentric styles.

There is also evidence to support the notion that women actually may make better organizational leaders, according to a study of African American female college presidents. Women are seen as effective leaders by engaging various organizational stakeholders in decisions that affect them (Waring, 2003). Waring sought to examine how personal histories of leaders influence not only their pathways to the presidency, but also their conceptions of what a leader does and how they should lead. A unique thread among participants in this particular study is they believed they needed to grossly outperform their colleagues in order to receive the same recognition lesser performing colleagues enjoyed. Most participants appeared to subscribe to servant leadership, placed relationship building as paramount to professional success, and were consistent in their
commitment to expand access to and diversity of their institutions (Waring, 2003). This type of research best supports the position that the value of diversity is not only in representation but in the variety of experience of people of diverse backgrounds. In addition to cultural diversity, the professional diversity of a workforce may bring added value to an organization. For ELP aspirants, professional development can be an individual pursuit external to the organization, such as through leadership training, or can be a formal professional development program offered internally within the organization in which individuals demonstrating leadership potential are identified and developed in preparation for future executive leadership positions.

There are multiple pathways and avenues by which a president arrives at their appointment to a leadership position in their organization. Traditionally, the path to the presidency starts with appointment as department chair and then to associate dean and dean. The traditional higher education promotional track has provided a stringent and inflexible path for professors to advance to high-level posts and even presidencies with little or no assessment of administrative and managerial expertise. Conversely, it is suggested there are actually four career paths of college presidents: Scholar, Steward, Spanner, and Stranger (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001). The scholar is the most traditional path, such as from career professor and dean. The steward may also hold an administrative position in higher education, but has never been a career professor. The spanner tends to have held high administrative positions in both higher education and other non-educational institutions, and the stranger comes to the presidency directly from a non-education organization, having never held a position in higher education (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001). This growing trend indicates that more future executive
leadership candidates may come from the private or public sector and may be completely disconnected from the traditional career path of professor, to dean, to executive administrator. With regard to academic preparation, all participants in this study attained doctorate degrees, either the Ph.D. or Ed.D. Additionally, all participants described staggered educational paths that included several years between attaining masters degrees and, ultimately, doctorates. Most cited starting families, career changes, or just not being ready as reasons they were dissuaded from continuing their studies.

Contrary to the corporate world, educational institutions have not developed and expanded programs and protocols to identify, develop, and promote administrative and instructional talent to ensure successive and sustainable leadership and to support organizational change and growth as needed (Gonzalez, 2010). In addition to developing a viable pipeline for advancement, Gonzalez (2010) posited coveted posts should be rotated, such as department chair, so as to offer opportunities to a varied pool of candidates, including women of color. The same can be said for deans, as they are traditional pathways to the presidency and would benefit greatly from mentoring by experienced leaders in preparation for their future appointment to an executive leadership position (Gonzalez, 2010). Additionally, Miles (2012) cited Rosser’s research finding that lack of formal professional development opportunities for Student Services professionals, of whom women of color are well represented, “is a major source of frustration amongst student affairs professionals” (p. 16). The research further underscores the need for a sustainable leadership strategy that is diverse and far-reaching in its approach to develop leaders for an organization.
Many community colleges impart some sort of succession planning and professional development at community colleges such as through “Grow Your Own” (GYO) internal recruitment and development programs (Jeandron, 2006). While these programs may impart sustained leadership, they may cause inbred leadership styles that stifle innovation and diversity. Still, it is suggested a GYO program offers more personalization and applicability to an organization than an external leadership program in that it can be tailored to an organization’s specific leadership needs (Stone, 1995). The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC; 2012) announced the enhancement of its leadership offerings to support GYO leadership programs offered by its member institutions. AACC (2012) will develop curricula to assist community colleges in developing and enhancing GYO leadership programs.

In addition, the AACC facilitates the Future Presidents Institute (FPI) designed for senior level community college administrators on the direct path to a presidency and who anticipate moving into a presidency within the next two to three years. By partaking in the intensive, five-day program, participants are exposed to experienced CEOs, industry experts, and their own senior level peers. Examples of successful GYO succession planning strategies include Daytona Beach Community College’s Leadership Development Institute (LDI), Owens State Community College’s Leadership Academy (LA), and Massachusetts’ Community College Leadership Academy. Basic tenets of GYO programs include:

- Developing qualified successors to vacancies in Executive Leadership Positions (ELPs) within the college,
✓ Designing and providing professional development opportunities specifically to internal faculty and staff, and

✓ Creating a viable pipeline for internal faculty and staff to advance a diverse talent pool within the organization.

Additionally, various ethnicity-specific professional development organizations are geared toward women and people of color such as Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP), Kaleidoscope for women leaders of color, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities Leadership Programs (HACU), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (A ASCU) Millennium Leadership Initiative (MLI) for leaders of color, American Council of Education Spectrum Program, and Leadership Development Program in Higher Education (LDPHE) for Asian Pacific Americans.

Mentoring as a support to female leaders of color. Another example of growing your own leadership is in developing a mentor/shadowing program. In a phenomenological research study that utilized surveys administered to a representative sample of female leaders, data were compiled on the effects career paths, professional development, demographics, and mentorship had on 91 female college presidents. Respondents varied in age, but not very much in demographics as ninety-five percent were White and 5% were Black. Findings underscored the importance of formal professional development programs that provided participants with invaluable leadership skills but also provided networking opportunities and enhanced self-esteem and confidence to apply for executive leadership positions (Brown, 2005). While the descriptions of the presidents’ mentoring relationships could have been richer, the data alluded to the support and guidance mentorship relationships provided mentees as being
invaluable to their ascent to their current leadership position. Brown (2005) also posited there is an obvious lack of women of color in roles as institutional leaders and career paths, and that mentoring relationships might address these inequities.

The value of formal mentoring relationships for women of color cannot be emphasized enough. In a narrative study of African American aspiring leaders in higher education, Grant and Simmons (2008) captured the relevance of mentoring through a participant’s experience:

In particular, African-American female mentors have helped me enhance my socialization skills into the cultures of a cohort group and department that have sometimes been unwelcoming. Specific ‘how to’ chats on ways to approach faculty and staff while maintaining hierarchy, as well as ways to communicate within peer groups as the only African-American, are a few examples that have been very helpful navigation strategies. (p. 507)

Additionally, in her study of the career trajectories of 13 women of color in higher education, Fong-Batkin (2011) asserted, “I believe my participants would not be as successful as administrators without mentoring and networking that provides them the support they need to move forward as a woman of color administrator” (p. 155).

Organizational Culture

According to the Community College League of California (2003):

Having highly qualified, diverse faculty, classified staff, and administration is essential to preparing students to be successful in our culturally diverse state and in the world, and creating an environment that supports success for all students. Employees who reflect the many faces of California bring richness to the college. Therefore, boards should affirm their support for equal employment opportunity and support efforts to attract and retain a diverse staff. (p. 8)

To be clear, this is not to say that quantifiable diversity and representative leadership is all that is required to demonstrate a commitment to diversity. Rather, Contreras (1998) cautioned that often people of color in higher education, both administration and faculty
are marginalized by being deemed merely role models or personified demonstrations of an organization’s commitment to diversity.

While creating and fostering representative and sustainable leadership may appear on the surface to be merely an administrative process, Ballinger and Schoorman’s (2007) research and literature underscored the importance of maintaining organizational efficacy and the ability to manage subsequent change through the succession process. Much care should be taken in developing and implementing a succession plan within an educational institution, as the initial and subsequent success of a new leader hinge on the perception of said leader as qualified to be an effective change agent and transformational leader (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Pillai, Schriesheim, & Williams, 1999). This is especially important as female leaders of color as they tend to assume leadership positions under more intense scrutiny than their male, Caucasian counterparts as there are still great disparities in professional advancement and mentoring opportunities (Pasque & Nicholson, 2011; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Thompson & Dey, 1998). Additionally, literature supports the correlation between succession processes and organizational effectiveness, which Ballinger calls the “succession effect” (Ballinger, 2007). This study intends to understand, through participant counterstories, the extent to which these assertions may be true for female leaders of color who have held presidential posts at California community colleges.

While many organizations tend to cherry pick potential leaders in which they will invest and develop, an emerging trend is to select first and develop second. To the contrary, Clunies (2007) asserted organizations will be more successful if they develop potential leaders first, then select the highest performing leaders from this pool. This is
the group development concept that has been advanced earlier in succession planning literature for higher education (Clunies, 2007). It is also important to focus on striking an appropriate balance between the leadership development of aspiring leaders of color, and “cultural taxation,” a concept introduced by Amada Padilla (1994), to describe the extra burden of additional responsibilities placed upon faculty and staff of color due to their racial, ethnic, and/or gender group memberships. While the intent of the organization may be to enhance diversity and offer professional development opportunities to people of color by creating working groups or programs, it actually further marginalizes and burdens faculty and staff of color.

The role of formal and informal mentor relationships with current and past leadership is a crucial one in an effective succession plan, particularly for women of color. Bridges, Eckel, Cordova, and White (2008) suggested mentor networks play a significant role in leadership development in that seasoned administrators can serve the dual role of interim administrators as well as viable mentors for aspiring administrators (Bridges et al., 2008). With regard to representative leadership, it seems a reasonable assumption that women and ethnic minority leaders would benefit greatly from mentor networks that can grant them exposure and validation to decision makers in the organization in an effort to ensure the leadership of an organization reflects the population it serves.
Summary

In summary, while narrative research “seeks to minimize the use of literature and focus on the experiences of the individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p. 516), the literature reviewed herein provides the foundation for the study through the three streams of the conceptual framework: Critical Race Theory, Career Paths, and Organizational Culture. Critical Race Theory literature focuses on the lack of cultural and/or professional diversity in the presidential career pipeline and the incongruence between the changing demographics of the student body juxtaposed with the stagnant demographics of leadership for many community colleges. Career path literature underscores the need for either internal professional development leadership programs and/or outsourcing professional development for executive leadership skills to an external provider. Included in this stream is a review of literature on career paths concerned with benefits of mentoring and shadowing to a female leader of color to attain a prescribed skill set that is required for executive leaders. Lastly, literature on organizational culture speaks to the internal environment of the organization and its readiness and conduciveness to cultivate innovation and manage change through sustainable and diverse leadership. In consortium, the three streams of literature support the need for research to identify challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to develop representative and sustainable executive leadership and organizational culture inclusive and supportive of female community college presidents of color.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Organizational and cultural systems at California community colleges may exist that hinder the recruitment, support, and professional ascension of female community college presidents of color, thus contributing to their disenfranchisement and jeopardizing the representativeness of the organization’s leadership. This research sought through qualitative narrative inquiry, specifically through counterstories of female community college presidents of color, to identify challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to develop representative and sustainable executive leadership to include and support female community college presidents of color. This chapter includes a description of the site and population studied, research design and rationale, and ethical considerations that were employed and considered within this study.

Research Design and Rationale

A counterstory narrative approach that allows the participants to share their experiences has been determined to be the most appropriate to conduct this study. Narratives seek to not only retell the experiences of individuals; they also involve the coding of themes in the stories (Creswell, 2007). Coding allows for rich data to compare and contrast the experiences of the participants and reveal emerging themes to generate recommendations for systems change and/or future areas of study with regard to organizational and professional challenges female leaders of color face.

Critical race theory (CRT) is an appropriate lens through which to view and conduct this study in that in addition to the social justice intent of CRT, it “also seeks to
raise the consciousness of people of color and whites alike. CRT attempts to accomplish this by grounding its analysis on the real, everyday experiences of people of color” (Brown, 2003, p. 7). Core to the epistemology of CRT is the experience of the “victim” as valid and reliable in demonstrating the force and power of racism on their lives. Women of color, particularly African American women, have not just survived their prolapsed oppression, they have thrived. Rather, their resilience has “enabled Black women to shape the raw materials of their lives into an extraordinary succession of victories” (Hine & Thompson, 1998, p. 5). One might surmise this resilience may be generalizable to other women of color as well. Additionally, the “thick descriptions and interviews, characteristic of case study research, not only serve illuminative purposes but also can be used to document institutional as well as overt racism” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 11). Thus, the shared values and experiences of people of color underscore the effects of both overt and covert racism and racial microaggressions, and their counterstories are relevant to understanding if and how organizations contribute to their exclusion.

It is important to note that majoritarian storytelling, or histories told by the Eurocentric majority, tends to dismiss the relevance of race and racism in the experiences of people of color, thus “marginalization is justified through research that de-centers and even dismisses communities of color through majoritarian storytelling” (Heller, 1966, p. 36). For this reason, it is most important the experiences of female community college presidents be told firsthand and without majoritarian filters. Additionally, narrative research is further legitimized for use in educational and social science research by educators D. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly in their article “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry” published in 1990, and by Ladson-Billings (1999) and Vargas
(2003) in their seminal work on CRT in educational research. CRT scholars underscore the legitimacy of counterstories; they posit that, “attacking embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity is a legitimate function of all fiction” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Qualitative measures are appropriate for this study in that the research sought, through female community college president counterstories, to identify challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to develop representative and sustainable executive leadership to include and support female community college presidents of color. This study utilized qualitative narratives by employing the seven major characteristics of narrative research (Creswell, 2007):

- Individual experiences
- Chronology of the experiences
- Collecting individual stories
- Restorying
- Coding for themes
- Context or setting
- Collaborating with participants (p. 517)
Site and Population

Population Description

Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>District Type</th>
<th>Geographic Region</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K.J.</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>Multi-college</td>
<td>Northern California</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hattie</td>
<td>Filipino American</td>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>Multi-college</td>
<td>Southern California</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelina</td>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>Single college</td>
<td>Northern California</td>
<td>Chancellor (ret.)</td>
<td>EdD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>Multi-college</td>
<td>Northern California</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>EdD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azora</td>
<td>Nicaraguan American</td>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>Multi-college</td>
<td>Northern California</td>
<td>Chancellor</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ding-Jo</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>Multi-college</td>
<td>Southern California</td>
<td>Chancellor (ret.)</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erlinda</td>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>Multi-college</td>
<td>Southern California</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>EdD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcie</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>55-65</td>
<td>Multi-college</td>
<td>Northern California</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participants were given the option to use their real names, initials, or to be assigned a pseudonym.

The participants in this study were selected using a purposeful, criterion sampling method. Criteria for selection included being a female, person of color, and current or former president of a California community college. Eleven participants were interviewed, and ultimately the data from eight community college presidents who were females of color were included in this study. A qualitative, narrative methodology was deemed to be the most appropriate to conduct this study as participant data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with questions derived from the literature review’s three streams of research. Due to the relative ease with which one might discern the
identity of the participants, college and district names and other identifying information are intentionally vague. All told, of the eight participants whose narratives were included in the study, three self-identified as African American, two identified as Latina (Mexican American and Nicaraguan American), one identified as Hispanic, and two identified themselves as Asian American (one Chinese American, and one Filipino American). All participants identified their age range as being between 55 and 65 years of age. While all participants were former or presently seated presidents at California community colleges, two had attained the office of chancellor after having served as president and one was a seated chancellor at the time of the study.
Site Description

Table 2

Participant Demographics Compared to Their Respective Colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Student Pop.</th>
<th>% of Students of Color</th>
<th>% of Female Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KJ.</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>35,554</td>
<td>57.52%</td>
<td>56.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hattie</td>
<td>Filipino American</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>15,741</td>
<td>54.98%</td>
<td>53.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelina</td>
<td>Hispanic American</td>
<td>Chancellor (ret.)</td>
<td>25,383</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>57.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>16,289</td>
<td>69.43%</td>
<td>52.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azora</td>
<td>Nicaraguan American</td>
<td>Chancellor</td>
<td>33,937</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>51.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ding-Jo</td>
<td>Chinese American</td>
<td>Chancellor (ret.)</td>
<td>15,741</td>
<td>54.98%</td>
<td>53.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erlinda</td>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>71,329</td>
<td>63.67%</td>
<td>42.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcie</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>11,059</td>
<td>68.89%</td>
<td>51.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Management Information Systems Data Mart

Research participants were eight former or current presidents of community colleges in California. The colleges vary in geographic location (northern and southern California) and organizational structure from single-college districts to multi-college districts. As illustrated in Table 2, all but one college’s student population is more than 50% female. Additionally, persons of color make up the vast majority of the student population at the participants’ respective colleges. Interestingly, the demographic data show six out of the college’s student demographics are mirrored by the demographics of
their president, both in gender and top two largest percentages of ethnicities. In one case, that of Erlinda, a Hispanic female president, more than 53% of the students is Hispanic.

Most participant interviews took place in a variety of locations such as in the participants’ offices on campus, at an off-campus library, and even at one participant’s private residence. An observation of note and consistent finding with regard to personal dress and home or office décor is evidence of cultural or gender expression and pride. Adorning walls and bookshelves were personal photos of family, art created by or illustrating women and people of color, several books whose titles denoted an interest in women of color studies, and personal dress, jewelry, and hairstyles that appeared to be celebratory of participant’s respective cultures.

**Site Access**

There were no unmanageable barriers, such as distance or travel costs, to prevent access to participants. Most participants worked or resided within proximal distance to the researcher. The researcher’s preference was to conduct face-to-face interviews when possible, so all but one interview included in the study was in-person. One telephone interview was conducted with a participant whose location and schedule would not allow for an in-person interview. Participants made themselves available to meet at their offices or at a mutually agreed upon location off campus.
Research Methods

Description of Methods Used

**Narrative counterstories.** By definition, a narrative “typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual” (Creswell, 2007, p. 512). As the researcher proposes to illustrate the experiences of female former community college presidents of color, a narrative methodology is most appropriate. Data were gathered by conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews that were then coded and analyzed for recurring themes to inform findings. Creswell identified seven major steps to conduct a narrative study undertaken by the researcher:

- Identify a phenomenon that addresses an educational problem
- Purposefully select an individual from whom one can learn about the problem
- Collect the individual’s story
- Restory, or in this case, counterstory the individual’s story
- Collaborate with the participant
- Write a story about the participant’s experiences
- Validate the story’s accuracy.

**Participant self-study.** Participants were also asked to respond to a brief online self-study for the purpose of gathering specific demographic, career path and organizational culture, and professional development data (see Appendix A).
Stages of Data Collection

Initiation/Introduction phase. The entire study was conducted over a period of seven to nine months divided into four chronological data collection phases: Initiation/Introduction (summer 2012), Administration Phase (fall 2012), Analysis (winter 2013), and Reporting (spring 2013). During the Initiation/Introduction phase, the primary tasks to be completed were instrument and protocol refinement and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Administration phase. It is critical the researcher present a clear, concise, and compelling case for the importance and relevance of the research to all participants in the Administration phase to establish credibility and trust with participants. Furthermore, because participants are CEOs of their organization and have extremely impacted schedules, it was critical that all initial contact was timely and thorough in requesting their participation. This was achieved with a pre-interview protocol developed and informed by the literature review and sent to all proposed participants and their executive assistants, followed by a qualitative semi-structured interview, and subsequent contacts by phone or email to facilitate the collaborative development of each narrative.

Analysis phase. Initial interview responses in the form of narrative counterstories were analyzed and coded for recurring themes within and between narratives. The researcher conferred with participants to share emergent themes revealed in their responses for congruence, as well as to clarify or confirm the researcher’s analysis of their counterstories via telephone and email. Demographic data was also analyzed from the online participant self-study to inform the findings on participants’ career paths, professional development, and organizational culture. Concurrently, data
were gleaned from statistical secondary sources and artifacts to provide an historical and demographic context of the organizational culture of California community colleges, and the impact on the experiences of female leaders of color.

