Understanding the Impact of Informal Mentoring on Female Mid-level Community College Administrators: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

A thesis presented

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Dawn King Moscariello

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how eight female administrators at a suburban community college located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States made sense of their experiences in informal mentoring relationships and the significance and value they placed on these experiences. Through interviewing these participants and gaining a better acuity on the feelings that each participant experienced by being a part of an informal mentoring relationship, the researcher was able to gain a true understanding of the impact of informal mentoring on these participants. A phenomenological approach of qualitative research was implemented. Data was collected through interviews with eight mid-level female community college administrators who revealed their lived experiences of informal mentoring. By following IPA methodologies for research analysis, themes were discovered, modified and adjusted to create four superordinate themes. The superordinate themes discovered during this process were: 1) Non-judgmental work environment 2) Self-worth and confidence growth, 3) Transfer of Power, and 4) Empowerment towards reaching goals. The themes showed that these participants not only benefitted career wise by participating in informal mentoring, but they have also benefitted on personal levels as well. Self-confidence, career success, professional development and leadership opportunities resulted from these experiences. This research demonstrates the need for more institutions of higher education to implement informal mentoring as part of the professional development of their employees and how this professional development could cultivate a more robust work environment and assist in succession planning.

Keywords: informal mentoring, female administrators, higher education, professional development, succession planning.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to five women in my life who have shaped and made me into the woman I am today. My Grandmother Corinne, my mother Ginny, my two beautiful daughters Corinne and Keira and my sister, not by blood, but by love, Kathy Eads. Your wisdom, strength, curiosity and love have opened the world up to me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................. 3
Dedication .............................................................................................................................................. 4
Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................................. 5
Chapter One: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 10
  Statement of the Problem .................................................................................................................. 10
  Research Question .............................................................................................................................. 11
  Significance of Research Problem ...................................................................................................... 12
  Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................................................... 14
  Social Cognitive Career Theory .......................................................................................................... 15
    Self-efficacy beliefs ............................................................................................................................ 16
    Outcomes expectations ....................................................................................................................... 16
    Personal goals ..................................................................................................................................... 17
  Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 18
  Definition of Terms .............................................................................................................................. 18
Chapter Two: Literature Review ........................................................................................................ 20
  Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 20
  Community Colleges ............................................................................................................................ 21
    Historical overview of the community college .................................................................................. 21
    The 21st century community college .................................................................................................. 22
  Female Administrators at Community Colleges ................................................................................. 25
  Mentoring ........................................................................................................................................... 27
    Definition of mentoring ...................................................................................................................... 27
    Mentoring phases ............................................................................................................................... 28
  Formal and Informal Mentoring Relationships ................................................................................. 31
  Benefits of Mentoring ......................................................................................................................... 35
  Marginal Mentoring Relationships ..................................................................................................... 37
  Mentoring Women ............................................................................................................................... 40
  Summary ............................................................................................................................................. 45
Chapter Three: Research Method ....................................................................................................... 46
  Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 46
  Qualitative Design ............................................................................................................................... 46
  Research Paradigm .............................................................................................................................. 46
Chapter Four: Report of Research Findings

Participant Profiles

Participant #1- Jane
Participant #2- Carrie
Participant #3: Linda
Participant #4: Anne
Participant #5-Kelly
Participant #6- Jacqueline
Participant #7-Shonda
Participant #8-Gina

Findings and Analysis

Theme #1- Non-judgmental work environment
Theme #2- Self-worth and confidence growth
Theme #3- Transfer of power
Theme #4- Empowered toward goals

Summary

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Discussion, Implications for Practice and Recommendations for Future Research

Discussion of the Findings
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

One of the greatest challenges facing community colleges today requires cultivating a new generation of leaders (Luzbetak, 2010; Robison, Sugar, & Miller, 2010; Strom, Sanchez, & Downey; Schilling, 2011). Community colleges face unprecedented vacancies in senior management positions and as a result, a large gap exists of qualified administrators prepared to take on leadership responsibilities (Luna, 2012; Luzbetak, 2010; Robison et al., 2010; Strom et al., 2011). Almost half of all presidents at community colleges plan to retire within the next decade and these vacancies will leave a vast depletion in the shared collective memory and understanding of leadership in community colleges (Garza, Mitchell, & Eddy, 2008; Strom et al., 2011; VanDerLinden, 2005). Despite this potentially alarming situation, many qualified administrators already work within the community college system and have the potential to be promoted to senior management positions (Luna, 2012; Strom et al., 2011). Many of these potential new leaders are female who would bring valuable insight and experience to their new roles (Campbell, Mueller, & Souza, 2010; Luzbetak, 2010).

Significant research states that many of the current and future community college leaders utilize mentoring as a form of professional development, allowing them to achieve higher levels of career satisfaction and achievement (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011; Campbell et al., 2010; VanDerLinden, 2005). These mentoring relationships assist in developing career aspirations, self-confidence, and institutional political awareness (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011; Campbell et al., 2010; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; VanDerLinden, 2005). Conversely, those individuals who do not enter into a mentoring relationship are less likely to achieve higher levels of career attainment (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011; Tran, 2014). Mentoring may not be
the only answer to career trajectory or career satisfaction, but it can assist the protégé with the psychosocial support and help build self-efficacy (Gander, 2012; Tran, 2014). This self-efficacy empowers the protégé to attempt new career opportunities that would otherwise appear too daunting and challenging (Gander, 2012; Tran, 2014).

From an institutional perspective, developing and cultivating employees is one way an institution stays relevant within its community (Scott & Sander-McBryde, 2012). Three strategic initiatives to develop high caliber employees, who will have the opportunity to successfully run the institution, are training, motivating, and supporting (Pearch, Craig, & Willits, 2005; Strom et al., 2011). All three of these strategies could be incorporated into an efficient and effective mentoring program (Pearch et al., 2005; Strom et al., 2011). A formal or informal mentoring program that is supported by the institution can assist in fostering an environment of vision and stability that will allow potential new leaders to infuse energy and experience when facing the challenges of today’s community college (Pearch et al., 2005; Strom et al., 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore how eight female community college administrators in the northeastern portion of the United States made sense of their experiences in informal mentoring relationships and the significance and value they placed on these experiences.

**Research Question**

The following research question guided this study:

1. How do female administrators at community colleges describe their experience with informal mentoring?
Significance of Research Problem

The numerous vacancies at the senior management level that will open up within many community colleges in the next decade will create opportunities for experienced administrators to ascend to these roles. The number of administrative positions that will need filling exceeds the number of qualified candidates (Gerald, 2014; Luna, 2012; Reille & Kazar, 2010; Strom et al., 2011). Most of the current community college senior level positions are held by “baby boomers” and their retirements will create a significant loss of knowledge, expertise, history, experience, and culture (Gerald, 2014; Reille & Kazar, 2010; Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). This loss can foster an atmosphere of vulnerability, due to the deficit of systemic knowledge at a time when the community college faces financial troubles (Gerald, 2014; Reille & Kazar, 2010). Compounding the issue, former President Barack Obama challenged the community college system to play a leadership role nationally to increase the number of Americans who hold a degree or certificate, thereby helping the country remain relevant and competitive in the global market (Bailey & Cho, 2010; Gerald, 2014). As a result, this situation has placed more stress on the senior management at many community colleges (AACC, 2015; Gerald, 2014; Reille & Kazar, 2010).

As the complexity of a community college system has grown, the understanding of the importance of mentoring has increased accordingly, especially in how it relates to the professional growth of less experienced community college administrators who aspire to achieve senior level positions (Valeau & Boggs, 2004). The administrators who move into these senior level roles will not only be qualified by work experience, but will also have received formal and informal professional development training (Luna, 2012; Robison et al., 2010). One of the most recent trends in academia is to develop these mentoring and leadership programs to foster growth
within their organizations and workforce (Robison et al., 2010). Research studies have detailed the benefits of mentoring and have noted that many current college presidents received some form of mentoring as professional development (Campbell et al., 2012). Mid-level administrators recognize that to increase their competitiveness within the community college system, the support and guidance of a mentor can enhance their chances for promotion (Dougherty, Dreher, Arunachalam, & Wilbanks, 2013; VanDerLinden, 2005).

The advantages of mentoring are known, such as career progression, work-place happiness, and personal fulfillment and establishing self-efficacy. However, disparities exist in the specific administrators who receive mentoring based on gender (Campbell et al., 2012; Tran, 2012). Historically, white males have been the main recipients of mentoring relationships in the workplace. This fact correlates to the number of higher-ranking male administrators at community colleges (Peters, 2010). With more females attaining administrative positions at the community college in recent years, it will become necessary to create opportunities for them to receive mentoring. Many institutions realize that in order to prepare women to take on more leadership roles at community colleges, there is a need for more formal and informal training programs, professional development opportunities, and mentoring (Campbell et al., 2012). Mentoring is essential for women to become more successful in developing a strong foundation for leadership and career advancement both in the business world and in higher education (Campbell et al., 2012; Tran, 2012). Such a relationship will also assist women in developing a sense of belonging in environments that could value masculine traits over feminine ones (Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014; Parker & Kram, 1993). Even though it is understood that mentoring is essential for career growth for women, there is a severe shortage of female administrators in
higher-level positions at community colleges, to mentor younger female protégés in the workplace (Campbell et al., 2012).

The lack of a mentoring relationship can have negative effects on women administrators’ career trajectories (ASHE, 2011; Moyer-Driver, 2013). Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) recognize that women who do not identify clear goals “tend not to plan intermediate five and ten year strategies. Rather, they take smaller steps, almost literally feeling their way along” (p. 45). Furthermore, women do not set career goals and plans the same way their male counterparts do, often leading to entry-level or dead-end management positions within the community college (Jones, Warnick & Taylor, 2015). Women will remain unaware of specific steps important to their career advancement such as mentoring (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Jones et al., 2015).

Mentoring is one method female community college administrators can use to improve their own career situation. This proposed study explored how eight female community college administrators in the northeastern portion of the United States made sense of their experiences in informal mentoring relationships and the significance and value they placed on these experiences.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study utilized the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) for its theoretical framework. This theory attempts to provide an amalgamated framework for identifying, supporting, and predicting the development of educational and vocational interests (Brown, Lent, Telander, & Tramayne, 2011; Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). SCCT is based on the assumption that “workers or students with higher levels of cognitive abilities and more fully developed skill sets tend to perform better at work and school than those with lower
cognitive abilities or less well developed skill sets” (Brown et al., 2011, p. 82). At its heart, the theory posits that people, career, and vocational possibilities are affected by many variables including “personal attributes (e.g., interests, abilities, values) learning and socialization experiences, and the resources, opportunities, and barriers afforded by their environment” (Lent & Brown, 2013, p. 155). For the purpose of this study, the outside factor and opportunity reviewed was the function of informal mentoring in the workplace and how it assisted in developing a more robust skill set for female community college administrators in order to influence their career trajectory.

**Social Cognitive Career Theory**

Based on Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) strives to provide a streamlined context that will assist in conceptualization of the process through which people develop vocational interests, make occupational choices, and achieve varying levels of success in their work pursuits (Brown et al., 2010; Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 1994). The central theme of SCCT is the belief that personal inputs (gender, race, predispositions) and background contextual affordances (training opportunities, socioeconomic status, changes in social organizations, and education systems) contribute to career-related learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994). These learning experiences are direct sources of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations, which contribute to the development of specific career interests, goals, and actions (Lent et al., 1994). SCCT focuses on the reciprocity and interactions between individual cognitive processes and their environment (Lent et al., 1994).

This theory proposes a framework for explaining three aspects of career development: (a) the formation of career interests, (b) the selection of career choice options, and (c) the
persistence in occupational goals. SCCT is based on the critical relationship between self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals in the career decision process (Lent et al., 1994). It is a person’s own self-efficacy beliefs that determines if one is willing and motivated to pursue a career. According to the theory, a person’s self-efficacy has a reciprocal relationship with outcome expectations. The consequences of this relationship is a person will gain or develop interest in a career, which will have a reasonable expectation of being successful (Lent et al., 1994). When a higher level of self-efficacy and successful outcomes expectations exist, interest will drive the person to specific career choices and goals (Lent et al., 1994). The construct of self-efficacy has been shown to have a significant impact on the career development process.