**Reporting phase.** Following analysis of transcribed field notes, interviews, field texts, coded themes and interpretations, and researcher’s reflections, data were compiled and analyzed to inform the findings of the study.

**Description of Each Method Used**

**Instrument description.** Interviews were designed as 1-hour, face-to-face meetings with participants. However, in actuality, the in-person interviews tended to last longer, sometimes up to two hours. Additional time was allotted to allow for unscripted questions and answers between the researcher and the participant. Approximately 15-18 scripted questions were posed to participants, but as mentioned previously, spontaneous questions were posed for further exploration of participants’ experiences and responses (see Appendix B). The interview protocol included full disclosure to participants on the purpose and intent of the study via an informed consent form with an option to opt out of questions and a description of measures taken by the researcher to ensure anonymity and safeguarding of identifying information. Participants signed two copies of the consent form: one to be kept by the participant and one to be kept on file with the researcher (see Appendix C).

**Participant selection.** Participants in this study were derived from a purposeful sample of females of color who were past and current presidents of California Community Colleges, including current and retired chancellors. An initial database was compiled using demographic data from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s
Office, professional relationships and networks known to the researcher, and snowball sampling in which participants referred additional participants who met the criteria of the study.

**Identification and invitation.** The researcher made initial contact with participants in writing to solicit their interest and availability to participate in the study. Approximately one week later, a follow-up email was sent to the potential participants and their executive assistants to secure an in-person or telephone interview within a specified time frame for data collection. Commitments were confirmed for interviews that would take place over roughly a six- to eight-week period of time.

**Data collection.** Data collection through field texts and semi-structured interviews took place in-person with all but one participant who was interviewed by telephone during the administration phase. The researcher recorded interviews and participant responses by both manual notes as well as by audio recording. Subsequent to initial interviews, follow-up contact through email gave each participant an opportunity to collaborate in the development of their narrative, and to contribute additional data if necessary. Of note was the quality and depth of interviews conducted via phone versus in person. The latter collection method proved to garner more detailed and richer data, particularly with regard to participants sharing their experiences with racial microaggressions.

This researcher posits that ideally, narrative inquiry should be conducted in person whenever possible to establish rapport and trust with participants. Doing so results in much richer and sensitive data that a participant may not otherwise feel as comfortable sharing via telephone. Likewise, conducting interviews in person allows for
a more intimate experience between the researcher and participant and allows the researcher to observe additional data such as physical surroundings in which the participant lives and/or works.

**Data analysis.** Data analysis in this study included descriptive statistics and coding of qualitative data from field texts, artifacts, and face-to-face interviews with participants. Recorded interviews were transcribed and then uploaded to Dedoose, a cross-platform application for analyzing text, video, and spreadsheet data that assists the researcher in analyzing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research ([www.dedoose.com](http://www.dedoose.com)). Within the Dedoose application, the researcher utilized various functions that allow for the creation and assignment of single and multiple codes to transcribed interviews. Analysis was then conducted to cross-tabulate codes, examine code co-occurrence between participants, and code application (number of times a particular code is selected or identified in a transcript). A core element of narrative studies is to collaborate with participants. In this regard, “collaboration involves negotiating relationships between the researcher and the participant to lessen the potential gap between the narrative told and the narrative reported (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). In identifying emerging themes, participants were invited to review draft narratives to confirm statements and generalized themes, as restoried and reported by the researcher.

**Ethical Considerations**

In accordance with the Belmont Report, the researcher obtained the appropriate IRB approval prior to embarking on any research. Care was taken to ensure subjects were respected, minimal harm was caused with maximum benefit through beneficence,
and justice was guaranteed by equal distribution of benefits. The researcher provided an appropriate and explicit description of the study’s intent, procedures, and any associated risks and benefits to ensure informed consent of participants. There are various ethical considerations for a researcher surrounding research with human subjects. Because many of the subjects would be sharing their experiences in the study, the researcher must take precautions to protect the anonymity of all subjects.

Additionally, the researcher used numerical identifiers on all printed and electronic data instead of identifying personal data and labels and protected data by using encrypted passwords and locked filing cabinets for storage. Professional transcribers used to transcribe interviews also signed nondisclosure statements prior to receiving recordings. Lastly, prior to agreeing to participate in the study, the researcher within the interview protocol advised all study participants that absolute confidentiality would be guaranteed and every preventative measure would be taken to protect participants’ rights to privacy and confidentiality. Such safeguards included providing minimal descriptions of participants and assigning pseudonyms, fictitious names derived from characters from various Langston Hughes literary works. Only three participants asked that their full real names be used, one asked that her initials be used, and the remaining participants requested pseudonyms.
Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

**Introduction**

To understand how someone gets to where they are, whether to replicate or mitigate their pathway for aspiring leaders, one must reflect on where they have been and the experiences that have shaped their very existence. The female presidents of color in this study have personal and professional journeys predating diplomas and promotions, journeys that can only legitimately be told and understood from their perspectives through their counterstories. The narratives herein describe not only chronological career paths, but also personal, professional, and organizational challenges each participant overcame, thus, making them the leaders they are today. Furthermore, aspiring leaders, current leaders, and organizations can learn invaluable lessons from the unique lived experiences of female leaders of color to make the ascension of future leaders less unnecessarily tenuous.

My primary motivation was coming out of that sixties era segregation and having people restrict certain kinds of things from me. So I come from a point of view that says, "I don't care how badly you think something is not going to be within my reach. I can access it and I'm going to show you that I can get it." I don't let anybody set the limits for me for what I can or cannot do. My parents worked hard to create opportunities for me and I took advantage of that. And there are people I did not even know who created opportunities for me and for you. So we have a responsibility to achieve, no matter what. We cannot allow ourselves to believe that we're not worthy and that we're not capable. We have to persist. We have no choice. (KJ, 2012)
Findings

Participant Narrative Counterstories

KJ.

Career path. KJ, as she preferred to be identified for this study, is a seasoned and sought after community college administrator. She identified herself as an African American whose journey began in Midwest America in the 1950s. In many ways, the adversity and discrimination she faced prepared her for other challenges in life, including the presidency. It is because of these earlier experiences that she is not deterred by the organizational challenges posed along her journey to the presidency.

I grew up in the sixties and came out of the fifties...and was part of the Civil Rights Movement and saw all of the things that were happening to people who were just trying to have a chance to buy a sandwich and a soda at the Woolworth's or fountain in downtown Oklahoma City. So, I mean, those are the kinds of things that mattered to me. When we would go into the shopping center and if you touched a garment, somebody white may have wanted that garment but if you touched it, because you were black, a white person did not want to touch that because you had handled it.

Rather than provide a reason to not succeed, early discrimination instilled in her a sense of cultural pride and resilience that has served her in her career, particularly her advocate stance in serving community college students. While she holds a doctorate in Community College Leadership, she shared that her road to the presidency was not specifically mapped upon the start of her doctoral studies. Rather, her original intention was to secure a faculty position at a four-year university that taught community college leadership. Having assessed the credentials of other faculty at this institution, she realized that while not a requirement, having been a president at a community college was a commonality among faculty teaching community college leadership courses.
Prior to her current appointment as a community college president, KJ held two former positions as either president or like-CEO of a community college campus and/or system. Her path to the presidency has been a robust and interesting one, with professional opportunities, challenges, and accomplishments. KJ took the traditional scholar path to the presidency, and for the past seven to eight years continued to teach community college leadership courses at various four-year universities while seated as a community college president. She described herself as not being a hesitant leader, but rather a very confident one. She shared:

This was not my first presidency, nor was it my first leadership over a campus...not being new to the role of president at the college and not being afraid of the responsibilities I think was a plus for me. And so I started my tenure with a great deal of confidence in myself and my abilities to do the job irrespective of what other people might have thought. I believe that because I was selected there was a level of confidence in the community college community as a whole in my abilities.

KJ’s professional accomplishments are many; she cited among them her ability to make meaningful connections with the college and community in general, maximizing resources, and stewarding a very successful capital campaign on an aged campus. She credited her success to her ability to motivate and leverage a team by bringing out the best in them to achieve a common goal:

I'm not an ego driven president, I'm a confident president, but it's not all about me. It's about other people in the organization and things we have to do collectively to make things happen on behalf of our students and to better serve our community. To me, that's a big accomplishment to get past myself. Sometimes CEOs, they get in their own way of being effective.

By the time KJ received her doctorate, she was a vice president at a community college. Naively, she thought that upon her completion she would apply for and land presidential positions. To the contrary, KJ said:
There is way in which you have to complete applications in order for people to see the skills that you have. If you submit just kind of random listings of things, your applications won’t get through the screening process...you have to know how to package everything. So I think that grooming piece is probably a part that a lot of people are missing.

It’s important to not only have the credentials, but also to know how to market and present oneself for advancement opportunities. Being able to attain and articulate academic and professional preparation to demonstrate oneself to be “presidential material” is imperative for aspiring women of color. KJ is clear that it is not just credentials that make you qualified to lead, “it’s soft skills and relationships...the difference is going to be in how polished you are, not just in how you look and present yourself, but in how you are able to exude the confidence that ‘I can do the job.’”

**Organizational culture.** Key to KJ’s success was a mentor, one of whom was actually a white male with whom she was paired at a former organization. She described their mentor-mentee relationship as a perfect match, although she initially thought they would not have anything in common; that actually worked to her advantage. He shared insight with her that she believed she may not have received otherwise, such as seeking professional development opportunities external to the organization in order to prepare her for future leadership roles. Likewise, KJ reflected on the value of that experience when she was instrumental in developing a leadership program at a former community college where she was president. When asked about ways organizations can help advance women of color, she shared that oftentimes internal GYO leadership programs can be beneficial. KJ was clear in her commitment to hire the best person for the job, irrespective of race or gender, but she also offered that women of color she has observed advancing in some organizations did so through the ranks in part to GYO programs.
My feeling is that they rose through the process because of the impact that training had on them. They helped them to know how to present their skills, they helped them to know how to articulate their past experiences and relate it to the job that they were applying for.

Having firsthand experience in designing and implementing human resource recruitment strategies, KJ offered recommendations to increase the diversity of executive leadership position candidate pools.

I think we have to use technology a bit more, in a more sophisticated way to reach out to people...I think going more directly to some of the programs where people are graduating to try to capture the young energy that's coming out of programs, particularly if you have some entry positions that you can feed people into would be good.

Another avenue KJ suggested women of color pursue is a headhunter agency because they make it their business to know where the talent it, especially the talented people of color.

While having a long and robust organizational history is advantageous, KJ cited that because many people have worked at the same institution for their whole careers they “are pretty staid in how they view the world of education and they don't always open up their minds to new ways of doing things,” and this poses challenges for women of color to advance. It was for this reason KJ sought opportunities for advancement into the executive leadership ranks at other colleges. While her career began at the same college where she eventually became president, she is clear that not only did she not set out to be a president, had she stayed at her current college for her entire career, it is unlikely she would have attained her current post. When asked why she thought this was so, she replied:

People tend to hire individuals that they have a comfort level with, and if the decision makers are less familiar with taking direction or leadership or valuing the
expertise of someone that's either female or a person of color, then they have to, I think sometimes, decide whether that's a person they're going to move forward and advance to that next level of opportunity.

**Critical race theory.** AB1725 created and upholds shared governance in community colleges. This legislation was introduced to ensure voices of those governed are heard at the decision-making table. KJ recognized the importance and value of shared governance and readily engages her institution's stakeholders in decisions directly affecting them. However, in her experience as a community college administrator, she, as a female president of color, has witnessed firsthand disparities in the ultimate decision-making authority of presidents and challenging of such authority by insubordinates. While she admits she cannot definitively know what motivates a person to easily accept the authority of one leader, and routinely challenge the authority of another, she has experienced multiple incidences when her authority and/or decisions were challenged more so than those of her white male peers.

With regard to her experience in the presidency of her current institution, she cited microaggressions such as power struggles and suspicion or resentment of her interest and desire to provide input regarding decisions affecting the campus that are directly overseen by subordinate managers. She pointed out the previous president, who was a white male, also had great interest in all things related to the college and his input was more readily received. Microaggressions also surfaced in the way her involvement and participation was solicited. Rather than meetings being scheduled around her availability, at her request, she would be advised of the meeting date and then told her participation was not mandatory, and that it was okay if she was not available.
Seeing a Plexiglas ceiling blocking her path to higher posts, she realized she would need to go to other institutions, and even other cities and states, to attain the professional growth and experience she wanted. KJ discussed how she believed the types of job announcements routed to her by superiors and colleagues, unlike those routed to her white male colleagues, did not match her aspirations to be a manager within the organization, but rather reflected what others thought she was capable of doing. Where she saw her white male counterparts ascending more quickly to management positions, even without the extensive supplemental professional development experience she had attained, she found herself deducing this may have something to do with her race and/or gender. KJ stated:

I'm not sure as to why someone making the decision about who would get the job determined that I did not have the readiness that some of my peers had when they were given the same level of responsibility at a younger age or an earlier point in their career. In fact, even now as I think about the years I've put into making sure my readiness for certain things couldn't be challenged, other people learn on the job. They get the jobs, they learn as they go. So I can't say with-let me put it this way- my suspicion is that it has something to do with being a woman and it has something to do with being a woman of color.

Nonetheless, KJ persisted and believed there are no external forces that could have held her, or even future female leaders of color, back from attaining any goal they set for themselves.

**Hattie.**

**Career paths.** Finding her place personally, as a first-generation Filipino American and professionally as one of very few Asian American community college presidents, has been eventful for Hattie. Core to her success, Hattie credited strong mentoring relationships with women of color who offered guidance, support, knowledge,
expertise, and a shared experience of being underrepresented in the professional and academic realm as well as a shared goal of excelling as a leader. As a new immigrant to the United States, after having completed her undergraduate degree and a stint as an intercultural trainer for the U.S. Peace Corps in the Philippines, Hattie found her first employment as an admissions evaluator for foreign students at a four-year university in northern California. Her first introduction to community colleges came several years later when she took the opportunity to serve as international student advisor and teach an introduction to college course.

Her most significant mentoring relationship, then and now, is with an African American female president who, according to Hattie, “really opened a lot of doors to me in terms of additional training but more than anything, really giving me a lot of advice and a lot of guidance throughout my career.” Her mentor encouraged her to pursue new challenges and opportunities, including the pursuit of a doctoral degree and higher levels of management.

I was always encouraged to go for the presidency. And in some ways, I felt I had an obligation to do so because there’s not a lot of Asian American Presidents and here I was, in a position where I could become one and wasn’t trying. So I decided to apply for a presidency to see if I would be competitive and, of course, I got the first presidency I applied for—the presidency that I have now occupied for two and a half years.

Contrary to the traditional path to the presidency usually originating from the instructional side of the house, Hattie served almost exclusively in student services. Hattie offered that while this “untraditional” path is becoming more common,

It’s still true that you are much better off having an instructional background, because it is the faculty who has tremendous influence in terms of hiring. But I think, more and more, there are a variety of paths now. I think Student Services is
really becoming a more common path for presidencies, but I think you still have to know instruction and you still have to know institutions.

Knowing institutions and the challenges they face and a genuine love for people are core competencies for community college leaders, perhaps even more so than being a subject matter expert. It was Hattie’s ability to work well with people from diverse backgrounds and with multiple perspectives and her well-rounded experience with budgeting, human resources, and institutional management that made Hattie a prime candidate for the presidency.

In the case of where I am right now, they weren’t looking for a leader that was necessarily from instruction. The College community was looking for somebody who was visionary and who was really good with people; someone who could really motivate and promote teamwork and collaboration, and I happened to be a good fit for what the institution was looking for.

Adding to Hattie’s core leadership competencies are her own personal experiences that proved to be invaluable in her ability to be an empathetic and effective advocate in her role as Dean of Student Affairs, and ultimately as a president. Her experiences and perspectives as an immigrant, as a single parent who raised two children, as a judicial affairs officer, and as a Dean of students who provided support and much-needed connections for students, helped her establish a strong foundation for her leadership, allowing her to excel along the way to the presidency. Hattie shared how her life experiences shaped and sharpened her as a leader and as a champion for not just students of color but for all students.

Being an immigrant…especially being a young professional who was very proud of my accomplishments when I was in the Philippines and then all of a sudden, not knowing where to go and how to begin a life in a new country… was very difficult. As a result, I’m always very sensitive to the struggles of immigrants and those of others who need support. My initial experiences as an immigrant sensitized me and allowed me to become much more empathetic to the
experiences of other immigrants and really, people of color who may be from low socioeconomic backgrounds having difficulty navigating an academic institution.

**Critical race theory.** Acculturation to the dominant culture, Hattie said, is a way to establish a level of comfort in a new cultural environment but it does not guarantee acceptance. “There’s a lot of literature among Asian Americans that suggests that Asians in the United States are viewed as forever foreigners, not only in terms of accent but in terms of look.” Hattie explained that for many Asian Americans, in addition to biases that may arise from differences in physical appearance from the dominant culture, an Asian accent may also impede professional advancement. Even when one speaks English fluently, one may still garner criticism or experience a lack of confidence in one’s abilities based merely on the way one speaks, or one’s accent. For Hattie, her Filipino accent has elicited curious comments from colleagues and employers. She recalled an incident that occurred at one of her first interviews at a community college.

During my first interview for a position at a community college the Vice President complimented me by saying that unlike other individuals from my ethnic group, I did not have an accent. I think he intended the comment as a compliment but it did not come across as such. It was also a backhanded comment in many ways. I found myself saying, “Yes I do! Of course I have an accent!” Because I do! But, you know, he made it a point to say that.

Why that would be important for an employer to evaluate and attempt to complement is irrelevant at best and disturbing at worst. Hattie further explained she, too, conducted research on community college presidents of color, specifically Asian American presidents. She shared that this is a common experience among people with accents.

I think you’ll find that’s true for a lot of Asians. Sometimes when you don’t sound just like the others or when you don’t sound like people expected you to sound,
then they block whatever you’re saying. And then they’re no longer listening to what you’re saying, they’re listening to your accent. I think it is important for first generation Asian Americans to be aware of the impact of their accent.

Gender bias has also proven to be a distinguishing factor between Hattie and her male colleagues. In the context of being in regular meetings with peers, on multiple occasions, Hattie has felt ignored and treated differently than her male colleagues.

I don’t know if it’s because I’m Asian or because I’m a woman, it’s probably more because I’m a woman…but it’s a feeling of being ignored, not being acknowledged or recognized, whereas my colleagues, would be recognized and would be called by name, etc. And it’s just something that you feel and it brings about a sense of discomfort within you. I suppose that could happen even if you’re not a person of color but I think that, throughout my career there has been that sense of being treated differently, of not being an equal. I’ve been lucky in that I haven’t had very many of those experiences but enough that I can sense it when it’s happening.

While the dominant culture’s reaction to Hattie’s race and gender have proven to be a hindrance at times, Hattie insisted her cultural influence has worked to her advantage, instilled in her a strong commitment to excellence, and ultimately influenced her leadership style as president. She is also honest in sharing how it may have stymied her when faced with new opportunities.