**Self-efficacy beliefs.** Betz and Hackett’s (1981) interest in self-efficacy as a construct in career research related to their understanding of the potential effects of predicking the development of career objectives and goals based on the theory of self-efficacy. The degree in which a person expends effort toward goal attainment and emotional reactions to experiences when meeting new challenges may be influenced by self-efficacy beliefs. As discussed previously, self-efficacy is informed by four sources: mastery experience, social modeling, social persuasion, and psychological response. However, self-efficacy information is processed through experiential learning, which is an individual process and influences self-efficacy judgments (Lent et al., 1994).

**Outcomes expectations.** Personal beliefs about probable outcomes establish another significant component in career development. In self-efficacy belief, the person is concerned with one’s own capabilities (“Can I do this?”); however, in outcomes expectations, a person imagines consequences for performing a specific action (“If I do this, what will happen?”).
Bandura (1986) outlined three classes of outcome expectations: (a) physical (monetary), (b) social (approval), and (c) self-evaluative (personal satisfaction) that can influence career behavior. When using the SCCT framework one can assume that interest in a specific career activity relies on the outcomes that are anticipated as a result of the participation and the value placed on those outcomes by the person (Lent et al., 1994).

**Personal goals.** In social cognitive theory, goals play a significant role in controlling one’s own behavior (Lent et al., 1994). By setting goals, people assist in establishing, influencing, and sustaining positive behavior over time without external reinforcement as well as increasing the probability of achieving a desired outcome (Lent et al., 1994). Goals can be defined as they resolve to take on a particular activity or to affect a specific future outcome (Bandura, 1986). Setting goals are self-motivating because they encourage an individual to achieve a specific result. These goals are linked to self-efficacy and outcome expectation as a reciprocal relation in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). The following diagram depicts the connection between self-efficacy, outcome expectation, and goals.

This theory is applicable to mentoring female community college administrators, as it will demonstrate the relationship between positive mentoring experiences and higher levels of self-efficacy/successful completion of career goals. Using Lent et al.’s (1994) theory assisted the researcher in explaining the motives to engage in mentoring relationships and the benefits associated with this type of professional development.

Conclusion

This study focused on the meaning that female community colleges administrators derived from a mentoring relationship. The framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory served as the lens through which to review the literature on mentoring and to analyze the data collected from the participants. The following sections present a review of the literature on mentoring, including a historical context of the community college setting, the different types of mentoring, and how mentoring can be a negative or positive experience. The last chapter will focus on the methodology chosen to conduct this study.

Definition of Terms

Community College- a nonresidential junior or two-year college established to serve a specific community and typically supported in part by local government funds that offers associates degrees or certificates. These institutions differ from a four-year university in cost, admission requirements, and goals.

Academic administrator- an employee who works within the branch of a university or college and is responsible for the maintenance and supervision of the institution. This position is usually separate from the faculty or academics, although some personnel may have joint responsibilities.
**Informal Mentoring** - when two people establish a developmental alliance without the assistance or guidance from the organization.

**Mentor** - a person in a developed mentoring relationship who is more experienced or more knowledgeable and helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person.

**Protégé** - a person under the protection or care of someone who is interested in his/her career or welfare.

**Self-efficacy** - refers to an individual’s belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). It reflects the confidence a person has in his/her ability to exert control over one’s own motivation, behavior, and social environment.

**Social Cognitive Theory** - is the view that people learn behaviors through observation, modeling, and motivation such as positive reinforcement.

**Social Cognitive Career Theory** - built on Bandura’s social cognitive theory and developed by Lent et al. (1994), suggests that career behavior is a result of an interaction between self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Historically, the community college embodies a hospitable place for female students and employees. However, within the community college system women still struggle to achieve higher levels of career advancement that are equal to their male counterparts (Campbell et al., 2010). A review of the literature from the last 30 years established that mentoring is one professional developmental technique for women to prepare for this kind of leadership. This literature review discusses the history of the community college and current issues that affect this system. It also investigated women in leadership roles at community colleges and identified causes that affected women’s ascension into larger leadership roles. The concept of mentoring was explored, along with the history of mentoring, the definition of mentoring, the phases of mentoring, and the types of mentoring. The benefits and negative aspects of mentoring were reviewed. The literature review then looked at the issues regarding women and formal mentoring programs.

The following questions guided the literature review:

- How have researchers and scholars explained the effects of mentoring in academia regarding women and career trajectory?
- How important is mentoring to female administrators at the community college level?
- How does self-efficacy guide the use of mentoring for females at community colleges?
- How does the social cognitive career theory influence the use of mentoring for female administrators at a community college?
Community Colleges

Community colleges, also known as the people’s colleges, have a long and rich history in American higher education (Gill & Jones, 2013). From their founding, they were set apart from other higher education institutions because of their commitment to the community in which they were located (Gill & Jones, 2013). Community colleges remain at the forefront of leading higher education at a time where more collaboration, both within and between institutions, is becoming the norm (Gill & Jones, 2013; McNair; 2015; Ottenritter, 2012; Vaughan, 2000; Wallin, 2012). It is an important time for community college leaders to embrace a collaborative style to become more diverse and understand the issues that many community colleges and their students face (Ottenritter 2012; Wallin, 2012). Community colleges often promote from within the ranks of their own bureaucratic systems (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008), with a large majority of the senior leadership roles being offered to administrators who currently work in these institutions.

Historical overview of the community college. The community college, or junior college, constitutes the cornerstone of American higher education since its inception (Cohen & Brawer, 1996). The community college initiative can be traced back to the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862 (Vaughan, 1982). Even though this act was specifically created to grant money to Land Schools for the use of the increasingly popular agricultural disciplines, it opened up higher education to both students and academic fields that traditionally had been excluded (Vaughan, 1982). These land-grant institutions helped propel the notion of equal opportunity colleges. They also “gave credence to the concept of the people’s college, a term widely used to describe community colleges” (Vaughan, 1982, p. 11). In 1901, the first publicly owned junior college was established in Joliet, Illinois, which “created a junior college that academically paralleled the first two years of a four-year college or university. It was designed to
accommodate students who desired to remain within the community yet still pursue a college education” (Joliet Junior College, 2015).

According to Schatz (1966), in the 1900s, there were approximately five million college-age students with only 4 percent attending college. By the 1950s, the number rose to 15.8 million with a 15 percent college enrollment rate and continued to rise in the 1960s to 18 million with a 40 percent college enrollment rate (Schatz, 1966). The growth that four-year colleges and universities witnessed also occurred at the community college level. The increased demand for higher education caused admission requirements to become more stringent. Qualified students rejected for admission to four-year colleges made up the potential pool of applicants at community colleges (Shannon & Schoenfeld, 1965). In the 1960s, 25 percent of all college students began their education at two-year institutions (Schatz, 1966). Additional factors that contributed to the continued growth of community college enrollments were the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, the Truman Commission’s report on Higher Education and Democracy, and the Vietnam War, which allowed men to enter into college as a way to defer being drafted into the war (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Schatz, 1966). Each of these factors helped drive the need and desire for higher education in their own way and allowed the modern community college to be a viable option for all students who sought higher education.

The 21st century community college. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2015) states that there are currently 1,123 public, private, and tribal community colleges in the United States. These community colleges educate over 11 million students annually. Community college attendance has increased during the 21st century with more students matriculating at this level. This student body is often largely underprepared for postsecondary education, which forces the community college to take on the role as a
developmental educator (Bailey & Cho, 2010). About 60 percent of community college students enroll in at least one developmental course during their first semester even though large majorities of these students graduated from high school (Bailey & Cho, 2010). The push from former President Obama to have an increase of five million community college graduates by the year 2020 also puts stress on a system that suffers from challenges both internally and externally (Bailey & Cho, 2010; Gerald, 2014). Other pressing issues that plague community colleges include the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, cutbacks in state and federal funding, growing competition from proprietary schools, and demands for an increase in work-based training (AACC, 2015; Boggs, 2012; Gerald, 2014; VanDerLinden, 2005).

One of the greatest challenges facing the 21st century community college is the development of a new generation of leaders (Boggs, 2012; Gerald, 2014; McNair, 2015; Strom et al., 2011). With community colleges facing unprecedented vacancies in senior management positions and fewer candidates applying for these positions, there is a large gap in administrators prepared to take on a leadership responsibility (Boggs, 2012; Campbell et al., 2010; Gerald, 2014; Luna, 2012). Almost half of all community college presidents plan to retire in the next decade and these vacancies will leave a vast opening in the shared recollection and leadership of community colleges (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Gerald, 2014; McNair, 2015; Strom et al., 2011; VanDerLinden, 2005). According to Weisman and Vaughn (2006), the projected number of retirements of current community college leaders will reach 84 percent by the year 2016. Approximately 800 of the 1,195 community college presidents will need to be replaced by the year 2017 (Campbell et al., 2010; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Gerald, 2014; Gill & Jones, 2013; McNair, 2015; Shults, 2001).
The pool of qualified senior administrators prepared to succeed current presidents is also dwindling due to retirements of these individuals and senior faculty members (Boggs, 2012; Campbell et al., 2010; Gerald, 2014; Luna, 2012; Strom et al., 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2006). With the considerable amount of senior level managers retiring within community colleges, the time is right for women and minorities to gain a stronger foothold in community college leadership (Campbell et al., 2010). This current situation offers community colleges an excellent opportunity to increase diversity and to inject a renewed energy into their leadership to more closely align the composition of the administration to the student population (Boggs, 2012; Campbell et al., 2010; Gerald, 2014).

Leadership development opportunities such as mentoring can serve as a valuable tool to help promote career advancement for administrators in community colleges (Boggs, 2012; McNair, 2015). In their study, Piland and Wolf (2003) found that 57 percent of current college presidents indicated that formal or informal mentoring helped them to achieve success in their career. Furthermore, the use of a mentor for community college administrators assists “in developing the advanced management skills, acquiring personal contacts, and, most important, becoming socialized into the values that are expected of senior college leadership” (Valeau & Boggs, 2004, p. 49). Mentoring plays a critical role in the career advancement of community college administrators and should be utilized to assist with the large amount of turnover in senior level positions that community colleges will face (Boggs, 2012; Duree & Ebbers, 2012). Mentoring relationships are a critical career development component that women have not always had in the past (Peters, 2010).

Women, especially women of color, who desire to hold senior level administrative positions would especially benefit from working with a mentor (Santamaria & Jaramillo, 2014).
In fact, some female college administrators claim that being in a mentoring relationship was critical to their success (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Duree & Ebbers, 2012; Walker, 2012). Furthermore, a mentor can enlighten the female administrator about the possibility of taking on a leadership role (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). In their study, Dahlvig and Longman (2010) researched defining moments in women leadership development. It was found that being encouraged by a person in a position of authority to assume a broader leadership role could enhance the participants’ own perception of their abilities and competence (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). This perception will, in turn, allow these women to achieve more responsibility and power (Boggs, 2012; Dahlvig & Longman, 2010).

**Female Administrators at Community Colleges**

Community colleges enroll and employ higher proportions of women compared to four-year colleges (AACC, 2015; Boggs, 2012; Martin, 2014; Townsend 1995; VanDerLindem, 2005). This number is encouraging to researchers and practitioners who seek equal representation of gender and minorities at senior administrative levels in higher education (Martin, 2014; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). The number is somewhat inflated compared to higher education as a whole, since it is recognized that women do not hold the same quantity of leadership positions at four-year institutions (Martin, 2014; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Although the reasons for this discrepancy are many, it has been established that higher education is similar to the business world where men continue to hold the majority of senior level positions (Jones, 2014; Martin, 2014; Townsend & Twombly, 2007; VanDerLindem, 2005). Many women (in both administrative and faculty positions) remain at the community college level (Martin, 2014; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Furthermore, although women do hold senior level positions, the number in comparison to men remains less than one-third (Eddy & Cox, 2008; Jones, 2014;
Martin, 2014; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Currently, women hold approximately 50 percent of executive/administrative and managerial positions at community colleges nationally, most of which are in mid-level administrations and not the senior management level (AACC, 2015; Jones & Taylor, 2012; Martin, 2014). In addition, Townsend & Twombly (2007) point out “women have been an important part of the community college student and employee base since its inception as the junior college, that numerically women are well represented, and that the climate, while not perfect, is relatively good for women” (Townsend & Twombly, 2007 p. 208).

With impending retirements and the characteristics that are unique to the community college environment, there will be more opportunities for women who choose to seek a higher administrative level at the community college (Gill & Jones, 2013; Shults, 2001). Added to the fact there will be a large turnover of senior administrators, it has been recognized that community colleges are bureaucratic institutions that promote from within their system (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Jones & Taylor, 2012). To obtain senior level positions at the community college, a series of promotions are necessary. Currently, 60 percent of community college presidents receive their promotions either from another presidency or from previously holding the chief academic officer position (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008). In addition, of that number, 22 percent of community college presidents originate from within the institution (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Gerald, 2014).

To prepare women to take on more leadership roles at community colleges, there is a need for more formal and informal training programs, professional development opportunities, and mentoring (Martin, 2014). The literature has demonstrated that mentoring was needed for women to become more successful in developing a strong foundation of leadership and career advancement (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Jones, 2014; Santamaria & Jaramillo, 2014; Walker,
Mentoring was the focus of this study and the following section addresses the theory of mentoring, the types of mentoring, the purpose of mentoring, and the benefits of mentoring.

Mentoring

**Definition of mentoring.** The history of mentoring is a long one that dates back to Greek mythology. Mentor, a primary character in Homer’s *Odyssey,* was a wise and faithful advisor entrusted to protect Odysseus’ son Telemachus, while Odysseus sailed to fight against Troy (Ragins & Kram, 2007). In this context, the role of a mentor was to be a tutor, a counselor, and sometimes a disciplinarian with the intention of having young Telemachus learn the skills needed to become an effective citizen (Rosenbach, 1999).

Until recently, mentoring was defined as a relationship between an older, more senior colleague who had more experience and a younger, less experienced protégé for the sole purpose of helping the protégé in career development (Grander; 2013; Kram, 1985; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, & Levinson, 1978; Noe 1988, Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, & Wiethoff, 2010). The mentor does not have to be employed in the same organization as the protégé or even in the same profession. The definition of mentoring has evolved over the years, but the core feature that differentiates it from other types of personal relationships is the development feature that is entrenched within the framework of career advancement (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Levinson et al. (1978) suggested that mentors provide six functions in an effective mentoring relationship:

- acceptance, support, and encouragement
- advice and guidance
- social status
● socialize as host and guide
● sponsorship
● advocacy, training, and instruction.

In 1983, Kram expanded the ideas made by Levinson et al. by explaining the impact the relationship has on the career development of the protégé.

In her seminal work on mentoring, Kram (1983), concludes that the “mentor relationship has a great deal of potential to facilitate career advancement and psychosocial development in both early and middle adulthood by providing a vehicle for accomplishing these primary developmental tasks” (p. 608). Kram further explains the two types of functions that mentors will serve for their protégé which include career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions involve a range of behaviors that will give the protégé a basic understanding of the rules of operation for the organization and prepare them for advancement in the organization (Kao, Rogers, Spitzmueller, Lin, & Lin, 2014; Kram, 1985). These behaviors include “coaching protégés, sponsoring their advancement, increasing their positive exposure and visibility, and offering them protection and challenging assignments” (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 5). In the psychosocial functions the mentor “builds on trust, intimacy, and interpersonal bonds in the relationship that include behaviors that enhance the protégé’s professional and personal growth, identity, self-worth, and self-efficacy” (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 5).

**Mentoring phases.** The mentor relationship normally progresses through four very predictable phases. Even though these phases are well defined, they are not always distinct. These phases are: (a) an initiation phase, (b) a cultivation phase, (c) a separation phase, and (d) a redefinition phase (Kram, 1983; Turban & Cheung, 2012).
In the initiation phase, the relationship begins and usually lasts for the first six to 12 months of the relationship (Kram, 1983; Turban & Cheung, 2012). The protégé will develop a strong favorable impression of the mentor, who is admired, and respected for his/her guidance and competence (Kram, 1983; Turban & Cheung, 2012). The mentor is seen as someone who will support the protégé’s attempt to operate effectively in the organizations’ world and the young mentee feels cared for, supported, and respected by the mentor (Kram, 1983; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007; Turban & Cheung, 2012). During the second phase, the cultivation phase, the positive expectations that were developed during the initiation phase are tested against reality (Kram, 1983; Turban & Cheung, 2012). This phase can last anywhere from two to five years. The range of career functions and psychosocial functions characterizing the relations will peak during this phase (Kram, 1983; Turban & Cheung, 2012).

The career functions are the first to emerge. The mentor will provide work that is more challenging and have a higher expectation of accomplished work tasks. During this time more coaching, protection, and sponsorship will grow (Dworkin, Maurere, & Schipani, 2012; Kram, 1983; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). As the bond between the protégé and the mentor increases, the psychosocial functions will appear (Kao et al., 2014). These functions primarily include modeling and acceptance and confirmation (Dworkin et al., 2012; Kao et al., 2014; Kram, 1983; Ragins & Kram, 2007; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). In relationships of greater familiarity, these functions could also include counseling and friendship (Kram, 1983; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

After this phase, the relationship will develop into the next phase of separation. The relationship might experience turmoil, anxiety, and feelings of loss during this period (Kram, 1983; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007; Turban & Cheung, 2012). The separation can occur both
structurally and psychologically. If the structural separation due to promotion occurs appropriately, it can stimulate an emotional separation that will enable the protégé to test his/her ability to function without the mentor (Kram, 1983; Turban & Cheung, 2012). Conversely, if the separation happens prematurely, the protégé might experience feelings of anxiety as s/he will feel forced to operate independently and feelings of abandonment might occur (Kram, 1983; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). The separation phase is essential to development as it provides opportunity for protégés to demonstrate their ability while working independently and without support (Kram, 1983; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007; Turban & Cheung, 2012). The separation phase concludes when both the mentor and the mentee acknowledge that the relationship is no longer necessary in its previous form (Kram, 1983; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007; Turban & Cheung, 2012).

The final phase of the mentoring relationship is the redefinition phase. This phase can last indefinitely, with the mentor and mentee navigating the new peer relationship that is formed (Kram, 1983; Turban & Cheung, 2012). It is during this phase that any resentment or anger that developed on either side diminishes while gratitude and appreciation of the relationship increases (Kram, 1983; Turban & Cheung, 2012). The stresses of the separation phase evolve into a new relationship that might include friendship (Kram, 1983; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007; Turban & Cheung, 2012). The mentor and protégé might remain close or they might keep in contact sporadically, but if the relationship was healthy and not toxic, they will both at any time reach out to each other for support and guidance (Kram, 1983; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007; Turban & Cheung, 2012).

The phases of mentoring are established and the typical definition of mentoring is one of a knowledgeable wise mentor helping a protégé. However, as the focus of the importance of
Mentoring relationships is researched, the definition and roles have adjusted. No one, true, acceptable definition of mentoring exists in the literature because, based on the applied context; the term mentor can mean a myriad of different ideas. This dissonance in the literature demonstrates why it is hard to establish a theory of mentoring. Bozeman and Feeney (2007) lament the lack of a more recognized theory of mentoring and note the limited progress that has been made towards creating one.

Most of the research related to mentoring and its perceived benefits has been in the business sector, with few studies conducted within higher education. Of those studies, a minimal number examine the benefits of mentoring at the community college level (McDade, 2005; Wunsch, 1994). Mentoring in higher education research has focused mainly on faculty and student mentoring or mentoring new faculty members by senior faculty members (McDade, 2005). A large gap in the literature exists in terms of mentoring of administrators in higher education.

**Formal and Informal Mentoring Relationships**

Mentoring relationships can be broken down into three distinct types: (a) formal, (b) informal, and (c) peer. Each type has both positive and negative characteristics that affect the outcomes of the relationships. Informal mentoring has been recognized for years in business and academia in assisting career advancement of protégés. Formal mentorship programs have become the norm in business and they try to capitalize on the success of informal mentoring.

Formal mentoring is based on the traditional definition and attitude of mentoring. Typically, a senior work colleague is assigned to work with a younger protégé (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Desimone et al., 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Kram, 1985; Parise & Forret, 2008;
Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Marchese, 2006). The institution supports this type of program as part of their professional development initiatives. Most formal mentoring programs have management match the mentor and protégé (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Desimone et al., 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Wanberg et al., 2006). The establishment of formal mentoring programs occurred to reinvent the informal mentoring relationships that have existed in organizations (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Wanberg et al., 2006). These programs have been successful in career advancement and in making these relationships more readily available for women and other underrepresented groups that might not have had the opportunities of informal mentoring (De Vries, Webb, & Eveline, 2006).

In formal mentoring relationships, the mentors may not view the protégé as someone they find worthy of attention or support and there is a longer adjustment period required between the participants in order to get to know each other (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Desimone et al., 2014; Parise & Forret, 2007; Ragin & Cotton, 1999; Wanberg et al., 2006). In contrast to an informal relationship, identification, role modeling, and interpersonal attraction do not influence the development of a formal relationship (Desimone et al., 2014; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Additionally, a formal mentoring relationship period usually lasts a shorter duration in comparison to an informal and peer mentorship (Blake-Beard, 2001; Desimone et al., 2014; Parise & Forret, 2007; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Furthermore, in a formal mentoring relationship, there is usually a prescribed setting for meetings between the protégé and the mentor and specific goals that should be attained during the relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001; Desimone et al., 2014; Parise & Forret, 2007; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). In addition, the mentor may not always have the best interest of the protégé when making decisions that affect the protégé; the mentor’s first allegiance potentially remains with the organization (Blake-Beard,
The focus of short-term career goals is usually the main objective within a formal mentoring relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Conversely, informal mentoring is usually self-selected, and builds on the relationships that are naturally present in a peer mentoring relationship (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Desimone et al., 2014). These types of mentoring relationships are important in an organization that does not support formal mentoring programs (Hu, Thomas, & Lance, 2008). Mentors often select the individual they will mentor because they identify with that person and are willing to develop and devote attention to them (Chao et al., 1992; Desimone et al., 2014). Furthermore, mentors select protégés who they believe are high performing and might be considered, “rising stars” (Desimone et al., 2014; Ragin & Cotton, 1999). In the informal mentoring relationships, many of the same behaviors that are seen in formal mentoring relationships are utilized (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Desimone et al., 2014). These behaviors including talking, listening, giving advice, revealing knowledge, and awareness about the protégé’s job that will assist them in career advancement (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Desimone et al., 2014). Additionally, the selection of a mentor by the protégé is based on strong communication skills and developed coaching skills (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

The very nature of informal mentoring enables relationships to develop normally through shared interpersonal interests, and the mentor and the protégé usually having similar individual characteristics and traits (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Desimone et al., 2014; Hu et al., 2008; Yang, Hu, Baranik, & Lin, 2013). The informal mentoring relationship does not just benefit the protégé, but also the mentor. Both mentor and protégé create useful networks to assist in career growth (Desimone et al., 2014; Hu et al., 2008; Yang, et al., 2013). In the spontaneous formation of an informal mentoring relationship the period for mentoring can last anywhere from 2001).
three to six years (Blake-Beard, 2001). In addition, the actual mentoring takes place when there is a desire to meet and the goals of the relationship evolve over time. In addition, the protégé and the mentor determine the successfulness of the relationship and not an outside individual (Blake-Beard, 2001). The long-term career needs of the protégé remain the main motivation of an informal mentoring relationship and at times, these needs can take priority over the needs of the institution (Desimone et al., 2014; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

The positive outcomes of informal mentoring can most readily be seen in career advancement for the protégé. A study done by Underhill (2006) examined the career outcomes of mentoring in the workplace. The study found that individuals that were mentored had a small, yet significant, advantage over non-mentored individuals (Underhill, 2006). The use of informal mentoring helped establish a more profound influence on positive career outcomes compared to formal mentoring (Desimone et al., 2014; Underhill, 2006). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Chao and Gardner (1992), research centered on the differences between individuals who were in informal and formal mentorships. These relationships were compared along two mentoring dimensions, psychosocial and career-related functions. The results revealed that, “protégés in informal mentorships reported receiving more career-related support from their mentors than protégés in formal relationships” (Chao & Gardner, 1992, p. 630).

In peer mentoring, the mentors are at the same level as the mentee and they can support the new employee in an informal or formal role. This relationship has been found to increase communication and collaboration for effective learning, information sharing, emotional support, and friendship. This type of mentor relationship is frequently seen in higher education for faculty development and student retention (Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schabmann, Spiel, & Carbon, 2011). When comparing peer mentoring to the more traditional types of mentoring situations
where the relationships are hierarchical, peer mentors are equal to their mentees (Leidenfrost et al., 2011). The priorities of peer mentors differ from the traditional mentor relationships. The main objective in this type of relationship is to provide social support rather than career-related functions (Leidenfrost et al., 2011).