I guess being Asian and having been brought up by a parent…a father who was a perfectionist; I always felt like I had to come as a perfect package---having all the requisite qualifications and preparation and having already achieved so much before applying for something. So that has been good because in whatever I did or whatever I do, I always achieve and strive to be the best, I always strive for excellence which I think is good. It’s negative because, in a sense, it probably inhibited me along the way when I had been prepared enough and I hadn’t gone for it.

**Organizational culture**. For Hattie, the understanding of organizational culture and environment plays a critical role in advancing to executive leadership positions.

Some organizations appear to only hire from within, putting an external candidate at a
disadvantage to compete for open positions. Some organizations are the opposite in which internal candidates are at a disadvantage in terms of attaining higher-level positions because the institutions consider external candidates to be more attractive. Hattie described her frustration with the organizational culture at the first community college at which she worked.

I don’t think I ever would’ve progressed to anything higher than the position I held, because the culture of the institution was kind of toxic and when the budget looked bad, the faculty started targeting specific individuals in specific positions and I knew I had to leave the institution. I think that institutions sometimes stereotype you based on the work that you’re doing. There are institutions that think they can get the best candidate from outside the institution because they know you— they know your strengths and your weaknesses. They don’t necessarily know that about an external candidate.

At the institution where Hattie became a target due to internal politics, she was “lucky to have a group of colleagues who really cared about me and saw my potential and encouraged me to leave. So I left that institution and ended up taking a promotional position at another community college.”

When Hattie’s college district, not unlike most other community colleges, began to experience budgetary problems due to the downturn in the economy, she saw firsthand how it adversely affected the organizational culture. In a multi-college district, of which Hattie’s college is the smallest and most unique, she described the infighting over scarce resources, something akin to sibling rivalry, competition, and jealousy. Longstanding murmurs of downsizing to a two-college district reemerged but were silenced by what she called a hallmark of innovation on her small college’s campus.

Where the other larger colleges had more faculty, this also made them less nimble to change. Hattie’s college was able to establish alternative degree completion programs
that accelerated a student’s graduation goals, and offered nontraditional curriculum. In such an innovative environment, Hattie has been able to stabilize her college that went through extended periods of vacancies in key leadership positions, and focus efforts on organizational sustainability through strategic planning. Likewise, Hattie believes she has earned the respect and trust of her organization through successfully leading them through critical institutional processes such as strategic planning, accreditation, budgeting, as well as guiding them through change.

I have succeeded in being able to recommend and influence some changes and in implementing changes, based on my wide experience with three other multi-college districts and exposure to a four year university. As well, because of my exposure and affiliation with professional organizations which allow me to research and implement best practices in terms of colleges.

A recurring theme in Hattie’s shared experience has been the impact and value of mentors and professional organizations, both of which she participates in even to this day based on a commitment to her own professional development and that of others. Hattie shared that, beginning early on in her career, mentors not only give you guidance, they also lend you credibility by association.

When I was doing my dissertation, I took a sabbatical leave for four months and a lot of other managers became very jealous of that. And so, again, it’s helpful to have someone who really believes in you and knows you as a person and knows your quality as a leader and who’s willing to be there advocating for you.

Beyond validating her academic and professional acumen, mentors introduced her to phenomenal networks and institutions by and for aspiring female leaders of color. Hattie clarifies that not all mentoring relationships are created equal.

I mean, everybody says they have a mentor but I was lucky to have really gone into a mentoring relationship with someone who to this day I can always call upon. I mean, I also have a lot of other people, and I’m lucky that way…that I can call upon. But I have this one person that I can really tell, no matter what, I can
always call on her in terms of any advice or just to get her perspective on different issues.

Understanding how important leadership development is to aspiring leaders and the organization’s sustainability, Hattie encourages and recommends participants to her college’s leadership programs that are attended by a combination of faculty, staff, and administrators.

In giving back, through serving as mentor to aspiring leaders, and by sharing her career and life experiences with higher education audiences, Hattie seems to have finally found her place. At the core of her motivation are her family and a sense of responsibility to serve her community through community colleges. She reflected on what kept her going, in spite of personal and professional challenges, and why she felt compelled to excel.

I really loved the mission of the community colleges. I loved the way that it impacted the ability of people of color, as you know there is a large percentage of people of color starting at community colleges, and the opportunities that they gave. And that was something that I felt passionate about and that I wanted to make sure that I made a difference. And the other key thing in becoming a president, as I said I could’ve very easily said no…you know, I’m happy where I am. But I had a sense of obligation, especially after I did my dissertation. I knew that there were very few Asian American presidents and for some reason it’s more difficult for Asian Americans to get to the top and here I was. I understood that being a president allowed me to be at the table and to really make a greater difference in terms of policy.

**Angelina.**

**Career path.** Angelina's commitment to service and advocacy began well before her appointment as president and, ultimately, the first female Hispanic chancellor of a multi-college district in California. Her first act of selflessness and service began when
she entered the convent right out of high school. Born in East Los Angeles, Angelina's post-high school plans and options were limited, or so she thought.

I went into the convent out of high school...and in retrospect; I know I did that because it was my only way out. I wasn't going to be able to go to college and it was my only way to do that.

When asked what limited her options for higher education and/or a career, Angelina explained that in her traditional Hispanic family, young women had only two obvious options: marriage or the convent. She chose the latter, and, to this day, she attributes much of her discipline and commitment to service to her experience as a young novice. When she exited the convent, she came home and did not have immediate plans for her future. She had yet to finish college, so she got a job as a bank teller at the encouragement of her mother who knew a young Hispanic man who managed a local branch in East L.A. Meeting her new supervisor proved to be a pivotal point in her career. At that time, in the 1960s, the banks were doing a lot of training programs for minority employees to place them into entry-level jobs to get them into banking careers. Angelina was hired to be a training officer by her new supervisor, and upon getting to know her and learning she had less than a year left of college to complete her degree, he constantly encouraged her to go back to college and even offered her a modified work schedule to do so.

After completing her degree, Angelina got the offer to move with a friend from the convent to San Francisco where she enrolled in graduate school to pursue a degree in vocational rehabilitation. While she was still uncertain about her future and career goals, she knew supporting others in achieving their goals was something she enjoyed. “What I clearly knew is I wanted to help, I wanted to work with people in a social setting; where
and how, I did not know.” The second year of her master's program required an internship; students were encouraged to secure a placement in a place or field they might want to work. About the same time, community colleges were just starting programs for disabled students, and Angelina sought and secured a placement at a local community college. This was the birthplace of what would be a life-long career in student advocacy for Angelina.

I loved it...it was great. The program was right up my alley, I’m really kind of a, I'm a real advocate kind of person and these students were, it was just brand new. No one wanted them on campus. I mean you had to do a lot of selling of the program. And so I did that for a year, three days a week, and so after that, I knew that that's what I wanted to do”.

Post-graduation, Angelina landed a job as counselor for disabled students at another local community college where she not only provided direct services, she also advocated for more resources for disabled students at California's state capitol.

"We had to do a lot of advocacy, and we were constantly in Sacramento trying to get more money for the students, so it was a really wonderful time where I met a lot of great people and we supported each other and just really enjoyed it.

Several years passed, and through the professional network she had developed, Angelina was offered a position through the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office's office to be a manager in the Workability Program charged with initiating training programs for disabled students to help them specifically prepare them for work. When Angelina was offered the opportunity to run the program as statewide manager, she stepped into several new challenges. In addition to assuming more duties, she inherited the burden of justifying the need for additional resources to this invaluable program in the wake of the former director embezzling funds. “It was a really difficult time of trying to clean it up and talk to the legislature about the fact that, even though he
had embezzled money, we still needed money.” Having succeeded at securing needed funds for the program, Angelina received a call from the current chancellor of the community college, where she was on inter-jurisdictional loan to Sacramento, saying he needed her to either stay in Sacramento or come back to her community college. Understanding she had outgrown her previous post at the college, he enticed her to return by letting her know he understood she was very capable and he thought there were a couple of jobs in which she might be interested. Angelina accepted the offer and the challenge to assume more complex responsibilities as dean of students. She offered advice to others looking for professional growth:

I always think, and I still believe this and tell others, you should always be stretching, looking for the job. You shouldn't go into something that you're very comfortable and you know you can do, not that you shouldn't be prepared, but just know that it's going to be a bit of a stretch.

Little did she know, Angelina was about to get more of a challenge than she bargained for. She recounted her discussion with the president of the college:

“I'm going to select you for this job,” he said, “but I need you to know that it's going to be kind of controversial because people are expecting me to hire this guy.” And he said, “It’s clear to me that he's not the right one for the job, but, I know I'm going to get backlash and so you need to know what's going on.” So I thought, it will be fine, people know me...it wasn't the same college where I was, but it was in the same district, and people did know me. So I said to him, that's fine, it's not a problem, and turned in my letter of resignation.

True to his prediction, the president got resistance in moving his recommendation forward to hire Angelina. He called her late in the evening after a long and contentious board meeting to announce the board had tabled her appointment. When she inquired about what had transpired, he replied, “Well, it was the whole issue of race and because I was not giving it to a black man.” Angelina replied in amazement, “But I'm a Hispanic
woman.” To which the president replied, “Yeah, but the politics.” Not much
reassurance for someone who had already submitted a letter of resignation to her current
employer, but nonetheless, with the chancellor's assistance, the president was able to
convince the board his recommendation was in the best interest of the college, and
Angelina was appointed Dean of Students. As it turned out, getting the job was just the
beginning of her tumultuous tenure at this college.

Angelina described her first day:

My first day on the job I walked in, it was a big student service area, a big room,
and my office was kind of in the back of that area so I had to walk through
everybody to get to my office, and I, well, the first thing that happened was I
came to the door and it was padlocked, the door to the building. And I thought,
Well, maybe there’s security. So I went around to the other side—padlocked. So I
went over to the president’s office and said, “I can’t get in the building.” He said,
“What do you mean?” I said, “It’s padlocked.” He said, “Padlocked?” I said,
“Yeah, both doors.” He said, “Is there anybody in there?” I said, “I don’t know. I
did not even see anybody. I just…” So it turned out they shouldn’t have been
padlocked but they had been so that I couldn’t get in. There were people inside.
So I walked in; no one said a word to me. No one said hello. No one looked at me.
I was just, and I thought, “Holy shit. Whooa.” So, at the same time when that
happened, the president came in with me and he saw it and then a couple of other
people that I knew from that college who knew me came to see me and, anyway,
it was a very difficult situation. I had my tires slashed. I had eggs thrown at my
car and that went on for, I don’t know, a month or two...So it was the first time I
ever experienced the racism among groups. I’d always felt it within, for reasons
of being Hispanic, but never with another racial group, ever.

Having not experienced overt racism on a daily basis before, Angelina was disheartened,
but not discouraged by what appeared to be interracial backlash from a predominantly
African American workforce reacting to her appointment over the incumbent candidate
who was also African American. Nonetheless, Angelina not only overcame the short-
lived shunning by some of her staff, she soon garnered the support of other Hispanic
colleagues and staff at the school who offered her moral support. Eventually, Angelina
gained the support of her colleagues and subordinates and made great strides in the two years she served as Dean of Students for the college, so much so, she reflected, “everybody liked me, and when I finally did leave, and everybody was upset, which is sort of ironic.”

Angelina’s next post, as vice president of student services at another community college in a multi-college district, posed an entirely different organizational culture and challenges. Whereas her former college was both rich in diversity and rife with problems initially, Angelina described her new college as “Pleasantville” with requisite ample resources and homogenous demographics. Being in a new and foreign environment where the majority of the campus and surrounding community was almost exclusively Caucasian, Angelina initially felt discomfort in the serenity.

Not only was it white, everyone was very nice and there were very hard working, And nobody, there were no like camps or there was no politics. And I remember thinking, this is weird. Something’s wrong here. This can’t be right.

To her surprise, through a turn of events that included the college president resigning two years after her arrival and being recommended by colleagues to apply for the presidency, Angelina, having recently completed her doctorate degree, applied for and was appointed to college president.

Pleasantville, as it turned out, had its own internal challenges Angelina addressed head on, namely sexism and inappropriate behavior of tenured faculty. Ever-reliant on keeping her focus centered on students, she found herself advocating for a tenured professor to be investigated and later fired for coming to class drunk and making sexist comments to female students. In her eight-year tenure, Angelina rid the campus of four
tenured professors who behaved equally badly, a stance she believes not only helped
the students but also garnered the respect and support of the faculty.

It sent a signal to people of how I was going to behave I think and I came to like
the job. I’ve always seen the administrator’s job as cutting through all the crap so
that people can do their jobs, whether it was the counselors or for those there to
teach. We were all there for the students and if bureaucracy got in the way, fine, I
would take care of that.

In true fashion, Angelina continued to advocate for all students for her eight years as
president of that college, and then ultimately six more years as chancellor of the multi-
college district where she had been president of one of the colleges.

**Critical race theory.** Undoubtedly, from whence a person comes has enormous
impact on the kind of person one will be, and in Angelina’s case, the kind of leader she
would become. Judging by the cultural art adorning her home, her preferred interview
location, one can see her Hispanic culture permeated not only her physical environment,
but her leadership style as well. She explained:

In the Hispanic community, whoever comes into your home is made to feel
welcome. I mean, it’s a very inviting atmosphere and it’s very familial and that’s
what I was used to. And so wherever I’ve been, I’ve always kind of set that up.

At first thought, the idea of leading in a very assertive and effective fashion, while
at the same time fostering a nurturing environment that values consensus is a paradox.
However, Angelina’s traditional Hispanic upbringing fostered both of these leadership
characteristics.

The church is very important. And I did want to serve. To this day, I mean, I
don’t think I could have been in any kind of career where I wasn’t doing service
or something that was specifically for me.

In a way, her limited options as a Hispanic female to become and wife and mother, or a
nun, may have formed her strong passion for community service, and advocacy for
community college students who may also have limits placed on their career and educational options. To this end, her service does not end with the typically workday. Angelina seeks out and mentors women of color and encourages them to keep furthering their education and apply for that next career opportunity that will get them closer to their goals and aspirations.

One might guess working in an organizational culture where the employees and surrounding community is largely homogenous that one would encounter less racism or sexism. Not necessarily so, as Angelina discovered. Unbeknownst to her, at least one faculty member voiced his assumption about Angelina’s career path. She recounted an incident.

I was at a party, a Christmas party at somebody, faculty’s house or something and the husband of one of the faculty members said to me, “How does it feel to be named president just because you’re a Hispanic woman?” I said, “I did not know I was.” He said, “Oh, yeah.” I said, “Really? Who told you?” He said, “Well, I mean, it’s pretty obvious.” I said, “To whom?” I thought, and I said, “Well, thanks for telling me. I did not know that,” and I just walked away and I thought, “Mm.” But then I wondered, “Okay,” then, “Oh, are people really saying that?” But I did not ask anybody else. I did not, I just, I let it go. I did not think it was true but I could see how they might think that. I hadn’t been there very long and they were white.

For women of color, it is often difficult to discern if any disparate treatment might be attributed to race or gender, and sometimes both. It is even further confusing when one experiences such treatment in one’s own cultural group, as Angelina can recall experiencing.

I remember when I was interim president, which was in, it would have been ’93, and I had gone to a meeting of all the local presidents. And we were sitting around, there were like twelve, fifteen of us, and they were sitting around and they were talking, and this was a group of Hispanics, okay? I was the only female there. And they were talking about the jobs that were opening up and how we were going to get others into that job. I was sitting right there. I was the interim
president and no one said, “How are we going to get Angelina into a permanent position?”

When asked what she attributed this oversight to, Angelina offered this was typical of the lack of support she felt from Hispanic men, that there was still some level of competition and sexism tingeing gender relations in her culture (also a generality).

While Angelina could not recount instances when she directly experienced racial microaggressions as president of the college, she described an organizational culture and surrounding community she never could fully relate to or feel comfortable in. “I felt like I did not know how to relate to them. This was not my community…so it’s kind of hard sometimes to muster passion in environments that don’t have those challenges.” The lack of diversity and focus on issues related to diversity and the fact that she had outgrown her current position were among the reasons Angelina began to seek lateral and vertical moves professionally.

*Organizational culture.* For Angelina, the advent of AB1725 brought many new opportunities for women to be engaged in and even lead shared governance at community colleges. Having researched the implementation of AB1725 at her own college and one other for her dissertation, Angelina knew two things unequivocally; not many people really understand the legislation and how to implement it, and men were initially adverse to this kind of collaboration. She explained:

Men did not want that kind of discussion. They did not want to be in a room where we had to discuss or take other peoples’ point of view. Women were much better at that. That’s when women started getting hired. And they also then started looking at women who were in student services because we really had those skills and we had them much better than men or women from the academic side ‘cause the women on the academic side had kind of modeled themselves after the men. And that’s a generality. Women are comfortable with shared governance ‘cause
they’re used to doing it. Men hate it. They don’t want to be told by anybody what decision to make.

Angelina shared that while she was partial to the leadership styles of women, she believes first and foremost comes a leader’s vision for their organization. For her

It was always about the students. I just so believe that education is everyone’s way out of whatever. And, to me, that was always primary, always primary, students. And that’s, to this day, I mean, I just believe in education so much. And what I love about the community colleges is you take that student who no one thinks can succeed and we get them to succeed like nowhere else, nowhere else. I mean, I just love the system and that’s why I hate to see it broken. So it’s always been about that.

Regina.

Career path. Dr. Regina Stanback-Stroud, henceforth referred to as Regina, is a force in the higher education arena. Her physical presence, activist/advocate stance, and stellar professional record are undeniable. While her career path, at first glance, appears to be a traditional one from scholar, to dean, to vice president, and then to president, further investigation indicates her path was rather untraditional, from what has been deemed career technical instruction, to the presidency. Regina began her career in higher education as a nurse teaching medical/surgical and pharmacological curriculum in community colleges, first in North Carolina and later in California. After teaching for a few years, she applied for and got a job working for the California Academic Senate, the force of the faculty on academic and professional matters. Recognized for her effective advocacy and political acumen, Regina rose quickly through the ranks to the presidency of the State Academic Senate. This position is credited with much of the core competencies Regina would later need and use as community college president. She described it as, “where you learn the system itself and you are dealing with kind of broad
policy issues. You learn how to interact with the legislature, you learn how to interact with the governor’s office, and you learn how to kind of navigate a lot of the policy discussions.” In addition, she was able to gain knowledge in legislation related to school-to-career policy that gave her the expertise leading to her selection as dean of workforce and economic development. Having a very successful tenure as dean, Regina promoted to vice president of instruction at another community college, then to vice president for more than 10 years, and, ultimately, to president.

Rather than a carefully prescribed trajectory to executive leadership, it was Regina’s blaring talents that set her apart from her colleagues, compelling others to recognize her ever-expanding expertise and recommend to her that she pursue promotional opportunities. At each segue of her career, it was a colleague or supervisor who suggested to Regina she pursue the next level – whether it was dean, vice president, or president. Although she did not know it at the time, nor did she request it, a white male supervisor was mentoring her and grooming her for advancement. His advice was to review a job announcement for a vice president position, to make a list of all the required experience she currently had and had yet to attain, and return this list to him. Having done so, Regina was surprised when he responded by assigning her to many of the areas where she did not have experience.

Every single thing that I said I hadn’t done, he assigned to me. He put me on the bargaining team. He put me on curriculum…and then I applied as a vice president, every question (snaps fingers for emphasis) they asked me, I had done, I had experience in. And if he hadn’t done that, I would not have been able to say, “Yes, I have experience in collective bargaining.” I wouldn’t have been able to say that.
She is clear to state that regardless of race and gender and the various barriers and challenges posed, she credited her authenticity, transparency, and talent for her advancement.