**Benefits of Mentoring**

A mentoring relationship is both dyadic and multifaceted. The success of the partnership is dependent on the actions of both the mentor and the protégé (Allen, 2007). The majority of the research related to mentoring has shown that mentoring can have a significant impact on career paths of those individuals who aspire to advance in higher education administration (Copeland & Calhoun, 2014; Stamm & Buddeberg-Fischer, 2011; VanDerLinden, 2005). Studies have also suggested that mentoring is the essential component that separates successful and unsuccessful administrators and is related to career development and job satisfaction (VanDerLinden, 2005). Furthermore, mentoring provides significant contributions to leadership development and creates learning relationships that can evolve and mature during the experience (McDade, 2005).

For the protégé, mentoring is a component in achieving higher professional and personal rewards including higher salary, promotions, personal development, stress management, and institutional commitment (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz & Lima, 2004; Hu et al., 2008; Scandura, 1992; Yang et al., 2013). VanDerLinden (2005) found that 52 percent of the people surveyed indicated that they were involved in a mentoring relationship and that this relationship had assisted them in obtaining new and higher-level positions. Studies have further posited that mentors can assist in learning, provide encouragement and advice, and help ease any potential obstacles for their protégés (Parise & Forret, 2008; Scandura, 1992; VanDerLinden, 2005; Yang
et al., 2013). Mentors also help establish professional networks for the protégé by introducing them to other administrators in their field, which provides career growth experiences (McDade, 2005; Parise & Forret, 2008; VanDerLinden, 2005; Yang et al., 2013). Mentors can act as an ally, a friend, a reference, and a sounding board. They can help the protégé navigate the political aspects of the organization and see the “bigger picture” (Parise & Forret, 2008; VanDerLinden, 2005; Yang et al., 2013). Research has demonstrated that the most successful and beneficial mentoring relationships are dependent on the protégés’ understanding of their individual needs for mentoring and their willingness to be mentored (Parise & Forret, 2008; Yang et al., 2013).

In addition to the benefits mentoring has on the protégé, research exists that shows mentoring should be considered a “mutually beneficially developmental relationship that provides learning and growth for both mentors and protégés” (Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2006, p. 439). The short-term benefits for those who serve as mentors are potential personal satisfaction, recognition by the organization, and developing a foundation of base support from the protégé (Eby et al., 2006; Ghosh, 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). In their study Allen, Lentz, and Day (2006) identified long-term benefits for mentoring such as higher reported income, faster promotion rates, and a stronger self-efficacy regarding career success. Furthermore, mentors report personal satisfaction from observing and participating in the career success of their protégés (Ghosh, 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Parise & Forret, 2008). Another likely outcome of mentoring is that the mentor will learn how to perform his/her own job better with a new perspective added by the protégé (Ghosh, 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Parise & Forret, 2008). In addition, mentors might see themselves in their protégés and live vicariously through their successes to mitigate their own failure (Ghosh, 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Parise & Forret, 2008).
Research has shown that there are no significant differences between informal and formal mentoring relationships on the side of the mentor (Allen & Eby, 2004; Allen, 2007; Ghosh, 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). This small variance contrasts to what protégés report when asked the differences between informal and formal mentoring (Allen, 2007). The perspective of the mentors and the meaning they acquire from being in the mentoring relationship is an important component of the partnership. The mentor’s perspective and its benefits remains mainly unexplored in the literature (Ghosh, 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). Overall, there is a suggestion that being a mentor contributes largely to job satisfaction and positive job attitudes (Allen, 2007; Ghosh, 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). A study conducted by Wang, Noe, Wang, and Greenberger (2009), concluded that the benefits of mentoring also influenced institutional success. Furthermore, to foster the positive outcomes of the mentoring relationship, organizations need help to enhance the status of mentors by recognizing outstanding mentors and the contribution mentoring makes to the organization (Ghosh, 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Wang et al., 2009).

Marginal Mentoring Relationships

Mentoring relationships are close, personal relationships that develop in the work setting (Kram, 1985). These relationships will experience changes and issues similar to what most relationships encounter. Even the healthiest of mentoring relationships will, at times, have negative moments. Other mentoring relationships are not always effective and can even damage the protégé’s career ambitions. These negative experiences can be categorized as marginal and dysfunctional relationships.

In a marginal mentoring relationship, a limit in the scope or degree of mentoring functions provided might exist (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007; Turban & Cheung, 2012). In a study conducted by Ragins et al. (2000), the opinions of protégés
who reported marginal satisfaction with their mentors were equal to or even worse than those individuals who did not have mentors. These mentors were “good enough” (Ragins et al., 2000, p. 1178) and the relationship would continue, whereas truly negative mentoring relationships would more likely terminate. The problems that occur in a marginally effective relationship will minimize the potential to fulfill important needs of the protégé (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007; Turban & Cheung, 2012). Even though the benefits of the relationships were limited, they did not cause substantial harm to the mentor or the protégé (Turban & Cheung, 2012).

Like with any close relationships dysfunctions can occur in mentoring situations. These “dysfunctions occur when the relationship is not working for one or both of the parties. One or both of the parties’ needs are not being met in the relationship or one or both of the parties is suffering distress as a result of being in the relationship” (Scandura, 1998, p. 453).

The dysfunction can result in a scale that ranges from disregard to disliking to even anger and hostility (Burk & Eby, 2010; Eby, Butts, Durley, & Ragin, 2010; Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1978; Scandura, 1998; Turban & Cheung, 2012). A negative mentoring experience has been linked to decreased learning, lower amounts of psychosocial and career support, a greater sense of depression at work, lower job satisfaction, increased turnover rates, and higher stress for the protégé (Burk & Eby, 2010; Eby, Butts, Lockwood, & Simon, 2004). Four types of possible dysfunctional relationships were identified and defined to categorize negative mentoring relationships. These include: negative relations (bullies, enemies); sabotage (needling, revenge, silent treatment); difficulty (conflict, binds); and spoiling (betrayal, regret) (Duck, 1994; Sauer, 2014; Scandura, 1998).
Negative relations involve psychosocial problems with bad intent (Sauer, 2014; Scandura 1998; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007). These problems can manifest themselves by “bullying, intimidation, overly aggressive behavior, abuse of power and provoking diversity issues” (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007, p. 11). Depending on how the protégé responds to these negative relations, the relationship can be considered abusive for the protégé (Scandura, 1998). Furthermore, if the protégé fights back it can lead to the protégé and the mentor becoming organizational enemies (Sauer, 2014; Scandura, 1998). In the case of sabotage within the relationship, revenge can be enacted on the protégé. Such sabotage can include: silent treatment, career damage, and withholding of information pertinent to the protégé’s job (Sauer, 2014; Scandura, 1998). When resentments or anger builds up enough for the protégé or mentor to take revenge, there is another possibility of a potentially abusive outcome (Sauer, 2014; Scandura, 1998).

Difficulty within mentoring relationships usually occurs without malice on either one's part. It happens “when the person has good intentions toward the other and there are psychosocial problems in the way they relate to one another” (Scandura, 1998, p. 455). These issues can include “different personalities, different work styles, unresolved conflicts, disagreements, placement of binds by the mentor, mentor on the wrong career track and overdependence” (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007, p.11). “Binds” occur when the mentor gives the protégé ultimatums or demands that the mentee make a choice (Scandura, 1998). Even though these difficulties could arise without malice, they could potentially have negative effects on the protégé.

In a spoiling situation, a relationship shifts from a previously effective and good relationship to a disappointing relationship (Sauer, 2014; Scandura, 1998; Scandura & Pellegrini,
2007). This type of relationship involves problems with vocational issues in the mentoring relationship but there is still good intent between the mentor and protégé. A good relationship gone sour is one in which some act of betrayal has occurred or was perceived to have occurred (Sauer, 2014; Scandura, 1998). The betrayed party may have feelings of resentment for investing so much time in the relationship. Spoiling can also occur when someone who is not on the fast track in the organization mentors a protégé.

Another aspect of a dysfunctional relationship that can occur during a mentoring situation materializes when the protégé becomes too dependent on the mentor (Daresh, 2004). Instead of becoming more self-confident and developing a stronger sense of self-efficacy, the protégé relies too much on the mentor and does not learn how to make his or her own decisions (Daresh, 2004). Based on studies, negative experiences tend to have a higher prediction of outcomes than positive experiences (Eby et al., 2010). The negative experience will have a stronger impact than a positive experience in human perception, as a negative incident is processed more methodically and contributes to the protégés’ overall impression (Burk & Eby, 2010; Eby et al., 2010; Sauer, 2014). Even with such overwhelming negative outcomes in a dysfunctional mentoring relationship, it is still difficult for the protégé to leave the situation. The fear of retaliation and the lack of other mentoring alternatives might be some of the reasons why the protégé stays (Burk & Eby, 2010; Eby et al., 2010). According to Burk and Eby (2010) recognized that more research was needed in regards to the negative mentoring experiences and the career outcomes of protégés who experience this type of relationship.

Mentoring Women

With more women entering administrative and managerial tracks, it has been suggested that in order to succeed and advance their careers, women should form mentoring relationships
similar to the ones formed by their male counterparts, as women and other minorities encounter more obstacles than white men (Blake-Beard, 2001; Moyer-Driver, 2013; Parker & Kram, 1993; Ragins & Kram, 2007). A mentoring relationship benefits women in most organizations, as it will contribute to advancement and assist women in developing a sense of belonging in environments that often value masculine traits over feminine ones (Dunn et al., 2014; Parker & Kram, 1993; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Ramaswami et al. (2010), it was concluded that having a senior, white male mentor was the most beneficial to the career trajectory, stratification, and compensation of the female or minority protégé. The belief that a senior white male mentor has a more visible role in an organization, in turn makes the protégé more visible and more likely to succeed (Ramaswami et al., 2010). Having a supportive mentoring relationship, especially in the early stages of a career, is a critical component of achievement in senior level administrative tracts. Strong evidence exists that women and minorities respond best in a training environment that is considered more collaborative, which includes working with mentors (Gorman, Drumowicz, Roskes, & Slattery, 2010; Walker, 2014). A recognized advantage exists to having a mentor; however, it has been shown that women and minorities may encounter more obstacles trying to establish a mentoring relationship than their white male counterparts, therefore making the benefits of mentoring out of reach for them (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Peters, 2010; Ragins & Cotton, 1991). Building these relationships is tricky for females, as senior men are able to mentor younger male protégés but complexities exist with cross-gender mentoring relationships (Crosby-Hilier, 2012; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Parker & Kram, 1993). It also remains more difficult for women to find a mentor than men (Crosby-Hilier, 2012; Gilbert & Rossman, 1992). When dealing with a cross-gender relationship one issue is learning how to negotiate the intimacy that evolves in a
mentoring relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001; Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011). Kram (1984) describes the intimacy that develops in these relationships as the “developmental dilemma.” This dilemma occurs when the protégé and the mentor have to decide what levels of familiarity are appropriate (Blake-Beard, 2001; Clawson & Kram, 1984). In addition, when women are involved in cross-gender mentoring relationships, these relationships can become difficult to manage based on possible romantic feelings that can occur, and therefore there is a possibility of a decreased range of benefits for women (Crosby-Hillier, 2012; Gilbert & Rossman, 1992).

The lack of a mentoring relationship can have negative effects on women administrators (ASHE, 2011; Moyer-Driver, 2013). Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) recognize that women who do not identify clear goals from professional advice “tend not to plan intermediate five-and ten year strategies. Rather, they take smaller steps, almost literally feeling their way along” (p. 45). They also state that women will remain unaware of specific steps important to their career advancement without mentoring (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Crosby-Hillier, 2012). With mentoring so important for career advancement, especially for women, the lack of viable mentors has greatly affected the advancement of women to senior administrative positions (ASHE, 2011; Crosby-Hillier, 2012; Ortiz-Walters, Eddleston, & Simione, 2010).