Because I brought my full self to those positions—which means, in some ways, a form of activism around social justice—it highlighted certain skills and certain dispositions that people would say, “You need to be in another leadership position.”

Critical race theory. When asked if she thought her male counterparts had experiences very different from hers as they advanced, she remarked that they tended to have more traditional career paths and come from the instruction side of the house compared to the heavy representation of people of color and women who come from the student services side of the house. Primarily, the difference appears to manifest itself two-fold. First, “when you come from philosophy or you come from English or you come from sociology… there is an inherent assumption that you’re a scholar and that this is your trajectory, that you should rise;” therefore, ascension is generally less impeded and accepted as a traditional trajectory. Secondly, that the authority of a white male counterpart appears to be accepted as inherently legitimate compared to that of a black female counterpart. Regina shared an example:

I’ve been in lots of situations where I make a statement or advocate for a certain thing or say, “We should go this direction,” or, “This is the implication of this policy,” and I say it and nobody really can glom on to it or there’s no real affirmation or validation of it…and then Bob sitting right next to me says the same damn thing. And I’m like…“Did I not just say that?” But somehow it’s better understood from Bob. Or now that Bob said it, it’s got some legitimacy. And so I’ve learned that in my trajectory that I have to challenge and push back on certain things and so I’m willing to say things like, “Well, you know Bob, saying it does not make it so.”
Organizational culture. Regina’s tenure as a president has been relatively short, only about two years, but she served as vice president of this same college for 10 years. She cited the organizational culture as being a source of great satisfaction and support, “I work for a college that is very supported by the community. And I enjoy the credibility and the respect of the faculty and staff.” However, there are times her motivations and rationale have been questioned, but she is not moved. It is in these times Regina admitted that she makes decisions that “I think it takes courage to make and that people sometimes are a little bit surprised.” She shared an example of a multi-level faculty hiring process in which it was obvious that the recruitment efforts did not produce a diverse applicant pool. Out of 85 people, she had seen nothing but white candidates, and she deduced there must be something in the processes or procedures systematically excluding people of color to be considered for these faculty positions. Seeing the gross lack of diversity in the talent pool, Regina made the controversial decision to put a halt to the hiring process until such time that the recruitment efforts could be reviewed and revised. When asked why she felt it critical to do this, she replied:

It’s hard for me to believe that there is nobody out of [hundreds of applications] there are no people of color that should be considered for these positions? ‘Cause if you hire the best, you will hire a diverse pool of people. You will hire white people, black people, yellow people, brown people…I’m willing to interrupt that kind of, what Joyce King calls Dysconscious racism. You know, it’s that uncritical habit of mind that lets us just go forward and not interrupt that line of thinking.

An example of Dysconscious racism Regina encountered is the assumption by some colleagues that she has a bias toward people of color. This is not usually a burden her white male counterparts have to carry or disprove, in that it is generally accepted they are not advocating for their white cohorts specifically. Somehow, being a woman of
color might erroneously represent to others that she not only advocates for, but has a preference for, only those that share her demographic. Nonetheless, Regina shared a situation in which a black male student brought a marijuana cigarette on campus in his pocket and was summarily expelled. While appropriate action was taken on the part of the school and district, Regina, then vice president, questioned the quick decision to have the student immediately expelled without further investigation or discussion. She added that in another situation, a white male student made serious physical threats against the administration and his offense was downplayed and dismissed. Excuses offered were:

He did not really mean that much. He was just desperate, don’t expel him…”

“Yet we’ll have one black student will walk by that’s got a joint in his pocket and he’s expelled for two years and we think nothing of it. In other words, nobody’s got any questions, it’s not interrogated; it’s just uncritical habit of mind that that’s how it’s supposed to be. So that’s the stuff that she’s talking about with Dysconscious racism.

In the realm of colleague relations, Regina shared that women of color are prone to experience racial microaggressions in various ways, one of which is exclusion. Such is the case in which she and male colleagues and peers concluded a meeting having not discussed any plans for after the meeting, as far as Regina was aware.

So we meet in the chancellor’s cabinet, me and the boys, the president of one college, the president of another college, the vice chancellor of human resources, the vice chancellor of educational services, the chancellor, these are all men. And we all finished the meeting and we get up and then I start to hear them saying, “Okay, we’re going to the same place?”

Needless to say, Regina was not invited to go to lunch, although her fellow colleagues had obviously discussed their plans in her absence, then confirmed them in her presence, and did not see it as rude or exclusionary to not invite her. While one cannot necessarily confirm her colleagues intended to exclude her, it does give one pause to think what
factors may have gone into them making a decision to necessarily slight one colleague whose demographic just happens to be singularly different from theirs.

Another form of slight she experienced leans toward the affirmation of stereotypes of African Americans. She recounted an instance in which administrators and staff were discussing special event planning for the college and dividing up labor for various celebrations. Regina did not share that she had exceptional culinary talent, but it was suggested she bring the barbecue to the festivities. She politely declined, yet she could not help but feel she had been insulted, however mildly and apparently unintentionally. Other comments from colleagues appear to tip their hand indicating subscription to racist stereotypes, such as African American women being vocal in their discontent and criticism in a confrontational and crass way, but not necessarily doing so with eloquence and critical analysis. Regina recalled an instance when she and other colleagues debriefed the outcome of a meeting as an example:

I come out of a meeting and I’ve just laid down my contribution as ideas that are nuanced and complex. I’m well thought out and I’m well read, and I’ll get, “Well, she speaks her mind.” Well, I do speak my mind, but that’s not a compliment. Everybody else walked out of that meeting being considered to be a scholar. Everybody else walked out of that meeting being considered to be an executive, you know? Who has this depth and breadth of knowledge and wisdom, and I get to be the person who’s described as, “She’ll tell it like it is?!”

Regina says there were other situations in which she was quite certain the person offending her had given her no indication they meant to, or that they were even aware they had offended her. Nonetheless, she came from what she called a “stance of inquiry” in which she asked herself “what makes someone need to say that?” “What informs that statement?” She recounted an incident in which she was preparing for accreditation as president of her college. She had served on the accreditation team at this same college
prior and had demonstrated herself to be well-versed and equipped to spearhead this process with her 30 years’ experience in community colleges. A colleague made a suggestion to her that she have the previous president review the accreditation documents prior to submission. Rather than take a defensive stance, Regina kindly posed questions back to her colleague and asked her what her concerns were. She also explained to her colleague,

“Well, let’s just think about that.” I really want to have an open mind, but I’m not quite sure. I said, “It has lots of other implications. If there’s a leadership board or a knowledge deficit, you do something like that, but I’m not sure that that’s the case here.”

Again, even in situations where one can be relatively certain no harm was intended, Regina intimated that throughout her ascension to the presidency there were other situations such as those described in which she was on the receiving end of slights inferring a lack of complete confidence in her abilities, exclusion or alienation by white male peers, and/or subscription to stereotypical notions of when, where, and how African American females present themselves in the workplace.

Racial microaggressions are not foreign to women of color, nor are they restricted to the workplace. Because these types of unconscious and conscious slights are commonplace, many women of color such as Regina have adapted a graciousness with which they address these slights. Doing so allows the offended to avoid constant defensiveness, and offers a learning opportunity to the offender to be more mindful of their words and actions.

The reality is that, particularly as an African American woman being raised in the south in segregation and having traveled this trajectory in these United States, I am really very familiar with what it means to defend myself, my ideas and people that I care about and things that I care about, whether it’s notions or policies or
whatever it might be. So defense is a familiar territory, but it’s not always the most gracious. And so I have to really be careful not to be too defensive. And what I have figured out, even though it’s not automatic and I don’t do it automatically, I just wish I could, the reality is the more power you have and the more you’re in a position of power, the less you have to defend.

Regina believes this graciousness, which comes with experience and maturity, also comes from a place of complete security and confidence in her abilities and intellect that do not require any defense and validation.

One of the most significant differences Regina cited as existing between her experiences as a woman of color in higher education and experiences of other colleagues is merely her presence and what it represents for those who assign notions to it. It is not necessarily a burden, but rather a palpable difference she is conscious of and acknowledges other colleagues do not appear to have the same attention paid to their presence.

I don’t have the ability to be low profile...I can walk into a room and I cannot say a word and my presence is known and there are ideas around that presence. And so people start saying things like, “Well, Regina, you might not agree with this, but...” I haven’t said a word. “Well, Regina, I’m not quite sure if this is what you’re thinking, but...” Haven’t said a word. So I—and I don’t know about all women of color—but I know that I—and it’s not intentional; it’s not something that I have tried to design—but I know that I have a presence and that when I enter that room, that my blackness enters that room, but not just my blackness, the centrality of my values enters that room, that people are clear, they are crystal clear...so when I walk into that room, I do not have the luxury of just being the wallflower...I also don’t have the luxury of mediocrity.

In fairness, Regina is well known for her courage and commitment to social justice, so it may also be her reputation that precedes her in some professional situations, in addition to her being a woman of color and all that might represent for others. Nonetheless, Regina described her standing among her peers to be very respected and revered, and she definitely enjoyed their confidence in her abilities and leadership.
Organizational culture. Perhaps inadvertently, there exist organizational and cultural systems at community colleges that appear to be almost completely void of diversity, while parallel systems in the same institution enjoy abundantly diverse environments. When asked why there seems to be a disproportionate number of female executive leaders of color in higher education, Regina explained how the traditional career path for recruiting and promoting for leadership positions may be skewed against women of color. Much of the recruitment and advancement Regina saw in community colleges begins with career instructors, then on to deans, then vice presidents, then president. Unfortunately, this is not where the majority of women of color tend to begin their careers in higher education, thus they are systematically left out of the promotional stream for those critical gateway positions, such as dean.

A lot in the instruction is predominantly white people that come out of the classroom, because the faculty hired the faculty and you know, it’s predominantly, you know normally white. But in the student services programs, a lot of those programs are what they call “categorical programs” and they were designed during the Civil Rights era to try to address and mitigate some of the disparities. So you might see people of color there because they have been the director of EOP or the director of matriculation or whatever it might be… An African American female colleague of mine, who was on the student services side of the house her whole career was in counseling but she intentionally took a joint vice president of instruction/vice president of student services job so that she could get to the presidency because just being in student services, it’s hard to get to the presidency.

The barrier for women of color to ascend from student services to the vice presidency, a much less traditional path, is mostly in the assumptions held by some that student services, while a critical component of higher education, is less scholarly or academic than the instructional side of the house.
Regina shared what she thought was the key ingredient to the success for women of color who have transcended these barriers and attained executive leadership positions in higher education, including the presidency.

What I see is that many of the African American women, for an example, that have navigated that is because they have other bold characteristics that they’ve been able to kind of push past that. Or the political climate might allow that or—so there’s a combination of things, it’s not just the committee that’s there but it’s the politics of the community… Like part of my becoming the president, I knew when I went in that I had to have certain things. So I, for an example, made sure I had the support from the central labor council that’s in the county. Made sure that I had support from the community organizations, the local business and industry. You know all of that, the local, the high school superintendent, people that we would have to have partnerships with and that kind of stuff, all of that makes a difference. But you have to, the reason I knew to do those things is because I understood the strategies.

With regard to offering professional development opportunities to attract and retain a diverse talent pool, such as GYO leadership programs at community colleges, she acknowledged organizations must be mindful of diverse succession management. Regina offered some caution.

I don’t have a negative disposition toward them, necessarily, but I do critique them in a way. Grow Your Own is a way of privileging the privileged who managed to get there. And it also closes the institution off to the kind of talent that might be outside of the organization. Grow Your Own is more designed to take care of the organization versus designed to move people. In other words, because the organization has no leadership succession, their Grow Your Own is their strategy. Whereas I think if you really want to look at getting the talent pool to where it could be a diverse talent pool, then we have to be open to people coming from all walks of life and they might not necessarily be there.

In discussing what appears to be a looming leadership crisis due to mass retirements, Regina echoed much of what is written in relevant literature on this topic. She shared that not only will there be vacancies (without systems in place at most colleges to fill those vacancies with talented and diverse successors), there is also no plan to capture the
institutional memory that will leave with the retiring leaders. Regina offered an example of a unique, innovative, and relatively inexpensive remedy for the impending institutional memory loss her organization was facing with the retirement of the vice president of student services and dean of language arts.

I hired somebody to interview these people. And in that interview have them pass on institutional knowledge because I was looking at a hundred years of institutional memory walking out the door. So I wanted to have a strategy for us to be able to go back to them and use them as a resource and use their words and their ideas. And so I had them interviewed and I had a document prepared and the new people that came in got that document. That’s minimal preparation. It cost the institution a couple thousand dollars. That’s minimal preparation. However, most institutions don’t have a succession plan in terms of preserving the institutional memory so it does not walk out in the heads of those people that walk out.

It is strategies such as these that serve to help not only women of color advance to executive leadership positions in higher education, but possibly to help avoid creating both a stagnant talent pool within an organization and the loss of invaluable institutional memory of effective leaders who are soon retiring.

Azora.

Career path. Azora’s lifelong passion for advocacy for non-native English speakers and culturally appropriate services was born out of personal trials and dire community need. The daughter of a mother who suffered from a mental illness never formally diagnosed in her native country of Nicaragua, Azora struggled growing up but persevered through her mother’s challenges, as well as those posed to new immigrants in America, namely language acquisition. She described what fed her passion:

What has guided me has been a mix of personal interest, concerns about other underrepresented groups, my own immigrant second language background and falling in love with things. I’ve followed it with my intellect and my heart. Watching students blossom; it is a miracle. Sometimes I think for all I care they
could be purple, they're just hopeful beings. They're people who want to improve their future. They’re not your average 18-year-old white males who might go to a university and whose parents can afford to pay tuition. They’re extraordinary, and I am fortunate to be near them and watch that happen. My God!

Intrinsically motivated by her own life experience, Azora pursued a bachelor’s degree in speech pathology, followed shortly thereafter by a master’s degree in community clinical psychology at a mere 24 years of age. She found herself with credentials, but no real-life experience in her field. Nonetheless, the need was so great for Spanish-speaking therapists she immediately found placement at a mental health institute overwhelmed by clients needing services. While rewarding, Azora found the experience both personally and professionally challenging:

I worked as a clinician for almost 3 years. There were two problems; one, I was extremely young and was the only Spanish speaking therapist in the county at that time, so I was really loaded with cases I really should have never had given my time in the field but there was nobody else. So it nearly destroyed me as a person. Two, I felt inadequate, had no real support from other Spanish-speaking therapists. I struggled with that for about 3 years.

As fate would have it, Azora’s academic and professional journey was not complete; she was contacted by a colleague who advised her of a program offering full scholarships to Latino students to get their doctorate degrees in the field of higher education. The program offered exposure to the breadth of higher education institutions, but Azora found her niche immediately.

They described community colleges as this magnificent open door institution with unbelievable access and served as a doorway for underrepresented folks with different language backgrounds. And I thought, that’s what I want to do. So I specialized in higher education policy, analysis and research, but we were able to specialize to select a focal point so for me that was it. So that was my path to community colleges and I finally found my fit and I never looked back since.
With an emphasis in policy analysis, Azora was well-poised to accept a position in the system-wide office of the California State Community Colleges in Sacramento, the capital of California where she served for 17 years, the last eight as the Vice Chancellor for Educational Programs and Evaluations.

While policy is her forte, she began to long for a different experience in higher education.

I fell in love with not only the community college system, but I must have visited in my capacity as Vice Chancellor or a member of the system wide office about 76 of the 112 community colleges up and down the state. And I thought I’d give anything to be on a college campus. I was tired of the policy. I was tired of the legislative pieces. I was tired of the research. I was tired of this sort of detached stance, if you will, and I really wanted to be on a campus because it seemed so amazing and alive, and the students, the faculty, the staff.

This was the start of her career in community college leadership. Her vast experience with and knowledge of the entire community college system at the policy level afforded Azora many unique opportunities and entry points to the presidency of a community college. From Vice Chancellor at the system-wide level, she applied for and was appointed to a position as interim president at a community college. Immediately after, she was appointed president of another community college, and ultimately chancellor of a multi-college district. Azora noted how unique her path to the presidency was, and wanted to emphasize that this path, while unique for a woman of color, was not any less than other more traditional paths.

I want to underscore nevertheless, and this is not an arrogant statement, I was extremely well versed on all aspects of community colleges beginning with my doctoral work in my focus on the administration, the history, the background, the mission, role and function of community colleges. So, that was a given that you should have solid theoretical foundation. And then I had performed at the Vice Chancellor level for the entire system. So while it’s not the route most presidents take, I want to underscore because I think that’s the other perception sometimes,
from the one end no crystal stairs, but on the other end some sort of the belief or perception that maybe this happened to you because you are a woman of color, the alternative path. I would say absolutely not, that proving myself as an expert in the field for 17 years was critical to landing the position. It’s never gifted to you. And the networks that are available that may exist for white males, less so I think as time progresses, are not there for women in general and for women of color in particular.

**Critical race theory.** Ever vigilant in advocating for students of color at both the policy and implementation levels of the community college system, Azora herself was not immune to deficit-based assumptions by others based on race and gender. As a brand new staff person at the system-wide office early on in her career, Azora was hired as a specialist in educational standards and evaluations right after graduating with her doctorate as the only female, only person of color, and the only person under 50 on the policy team in the system-wide office. The only other females were clerical or program assistants. Routinely, her colleagues neglected to notify her of staff meetings and located her workstation in a cubicle on a floor below while the rest of the team was housed in offices on the same floor above. Tasked with writing the analysis and recommended implementation of a policy to be consistent with recent legislation, Azora completed the assignment and was directed to have a senior staff member review and approve her work. Upon submitting her piece to a supervisor, who was a white male, Azora recalled his reply to her and her reaction.

“You write well. You write as well as most of us,” he said with enthusiasm and a smile. My jaw dropped and I thought, okay, at this point I’m 28 years old and I thought I’m brand new on the job I haven’t even passed my 3rd month. And I said, “Dr. Blankly Blank, I have read your works I believe I write better than most of you.” And I thought were did I get that? It just came out, and I’m this pipsqueak. And so he looks at me and he says, “I was complimenting you, I’m trying to be your friend.” And I said, “You know I believe that you are but do you understand what you just did? Is it your assumption because I’m my age, because I’m female, because I’m Latina, because English is my second language
that I would not be a good writer? That’s an insult to me.” I said, “You know, my having read pieces written by every member in this group I believe that I write better than most of you.” Where did that come from? My goodness! Don’t ask me, I don’t know (laughing) I don’t know where it came from, but it came. I believe that I was enraged and sometimes, interestingly enough, the one thing that motivates people of color and women of color is rage that you control and turn into a very creative outcome. So I never forgot it. We did become good friends eventually. I later became his boss because (laughing) I became Dean of the unit, but that was many years later.

Perhaps even more daunting than the limitations and negative assumptions imposed upon communities of color by majoritarian society are the burdens people of color place on themselves to overcompensate for said limitations. Azora, like many people of color, was raised with the notion that she needed to not only meet the expectations and attain the qualifications required for success, she needed to exceed them by far to be considered equal to her white colleagues. This, Azora said, presents both benefits and challenges to her as a person of color. First, it makes one strive for excellence as a standard, and second, it can cause one to place an unnecessary burden on oneself.

You have to, in order to be considered the same you have to do twice as well as others; and that if you are, even after you’ve landed the position, you have to go through the extreme for those that think it was an affirmative action hire. So the issue is: I’m going to prove my expertise above and beyond and even if it’s silent; that is an extra thing you have to do. Where it does end up hurting you is where you overcompensate and you’re not just good, but excellent and you’re not just working 40, but 60 hours.

Azora found that her accent, more so than her gender or race, tended to expose her to unsolicited comments and possibly assumptions by others of her ability and intellect. A well-meaning peer, who was also a professor and expert in speech and debate, suggested that because she was such an eloquent speaker with such an extensive vocabulary she consider getting vocal coaching to eradicate her accent. More
discouraging than outsider criticism is that which comes from within one’s own ethnic group. Azora, who emigrated from Nicaragua when she was 11 years old, is eloquently fluent in both Spanish and English and has an identifiable accent to English speakers. She recalled an instance where she was commended after giving an inspirational commencement speech by a colleague who was also Latina.

I gave a convocation address at the beginning of my presidency and it happened to be a Latina who approached me and wanted to congratulate me. She says, “I was sitting in my chair and crossing my fingers that you would do well because I know you have an accent.” And I knew she meant well and I looked at her and said, “Well, was I understood?” And she said “yes.” And I said, “Was it substantive, the things I said?” And she said, “yes and I’m so happy.” But it hurt, nevertheless.

**Organizational culture.** The last three years of Azora's post as chancellor of a multi-college district proved to have made great use of her background in clinical psychology as they had been rife with challenges. Described as being in “a pathological state of huge distrust,” Azora's district experienced interracial conflict, classified staff versus faculty, and college versus college issues marked by a “lack of civility that you wouldn't believe.” Through it all, Azora said the last three years also showed how committed she and her team are to serving students and their communities. As an effective change agent, she is successfully resuscitating her organization's morale and harmony and is very proud of their success. She attributes these gains to helping her team recommit to their core values that are shared individually and as a community.

The one thing that sustained all of us is because at the core, regardless of how dysfunctional we may have been in a number of areas was a deep sense that this district is the only one that has equity opportunity and social justice on its website. And that's why I came here, I knew they were in trouble and then I saw this shining beacon of liberalism and deep values and I thought "I can do that.”
So whatever we may be, even when we are at our worst with one another, at least there is something that everyone aspires to.

Because Azora benefited from organizational development opportunities through a cultural, collegial mentor, and networking relationships during her ascension to the presidency, she is mindful of creating as many opportunities as possible for aspiring leaders in her organization and beyond to grow professionally. She maintains contact with, and even serves on advisory committees for, succession management and executive leadership programs offered by various universities and institutions. She also ensures staff and faculty interested in pursuing these opportunities have time off to do so. Azora cautioned that being an advocate for people of color does not mean you systematically ignore the needs of white, male students. In fact, she posited that by deciding early on what type of leader one will be, and what one’s core beliefs are, one will invariably be an advocate for all the communities served when times are toughest.

That's when you have to test yourself as a leader...what do you stand for? You stand for students, and in a community college, most of them are students of color, most are female, and many have children that live in poverty, so that's who you work for. But, if there are white males who need you, you serve them just the same because what he brings to the table is the hope for transformation to go from here to there, and you can be the conduit.

Ding-Jo.

Career path. Ding-Jo was just a teenager when she came to America from China, alone and without her parents supervision or protection. This experience, while scary and uncertain, forged the independent and formidable spirit Ding-Jo now embodies.

I got to experiment with a lot of things, stretching my wings, you know a bit more than if I had been sheltered under their wings. I had to stand up on my own two feet because they weren't around to shelter and protect me. So I think that helped a lot. So when you go out there to the limb, many different ways for
me...confronting culturally the language, environment, all of that...every bit of
that makes me stronger, and in every one of those tests makes you say, “I can do
this, I can do that. I can do more. I can do higher-level things.”

Higher-level things are exactly what Ding-Jo strove for and attained. Passing her
parents’ professional expectations for her was not difficult. She was expected to excel
academically, but in her traditional Chinese culture, her father would rather she got
married and occupied her days sewing and cooking as a dutiful wife. Such was not to be
for Ding-Jo. Not only did she complete her undergraduate studies, then her masters, and
ultimately her doctorate at prestigious universities, she rose through the ranks within the
community college system to the presidency and finally to the post of chancellor of a
multi-college district.

Given her personal experience as a Chinese immigrant, a newcomer immersed
into a foreign land, language, and customs, it made perfect sense that Ding-Jo’s first
foray into community colleges was working in a program assisting refugees new to
America and its higher education system. It gave her a unique opportunity to delve into
both the student services and instructional sides of the community college house. She
attributes many of the core competencies for leadership to her experience as a leader in
both her college’s economic development and distance learning initiatives. Having
expertise in both the instructional and student services realms prepared Ding-Jo for her
promotion through the ranks to president, and ultimately to chancellor. When asked how
she set her sights on such high posts, she replied:

I did not. It wasn't something that I set a goal to become. It's one of those things
that you could say I was nudged, pushed into it, and when others recognized and
asked me 'isn't it about time? Isn't it overdue? All the way to “I want you to
apply for this job”. So that's the kind of the nudging I mean...I always say I have
footprints on my back.
Although Ding-Jo was highly qualified and credentialed, she credits her mentor network with giving her the confidence and nod of approval to continuously strive for higher goals.

You know you recognize some signs, but the validation sometimes does not come internally, but externally. When someone tells you over and over, and when multiple people who've done the job say, “I know you can do this,” that’s when you know you’ve grown out of your current post and need to strive for higher heights.

**Critical race theory.** To be fair, Ding-Jo acknowledged she could not say for sure her career path experience as a woman of color was necessarily more challenged than that of her white male peers, but she did share her perceived differences and challenges.

You have to be first of all viewed as ok, the Presidential type. Do you possess the characteristics of a leader? From a critical race theory point of view, it's a lot easier to say ok you're a white male, if you're tall or grey haired, ok, you have all of the check marks…you have all those traits. And same thing, being Asian, female, not so tall and I’m sure I don't talk the same as a white male. Those are things that in terms of how you can perceive whether you are a leader fit for the job, fit for what the requirements are. Not just the look, but also what you perceive the look to denote… whether you possess or don't possess the required leadership qualities. I felt I'd better have all the check marks in any job description and more, because, you know my name is very recognizable. If I was Mary, you probably wouldn’t know my ethnicity. I use my given name by choice. I could have changed my name to something more ... I could put disguise on it, they wouldn't really know, but because my name is recognizably Asian, they know this is not somebody you see every day. So that's a conscious choice therefore, I do know that my paperwork really has to not only reach the standard of what they say they want on the paper, but I really need to stand out as a candidate.

Cultural identity is important to Ding-Jo, and said attacks on it, whether intentionally or unknowingly, are hurtful but not insurmountable. Early on in her career, a colleague made a comment about her word choices and wanted to discourage her from speaking “Chinglish,” as he coined it. Ding-Jo’s natural inclination was to ignore the insult, to not give any credence to it. However, it still stung, and later after sharing her experience
with a Hispanic administrator at her college, he encouraged her to confront the slight, and she did.

Was it out of the ordinary for me? Absolutely! But having gone through that process to be able to stand up for myself, that was very empowering. I don't think it was a conscious intentional gesture, but it is at a subconscious level that it's automatic, if you will. By calling attention to it I'm sure they will never forget it because I made them aware that it is not acceptable. So, I think that was both a win-win because I understood it differently from taking care of it, dealing with it you know, in a very frontal way. And then on the receivers' end they were brought to a whole new conscious level.

Motivated by the positive impact mentor networks had on her career, Ding-Jo now facilitates a professional network for women of color to assist them in navigating the community college system and promoting to executive leadership positions called Kaleidoscope. Her experience with mentoring relationships with other women striving to break barriers to their ascension was invaluable to Ding-Jo’s leadership development. She described her first invitation to the network as coming from a Caucasian female colleague who had become aware of the challenges women of color face and wanted to help them overcome them. Ding-Jo reflected:

For the first time I felt, wow she really cares. She just embraced me and I think for the first time I could understand what inclusive truly means. Because she included me as one of her own. And for her, she really did not see me as an Asian woman. She just saw me as who I am as a woman, and no different than all the other ladies she's trying to help develop and because of that, I was more cognizant of what a leader is.

While most other leadership development offerings focus on hard skills such as finance, policy, and organizational development, Kaleidoscope expands its offerings to include soft skills such as emotional intelligence and transformational leadership. Ding-Jo said:
It's very customized because every group is different. So you're around the women who have some success stories and so we try to shine the lights of that so they don't have to operate in the dark. We kind of show them the pathway. Everybody takes their own pathway but it's not a mystery. When you don't know where the pathway is you think it's a mystery to get to the Presidency.

After much discussion of race and gender, one might stop to ponder why any of that matters, especially in community colleges that are usually the gateway to some other future venture. Ding-Jo stated it best when asked why diversity in community college leadership is so essential to the success of its students and its own sustainability.

Because there is such profound indescribable power when you see someone who you connect with and identify with who is sitting in positions of power, authority, success, for your mirror neuron to be working inside of your head to say, “I can relate to that, I can see myself and that possibility exists”. Until you see that you can find all kinds of reasons why you can’t do something. I mean on some subconscious level, very subconscious level that's what is the scary part and the exciting part at the same time. It isn't the conscious level the students say "well, I don't see any African-American faculty standing in front of me therefore I don't see myself, I can't become a faculty." It isn't that simple, but over and over when there is a lack of presence the translation of that on a subconscious level is "I can't." And they don't even know that that message is there. By osmosis that program is already in there. “Hopefully, maybe one day it won't matter because having a white male will be just as empowering. Maybe that day will happen. I want to believe that will happen. But for now, our students need that. Our faculty and staff need that. And they need to see leaders that they can relate to, to reflect in a real personal way.

Ding-Jo agreed that much of the adversity she has experienced as a woman of color has been as much of a blessing as it was a challenge. She explained:

I know it sounds a little bit crazy but you know, when people pray they may be praying for peace, prosperity, a trouble-free life or whatever … I've been taught that actually you can pray for tests for difficulties because that's what makes you strong, makes you better and you learn more from it.

Organizational culture. Ding-Jo cautioned that women of color could not succeed with leadership development opportunities and mentoring alone, but rather a healthy organizational culture that breeds success and mutual collegial support. Such is
the culture Ding-Jo is proud to have created and fostered in colleges she has led as both president and chancellor. The best recipe for diverse and sustainable leadership is an intentional one. Ding-Jo shared her recommendations:

I think that being mindful first of all, it has to be on your radar. It has to be a conscious effort on the institution's part that we want to grow diverse leaders. We want to grow women leaders. We want to grow women of color. Who are they, right? Because a lot of times you're invisible. Whether by choice that we stay invisible, or you don't even see them when they are standing in front of you. So being mindful to bring them out. Sometimes, as the Chinese would say, when we invite you, we invite you three times to show sincerity because you do not know our full intentions. You send out the first invitation, you extended your hand out but they may not have the experience to trust you. So you have to do it and do it repeatedly; do it with sincerity and do it with a plan.

Ding-Jo has indeed been diligent in bringing out leaders, and developing them internally. This has proven to be successful in creating a positive working environment within her college and district, a fact Ding-Jo cited as one of her greatest professional accomplishments. Ding-Jo shared that she is fulfilled by knowing she helped her team and:

that they now understand all the latent potential that they have always had, but did not understand or perceive. So helping that to come about, the internal transformation for the institution as a whole and people as one, that's very powerful. Extremely rewarding. I won't let someone else's behavior change who I am and how I'm going to behave and in this case behave as a leader. So if you are consistent and you remain anchored in your values and principles you'll come out whether they approve you as a person first of all, secondly whether they will respect you and want to follow you willingly as a leader. So what is the anchor? The anchor is trust and integrity. So I think that’s how I overcome or on the other way you can state it is that this is how “they” have overcome their initial prejudice and certain perceptions they may have about me as an Asian woman. So why do I climb... Does it feel good? Absolutely! So I'm driven by that good feeling too and at the same time I'm very mindful that the climb has a different kind of a long lasting meaning because many have climbed before me, and their roads were even harder to climb than mine. I'm just going to make it easier for the ones who are coming behind me; easier so that it's not as steep a climb. But I think they will be able to enjoy their fruits of their own labor. This is the same, because the fruits are pretty sweet.
Erlinda.

Career path. Born in a small rural, farming town in central California, Erlinda had instilled in her early and regularly that education was the key to both success and abundant choices for career and prosperity. Contrary to the prevalent cultural norms of some migrant farm workers, both Erlinda’s paternal and maternal grandparents who emigrated from Mexico, and who had 7 and 10 children, respectively, encouraged all their children to finish high school, and many attended college. In fact, her grandparents were criticized by their peers for letting their children waste valuable working time on education. Erlinda said this was especially true for the girls, “Why are they going to school? They’re just going to get married and have children,” fellow workers chided. Undeterred, the Martinez’s made sure Erlinda understood college was imperative, not simply a post-secondary option. Having moved to southern California as a small child with her immediate family, Erlinda was a self-described dutiful daughter who excelled in school, sports, and music. She wanted both a traditional family life and a career, so after high school and marriage, she kept her promise to her parents to continue her education, and ultimately graduated from college.

Erlinda’s first job in education was as a Community Worker for the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools where she managed a caseload of at-risk inner city students and encouraged them to continue through high school. This was quite a challenge as many were gang members, formerly incarcerated, and/or had unstable family support and tenuous living situations. Although eager and dedicated to affect positive change in these youths’ lives, burnout was inevitable. After a little over two years of working for the county, Erlinda sought a career change. One thing she was
certain of was she wanted to advocate for all people who faced apparently
insurmountable barriers to achieve and attain an education. Little did she know she
would face and conquer her own barriers along the way. It was during her first job at a
community college as Student Center Facilities Coordinator that Erlinda learned the true
value and importance of such an institution to its surrounding community. Her duties
included keeping the facilities graffiti-free and manicured, which taught her a valuable
lesson that many times a community college campus may be the only safe and beautiful
haven in a congested inner-city environment. It was also through this experience it
became evident to Erlinda that her advocate stance was more than a philosophy; it was
her calling. A position as Student Services Specialist at another college offered new
professional and academic opportunities. During this time of professional growth,
colleagues encouraged Erlinda to undertake her graduate studies, both her masters and
doctorate, followed by a promotion to Director of Student Affairs.

When asked if she found it difficult to transition from student services to
administration, Erlinda offered a surprisingly convincing answer that confounds the
literature on career paths to community college presidencies. Erlinda posited:

Student Services people offer skills that quite frankly are more in line with shared
governance; we are more group oriented. We're used to having to facilitate either
student groups or employee groups or community groups, so to transfer those
skills from those groups to when you're President, now you're facilitating college
council and Academic Senate. Those are very transferable skills for someone
who’s come through Student Services. And those skills have helped me be
successful as I've progressed to the Presidency. Being Director of Student Affairs,
being a Dean, being a Vice-President, those were the same skills that I used
having been a counselor in student services.
While prepared academically and professionally for her ascension, it was her next big promotion that would test not only her personal fortitude, but also cultural norms that both guided and confined Erlinda.

Being a dutiful daughter was inherent in Erlinda’s traditional Mexican American upbringing. Although her parents encouraged her to pursue higher education and balance family and career, her father was not at all pleased that Erlinda would be moving her family to northern California to pursue a dean position. In fact, her father was so deeply disappointed about her uprooting her family to pursue a career opportunity, he did not speak to her for several months. In spite of the strain and pain this career move would cause, Erlinda was undeterred, “I have a deep faith and feel that I have been given certain gifts and it was wrong not to use them.” Her family relocated to northern California and after 10 years, she returned to southern California for a position as Vice President of Student Services. It was not long before Erlinda was encouraged to pursue a presidency. Pursue and attain a presidency is exactly what she did, and she has been the president of Santa Ana College for the past eight years.

*Critical race theory.* Being the gender minority in the room, as was frequently the case for Erlinda, took some getting used to. One thing she has never gotten used to is at times feeling invisible, or ignored among her peers. Erlinda explained:

What I have seen in meetings is where I could say something and it gets ignored. Then, someone else says it, usually a male, and it gets paid attention to. And you sit back and you want to go, "Hey, wait a second, I just said that". But you don't, you swallow hard and realize that you are being treated differently. And that's really hard. That is really hard.

At other times, Erlinda described situations where rather than being ignored, she is patronized by male colleagues as if they said, “there, there nice little girl” when she has
not been taken seriously. Intra-racial conflict, however covert, is also a factor for
disparate treatment as the lone female of color in the boardroom. While there may be
individuals who share Erlinda's ethnicity, they are men whose wives are homemakers that
assume support roles to their husbands as organizational leaders. Not having another
Latina female colleague at the table makes Erlinda the lone, clanging cymbal that has to
be creative and persistent in getting her unique point of view across. Thankfully, these
experiences and feelings have lessened over the years, and Erlinda is recognized as a
formidable colleague and leader. However, there was one experience during Erlinda's
tenure that would not only affect her as a leader, but also as woman of color and would
remind her racism is indeed alive and well.

Some years back, a tragedy involving a former student would test her fortitude
and even her sense of personal safety. The student, a phenomenal scholar who eventually
went to UCLA and then to Brown University, started at Santa Ana College as an
undocumented student. She was tragically killed by a drunk driver, and the family asked
if a memorial could be held at the college; Erlinda was happy to oblige. In addition, a
scholarship was established at the college for students from similar demographics and
immigrant statuses, at her parents’ request. To Erlinda's shock, she received physical
threats and racist hate mail from individuals irate about promoting educational
opportunities for undocumented students and a threat to withhold federal funding to Santa
Ana College by an angry Congressman. Her college's Board intervened and supported
her decision to establish the scholarship fund, but there was a time when she believed her
job may have been in jeopardy.
It got really ugly and there was a point in time where the Vice President came in because we thought the Board might fire us. Erlinda's response was, “If we're going to go down, we're going down for the right reason. If there was ever a right reason, this was it...racism is real and there are some crazy people out there who will do things that are unimaginable.”

**Organizational culture.** In describing the culture of her organization and how it supports or impedes aspiring female leaders of color, Erlinda smiled upon reflection and then offered a concise description of a workplace that is collegial and collaborative. Her description of an organizational culture that supports women of color in leadership is one that offers professional development and mentoring, encourages staff and faculty to take calculated risks in the name of innovation, and makes conscious efforts to establish and maintain diverse and representative leadership. Understanding the alienation successful women of color experience, she offers that establishing a culture both diverse in its leadership and mentoring opportunities is imperative to female leaders. “The further you go up and the more and more isolated from people who look like you that you get, the more you need a mentor support network.” Erlinda shared that she benefitted greatly from the mentors she has had and still has, and she herself is now a mentor and presenter at conferences for female leaders of color. This has been equally beneficial to Erlinda in that presenting at leadership conferences offers her the opportunity to expand her own professional support network.

I’ve been in this profession now for a period of time; there’s been a natural gravitation toward other women of color and Hispanic women that are likeminded. I think all of us want to hang with people who share the same values, but you do have to seek that out because you find yourself isolated with fewer and fewer possibilities.