If a woman is able to find a mentor relationship, especially formal mentoring relationships, she is faced with two tasks: managing the internal relationship between the protégé and the mentor, and managing the external relationship between the dyad and the rest of the institution (Blake-Beard, 2001; Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Ortiz-Walters et al., 2010). The gender composition of the mentor-protégé dyad will have a direct influence on the effectiveness of the relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001; Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Clawson & Kram, 1984; Dworkin et.
Studies have shown that the gender make-up is significant to the long-term success of the protégé, with same-sex pairing to be more beneficial for the psychosocial functions of the protégé (Blake-Beard, 2001; Blake-Beard et al., 2011; Gander, 2013). Conversely, it can be seen that in gendered industries, such as higher education institutions, having a high-powered or high-profile male mentor is more beneficial to career success and satisfaction (Dworkin et al., 2012; Gander, 2013; Ramaswami et al., 2010).

The internal aspects of a formal mentoring relationship can be broken down into five characteristics that women need to be cognizant of as they negotiate these relationships. These characteristics include: “unrealistic expectations, lack of attraction/opportunity for identification, managing the developmental dilemma, unbalance focus on the protégé, and forging a post program relationship” (Blake-Beard, 2001, p. 335). Unrealistic expectations can occur when there is a sense of excitement and the mentor (Blake-Beard, 2001; Blake-Beard et al., 2011) can provide hope that is out of proportion with what. The natural attraction that is felt between mentor and protégé in an informal mentor relationship cannot always be duplicated in a formal relationship. Without this foundation, it can be difficult for the relationship to achieve a cohesiveness that is important in an effective relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001).

During the mentoring relationship, there can be an excessive amount of attention spent on the positive outcomes for a protégé in the relationships without considering the benefits for the mentor (Crosby-Hillier, 2012). With this uneven amount of time devoted to the protégé, an imbalance will develop, leaving the mentor wondering what she/he gets out of the relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001; Blake-Beard et al., 2011). A true sense of reciprocity will determine how much energy the mentoring partners put into the relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001; Blake-Beard et al., 2011). At the end of a formal mentoring relationship, the separation phase of the relationship
begins, which might be unnatural, but is inherent in the informal mentoring relationship (Kram, 1983). When this happens, the protégé and mentor need to learn how to navigate this new relationship and conclude if the rapport will survive outside the formal relationship (Kram, 1983). If it does, the formal relationship will be deemed successful (Blake-Beard, 2001; Blake-Beard et al., 2011).

The external factors that can affect the mentoring relationship are the involvement of the direct supervisor, who may or may not be the mentor and most especially the feelings of non-participating peers (Blake-Beard, 2001). If the mentor is not the direct supervisor, a problematic triangulated association can occur. If the supervisor feels that his /her supervision is under scrutiny, they might feel threatened. This threat might prevent the protégé from fully utilizing the mentoring relationship, thus creating a damaging relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001). Furthermore, in a formal mentoring relationship the peers not selected for the program might feel jealous and view those selected as receiving preferential treatment (Blake-Beard, 2001). This difficult situation will put the protégé on the defensive and make it problematic to achieve the full benefits of the relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001).

As with any formal professional development plan, benefits and drawbacks to the program will exist. Mentoring women in higher education is one of many ways where women can achieve higher levels of career success. It is important to look at the negative aspects and strive to mitigate the potential harmful outcomes of these relationships in order to focus on the benefits, which are many.
Summary

This chapter discussed the history of the community college and current issues that affect this system. It also investigated women in community college leadership roles and identified causes that affected women’s ascension into larger leadership roles. The concept of mentoring was explored, along with the history of mentoring, the definition of mentoring, the phases of mentoring, and the types of mentoring. In addition, this chapter reviewed the negative aspects of mentoring. It concluded with considering issues regarding women and mentoring programs.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how eight female community college administrators in the northeast United States made sense of their experiences in informal mentoring relationships and their connection with career progression.

The research question that guided this study was:

1. How do female administrators at community colleges describe their experience with informal mentoring?

Qualitative Design

Qualitative research as recognized by Creswell (2012) assists in the understanding of the significance and meaning that individuals attribute to a specific, or shared social problem. This design allows the participants to express their own feelings and views of the experience of mentoring as it applies to them. The purpose of a qualitative study is not to confirm or test existing theories, but to encourage a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by posing open-ended, semi-structured questions and pursuing the information based on the answers to these questions. It is understood that participant responses might reveal areas of questioning outside of the researcher’s original prospectus. By utilizing a qualitative design, the research structure will be flexible depending upon findings, which allows the researcher to make interpretations based on emerging themes in the data.

Research Paradigm

This research study utilized the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm:
Is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of the subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action (Burrell & Morgan, 1979 p. 30).

Additionally, Burrell and Morgan (1979) theorized that the focus in an interpretative paradigm is to gain understanding of the world in its native state based on subjective experiences. The participant in action best comprehends the participant’s world. It is the role of the interpretive researcher to analyze the process that creates and sustains shared realities (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This approach of research relies on naturalistic methods of research and “tends to be nominalist, anti–positivist, voluntarist and ideographic” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 30).

The ontological assumptions of the interpretive paradigm show that there are multiple perspectives on once incident and people will interpret and make their own meaning of specific life events (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For this study, the researcher looked at the meaning that the participants made concerning mentoring in the workplace. Each participant had their own perspective and understanding of their mentoring relationship and it is expected that their interpretations will be subjective.

The interpretive epistemology will be transactional and subjectivist based on real world phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The assumption of interpretive epistemology is that we are unable to separate ourselves from what we know and believe. The researcher and the participant were “interactively linked so that the findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994 p. 111). The researcher acknowledged personal bias as it related to the examined topic that is in accordance with the interpretative paradigm. All truth is subjective and
the researcher understands that her own positionality factored into the study. The role of the researcher was considered throughout the methodology.

**Research Tradition**

The research tradition deemed most appropriate for this study was Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA). Jonathan Smith and colleagues introduced IPA in the 1990s as a dynamic qualitative method first utilized in psychology (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The original goal of IPA was to “enable researchers to capture the qualitative and experiential dimension, yet still dialogue with mainstream psychology” (Shinebourne, 2011, p. 17). An IPA approach is inductive by nature and is influenced by the hermeneutic form of phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, the purpose of an IPA study is to:

explore in detail the processes through which participants make sense of their own experiences, by looking at the respondent’s account of the process they have been through and seeking to utilize an assumed existing universal inclination towards self-reflection. . . .The processes referred to here include all aspects of self-reflection and refer to the way in which IPA assumes that participants seek to interpret their experiences into some form that is understandable to them (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 88).

Three areas of philosophy: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography, influence the theoretical foundation of the IPA tradition (Smith et al., 2009).

**Phenomenology.** Smith et al. (2009) describe phenomenology as a “philosophical approach to the study of experience,” focusing on that which is significant and which represents “our lived world” (p. 11). Constructed from the writings of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), phenomenology suggests that experiences should be observed as they occur, on their own terms, rather than attempting to fit them into any “pre-existing system” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012;
Smith et al., 2009). Husserl (as cited by Smith et al., 2009) explains that the importance of a phenomenological inquire involves looking at an everyday experience by looking in on it from an outside perspective. In a phenomenological study, the researcher endeavors to understand the participants’ relationships to the world and will focus on their attempts to make meaning out of their experience and what has happened to them (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenology also stresses that the research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher within that process (Smith et al., 2009).

**Hermeneutics.** A second key underpinning of IPA is hermeneutics, which comes from the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). The objective of hermeneutic inquiry is to discover the participants’ meanings from the blend of the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon, participant-generated information, and data obtained from other relevant sources (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA, the researcher attempts to understand the perspective in order to interpret the participants’ meaning (Freeman, 2008).

Within this approach exists the central thought of the hermeneutic circle, which is the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole (Lee & McFerran, 2015; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). To understand the whole, one must look at the parts and to understand the parts, one must look at the whole (Smith et al., 2009). By utilizing the hermeneutic circle, an iterative process, to interpret data, the researcher tries to reveal the true spirit of the participant’s experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Shinebourne, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The idea of the hermeneutic circle suggests that one’s understanding of the meaning of a text is made at different levels, all of which relate to each other, and many of which will offer different perceptions on the part-whole rationality of the text (Lee & McFarran, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). A central factor of IPA is its double hermeneutic perspective (Lee &
McFerran, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). This is where the researcher attempts to make meaning of a participant’s experience, who at the same time is trying to make sense of that experience (Lee & McFerran, 2015; Shinebourne, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). A dual interpretation occurs when the participant tries to make meaning of the phenomenon in his/her own terms by describing and understanding an experience, and further explanations may be offered in response to direct questioning. During the analysis, the researcher explains and interprets the meaning of the participants’ accounts (Lee & McFerran, 2015; Shinebourne, 2012; Smith et al., 2009).

**Idiography.** The third major theoretical influence in IPA research is idiography, which deals with the concern of the particular (Smith et al., 2009). The commitment to the particular within IPA occurs on two levels. The first is the commitment to detail and depth of analysis, which makes the analysis thorough and systematic (Smith et al., 2009). The second is the commitment to understand how a particular phenomenon has been understood from the perspective of individual participants within their context (Smith et al., 2009). Within the IPA tradition, the researcher consciously chooses to work with a small sample size to identify in-depth personal experiences of the particular subjects (Smith et al., 2009). Within these small samples, the researcher compares and contrasts the information from each participant to establish similarities and differences, but the object is to understand the themes of the interpretations not to generalize or form theories. The researcher can recognize general statements; however, one is still able to elicit particular claims of any of the participants (Smith et al., 2009).

These three streams of philosophy embody the essence of IPA research that seeks to find the lived experience of the participants and seeks to find how they make meaning of this experience. The experience is communicated in their own terms and not according to any pre-
determined categories. This research tradition allowed the researcher to find the meaning the participants had with their experience with mentoring.

**Participants**

IPA research is “conducted on relatively small sample sizes, and the aim is to find a reasonably homogeneous sample, so that, within the sample, we can examine convergence and divergence in some detail” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 3). In line with IPA tradition, the sample will include eight participants as IPA focuses on small sample sizes (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). All of the participants chosen for this study came from the same suburban community college. Each participant worked at least two years at the institution as a full-time administrator. The sampling consisted of purposive sampling, inviting specific administrators who met the criteria of being full-time female administrators at the chosen community college for at least two years. Furthermore, the small number of participants that was purposefully selected for this study limited the findings from being irrevocably relevant to the general population (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Smith et al. (2009) concluded that there was no perfect sample size in an IPA study. The size selected gave the researcher the opportunity to understand the complexity of the phenomenon.

**Recruitment and Access**

The community college selected is a multi-campus, competency-based institution located in a suburban, Pennsylvania setting. Established in 1967, it serves two counties and over 28,000 students annually. It offers a total of 33 associate degrees, 17 transfer degrees, and 33 certificate programs in a variety of mediums including traditional, hybrid/blended learning, and thoroughly
online. The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools accredit the institution. It employs approximately 1000 full-time faculty and staff and over 300 adjunct professors.

The participants were recruited based on face-to-face conversations and e-mail correspondence (Appendix A) to establish that they met the criteria needed to participate in the study. Performing any research study that involves human participants will involve many different ethical issues. Informed consent was very important for the completion of this research project. The researcher employed a qualitative study, which included conducting interviews of participants, who had the right to understand the purpose of the study and how the outcomes might be utilized and applied. To maintain a valid study, the participants volunteered to be part of the study. The researcher completed an IRB application for both Northeastern University and the institution where the study was being conducted.

**Ethical Considerations**

**IRB approval.** The researcher obtained IRB approval, by completing all of the required steps outlined by Northeastern University. Once the researcher received IRB approval from Northeastern University, all documents were forwarded to the community college where the study took place for their approval.

**Protection of human subjects.** This study followed the guidelines established by the National Institute of Health. This included anonymity of the participants, as it was recognized that their responses could affect their place of employment, and could risk their position within the institution. In addition, the participants were made aware of what measure the researcher would take to ensure their privacy to alleviate any concerns they might have.
It is important for any qualitative research study to gain informed consent of the study’s participants. In an IPA study, the informed consent is two-part (Smith et al., 2009). First, for the participation in the data collection, which included interviews, second, the participants’ needs to be aware of the possible outcomes of data analysis, which included using verbatim extracts of the interviews in, published reports (Smith et al., 2009). All participants were asked to sign the Northeastern Approved consent form (Appendix B) before the start of the interviews to acknowledge they understood the purpose of the study and any risks associated with the study. They were also informed that they had the ability to withdraw their participation from the study at any time without any repercussion.