Professional risk-taking among female leaders of color within an organization should be encouraged not feared, according to Erlinda. For her to advance
professionally, she had to be willing to move away from her extended family and take
on new challenges. Based on her personal experiences with managing change, as
president she creates a culture of innovation in her organization that rewards faculty and
staff for bringing new ideas to the table for consideration.

You can’t ask faculty to be innovative if you’re going to turn around and then be
critical…I think that’s one thing you learn as a leader that if you’re going to ask
the question, you’d better be prepared to accept the answer.

To this end, Erlinda recommended aspiring female leaders of color seek out professional
development opportunities that stretch their boundaries, cross-train them for expanded
duties, become active and vocal in offering recommendations to executive leadership,
and consider positions at other institutions to give them the required diverse skill sets to
advance. In particular, participating in critical areas such as Academic Senate and
accreditation can offer female leaders the best opportunities to get experience outside
their current assignment.

In Erlinda’s experience, there were not many deliberate attempts in organizational
culture to block her and other women of color from advancing, but there are some
institutionalized habits that unfortunately can impede women of color. Take, for
instance, entry to tenured faculty positions, most often deemed the primary pathway to
advancement within higher education.

If you stop to think about it, if you have primarily Caucasian males as faculty, and
committees tend to look for like-faculty, you have a self-perpetuating selection
process unless you take charge of that committee or give the charge to the
committee to be open to other possibilities.

This is so important to Erlinda not only as a woman of color, but most importantly for the
myriad students that come through California’s community colleges each year.
It matters for students to see themselves as the scientist, the geographers, and the political scientists. They need to see the biologist, paralegal, etc. who is diverse to know that college is for them and that they, too can be professionals and scholars.

Erlinda urged all presidents, as organizational leaders, who desire to create diverse and representative leadership must not only encourage diversity in faculty and staff, but demand it. An example of this is when a faculty selection committee was formed, Erlinda rejected it due to lack of diversity just two months into her tenure as president.

I think they expected a rubber stamp, but I said, “I don’t think so, this is not diverse…tell them I said no, send it back…tell them I need more diversity.” I let my Chancellor know what I had done, and he just smiled, and the selection committee composition came back to me more diverse. But I think that’s how it starts…that’s how you start institutionalizing diversity.

Arcie.

Career path. To say that Arcie's career path as an African American woman has been untraditional is a gross understatement. Maintaining a civilian-military career for most of her adult life, she retired recently from the Air Force as a Full Bird Colonel after 32 years of service, including deployment to Iraq. Given her proven leadership abilities, it seems only fitting she would also hold the highest office on a community college campus as president. Equally untraditional is Arcie's ascension to the presidency given that she started her career in higher education as a classified professional teaching information technology to community college professors in the early 1980s. While teaching, she continued her own education and earned her master’s degree and later became a full-time tenured faculty member at a community college. After being selected to serve as department chair, Arcie became active in the Academic Senate and was selected to work at the statewide systems level for curriculum development. At each
progression in her career, Arcie kept her sights on the next leadership opportunity, but she knew she had to be both academically and professionally prepared to attain the highest leadership levels, so she leapt at the chance to attend a tier-one university doctoral program on a full scholarship.

I knew I needed to get a Doctorate Degree because of being a person of color it's always difficult, whereas others may be given an opportunity without those credentials, it's very difficult for someone especially a woman, and I say that because I think that African-American men are sometimes given more opportunity than African-American women.

Almost immediately upon completion of her doctoral coursework, Arcie was recruited for a dean position at her former community college where she would complete her practicum and serve as dean for the next six years. Her journey would then lead to a vice presidency at her college, followed by the presidency for the past two years.

Fortuitous, that is how Arcie described her career path, but she made it clear luck had nothing to do with her preparation. She attributed much of her acclaimed leadership reputation and calculated risk-taking to her dual career in the military and her upbringing as the oldest of several siblings.

When people said “oh, you can be a Dean or you can be a President,” it’s like “Arcie, you took people to Iraq of course you can be a President. You know, you had 3,000 soldiers that reported to you on a daily basis, life and death, of course you can run a college.” You know, that's a no brainer. And growing up with a large family you have that leadership thrust upon you at an early age anyway. So that part, I think is the same for any other African-American woman or man who comes from a large family because you have that just because, and if you're poor. If you grow up kind of indigent in an environment where your single parent relies on you much more so than they would if you were a child in a more well-to-do-family. You don't have the finances to have a baby sitter, so you are the baby sitter. Even though you stay home and lock the doors and don't let anybody in, you still have that role and so they set a trust and responsibility that you have from an early age. So I think that also had something to do with it.
Critical race theory. As the only female and person of color in a relatively homogenous and male-dominated military environment, Arcie had experiences with racism and sexism that, while hurtful, were opportunities to develop her resilient leadership style and professionalism in spite of others’ transgressions. She recalled an instance where racism reared its ugly head, and she responded with grace and resilience.

I was the first woman on the Battalion staff in the military, in the history of the unit. The unit had been around almost 80 years and they never had a woman on staff. I mean, that seems unheard of but that was in 2003. And so, I was on staff, the only woman, the only African-American, with all white men, and we went out to dinner once and one of the staff had been drinking and used the “N” word. Everyone just.... there was 7 of us on staff and the place just got quiet and the Battalion Commander who was a Lieutenant Colonel, turned to him and said, “you know Mark, bleep, bleep bleep, you need to watch your blank, blank mouth. “Oh I did not mean anything, the offender remarked. “But that set the tone and that set the standard that if he ignored it then it would have been agreed upon that you can make those kinds of expletives.” So, I think that's different for a white man. But for an African-American that's typical. That's typical. And to me it was a validation that I had made it when he could no longer see me as a black woman. He just saw me as Arcie so he felt comfortable saying that. So in effect I turned it around and made it a positive for me. I sucked it up, I continued to march, I rose above him, I did not go down to his level and because of that he was the one that was alienated in the end from the group. He became “the other” because he did not share those common values and all of us had those values of respecting each other, respecting the rank and you don't let a comrade fail.

Through these experiences in a male-dominated environment, Arcie developed a leadership style in the higher education arena she said both men and women thrive under.

I will tell you what people have told me about women managers, women supervisors, is that they over-think. They don't want to make a decision or a “hard decision.” So in effect they don't make a decision which in effect is a decision. If they do make a decision they tend to be, moody. They tend to be either overly social or reclusive. There's no middle. They're one or the other. So I've tailored my management style, I think, a little different than most women because I grew up in a male dominated environment in the military.

Arcie was emphatic that racism and sexism are not relegated to insults by those external to the African American community. In fact, she experienced instances in her
career of unconscious and not so unconscious slights from African American women and men, often referred to within the culture as the “crabs in a barrel” mentality. When she was being considered for her current presidency, an African American colleague suggested she not get her hopes up too high as there were already two other African American presidents either currently or formerly within the same district.

I knew that in a way that it meant, “don't get your expectations up even though you're qualified. Everybody knows you're qualified. We just can't have three black Presidents here in this district.” Then I thought, go back and look on the wall. There was a time when we had all male, white Presidents. We had all male Senior Administrators. It has only been in the last 15 years that we have had women in positions as a President and not always African-American women. And it has only been within the last 18-20 years that we've even had an African-American as a Chair in this district. So, you know, to say that simply because of your color that you would not be qualified because we've already got 2 of those…It appalled me.

One incident had Arcie in the uncomfortable position of having another African American woman explaining to her that her blackness was not a good selling point for executive positions in higher education. Unfortunately, while not unique to African Americans, the expression of cultural identity through hair and dress is discouraged as unprofessional, compared to that of dominant Caucasian culture. Arcie explained:

I had an African-American woman when I was applying for a job as a President tell me, “you'll never get a job with those braids in your hair” (laughter), that’s just how she said it. She's a consultant, a national consultant and she said, “You'll never get a job with those braids in your hair, you better press your hair.” I said, “I guess I'll never get a job.” (laughter) But I did. I listened to her and I did kinda curl it a little bit, when I got the job I went back to my braids. So they know me now. So they know don't just at the outside and say, “this is what you should look like.” And if you don't look like this you're not Presidential material. But that's within our culture, so I do believe that race theory does expose itself within a culture much more so than kind of the subversive or the covert racism that exists from other races.
While Arcie admitted that she, too, has subscribed to the Eurocentric professional standards when interviewing in the past, she shared that she no longer felt compelled to conform because cultural expression and professionalism are not mutually exclusive.

Yes, I am an academician. Yes I am a scholar. Yes I have the credentials. But do I think that I can wear a little bit of color and wear my hair in a different way? Yes, I do. I think I can and if that's not what you're looking for then this isn't the job for me. You're looking to see the essence of who I am as a leader, you're looking at me as a person and hopefully that will influence you one way or the other.

Indeed, given Arcie’s military and civilian promotions and high posts she has held, her expression of cultural pride has never served to be a hindrance, but rather fully displayed who she is as a person and a professional.

**Organizational culture.** Of her accomplishments as a community college leader, Arcie counted her ability to manage change and positively affect institutional climate as one of her most notable. Arcie coined the term and practice of a “culture of care” that demands accountability, personal investment, and organizational excellence for the betterment of students and the community. Her strategic goals for her institution are encompassed in her ABC initiative; A for academic excellence, B for budgetary confidence, and C for community collaboration. This was a work in progress. When asked how she thought other women of color who aspire to be leaders might gain the core competencies for executive leadership, Arcie mentioned successful GYO leadership programs offered at her district and at others. It is through programs such as this that leadership aspirants learn about district-level decision making, budgeting and finance, and human resource management – aspects of community college management to which faculty and staff may not be exposed in their current posts.
In discussing how organizational culture can help or hinder African American women, Arcie hailed GYO programs as highly effective and also stated that informal succession and leadership strategies are important for people of color to advance. Having benefitted from mentors who not only gave sound professional advice but also recommended her for cross-training assignments, Arcie served the same role for her staff. She discussed a leave of absence she granted to one of her deans for his professional development and the college’s sustainability.

I gave him a leave of absence to go back to the Philippines because I want to develop an exchange program with the Philippines, he's Filipino and he just got his Doctorate Degree and I thought that would be helpful for him and also helpful for the institution…So it's a cultural exchange as well as an educational exchange.

Above all, Arcie expressed deep commitment to creating and maintaining an organizational culture that supports all faculty, staff, and students regardless of culture or creed. She attributed much of her motivation and persistence to core values she holds dear.

People know that I'm fair, I'm honest, that I have integrity, that I'm loyal, that I'm truthful and I'm selfless in service. I try to put others above myself. And I think people can see through that. My career path has been fairly steady and I think I have a proven track record, as they say. And it hasn't been driven by greed or by self-adulation. It really has been fueled by my desire to want to do better. And I think I can do better and influence the outcome of things for the students and what they need at those different levels, and be an advocate for them at those levels. So that's why I keep doing this. It's just something in me. And sometimes I think, “why can't you just be satisfied?” I am, but I just think it's a calling. It really is a calling.
Interpretations

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the paths to the presidency for female community college presidents of color, including academic and professional preparation?
   And,

2. What are the unique personal, professional and organizational challenges and opportunities for female community college presidents of color?

In keeping with the three streams of this study’s conceptual framework, the findings for these research questions are grouped according to emerging themes within the areas of critical race theory, career paths, and organizational culture. In summary, there are findings in participants’ narratives consistent with and supplementary to the literature review with regard to systems and environments at California community colleges that may impede aspiring female presidents of color.

Emerging Themes: Paths to the Presidency for Female Community College Presidents of Color

Contrary to the path their Caucasian male colleagues have taken to the presidency, the traditional professor to dean to vice-president to president route, the women in this study found their way to the presidency via Student Services and/or other auxiliary functions. These auxiliary functions include leadership roles in the Academic Senate, vocational instruction, economic development initiatives, and various system-wide curriculum and programmatic initiatives administered at the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. Such auxiliary functions have ironically not barred the participants from advancement, but rather afforded them the opportunities to develop the
required core competencies of community college leaders such as organizational strategy, community college advocacy, resource management, communication, collaboration, and professionalism (AACC, 2005). On this apparently newly emerging path from Student Services to the presidency, Hattie said:

I think it’s changed a little bit. I mean, it’s still true that you are much better off having an instructional background because it’s the faculty who has tremendous influence in terms of hiring. But I think, more and more, there are a variety of paths now. I mean, right now for example with the economy, a lot of colleges are hiring college business officers or financial managers coming from financial backgrounds. There’s a lot that are hiring totally from the outside. And I think student services is really becoming a more common path for presidencies, but I think you still have to know instruction and you still have to know institutions.

The eight women in this study entered the field of higher education ultimately ending at the office of president (and for three participants, office of chancellor), through three of the four pathways as described by Birnbaum and Umbach (2001). The occurrence of each type of pathway is illustrated in Figure 2. This finding parallels prior research that found, “The proportion of women among presidents following the two traditional paths of scholar and steward was much higher than among those in the nontraditional paths of spanners and strangers” (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001, p. 207). However, with only one participant following the traditional scholar path, the findings of this study are at variance with Birnbaum and Umbach’s research and illuminates the Steward route as a more traditional path to the presidency, particularly for women of color.
One African American participant took the traditional scholar route from career professor and dean to vice president and presidency. Two African American participants took the spanner route, having held high administrative positions in both higher education and other non-educational institutions. The remaining five participants followed the steward route, meaning they held an administrative position in higher education, but were not career professors. Two steward participants were Asian American and three were Latina/Hispanic. There were no stranger path seekers among the participants. Strangers come to the presidency directly from a non-education organization, having never held a position in higher education (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001).
Emerging Themes: Unique Personal, Professional and Organizational Challenges and Opportunities for Female Community College Presidents of Color

Dysconscious racism and racial microaggressions (King, 1991). Participants acknowledged that overt racism, while accounting for a few instances, was not prevalent in their experiences in higher education. Rather, they cited multiple racial microaggressions. Sue et al. (2007) described these as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward people of color” (p. 271). These instances are grouped by the researcher into five main categories: socio-emotional (exclusion, avoidance, isolation, etc.), intellectual (others expressing frequent doubt or uncertainty of abilities, intellect, and direction), physical (avoiding physical or eye contact, expressing irrational physical fear or suspicion), positional (insubordination by staff/faculty, undermining by colleagues), and verbal (racial slights/slurs, gossip, or rumor spreading). The occurrence of participants’ experiences with each type of microaggression is illustrated in Figure 3.
Categories of racial microaggressions experienced by participants.

Socioemotional. Regina shared her experience of being excluded from interactions with her male colleagues following board meetings as a form of socioemotional microaggression. At the conclusion of the meetings, where all but Regina were Caucasian males, she shared that as the meeting was wrapping up a male colleague would say to the other males, “same place for lunch?” While one could assert that extending invitations to social gatherings should be a personal prerogative, it is curious Regina was specifically excluded from the invitation. How does the saying go, “more business is handled at lunch or at the golf course than in a board meeting?” It is difficult to believe such accomplished leaders who would be expected to have political acumen and common courtesy, for that matter, would inadvertently “forget” to include all the colleagues at the table, let alone exclude one intentionally.
Interestingly, within each ethnic group, responses reflected both general microaggressions, and ethnicity or language-specific microaggressions. For instance, African American responses coalesced around issues of not being recognized as a legitimate scholar or leader, but rather attributing their insight and being vocal to simply being outspoken and “telling it like it is.” They universally expressed instances when they attending large meetings or conferences and were either confused for support staff or otherwise greeted with tremendous surprise upon introducing themselves to new colleagues or staff.

For Asian American participants, narrative themes converged around what they assumed to be stereotypes of being demure or passive, and thus, they expressed feelings of doubt of their abilities on the part of their non-Asian counterparts. In addition, derogatory comments addressed to participants in reference to English spoken with an Asian accent were noted in both participants’ narratives. In at least one narrative, the participant was encouraged to Anglicize her accent, presumably to sound more scholarly or professional. Latina/Hispanic participants universally expressed pressures that came both from within and outside of their ethnic group.

Universally, participants spoke of being “firsts” or the “only” in their post as president and even in the executive leadership positions leading up to the presidency. The researcher surmised had it not been for mentors and professional networks of color and gender affiliation, many of the participants might have been overlooked or not sought out for promotional opportunities based on the assumption by majoritarian beliefs that they are not “president material.” Common among participants was the notion that they needed to be at least twice as qualified, twice as credentialed, and twice as
politically/collegially connected as that of the Caucasian male counterparts to be considered for executive posts. While this disparity may not have been intentional, it has at its core an assumption that a Caucasian male is the generally accepted norm for “president material.” This underscores Joyce King’s theory of dysconscious racism, or “An uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (King, 1991, p. 135).

**Physical.** It was difficult for Angelina to discern whether her traumatizing first-day experience as Dean of Students at a new campus was attributed to her gender, ethnicity, or both, and certainly the impact was both physical and socioemotional. In her narrative, she recounted being literally locked out of her office by subordinates. She acknowledged the heir apparent for the position was an African American man and the campus had a vocal African American constituency that appeared to resent her appointment. It took several months for Angelina to adjust to her new environment and for her environment to adjust to and accept her. During this time, she experienced multiple physical barriers that would most appropriately be characterized by harassment and intimidation. Nonetheless, she overcame these barriers and ultimately earned the respect and support of her colleagues and subordinates.

**Positional.** Both Regina and KJ spoke of having their authority questioned and/or colleagues and subordinates urging for “second opinions” from other colleagues to confirm their positions on an issue or thoroughness in completing a complex task. For Regina, the accreditation presented a situation in which subordinates urged her to confirm her proposed findings with the former president prior to presenting to the accrediting committee. The irony of this request is that as vice president for several years, she had
been the lead in overseeing the accreditation process and made recommendations to
her president in formulating the final presentation. For KJ, being left out of decision
making for campus-wide projects such as capital improvements reinforced for her that
some colleagues and subordinates decided what she should and should not have a say in.
KJ found this curious in that the prior president also expressed interest in the physical
environment and presence of campus, and his participation in such projects was
welcomed and invited.

*Verbal.* While overt racism, particularly in the form of slurs appeared to be much
less common among the participants’ experiences, Arcie shared an instance when the use
of the word “nigger” flowed freely from a colleague’s lips. Albeit the encounter was not
directed toward Arcie and it took place in a context outside of higher education, but it is
disheartening that such racist language and ideology persists. Additionally, Ding-Jo
recounted that a colleague referred to her accent as speaking “Chinglish,” referring to her
being Chinese American and English being her second language.

*Resilience and advocate/activist philosophy.* The majority of participants, either
in their exact words or by the researcher deducing through their narratives, assumed what
can be described as an advocate/activist stance meaning their commitment to helping all
students was grounded in their own experience with adversity. When asked if she
thought colleagues or subordinates assumed she appeared to be too focused on creating a
diverse organizational culture, Azora replied:

I think I established a representation for being extremely student centered. I think
I led with that philosophy and it didn’t bother me that some people say you’re a
single issue person; those issues being underrepresentation for students of color,
or the issue of second language and proficiency, or immigrant education. I
advocate for all students, even if in other’s opinions it wasn’t my responsibility, I would take it on.

Regina expanded that this sense of advocacy is important for effective organizational leadership:

With my educational philosophy I say very specifically, “This is what I believe about education.” And I think that’s one of the things that leaders have to do, particularly if they’re doing decision-making. They have to do that and people that they are working with and that are selecting them to lead them have to know that, “This is what I believe, here’s my center.”

**Inter/Intra-racial conflict.** The dichotomy of mother/professional appears to have been somewhat of a struggle for some Hispanic/Latina women in that their families did not expect them to do much more working or schooling after high school, as they would become wives and mothers. Accompanying this is the perception by two Hispanic participants that they at times felt unsupported by Hispanic men, or felt invisible or excluded from primarily male Hispanic professional groups’ efforts to advance Hispanic people to executive leadership positions. Participants also shared either spoken or unspoken sentiments of colleagues that they were “affirmative action” hires, or that they were merely hired because of their demographics and not their qualifications. Again, as with the Asian American participants, English spoken with an identifiable ethnic accent appeared to be justification for the discounting of their abilities by some colleagues.

For professional African American women, the balance of professionalism and cultural expression continue to be at odds, according to the African American participants in this study. Two of the three African American participants described being coached and even criticized for wearing their hair naturally (not chemically or mechanically straightened) and for wearing colorful or ethnic prints in their professional dress. As
described in Arcie’s narrative, she was advised by a renowned executive leadership coach to not wear braids, a natural hair style, because it was “unprofessional” and did not convey a “polished” appearance to perspective boards and hiring committees.

**Cultural influence and value of diversity.** One overarching finding of this study emerges from the observation that the participants all displayed evidence of culture or gender pride and expression through personal dress and home or office décor.

Participants shared stories illustrating the influence of their culture on how they led, as well. For instance, Angelina shared:

> In the Hispanic community whoever comes into your home is made to feel welcome. I mean, it’s a very inviting atmosphere and it’s very familial and that’s what I was used to. And so wherever I’ve been, I’ve always kind of set that up within my organization’s culture.

Hattie described how her cultural experiences shaped her as a leader:

> I think being multicultural definitely shaped me as a leader. I lived in the Philippines and I married a Caucasian and so I have bi-racial children. And I’ve worked with a lot of students from different cultures and different nations and cultural identities. Also, my being a single mom … I think they all helped to form my leadership style.

**Emerging Themes: Organizational Culture**

With regard to organizational culture, participants were asked, “with regard to your career path to the presidency, specifically as a woman of color and referring to your race-based experience, what organizational factors might have impeded your ascension?” Responses to this question were grouped into four main categories by the researcher. These include Governance Structure (hierarchy, oversight, power of influence, etc.); Organizational Culture (behavior, beliefs, language, etc. of superiors, subordinates, and colleagues; Policies and/or Procedures (rules and/or lack of rules and regulations); and
Talent Management/Human Resources (career options, promotions, recruitment, etc.). Participants were also given the option of indicating if they did not experience any career impediments based on race. The occurrence and ethnicity of respondents for each response are shown in Figure 4. Of note is that one Asian American participant indicated she felt her career impediments were not caused by external sources, but rather by self-imposed restrictions. Hattie shared she often felt that she stood in her own way.

![Figure 4](image)

*Figure 4.* Participant’s perceived organizational factors impeding career ascension.

**Organizational culture.**

**Governance structure.** Participants’ narratives revealed three main notions that spoke to how organizational culture impeded their ascension to the presidency, as illustrated in Figure 4. These are expanded upon in Chapter 5 as recommendations for
removing barriers to the career ascension of women of color and include:
representative leadership, succession management, and mentoring. Briefly,
representative leadership speaks to community colleges’ administration’s value of, and
commitment to, the diversity of their student body being reflected and represented by
executive leadership. At least three presidents interviewed shared their experiences of
receiving a list from hiring panels of recommended finalists for faculty positions lacking
ethnic and gender diversity that were ultimately rejected with instructions for the
committee to cast a wider and more diverse net. These presidents added that based on the
lack of diversity of the executive leadership positions, they doubted this firm
commitment to diversity was shared by all presidents, regardless of gender and race.

Effective succession management strategies are essential to the sustainability of
community college leadership. Participants spoke of the dire need for gender and ethnic-
specific professional development opportunities, offered and sought both internally and
externally to an aspiring leader’s organization. Supplemental to advocacy for
professional development opportunities for women and people of color was the
importance of a mentor. While many participants shared that their first and/or most
influential mentor might have been of a different ethnic background or even a man,
participants were unanimous in their affinity for having a female of color to provide both
professional guidance and emotional support to aspiring female community college
presidents of color.
Emerging Themes: Opportunities for Aspiring Female Leaders of Color in Higher Education

Figure 5. Where participants acquired competencies for community college leadership.

The American Association of Community Colleges outlined core competencies for community college leaders in their paper titled Competencies for Community College Leaders. These competencies were born out of the understanding that “the development and availability of well-prepared leaders is vital to the continued success of community colleges and their students” (AACC, 2005, p. 1). In this document, six core competencies are outlined for successful leadership: organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and
professionalism (AACC, 2005). The AACC recommended the “leadership gap can be addressed through a variety of strategies such as college grow-your-own programs, AACC council and university programs, residential institutes, coaching/mentoring, and online/blended approaches” (AACC 2005, p. 2). Confirming and expanding upon these recommendations are the findings of this study in which participants were asked to identify where they acquired their leadership competencies. Participants responded that university programs, coaching/mentoring, and professional development offerings external to higher education were the most effective means of acquiring relevant competencies for community college leadership.

*Mentor networks and professional development.* A common subtheme among participants was the importance of having mentors and/or being a member of a professional development network within their career paths. All participants expressed they were either encouraged by their mentors to apply for higher-level positions and professional development opportunities, with at least one participant saying she always had “footprints on her back, expressing the active encouragement and nudging she received.” Additionally, many participants shared they became aware of promotional positions through their professional networks, especially those that were gender or ethnicity-specific.

*Student services, system-wide special projects and Academic Senate.* Erlinda stated concisely why Student Services was a viable career path to the presidency and how it develops core competencies for executive leadership.

I think this Student Services people offer skills that quite frankly are more in line with shared governance; we are more group oriented we're used to having to facilitate either student groups or employee groups or community groups, so to
transfer those skills from those groups to now you're President, now you're facilitating college counsel, etc. Those are very transferable skills for someone who’s come through Student Services. And those skills have helped me be the successful as I've progressed to the Presidency. Being Director of Student Affairs, being a Dean, being a Vice-President, those were the same skills that I used having been a counselor.

Azora offered that although she was not a career professor, she gained much of her knowledge of higher education leadership through working at the district and system-wide levels in the state’s capitol. “I spent years in curriculum and academic planning and program development...this helped to prepare me for leadership at the community college level.” She made no apologies or concessions about not having taken the scholar route, instead Azora clarified:

I want to underscore nevertheless that I was extremely well versed on all aspects of community colleges beginning with my doctoral work in my focus on the administration, the history, the background, the mission, role and function of community colleges. So that was a solid theoretical foundation for me. Additionally, I had performed at the Vice Chancellor level for the entire system, so I was prepared to lead at the community college presidency level.

For at least two of this study’s participants, involvement and leadership in Academic Senate afforded them invaluable professional development opportunities and opened up a viable path to executive leadership. Arcie described her transition from adjunct faculty to Academic Senate leadership and beyond. “I became a full-time tenured faculty teaching students, became a department chair…was active in the Academic Senate that was the political arm of the faculty, and then I got involved at the state level with curriculum development.”
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommended Actionable Solutions

Introduction

Organized by the conceptual framework of this study that includes Critical Race Theory, Career Paths, and Organizational Culture, this chapter summarizes interpretations of major findings and conclusions. Recommendations presented in this chapter formulate actionable solutions for aspiring female leaders of color, current executive leaders of color, and community colleges to achieve and sustain diversity in executive leadership positions at California Community Colleges. Lastly, this chapter concludes with recommendations for further study and research.

Conclusions

Critical Race Theory: Dysconscious Racism, Intersectionality, and Counter-transgressive Grace

Based on the findings contained within the narrative counterstories, it is evident the participants in this study experienced dysconscious racism and multiple “isms” such as racism, classism, and sexism both internally and externally to their respective ethnic groups. A common thread through participant narratives was both gender and ethnicity-specific transgressions. In fact, many participants acknowledged such exchanges often could not be characterized as either gender- or ethnicity-related, but rather could be attributed to either or both characteristic(s). Furthermore, this researcher posits that while these findings are not generalizable to all female leaders of color within the California community college system, the participants were purposefully selected and represented various ethnic, socioeconomic, personal, professional, and geographic backgrounds providing rich data from which sound conclusions and recommendations can be made.
Notwithstanding a small and ungeneralizable sample, the findings of this study raise important issues that warrant the attention of scholars and policymakers in addressing barriers to female leaders of color. Common and often daily racial microaggressions can and do cause unnecessary stress, hardship, and demoralization for female leaders of color. Feelings of isolation, marginalization, tension, and professional and intellectual undermining are inevitable, but not insurmountable for inherently resilient women of color. Nonetheless, the social, intellectual, emotional, and positional microaggressions experienced by this study’s participants are harmful not only to the individual, but appear to also be contradictory to a community college mission to educate and empower.

The inherent and learned resilience of women of color, and the professionalism with which they navigate dysconscious racism as demonstrated by this study’s participants, can be described as what the researcher calls counter-transgressive grace. The researcher posits that counter-transgressive grace, as it relates to women of color, is a form of emotional intelligence demonstrated by women of color in which unrequited gracious behavior, which is not necessarily merited, is granted to the transgressor(s) by the recipient in light of dysconscious microaggressions of a racial or gender bias nature. Such grace is generally demonstrated through language and behavior that corrects and/or educates the transgressor so he or she is made aware of their slight and is discouraged from repeating it. The grace is presented in a dignified manner that is professionally acceptable and maintains the dignity of all involved.

It is important to distinguish counter-transgressive grace from an aggressive enforcement of political correctness and also from an apologist stance of “eating crow” for the sake of not making waves. Rather, based on this study’s narratives, to grant such
grace requires women of color to confront dysconscious racism in a way that causes
the transgressor to challenge and question their own mental models that may inform their
inappropriate actions and mitigate potentially negative outcomes that could result from
them. Generally, exercising counter-transgressive grace requires women of color to
make an instantaneous assessment of the intentions and cultural competence of the
transgressor. Wang (2012) cited this in her research on racial microaggression and states:

Racial minority targets often face the problem of determining the intention of
someone who commits a racial microaggression (i.e., perpetrator), such as
whether the behavior is due to racial prejudice or not, and may use the
perpetrator’s characteristics (ethnicity, gender, etc.) to determine prejudice.
(Wang, 2012, p. iii)

This trait, that all the participants in this study exhibit regularly in their role as executive
leaders of their organization, in the context of the intersectionality of race and gender, is
both a burden and a unique asset. In instances where dysconscious racism is apparent, to
be able to discern the intent of the transgressor in a split second, maintain the dignity of
all involved, and ensure organizational cohesion and effectiveness with the utmost
professionalism is indeed an invaluable and remarkable feat.

Career Paths: Challenging Tradition and Leading from Where You Are

All but one participant bucked the tradition of attaining a presidency through the
scholarly route. This is not to say the participants were not scholars and academicians;
this is to say most of them did not get their start as professors. Rather, this study’s
participants found their ways to the presidency via auxiliary functions such as through
grant-funded programs and initiatives, leadership at the state-wide chancellor’s office
level, through advocacy and leadership at the district and state-wide level of Academic
Senate, and through various functions of student services at community colleges. These
untraditional conduits to the presidency lead to two conclusions on the researcher’s part: a) there is may be no such thing as a “traditional” path to the presidency for women of color and b) these female leaders of color made a conscious effort to lead from where they were. They did not wait for someone to appoint or promote them to a formal position leadership before they attained and mastered the requisite leadership skills needed to be an effective executive leader.

Mentors and professional networks were paramount to the professional and personal support for the women in this study. Many, if not all, participants spoke of either not having the luxury of being fully accepted because they stood out as the “only” woman or person of color in the room or feeling invisible and unheard due to others’ perceptions of their gender and ethnicity. Offering a place of solace and unspoken understanding for these women are professional mentors who either served as executive leaders themselves, or recognized their latent talent for leadership at pivotal points in the participants’ careers. The same could be said of the various gender- and ethnicity-focused professional development networks upon which participants relied and in which they took leadership roles to provide support for aspiring female leaders of color. As one participant described, she “always says she had footprints on her back,” meaning she was often encouraged by mentors to take risks and pursue executive leadership positions, even when she did not see her own potential initially. Of note is the fact that not one participant described ever having actually planned or even dreamed of being a president, but rather they were all coached and encouraged to each subsequent promotional opportunity by a mentor.
Organizational Culture: Institutionalized Diversity and Sustainable Leadership Strategies

Participants seemed to believe the culture of their respective organizations had an impact on their ascension to the presidency, either helping or hindering. Macro systems, such as governance structure and policies and procedures, had great effect on the perceived opportunities for advancement and support of leaders of color once appointed to executive leadership positions. Likewise, micro systems such as professional development opportunities and organizational behavior of superiors, subordinates, and colleagues can convey an unspoken sense of appreciation for and institutionalized practice of valuing diversity, or lack thereof. As many participants described being encouraged by superiors to pursue promotional opportunities within their current organizations, this suggests there may be a de facto culture in some community colleges advocating for sustainable leadership. That an existing vice president or president would recommend to an aspiring leader of color that she should consider applying to be their successor indicates to the researcher that said leader of color is not only deemed competent, but also that the incumbent president recognizes the value of cultivating leadership within the organization.

Conversely, some participants described frustration at the lack of opportunities to advance within their own organizations but did not see a lack of said opportunities for their white, male counterparts, and felt compelled to seek advancement opportunities elsewhere. While this does not necessarily mean that lack of internal promotional opportunities denotes lack of sustainable leadership strategies, or that leaders of color are not identified as “leadership material” as often as their white male colleagues, it is noted
that at least one participant felt overlooked for promotions and left her organization to accept a promotional position at another college. She later returned many years later having gained invaluable leadership skills at another institution to become the president of the same college she left after not being groomed for executive leadership. This leads the researcher to deduce that female leaders of color, by either lack of viable promotional opportunities within their organization, or due to lack of a culture of sustainable leadership, find their path to the presidency having more hazards and roadblocks than that of their white male colleagues.

**Recommended Actionable Solutions**

This study sought to identify organizational systems and culture that may pose barriers to female leaders of color to ascend to the presidency at California community colleges. Based on the review of relevant literature and this study’s research findings, recommended actionable solutions are offered that expand from micro to macro. First, recommendations are made for aspiring female leaders of color; secondly, for current leaders of color in higher education and professional development networks for people of color; and lastly, for organizations seeking to attract, develop, and retain female leaders of color for representative leadership.

**Recommendations for Aspiring Female Leaders of Color in Higher Education**

Based on the findings of this study, several lessons may be gleaned from the participants’ experiences. All the participants advised that aspiring leaders should avail themselves of professional networks for professional and personal support, mentor relationships, risk-taking, and seek leadership opportunities for professional development.
**Professional networks.** One cannot merely wait for one’s talent to be developed or recognized, and participants recommended aspiring leaders to seek professional development opportunities external to the organization. Having been recommended and encouraged by colleagues to further their own growth, many of this study’s participants attended and led conferences and development activities that not only availed them executive training but also exposed them to other best practices in community college leadership and a mentor network. “It gave me a chance to see women doing work in leadership roles at the other colleges, and that's where I really started to see that there was an opportunity for me to move forward” (KJ, 2012). One such professional development offering is the Kaleidoscope program, designed to celebrate and enhance the achievements of women of color in higher education. There are also professional development networks designed for and by various ethnicities mentioned by participants, such as Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (LEAP for Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities across the world) or Asian Pacific American Empowerment Conference (APAEC) whose mission is to “foster a spirit of student activism that will raise awareness about Asian American identity and facilitate self and community empowerment” (ACE, 2012a, para. 1).

**Mentor relationships.** With various challenges related to gender and race bias, in addition to the universal challenges that all aspiring leaders face in navigating their careers, one participant advised women of color to explore all options for advancement.

I think for women of color there is no singular formula...I think we have to push, you know, we have to try any key we get. We have to try any key in the door, and the key might be a mentor.
That key, for all of the participants in this study, was an invaluable asset in the form of a seasoned professional who provided them professional guidance and moral support. In some cases, participants were identified as emerging leaders by superiors, but in other cases, participants sought mentor relationships with professionals they met through networking opportunities and/or along the way in their careers. As one participant demonstrated in her acceptance of my invitation to participate in my study:

“That's why we're talking; because I take time to help people who are working on their doctorates. Someone helped me when I was working on mine and I feel I need to give back. I'm particularly supportive of requests that I receive from people of color. I rarely turn down anybody, regardless of their ethnicity and regardless of their gender. It's rare that I will say no to people; because that's my personal commitment to helping people achieve their academic objectives.

Aspiring leaders might also pursue participation in the League of Innovations that affords mentees the rare opportunity to be formally partnered with a professional mentor who often remains a trusted confidant long after the program concludes.

**Risk-taking.** Preparing for the presidency, or any ambitious goal for that matter, requires risk-taking. Wootton (2006), longtime researchers in the field of self-determination theory (SDT), provide insight into “intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors and the influence those factors have on leaders” (p. 27). To take risks, one must be internally motivated to supplement external factors, both incentives and fear of failure. Given the apparent additional barriers women of color face related to race and gender, KJ said most executive leadership aspirants in higher education have to navigate career pitfalls. One pitfall is the traditional and often rigid and linear path to the presidency that begins with being a professor, then dean, then vice president, then president.

    If you don't step through hoop one, hoop two, hoop three, then you can't go on to four. And I really challenged that and moved from this college to another position
and went two steps higher than I would have been if I stayed...actually I probably wouldn't even be president of this college had I stayed here.

The risk one takes in leaving an organization for advancement has great advantages as well. Where there is safety in long institutional memory and organizational history, there could also be inbred and stagnant systems thinking.

When you're in the same place you have a closed mindset about how to do things. I think going to other colleges and seeing how things are done in other parts of the country, seeing how things are done at other institutions, has been a benefit in my coming back [to my college where I am now president]. It's broadened my perspective of myself, and it's enabled me to see this position and myself in this position in ways that I wouldn't have envisioned had I stayed here and moved into this position, growing into it internally.

As demonstrated in Table 3, if an aspiring female leader of color desires to ascend to the presidency within the California community college system, she should avail herself the opportunity to develop and refine core competencies for community college leadership, as recommended by the AACC (AACC, 2005). The data illustrated in this study underscores the need for women to get involved in shared governance and assume leadership roles within the community college system to attain these skills and competencies within the system. Doing so allows women vital experience in formal leadership, affords them visibility in their organization that could lead to other opportunities for advancement, and most importantly, allows them to advocate for all students, especially disenfranchised women and minority students.

Perhaps the most sensitive of issues for female leaders is advocating for oneself when it comes to appropriate compensation. As indicated by at least one participant’s reflections on barriers to her ascension to the presidency, one was self-imposed restrictions, primarily self-doubt or fear of rejection from peers. Confirmed by Nicklin’s
(2001) research, some women hinder themselves professionally by being timid in advocating for themselves, especially when it comes to executive level position compensation.