Data Collection

For data collection in an IPA study, having the participants offer a rich, detailed, meaningful account of the experience in their own words, works best. The interview style most commonly employed is semi-structured, where there are prepared open-ended questions, but the researcher also has the option of adding additional questions for clarification, depth, and the exploration of themes (Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). For this study, open-ended questions were used to allow the participants to uncover how they made sense of their mentoring experience (Seidman, 2006). An initial interview was conducted with each participant, no longer than 45-60 minutes. The interview was in-person, conducted in a neutral location of the participants’ choosing, and recorded for accuracy. If necessary, a follow up interview was scheduled within a week of the first interview, was conducted over the telephone or in-person, depending on the participants’ schedules, and was recorded. The two interviews gave the participants time to reflect on the answers given in
the first interview and build familiarity between the researcher and the participant (Seidman, 2006).

A schedule for the interviews (Appendix C) was developed in order to properly acknowledge the possible range of issues that the study would cover (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Appropriate questions that follow a specific pattern, use funneling techniques and include possible prompts were considered before the interviews take place (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Interview questions following the IPA tradition should never overtly ask specific questions in a structured interview setting as this would create “artificial” conversation (Smith et al., 2009). The interview schedule that is developed will guide the interview and not control the actual session (Smith & Osborn, 2008). By utilizing a semi-structured interview process, the researcher attempted to establish rapport with the participant and the interviewer can probe areas of interest that surface during the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008). During this type of interview process, the participants assisted in directing how the interview evolved and could be considered “the experiential expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell their own story” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 59).

Data Storage

It is understood that data storage and security are very important aspects in conducting a qualitative research study. For the purpose of the study, various data sources were used, each having specific storage and security needs. All interviews were recorded on an iPod and saved to a local computer that was password protected, allowing the researcher to access them for referencing. Therefore, all recordings needed to be kept in a secure location. The location was at the home office of the researcher, allowing for limited access to the data. All transcripts from the data were created in a Microsoft Word document, which was saved on an external drive and
on the researcher’s personal computer, which was password-protected. All transcripts were de-identified to protect the anonymity of the participants (Creswell, 2012). In addition, the researcher ensured anonymity by de-identifying the participants, institutions, and any other characteristics that could confirm individuals participating in the study. Since there was a wide breadth of data collected to inform this study, many steps needed to be developed to allow for ease of locating data. These steps included creating a master list of the various types of information collected and “developing a data collection matrix as a visual means of locating and identifying information” (Creswell, 2012, p. 175).

In order to accelerate the review of the data from the interviews, a web-based service, Rev.com was used. This secure site had the maximum precautions in place to ensure the security of the documents at all times. The transcriptionists at Rev.com must abide by a strict nondisclosure agreement to ensure the veracity of the data (Appendix D).

Data Analysis

The data analysis process initially began with rereading the transcribed interviews that were conducted to help inform this study. The transcribing process was done by an outside agency, but the researcher will reread and check the final transcripts to confirm accuracy. After the researcher ensures accuracy of the interviews, the participants of the study were allowed to read the transcribed interview to check for accurateness and to clarify misinterpreted information. Once there was a thorough check of the transcribed interviews, the initial step of analyzing began. The purpose of an IPA study is to search for and extract individual voices and meanings with the emphasis on the convergence and divergence of themes (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Meaning is central and the goal is to understand the complexity of those meanings rather than determining the frequencies (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn,
There is no standard approach to data analysis in IPA, but an established guideline for novice research has been documented (Smith et al., 2009). The analysis in IPA research is focused on the participants’ attempts to make sense of their experiences and is iterative and inductive in nature (Smith et al., 2009).

During the first phase of analysis, the researcher immersed herself in the data. This immersion is accomplished by reading the transcript multiple times (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). It is important to read and reread this transcript multiple times to become familiar with the account and assist in developing themes (Smith et al., 2009). It is during this stage of the analysis where the participants’ accounts become the focus and listening to the recording of the interview while reading the written transcript will help the researcher “enter the participant’s world” (Smith et al., 2009).

The second step of the data analysis in IPA research is the initial noting. During this phase, the semantics of content and language are examined at a very basic level (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The examination was done with an open mind and the researcher began to create notes on anything that sparked an interest while reading. The comments were categorized as descriptive—pertaining to what the participant said; linguistic—comprising the specific language the participants chose to use; and conceptual comments—determined on an interrogative and interpretative level. (Smith et al., 2009).

During the third step of analysis, particular themes emerged. At this time, researchers will rely more on the initial notes they took during the reading of the transcripts than the actual transcript (Piertkiewskicz & Smith, 2012). The main undertaking during this phase is to take the original notes and turn them into concise and brief statements from the salient points made in the notes (Smith et al., 2009). In addition, another important task of this phase is to reduce the
volume of data while still capturing the complexity of the statements by connecting patterns and themes (Smith et al., 2009).

The fourth phase of analysis involves identifying connections across emergent themes (Pierthkiewskicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher considered ways to weave the themes together to create a structure that would highlight the most interesting aspects of the participants’ accounts (Smith et al., 2009). The statements are removed from chronological order and then reassembled together to form themes. The process in which this was done can be broken down into smaller steps. Smith et al. (2009) describe these steps as: abstraction—a basic form of identifying patterns; subsumption—where emergent themes become subordinate themes; polarization—identifying oppositional themes; contextualization—themes are placed into context; numeration—the frequency of the theme is identified; and function—emergent themes are assigned a relevance within the interview.

In the fifth stage of data analysis in an IPA study, the researcher moved onto the next case (transcript) and started the analysis process with this transcript (Smith et al., 2009). During this process, it was important the researcher “bracket” his/her ideas and thoughts that were created during the first case while working on the next cases(s) (Smith et al., 2009). The final step in the analysis involved looking for patterns in themes across cases (Smith et al., 2009). In this step, the researcher identified and group themes found throughout the various interviews in order to find patterns and prioritize the data to decide which themes to examine (Smith & Osborn, 2008).
**Trustworthiness and Verification**

Some specific guidelines were utilized for assessing qualitative research, including: sensitivity to context, rigor, transparency, coherence, impact, and importance (Yardley, 2000). Sensitivity to context was achieved by being aware of the relevant literature related to the topic, which included a comprehensive literature review and an understanding of the related empirical work surrounding the study. In addition, the researcher acknowledged the sensitivity of the participants in the study by ensuring that their perspective was heard through the interview and data analysis.

Rigor and commitment was achieved by ensuring that the data collection conformed to a traditional qualitative process. Analysis and reporting was thorough (Yardley, 2000). This will be achieved by having a well-thought out interview schedule, having a purposeful sample of participants that is appropriate to the study and matches the criteria needed for this research, and by conducting a thorough interview.

To establish transparency and coherence, the researcher clearly detailed the stages of the research process in the summary of the research study. A thorough description for each stage of the process, including participant selection, interview schedule, data transcription, and data analysis was provided so that the reader would understand the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness. Coherence refers to the clarity and power of the argument presented in the study and the fit between the research question and the research tradition selected (Yardley, 2000). The coherence was achieved by writing a compelling summary about the lived experiences of female community college administrators with mentoring which established the rationale of using an IPA research tradition.
The last principle to establish trustworthiness was the impact and importance of the study. A well-developed IPA study should strive to tell the reader something interesting or useful. This study attempted to do that by constructing a well thought-out research and data analysis about the lived experiences of community college administrators and mentoring.

Reflexivity is another important aspect of the process of obtaining trustworthiness in qualitative research. It refers to the continuous process of self-reflection the researcher engages in during the analysis of the data (Darawsheh, 2014). In an IPA study, it is important for researchers to minimize their bias. This minimization involved the researchers reducing their own previous biases and their own preconceptions of the topic before attempting to interpret the lived experiences of the participants. This self-reflective process improves the transparency of the role of the researcher and helps to confirm the credibility of the findings (Darawsheh, 2014). This process occurred by keeping a reflection journal. This helped to ensure confirmability, which deals with the objectivity of the study. In a qualitative study, it is important to ensure that the findings remain uncorrupted by the researcher’s own biases and feelings about an issue (Shenton, 2004).

Another form of validation this researcher utilized was member checking. This form of validation is the most important method for determining credibility (Creswell, 2012). This approach allows the participants to verify the data collected and ensure accuracy of the account (Creswell, 2012). After all interviews were transcribed, the participants were given the opportunity to read over the document for accuracy. The use of participants in a research study allowed them not only to ensure trustworthiness but also gave them the opportunity to be co-researchers.
Transferability relates to external validity and how the finding of the research can be applied to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Due to the specificity of this study, transferability was limited to situations that were within the same context as the study. Shenton (2004) states, “The results of a qualitative study must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organization or organizations and, perhaps, geographical area in which the fieldwork was carried out” (p. 70). This specificity could hinder the transferability of the study, yet may also add to the literature and give a broader understanding of mentoring for female administrators at a community college.

**Positionality Statement**

For the past 15 years, I have held various administrative roles at a community college. I have great pride in this institution, as I myself started my higher education journey here. I graduated from high school with no real direction in life. My parents never went to college and did not push education as a goal that would be obtainable for me. I knew that I wanted to obtain a career and not a job like my parents, and I understood that college was the way for me to do this. I entered community college without a strong educational background, but was able to work hard and transfer to a four-year university with the hopes of becoming a teacher. I completed my Bachelor of Science degree and became the first college graduate in my family. While working as a teacher, I received more advanced training in technology at a community college, which provided the opportunity to evolve into my current career.

While I have achieved many personal goals, I realize that I lack particular professional development goals. I have steadily received promotions, but always at the same level as director. If I want to go further as an assistant dean or dean, I feel that more preparation and assistance
from my college is needed. The college where I work did a two-year leadership program, in which I was invited to participate. The mission of this intensive training was to prepare those selected to become the future leaders of the college. Even with this training, I feel I lack the political, professional, and social advantages needed to be successful at the college. This feeling is reinforced by the fact that several recent positions were filled by outside candidates, even though several colleagues (who also participated in the leadership program) and I applied for these positions.

I have had the good fortune to work with women who have been supported by informal mentoring relationships. These individuals have a well-rounded awareness when it comes to navigating the political climate of the college thanks to their particular mentors. I have witnessed the advantages these colleagues have received by being in such relationships. Knowing that they have someone who will support them, guide them, and present them as a viable future leader to the college boosts their confidence and creates a “safe” place for them to work. It appears that these individuals have an ally and a protector in senior management, who will assist them in making appropriate and important career decisions. For myself and other administrators at the college, we do not have the same advantages. Because the college does not provide any incentive towards mentoring programs, formal or informal, many administrators go without any kind of mentoring intervention unless they act on their own to develop a mentoring relationship. I feel that we remain at a disadvantage and might not be seen as a strong choice for senior management. I have seen women (and men) rise faster in their careers than I, even though they were hired after me because of the benefits of having a mentor. My male colleagues have easily identified and chosen (or in some cases have been chosen by) members of the senior management team as mentors. One of the most important factors in choosing a mentor is having
someone with whom you can identify. With the majority of our senior management team being white men, it remains more difficult, I believe, for females and other minorities to develop the much-needed mentoring relationships.

Higher education in general and community colleges specifically, value and understand the different perspectives that female administrators can contribute. I do not feel penalized for being a female at the college, but I do feel that I have to “act” differently than my male counterparts. I once had a dean tell me that I not only have to look like Caesar’s wife, but I had to act like Caesar’s wife. When I questioned what he meant by that, he said women at the college have to be above reproach and suspicion. I know that this statement could seem offensive, but in reality, it made me understand that transparency and honesty are very important for administrators at the college, especially for women. I know that an “old boys club” still exists at most institutions of higher education and for some women to break through that, they have had to take on male qualities. The inconsistency of mentoring among female colleagues is partly the result of the differences in leadership styles among female administrators. Many of the female administrators at higher levels have leadership styles that resemble their male counterparts, yet those qualities are not the only ones that can result in good leaders. As a woman, I do not want to be held to a specific type of leadership style if it differs too much from my own style. However, to approach another female leader at the college, in order to be mentored, could prove difficult if our styles are completely mismatched. While the “old boys club” mentality and the male leadership styles might have worked in the past, I believe that as more women enter senior management, more female style leadership will be displayed.

This topic sparked my interest when I began to serve as an informal mentor to some younger female administrators at the college. I feel very fortunate to assist other female
administrators at the college, offer them support, advice, and career guidance as they navigate their entry-level administrative careers. I began to reflect on my own lack of mentoring relationships and the sense that it could result in slowing down any upward movement within the college community. With that in mind, I wanted to explore the topic of how to be a mentor and what people felt about their mentoring relationships, including the level of personal successes that they felt could be attributed to the mentoring experience.