**Current Leaders of Color and Professional Development Networks**

From the organizational perspective, the value of implementation of mentoring programs at community colleges to identify and develop diverse leaders is not a new discovery, but these types of programs are not necessarily universally robust across the California Community College system. The Association of California Community Colleges Administrators (ACCCA; n.d.) provides recommendations on the integral components of a mentoring program that could be implemented at college campuses. The main goals of the ACCCA mentoring program are to provide training in leadership skills, provide participants with a network for career opportunities, encourage participants to seek leadership opportunities, and encourage regional networking to improve working relationships and communications statewide (ACCCA, n.d.; Fong-Batkin, 2011). From a systems-change approach, the benefits of robust mentoring projects throughout the California Community College system are at least twofold: overall intellectual capital is increased and aspiring executive leaders have opportunities for professional development and advancement (Valeau, 1999). Participants having benefitted from active mentoring relationships and discussed making themselves available to mentor and assist other women of color striving to push beyond limitations others place on them.

A common theme among participants’ narratives includes a sense of responsibility and reciprocation to the communities that support them. As one participant states, “Like faculty select like faculty”, meaning that if the majority of the existing
professoriate are White males, so likely will be your newly recruited professors.

Many participants in this study described instances where hiring committees that they participated on, or had jurisdiction over, were simply not diverse enough in gender and/or ethnicity and were likely to recommend a short list of potential appointees to the president for final consideration. Some participants in this study asserted themselves proactively in the selection process for hiring panels. Diversity was insisted upon within the hiring committee, and advanced candidate lists were rejected once presented to participants in their role as president or chancellor for lack of diversity. Such a fervent stance does not serve to undermine hiring committees, but rather empowers them to expand their search for the highest quality candidates professionally and diversity-wise.

**Organizations Striving for Representative Leadership**

**Combatting Dysconscious Racism and Microaggressions.**

Based on the findings of this study and relevant literature, the researcher asserts that the most effective way to address racial and gender microaggressions suffered by female leaders of color are to:

1. Acknowledge White Male privilege and mitigate the legacy of dysconscious racism and sexism.
2. Implement deliberately diverse succession management strategies.
3. Create and monitor culturally-responsive organizational culture.
4. Actively identify and provide professional development opportunities for diverse leaders.
These recommendations are substantiated by Aguirre and Martinez (2002) who cautioned that institutions of higher education should strive for a synergistic relationship between diversity and leadership. These researchers posited:

Diversity promotes change as an emergent agent in the structuring of higher education, while leadership promotes practices that identify diversity as a nested context for achieving balance in the social relationship between higher education and society. (p. 56)

Perhaps an even more aggressive and appropriate strategy to increase not only the ethnic diversity but also the professional diversity of community college administrators would be to abandon the “old boy network” of hiring (McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990) by actively seeking and recruiting candidates from outside higher education. Additionally, the Community College League of California (CCLC) recommended colleges institutionalize diversity by creating and enforcing human resource policies that monitor the requirement and hiring, retention and support, and professional development of diverse leadership candidates (CCLC, 2003).

Multiple researchers have found successful endeavors for an organization to address and advance diversity in leadership that include mentoring and sponsorship initiatives providing faculty and administrators of color opportunities to fill leadership roles (Ebbers, Gallisath, & Rockel, 2000; Hoops, 2001). As demonstrated by a qualitative study of internal professional development programs at community colleges, the researchers observed positive changes in department chairs in the areas of consensus building, communication, and overall improved confidence in ability to lead through GYO professional development programs (Ladyshewsky & Flavell, 2011). Additionally, organizations could make diverse and representative leadership as a specific goal within
their organizational strategic plan as such practices “must advance the social reality
that diversity is real, it has meaning, and it has a purpose in society” (Aguirre &

As for creating and fostering an organizational culture that supports and promotes
aspiring talent and boosts the sustainability of an organization, Regina offered some
concrete suggestions such as formal and informal mentoring networks, valuing a collegial
environment in which people genuinely like each other and are not afraid to take risks,
offering structured professional development opportunities for leadership, and
establishing and maintaining cultural fluency. The alchemy of these components
strengthens the organization for all people, not just people of color. Regina expanded by
saying:

We have to have some facility with being able to talk about issues of race, class,
and gender. We have to be in an environment where it’s okay to make a mistake
around that ‘cause some people don’t want to talk about race ‘cause you know
they might mess up and say the wrong thing and then they’re a racist for life. So I
actually lead with the intention of creating this kind of an organization, because I
think it’s these kinds of organizations that allow people, not just people of color
but allow people, to move through these organizations.

With regard to organizations striving for representative leadership, Ding-Jo succinctly
stated:

I think that being mindful first of all, it has to be on your radar. It has to be a
conscious effort on the institution's part that we want to grow diverse leaders. We
want to grow women leaders. We want to grow women of color.

While there is no prescription for the ultimate inclusive and representative
sustainable leadership plan in higher education, review of the literature in this area
uncovers some common themes. Carey, Ogden, and Roland (2000) outlined 10 parallels
that could be drawn from the corporate sector’s succession planning and adapted to higher education to ensure inclusion of and support to female leaders of color:

1. Strong, engaged trustees.
2. Continual exposure of executive leadership positions such as vice-presidents and vice-chancellors to the trustees.
3. Identification and encouragement of next generation presidents/chancellors to gain exposure to the surrounding community, public speaking, and alumni.
4. Formation of executive committees to ensure institutional memory is transferred from seasoned executives to upcoming executives.
5. Philosophy that succession management is a legitimate strategy and process.
6. Removal of the personal interests from the succession strategy process.
7. Linkage of executive leader’s compensation to the development of a succession management strategy.
8. Ongoing confirmation that trustees personally invested and committed to institution and sustainable leadership.
9. Constant and deliberate identification of internal talent, and comparison to comparable talent external to the organization.

While it is certainly advantageous to an organization to preserve institutional memory and internal talent by developing their current aspiring leaders, they might also benefit by looking outside of their organizations as “Potential candidates might not only come from
the higher education routes that include scholar, steward, spanner, and stranger, but they may also come from government, nonprofits, or the corporate sector” (CCLC, 2013, p. 204). Additionally, organizations should conduct a needs assessment tailored to the particular campus or district, identify and mitigate internal and external bias, incorporate both internal and external speakers and instructors, balance program with regional professional development offerings, and assess program for effectiveness (Reille & Kezar, 2010).

Conversely, while the majority of this study’s participants found their way to the presidency not through the traditional scholar route, recommendations for women of color scholars are offered. The Grant-Simmons Eight-Step Mentoring Model (Grant & Simmons, 2008) prescribes organizational supports for female doctoral candidates of color, who may make excellent executive leaders through the Scholar route (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001). These recommendations include introducing female doctoral candidates of color to academe by encouraging them to get involved in college committees, connecting them with mentors in administration if they express an interest in executive leadership, and supporting their recruitment and retention into faculty positions.

Lastly, organizations striving for diverse and representative leadership have to instill this goal in all facets of the organization, most notably human resources. Given that many leaders of color have experienced significant impediments in their professional careers, one might assume that prior to taking a risk and pursuing a presidency at a college, candidates would investigate the organization’s culture. A commitment to diverse leadership should be evident and inherent in all representations of the college including its multimedia outlets and vacancy announcements. One such way for an
organization to attract and retain the highest quality and diverse leaders of color would be to institutionalize forensic talent management. Forensic talent management requires efforts at community colleges to advertise presidential recruitments by working outward from the desired core competencies for their institutional needs to create prolific job descriptions that at the same time convey a culture valuing diverse leadership and unique competencies that female leaders of color possess.

**Areas for Further Study**

The areas of research on the issue of creating representative and sustainable leadership at California community colleges is as vast and robust as the diversity therein. Based on the findings of this study, participants’ suggestions, and review of the literature, the following are proposed areas for further research with regard to women and people of color in executive leadership positions:

1. Personal and professional concessions women of color make in attaining and maintaining executive leadership positions
2. Longitudinal study tracking career trajectories of women of color who attain doctorate degrees in education
3. Forensic study of executive leadership position recruitments for California community colleges
4. Mixed-methods study of professional development organizations and opportunities for aspiring leaders of color in preparation for executive leadership positions in higher education.
5. Availability and effectiveness of formal professional development training for leaders of color
6. Mixed-methods study of women of color in executive leadership positions who do not aspire to be president.

7. Mixed-methods study comparing the experiences of California community college presidents of both genders and varying ethnicities and sexual orientation.

8. Research on the recruitment and ultimate success of individuals who take the “strangers” career path to executive leadership positions in higher education.

**Conclusion**

Female leaders of color have multiple and intersecting barriers to their success within California community colleges, but the barriers are not insurmountable. To the contrary, this study’s participants demonstrated through their counterstories that while the path may be difficult, aspiring female leaders of color can and do overcome and succeed in pursuing the presidency, and even chancellor, of single- and multi-college districts. In spite of various racial and gender microaggressions, organizational culture and systems, and untraditional career pathways, the female leaders of color in this study yield complex coping skills that transform their adversity into resilience. Recommendations for aspiring leaders of color and the organizations that will employ them converge at common themes related to Critical Race Theory (CRT), creating and supporting career pathways for aspiring female leaders of color, and establishing sustainable succession management strategies.

First, the transgressions of some individuals and organizations described in this study indicate they were not mindful of Dysconscious racism, White male privilege, and
its legacy that underpins disparate treatment of people of color. To counter this marginalization, individuals and organizations must make committed efforts to ensure the identification, recruitment, professional development, and retention of highly qualified female leaders of color. Very few of the racial or gender slights experienced by the study’s participants were of an overt nature. Rather, subtle and often unintended insults by colleagues who otherwise exhibit respectful behavior are much more common, and just as hurtful. Given the historical importance and impact that the California Community College System has on its immediate communities and beyond, it is imperative that organizations, current higher education leaders, and aspiring leaders put in place organizational systems and cultures that do not create barriers to diverse leadership.

Secondly, the women of color in this study found their way to the presidency through a variety of means and gateways. All but one participant who was a traditional scholar and career professor, ascended to the office of president and/or chancellor through leadership positions in Student Services, Academic Senate, and/or special or system-wide projects. This illuminates two things for organizations seeking to increase women of color in their executive leadership position ranks: 1) there should be more women of color recruited into the professorial and dean ranks, and 2) nontraditional scholars, such as those who ascend from the Student Services side of higher education, should be inserted in the executive career pipeline as they tend to develop core competencies for community college leadership through their auxiliary roles. Additionally, aspiring female leaders of color must also be vigilant in their own
advocacy, and pursue professional support and advancement through professional
development networks and mentors.

Lastly, the impending mass vacancies resulting from the retirement of a
substantial number of executive leaders in higher education presents both a crisis and
opportunity for community colleges to develop sustainable and diverse succession
management strategies. These vacancies include the offices of the executive cabinet
(president, vice president, associate chancellors, etc.), and will undoubtedly pose a
challenge for organizations to maintain stability and institutional memory. Sustainable
leadership involves not only knowing who might be next in line, but creating a viable and
diverse pipeline of potential organizational leaders through professional development
opportunities offered both internal and external to organizations. To ensure that this
pipeline is as diverse and talented as the students and communities served, California
community colleges must be deliberate and consistent in the recruitment, advancement,
and support of aspiring female community college presidents of color.
List of References


Rothwell, W. J. (1994). Effective succession planning: Ensuring leadership continuity and building talent from within (2nd ed.) New York: AMACOM.


Appendix A: Participant Self-study

No Crystal Stair: Narratives of Female Community College Presidents of Color

Description and Instructions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my doctoral dissertation study titled No Crystal Stair: Narratives of Female Community College Presidents of Color. This qualitative study seeks, through the counterstories of female community college presidents of color, to identify challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to develop representative and sustainable executive leadership, and an organizational culture that is inclusive of and supportive to female community college presidents of color. By completing this survey, you will be offering invaluable insight into the study of female community college presidents of color’s experiences with academic and professional preparation for the presidency, racial microaggressions, and organizational culture systems that may hinder their ascension. Please complete the survey by selecting and submitting your answers electronically. All responses will be anonymous. Thank you for your participation.

1. Rate the following American Association Community College (AACC) Competencies for Community College Leaders on how strongly you agree or disagree that they are essential to the effective performance of a community college leader

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Are there additional competencies not mentioned that are essential to effective leadership? If so, please list or describe below.

3. Where did you acquire the competencies necessary for the position of Community College President?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American Association of Community College Council Program</th>
<th>Community College Program</th>
<th>Professional development program external to higher education</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Community College Advocacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Organizational Strategy</td>
<td>Organization's Mentoring Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Advocacy</td>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Online or Blended Courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Management</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. Which route best describes your career path to the presidency (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001)?

- Scholar: traditional career path almost entirely in higher education from career professor and ultimately to presidency
- Spanner: may or may not have been a career professor, but has held high administrative positions in both higher education and non-educational institutions
- Steward: most of career has been in higher education including holding administrative positions then ultimately to presidency, but having never been a career professor
- Stranger: non-traditional path directly to presidency, having never held an administrative or career professor position in higher education

5. In order of greatest impact, with 6 being highest, rank what is/has been the source of moral support for you in your ascension to the presidency?

- Personal friends and family
- Professional colleague(s)
- Alumni association or network

6. Critical Race Theory (CRT) asks "whether a rule of law or legal doctrine, practice, or custom subordinates important interests and concerns of racial minorities" (Brown, 2003, p.3). With regard to your career path to the presidency, specifically as a woman of color and referring to your race-based experience, please indicate which of the following organizational factors may have impeded your ascension?

- Governance structure (hierarchy, oversight, power of influence, etc.)
- Organizational culture (behavior, beliefs, language, etc. of superiors, subordinates and colleagues)
- Policies and/or procedures (rules and/or lack of rules and regulation)
- Talent management/human resources (career options, promotions, recruitment, etc.)
- N/A, I did not experience any career impediments based on race
Other (please specify)

7. Racial microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Sue et al. 2007). Please indicate if/how you may have experienced racial microaggressions professionally during your ascent to the presidency.

- Socioemotional (exclusion, avoidance, isolation, etc.)
- Intellectual (expressing frequent doubt or uncertainty of your abilities, intellect, direction, etc.)
- Physical (avoiding physical contact, avoiding eye contact, expressing irrational fear or suspicion, etc.)
- Positional (insubordination by subordinates, undermining by colleagues i.e: lack of attention, participation, or positional respect and courtesy, etc.)
- Verbal (racial slights or slurs, gossip or rumor spreading, etc.)
- I have not experienced racial microaggressions
Other (please specify)
8. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.)
   - American Indian or Alaskan Native
   - Asian / Pacific Islander
   - Black or African American
   - Hispanic American
   - White / Caucasian
   - Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)

9. Please choose the age range that best describes you
   - □ 45-55
   - □ 55-66
   - □ 67-77
   - □ 78+

10. Optional: Please use the space below to provide any feedback or comments to the researcher. For instance, is there a question you have not been asked that you wish you had been? Is there a specific area of focus that you think merits more research with regard to women and/or people of color? Do you have any suggestions or concerns with regard to this research? Would you be interested in being contacted for future research on women of color and/or leadership?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

No Crystal Stair: Narratives of Female Community College Presidents of Color Camille Broussard Wise

Interview Questions

Career Paths

1. Tell me about your journey to the presidency of a community college, including academic and professional preparation.
2. Did you set out to pursue the presidency of a community college, if so, what steps did you take? If not, how where you redirected to this position?
3. What positions did you hold and where (community college, university, external to higher ed, - Scholar, Spanner, Steward, Stranger, etc)?
4. Has your path been typical or atypical of your peers who are Caucasian males? If so, how?
5. What would you say are the core competencies that a community college president needs to be an effective leader? Where did you attain those skills?
6. What professional or personal support systems have you accessed or relied on to assist you in your presidency?
7. How would you describe your tenure as president? What were the greatest accomplishments and challenges?

Critical Race Theory

1. Have you experienced overt racism in your professional role as president? If so, please describe this incident(s)?
2. Have you experienced racial microaggressions in your professional role as president? If so, please describe this incident(s)?
3. Has being a woman of color impacted your ascension to the presidency? If so, how?
4. How has your experience of being a woman of color impacted your leadership style as president?
5. How does the intersectionality of gender and race presented itself in your professional life?

Organizational Culture

1. Describe the organizational culture of the organization at which you were president?
2. What organizational systems either hindered or propelled your ascension to the presidency?
3. What impact or influence, if any, do you think your presidency made on your organization’s culture?
No Crystal Stair: Narratives of Female Community College Presidents of Color  Camille Broussard Wise

4. How can/does your organization support women of color aspiring to the ranks of the presidency? If so, how?  
5. What are your recommendations for how an organization could better recruit and support aspiring leaders of color?  
6. Does your past organization have a formal succession planning strategy in place to ensure sustainable and representative leadership? If not, what would you recommend to your organization?
Appendix C: Consent to Participate

August 15, 2012

My name is Camille Broussard Wise, and I am a doctoral candidate pursuing an EdD in Educational Leadership and Management at Drexel University’s Center for Graduate Studies in Sacramento. My dissertation is titled No Crystal Stair: Narratives of Female Community College Presidents of Color. This qualitative study seeks, through the counterstories of past female community college presidents of color, to identify challenges and opportunities for California community colleges to develop representative and sustainable executive leadership, and an organizational culture that is inclusive of and supportive to female community college presidents of color. Setting the context for this study are the shifting demographics of community college campuses, impending mass retirements of community college presidents in the next 5 years, and organizational culture and practices that may impede the ascension of female administrators of color that could present a challenge for organizations to foster sustainable and representative leadership.

As a former community college president who is a female of color, I would like to interview you in person to collect your narrative to be included in my study. Your participation in this study would add immensely to understanding the unique challenges and opportunities that exist for female leaders of color in academe. Ultimately, the study seeks, within a conceptual context of critical race theory, to produce narrative counterstories that illustrate the career paths of female past community college presidents of color, and to analyze organizational culture factors to understand if and how organizational and cultural systems at California community colleges may exist that hinder the recruitment, support, and professional ascension of female community college presidents of color.

I anticipate that your participation would entail one in-person interview lasting 90 minutes or less, with any follow up questions via email and/or phone. I would like to begin my interviews the week of September 10th and conclude by October 5th. I am available to meet at your convenience, at a location of your choosing. Please contact me by email and/or phone at cw475@drexel.edu or 916-638-8840. If you are not able to participate in this study, but would like to refer another colleague that meets the criterion for this study (female community college president of color), please forward their contact information to me.

I thank you in advance for considering my request. I am looking forward to meeting with you to learn more about your invaluable knowledge and experience as a female community college president of color.

Camille Broussard Wise

APPROVED
Office of Regulatory Research Compliance
Protocol #20800291481
Approval Date: 08/13/12
Expiry Date: 08/14/13
18. **CONSENT**

- I have been informed of the reasons for this study.
- I have had the study explained to me.
- I have had all of my questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I have carefully read this consent form, have initialed each page, and have received a signed copy.
- I freely consent to participate in this research study.

I grant permission for the use of this information for:

- Dissertation
- Journal publication
- Presentation

I grant permission to use one of the following:

- My first name only
- My full name
- Just a pseudonym

**Subject or Legally Authorized Representative**

_____

**Date**

**Investigator or Individual Obtaining this Consent**

_____

**Date**

**List of Individuals Authorized to Obtain Consent**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>24 Hr. Phone #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jose Chavez</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>915-324-4600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camille Broussard Wise</td>
<td>Co-Investigator</td>
<td>916-838-8840</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subject Initials**

APPROVED
Office of Regulatory Research Compliance
Protocol # 1208001481
Approval Date: 08/15/12
Expiration Date: 08/14/13