**Limitations/Delimitations**

The choice of methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) imposed certain limitations to this study. The small sample size of eight participants may make the findings not generalizable to the larger population. Nonetheless, this size maintained the idiographic commitment of a well-developed IPA study, which focused on the particular experience of a specific group and not generalizability (Smith et al., 2009).

This section provided a thorough explanation of the research method and tradition that was used to conduct this study. A detailed description of the underpinning of IPA research was included, consisting of an explanation of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. This section was followed by the description of participant recruitment, access, data collection, data storage, data analysis and how they collectively fit within IPA research. A section on the trustworthiness and quality of IPA research was detailed and the chapter concluded with the limitations/delimitations of this particular study.
CHAPTER FOUR: REPORT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how female administrators at a community college made sense of their experience within an informal mentoring relationship.

Participant Profiles

The following is a demographic table of the participants that were interviewed for this study. Eight female, community college administrators were interviewed, the youngest being 31 and the oldest being 45. They have all worked in higher education for at least eight years (with the longest being more than 20 years) and have been employed by this particular community college for at least four years. The ethnic breakdown of these women was as follows: five were Caucasians, one African American, one Pacific Islander and one Latina. Each participant was asked via email to join the study, as they filled the basic requirements deemed necessary by the researcher. The request for participation email was sent to fifteen administrators who met the prerequisites and those who accepted self-identified as having an informal mentor at some point in their career.
Table 1: Participant Demographics and Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>ETHNICITY</th>
<th>HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED</th>
<th>YEARS AT PRESENT COLLEGE</th>
<th>HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCE (YEARS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JANE</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARRIE</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINDA</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNE</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KELLY</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JACQUELINE</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHONDA</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>M.Ed.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GINA</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant #1- Jane. Jane is a 44-year-old administrator who has worked for the college for 15 years. She acknowledged that getting a job in higher education was not her first intention, as she majored in pre-law undergrad and upon graduation worked in a law office. It was there that Jane realized she wanted to work as a counselor. She returned to school for her master’s degree in counseling for higher and secondary education. Even then, she thought she would work in a high school setting but received a job as a career counselor at her current college. Jane shared the following:
I did my practicums, two middles schools, a high school and then a university and I worked in their Career Services. When I did my middle school and high school practicums, it was in Guidance Counseling, I was offered a long-term sub position, and then I interviewed for several position. Did not get those but then I got a position in higher education at a community college. That was over 16 years ago.

Jane’s mentor was her immediate supervisor and she felt this relationship formed because the job she was hired for was a new position at the college so both she and her supervisor were trying to define the job. She said:

My first supervisor when I started at the college was the first person who I can think of that was a mentor to me. Because I was new to the college, the position was new and she had been here a number of years, I felt like she definitely mentored me constantly, checked up on me, made sure I was knew what needed to be done. Also, because I was new, she wanted to make sure that I knew everyone, I knew what was going on, I knew my place in the college and also what everyone else at the college did.

Her relationship with her mentor was professional but did not cross the boundaries of being a friendship. Even though her mentor has since left the college, Jane reaches out to her for guidance as needed. Jane’s position has evolved with her promotions and she realized how important her informal mentor was to her changing positions.

Participant #2- Carrie. Carrie is an associate dean with over twenty years of experience in higher education at various colleges and universities. She graduated college in 1996 and took a position as a resident assistant at a college when she started to work toward her master’s degree. While at the university, she was promoted twice. She received the opportunity to
interview for a position at another community college and has been employed there for 16 years. At 41, Carrie continued to improve her development within the college through various trainings and educational workshops. She credited her mentor with encouraging her to pursue her Ph.D.,

We went back and forth about that (going back to grad school) because I thought about it early on when I first started here. I would talk to her about it and she would say, “If there is something you want to do you should really consider it. It could be beneficial to you”…. She was very encouraging “Jump through the hoops, Carrie. Just jump through the hoops. Write the paper, take the classes do what you need to do”.

Initially, Carrie began working with her informal mentor when she was hired. The mentor was her immediate supervisor. In the beginning, Carrie felt her informal mentor was a bit intimidating but always supportive and encouraging.

She can be a little intimidating in the beginning, but she was always very supportive and always very encouraging. She just made me better. There was a comfort level that we established in and the fact that we established….I always knew what she was thinking before she said it because she was so direct and she was so honest about things. These are the traits I definitely try to emulate.

Throughout her tenure, Carrie’s mentor ceased to be her immediate supervisor but never stopped being a mentor. Additionally, due to some personal issues that Carrie was facing, the mentor/work relationship become one of strong friendship. “Some people might look at my relationship with my mentor as being too close. Stepping over the line of mentorship. Which, it does. We are friends now”. The mentor has since retired but she and Carrie remain in touch. Carrie shared that she still reaches out to her informal mentor (and now friend) when in need of
advice and/or guidance. Even though Carrie spoke mostly about her specific mentor at her current place of employment, she acknowledged that she was very fortunate to have met, worked with, and been mentored by many other women in her career. Carrie believed that to advance in her career, having a mentor was an important component. She actively sought out people who she wanted to learn from and she identified others who could help her achieve success in her career. For her, working with other women administrators helped her career and in turn, she has become an informal mentor to younger administrators who now work for her.

**Participant #3: Linda.** Linda is a 34-year-old assistant director at the college. She was hired while still attending school and has made the college her career. She has held various positions at the college and was promoted to administrator four years ago. She identified two women she would consider informal mentors, one her current supervisor and the other her former supervisor. She found both women to be encouraging, nurturing, and helpful when guiding her through political atmosphere of the college. She feels lucky to continue to work with these women and knows that either one can be called upon if she needs advice. Both women have transcended the supervisor/mentor role into friendship. Linda realized the importance of having a mentor and actively sought out someone to fulfill that role. She found comfort in working with other females in a mentoring relationship and has now taken on the role of a mentor to a younger administrator in her office. Linda shared, “It is interesting being on the other side of that. She asked me if I really thought it was possible for her to take over my position when and if I was promoted and I said that I was willing to show her everything that I do and not hide anything. These are the same things I asked my mentor a couple of years ago.” She acknowledged that if it were not for her mentors she would not have achieved the success she had in her career.
Participant #4: Anne. Anne is a 34-year-old administrator who never envisioned her career to be in higher education. She felt privileged enough to work in an environment that allowed her to continue her education and to find what she believed was her true passion in higher education. Anne began her career as a part-time administrator and received job opportunities that eventually led to where she is now, an instructional designer. She did credit her mentor with help guiding her on her career path: “I was lucky enough to form a relationship with somebody who is above me and has really able to guide me in decision making, career wise and education wise.” When her mentor/supervisor initially hired her, Anne had a degree in psychology and was unsure of her ultimate career goals. After being encouraged to take the lead on numerous projects that involved technology and working with faculty in a classroom setting, Anne realized that she had an aptitude for this type of work. Her mentor encouraged her to pursue her master’s degree, which she is currently in the process of completing, “She helped me pick my school and she advised me on different programs”. Her mentor is no longer her immediate supervisor but Anne still communicates with her daily and seeks her advice as needed. Her experience with having a mentor had been very positive and she is looking forward to becoming a mentor for other women who work at the college.

Participant #5-Kelly. Kelly is a 31-year-old administrator at the college. Her undergraduate degree is not in education and, in hindsight; she believed her future would be one within the business world. She started to work for the college as she was completing her degree and left to pursue a job in management. She returned to the college for the environment that higher education offered. Kelly identified her supervisor as her informal mentor and she actively sought to have a mentoring relationship, as she knew it was the most effective way to learn more about the college environment. In addition, her mentor pushed her out of her comfort zone,
giving her more challenging tasks to help her skills grow. She has been promoted and no longer worked for her mentor but still seeks her counsel and advice, considering her to now be a friend.

**Participant #6- Jacqueline.** Jacqueline is a 35-year-old administrator at the college. Her role is different from the other administrators as she works on the non-academic side of the college and does not interact with students. Of the women interviewed, she was the only one to identify a male as her mentor. When she was first promoted to her position, there was a succession of power in place and it was known that her mentor was going to retire in five years. She actively sought him out to help navigate her position and the department and to gain information on why the work and responsibilities were done and set up as they were. She stated:

> Once I got there, I knew exactly who I needed in order to be more successful down there, and that was Bill. I knew that he was the only person who could answer any of the questions that I had, and if he couldn't answer them, he could tell me who could answer them. The fact that I just kept pestering him, he liked that. He liked that I wanted to know why this happened and why when that happened, this happened, et cetera. We have had a really successful relationship, and there was a time when I was in his office all the time asking him questions. We also would talk about life stuff and all that, but I basically sort of got the training that I needed, so to speak, to be an expert in doing what I needed to do without having to go talk to him all the time.

Jacqueline’s mentor not only “trained” her on her job, but he was also who she went to for advice when dealing with college related issues. Jacqueline was the only participant interviewed that acknowledged that her mentor might not be aware that she saw him as her mentor.
Participant #7-Shonda. Shonda is a 38-year-old administrator who has been employed by the college for four years. Her informal mentor works outside the college but is still in higher education. Shonda used this person as someone to go to for guidance and knew she could pick up a phone to reach out to her informal mentor whenever she felt the need. When she first started to work in higher education, she relied heavily on her informal mentor, but with experience and ability, the time once used to seek out her mentor for assistance has diminished.

When she was first hired at the college, a faculty member befriended her and acted as an informal mentor to help her navigate the political aspects of working at this college. Since her position was newly developed and unlike any other administrator, she struggled to establish boundaries and guidelines. Instead of relying on her supervisor, (who also seemed unsure of the position responsibilities), she utilized a reputable faculty member to help her define her position. She still meets with the faculty member each semester to discuss any issues that have come up and she acknowledges that this mentor played a vital role in her becoming successful in her current position. What she liked about this informal mentor was that she reached out to her:

…she actually reached out to me. She said, "I heard a lot of good things about you. I am going to make it a point to make sure we have lunch at least once a semester." She really made herself available to me, so that made me comfortable to say, "Okay, so this is going on, now how do I work this?" It's not even always a super deep problem, it could be something little that just, what's a good way to engage students more, what have you seen that didn't work, or what works? She's just good with those kinds of things.

Participant #8-Gina. Gina is a 45-year-old administrator who has been working at the college for a combined total of 8 years. When she first started, she worked part-time and her informal mentor was her supervisor. Even after she left the college, her mentor still kept in touch
with her. When there was an opportunity at the college for a full-time administrative position, her mentor reached out and encouraged her to apply. She came back to the college in a full-time capacity, still reporting to her mentor and the relationship continued to flourish. She no longer reports to her mentor, but speaks with her daily and depends on her to help guide and encourage her to pursue higher levels in her career. She felt that she chose her mentor not only because of their shared work experience, but they have shared religious views that made it easier to connect to her. She shared:

….but I think that because we share a religious affinity, I think that also has helped. I can talk about my beliefs, knowing that she understands what I believe. We have a similar way of looking at things, but then we disagree in politics and we talk about that. I think that religious affinity was really helpful.

**Findings and Analysis**

By following IPA methodologies for research analysis themes were discovered, modified and adjusted to create four superordinate themes. The superordinate themes discovered during this process were: 1) Non-judgmental work environment 2) Self-worth and confidence growth, 3) Transfer of Power, and 4) Empowerment towards reaching goals.

*Table 2: Superordinate Themes and Definitions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>1: Non-judgmental work environment</td>
<td>A feeling of being in a place where you are not being evaluated in a negative way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#2: Self-worth and Confidence Growth</td>
<td>Internal belief that one is able to achieve success.</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>#3: Transfer of power</td>
<td>The experience of shifting power from mentor to mentee resulting in an equitable or revers relationship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#4: Empowerment towards Goals</td>
<td>The experience of collaboratively defining new aspirations and support toward their accomplishments.</td>
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**Theme #1 - Non-judgmental work environment.** One of the most salient points referred to repeatedly was that the mentoring relationship created a “safe” environment for the participants that allowed them to experience growth within their position. Although each participant described this safe environment in different ways, each woman interviewed was able to identify how their mentor made them feel safe and the effect it had on their career trajectory and growth. Carrie identified this environment: “I appreciate being able to do that and know that the relationship is safe enough that it's not going to damage the relationship at all to voice my opinion. I think that's important, too. Being able to be yourself with your mentor.” Carrie also described the mentoring relationship as a “safety net” and a place where she knew that she would not be judged.

Another way the participants described their experiences of being secure was that they felt comfortable, almost shielded and able to grow within their positions. Out of the women interviewed, Carrie, Anne, Linda, Kelly, and Jane thought that there had to be a certain comfort level with their mentor in order for them to be willing to be vulnerable in front of them. They
understood that they were going to the mentor with the expectation that they needed someone to help guide them and if they did not feel comfortable with their mentor, then they could not have experienced this safe environment. A model of how a mentee was made to feel comfortable was when the mentor took on more of a motherly nurturing role. It was through this role that they experienced a bond with their mentor in that the mentor took on a role of a person who encouraged them to improve their capabilities and took on an active role in developing their skills. Jane described this by saying: “I could go to her and talk to her about anything...She definitely wanted to promote and encourage, always encouraging me to move on to the next step, to set another goal”.

The mentor did not just give advice; most participants felt that the mentor also had a stake in their success and experienced a true sense of support and a feeling of being protected by their mentor. Consequently, the feelings of protection and support they experienced were crucial in many decisions for their career and their lives. As Anne described her experience, “I mean she helped me pick my school. She advised me on different programs. She knew more about it than I did. She had already gone through a master’s programs. It was really her guidance and support that helped me make that decision. It’s huge in terms of life decisions”. The support Anne felt from her mentor gave her the security she needed to help her make career decisions. The participants felt mentor support allowed them to take more risks with their decisions, knowing that someone was there who, “had their back”. Most participants felt that this was one of the true benefits of being in a mentoring relationship. Jane explained:

I think it is good to have someone that is on your side and is going to support you and that helps you so that you don’t feel like, “Okay, what do I do? Who is on my side? Who
can I go to with questions and concerns?” I think that is important and needed if a person is going to be successful.

The relationship that the participants experienced with their mentors allowed them to challenge themselves and take risks because they felt supported. Anne explained, “I can't imagine not having that. I feel like that would be so scary to not, to be in an environment trying to build your career. Not really knowing. Not feeling like you had anybody that you could trust to ask questions. That you could really ask any question to”. Shonda also spoke of the encouragement to take risks, “….that environment and my mentor was also very encouraging of risk-taking and experimenting, which led me to a greater understanding of my profession and abilities”. The trust formed between the mentors and the participants allowed them to not feel frightened by making decisions. Gina felt that she could trust her mentor to catch her in a free fall exercise. As she said, “I trust her to catch me. There's no question in my mind that she wouldn't”. All participants agreed that they needed the support and trust they received from their mentor to be successful in their career. Even if a mentor offered criticism, most participants felt that this was positive, as it helped them to grow.

Most participants agreed that feelings of trust and comfort they received were also connected to the trust they had in their mentor. Jacqueline commented, “Again, it's really nice to have somebody to talk to that you can trust that knows your work environment. You can talk to your husband as much as you want about what's going on, but somebody who's in your arena who you can talk to and you can trust and actually give you good feedback, that's invaluable.” Kelly also explained how the trust was so important for her in feeling safe and comfortable with her mentor, “You develop a relationship with a person, and the trust and everything. It's just nice knowing that you have someone that is supportive of your decisions, and that would ... having
that soundboard that could tell you when you're not thinking about things the right way, and you need to find a different ... to give that constructive criticism to you. It stops you from making mistakes. It makes you think twice about things.” Gina talked about how the increasing trust she had with her mentor allowed the relationship to grow stronger: “I think when she was my supervisor, I was very free to try different things as long as I ran it by her, but eventually that trust grew. I think that as the trust grew then the relationship grew to the point that I'm free to say, "No, I don't think that's right." I'm not going to hurt her feelings or something is going to happen or that she's going to be offended or anything like that. Definitely grew through time.”

Kelly spoke about the feelings of not being judged but rather encouraged, “I feel that I can go to her pretty much about anything. It's pretty much an open door. She won't judge me, anything I ask she'll give me her honest advice about. I feel like once she gives me her advice, it's in my best interest. She wants to see me succeed, so when I go to her for advice I feel like what she tells me is where she can see me succeeding the most on that path.” Since she did not feel judged, was she able to form a close bond with her mentor, which allowed her to trust the advice her mentor gave her.

The safe environment that the participants experienced in their mentoring relationships had a direct impact on their abilities and career progression. They experienced a place where risk taking was encouraged, and failure was not judged as being negative. These women pushed themselves and the outcomes they experienced allowed them to grow and learn in ways that they might not have had the opportunity to have without being in a mentoring relationship. Jacqueline explained, “Some the success I have experienced at the college is because I've been trained and mentored by him. Without his constructive criticism, his accessibility and his willingness to share, and also my need to ask questions, I would not have the knowledge I have today”.
Theme #2- Self-worth and confidence growth. Numerous participants experienced increased levels of self-worth and gained confidence by participating in an informal mentoring relationship. They felt the connection they developed with their mentor allowed them to see themselves through their mentor’s lens and feel better about their abilities. Kelly shared, “….it was because my mentor saw in my something that was worthwhile, that I had the capability to achieve more. It is like she saw something in me that I never saw in myself.” The mentoring relationship contributed to growth not only in their career, but also in their self-esteem. This growth of self-worth gave them the trust in their own abilities, which allowed them to continue developing in their field, even after the mentoring relationship ended. Shonda explained how this growth in confidence helped her at work, “Even if she was giving constructive criticism, she was always very encouraging also. Saying things were good ideas, or I was sometimes really hard on myself about things and she would sort of help boost my confidence. I've always been my hardest critic, so I think also having someone to be supportive and be like, "Oh, that's great." She did give a lot of positive feedback about the work I was doing, so that's important too obviously.”

The participants acknowledged that being in this relationship gave them more confidence in their abilities. They felt that if someone believed in them as much as their mentor did, they then had the abilities to succeed in their position. This confidence helped increase their professional skills, allowed them to take risks, and pushed the bounds of their abilities. As Gina described, “I think there is a lot of self-confidence that can come of it, having a mentor. You said, not just to bolster you, but also to keep you level headed and your feet on the ground. I think that is very important.” Carrie further explained the growth of confidence: “Just things like that. Knowing that people are out there pulling for you is a very good feeling. Yeah. Definitely.
Where if your name came up its very positive in respect to who you are and the work that you've
done. I get a lot of confidence from that, I think.” Linda explained that the gaining of confidence
helped her to see the value she had in her position: “She gave me more confidence too because
she apparently respects my abilities. Therefore, it gives value to what I do.”

The participants understood the advantage they might have over others who were not as
fortunate to have a mentor. This advantage also gave them confidence. Kelly commented, “…I
mean, it can give you confidence in the workplace. It can push you to seek out opportunities that
you wouldn't have on your own, which I guess relates back to the confidence, it can expose you
to developing relationships with other people in the workplace. It can expose you to different
projects, challenges, scenarios that you wouldn't normally encounter, and because of this I was
able to do more things than my own peers.” Shonda also spoke about the isolation one may feel
in a new work environment and how her mentor helped her become more confident and less
secluded. She shared “‘you know more than me, is this right? Am I on
the right track here? Do
we look at this way the same because I don't know that much and you've been here a while?’ I
think just confirming so you feel more confident in what you're doing. Confidence is a big thing.
If you don't feel confident, then emotionally I think that can really wear on you. I also feel
sometimes you can feel isolated in a new work place, and I think a mentor can help with that too
and if you didn’t have a mentor then you might never feel as part of the bigger group”

This newfound confidence in their abilities allowed the participants to feel that their
perspectives on situations were correct and erased any doubts they, at one time, felt when doing
their job. Gina described it as no longer, “second guessing” herself. She said, “I don't question
myself as much as I did when I first started, every email three times read it and two other people
have to read it to make sure that I was saying it correctly. I don't question my abilities as much. I
don't question my decisions as much. I have a clear plan and I know little by little, I'm implementing it. I think that definitely confidence is what it has given me”. For Anne it was as simple as someone having confidence in her potential. She explained:

When it came time for somebody to sort of be in charge of this area and learn how to use this equipment and learn how to use these programs, it was my mentor who suggested that, "Hey, maybe you should throw your hat in the ring. Volunteer to be this person because that is going to be really good experience for you. That's going to give you, you know, that edge that you're going to need to advance in your career and we need somebody to do it and who better than you? Anne continued to say that without that confidence; she would not have realized her own potential and achieved her career goals. Of the women interviewed, five of them felt that their mentor put them in situations that allowed them to develop professionally. They found this development imperative for career growth and success and acknowledged that without this relationship, they might have made different career choices and not reached their full capability. Anne further stressed this point when she spoke about how she went to her mentor not just for career advice, but also education advice. She felt the time that her mentor gave her was invaluable and said, “She always took the time to sit with me and talk to me about what is it that I really want to do? Why do I like to do these things? Is this a good move for me career wise? Even down to the little stuff like how to navigate relationships in the work place and how to negotiate different things throughout my career, because she gave this time to me freely it made me feel more valued which gave me confidence in my potential.”

Shonda spoke of one of the benefits of participating in an informal mentoring relationship as experiencing the growth of self-confidence. “Yeah, just one of the benefits of those
relationships. I think that sometimes it's just to get confirmation that you're on the right path, and so that's sometimes the important role of a mentor like, 'You know more than me, is this right? Am I on the right track here? Do we look at this way the same because I don't know that much and you've been here a while?' I think just confirming so you feel more confident in what you're doing. Confidence is a big thing. If you don't feel confident, then emotionally I think that can really wear on you.”

Theme #3-Transfer of power. Participants experienced a shift in power in the mentoring relationship, which was a catalyst for obtaining more advanced skills for their position. The administrators interviewed said there was an, “almost palpable shift” in the dynamics of their relationship when they were seen less like a mentee and more like a peer to their mentor. Carrie said, “I don't know if she would want to report to me but I definitely think that she would support and encourage me to go as high as I want to go. I realized that when I was reporting to her she was slowly giving me more and more responsibilities, some that were hers, to help me grow. I felt that eventually I went from being her mentee to, to equal, and in some ways I have mentored her.”

Jane stated that having her mentor value her opinion helped her to grow more confident in her abilities and allowed her to feel like an equal to her mentor. “I feel like I have grown enough at this point, where she also values my opinions. Where in the beginning it was a lot of me asking her questions and really valuing her opinions. I did not have a lot of experience, but now that I have been in the field for a while, I feel like we are closer to colleagues so that gap has closed a little bit and I do feel like she values my opinions.” Jane felt that her mentor wanted her to have her position in the future. “She said to me I want you to be at the table someday. I want you to do this job and I want you to be good at it.” This faith in her ability was what
allowed Jane to set her goal of being the director and ultimately achieved that goal. Carrie spoke about the trust that she and her mentor shared and how her opinion was valued. “I think it's a testament to what she's given me that she now trusts me and my judgment. She'll ask me the question, "What do you think? This is what I did. Could you read this letter, make sure I'm on the right page?"

Other participants in this study also experienced a transfer of power when they replaced their mentor’s position at the college. Moreover, they felt that this transition was smooth because their mentor knew they could be successful. Gina commented, “I think the one thing that I can think of was when she was the director and then was taking a major part of her job away from her, the way she handled that situation. Anybody else would have kicked, screamed, gone to HR, and made a big deal, but for her, she didn't do that because she knew that I was taking over. She was at peace with that decision even thought she might not have liked it. The only reason she was at peace was because I was taking over. It made me more aware of my decisions, that I'm continuing her legacy so I need to be mindful of how I do it and what I do.”

All participants interviewed agreed that if they wanted to achieve higher levels of achievement, they would work with other mentors to help them obtain that success. They acknowledged that each of their mentors gave them what they needed to succeed in a specific situation and prepared them to handle whatever may come next.

Generally, the participants experienced the desire to become a mentor and to share the involvement of being in a mentoring relationship. They now are engaging in another mentoring relationship in which they are the mentor, which supports their position and allows for more career growth. The participants agreed that their relationships with their mentors were positive
on multiple levels and they wanted to have the opportunity to do the same for other female administrators at the college and even those in their personal lives. Carrie said, “It's very important for me to do what's needed for me and support them and help them make decisions and back them when they need to be backed. If they stumble then they stumble, we address it, and we move on from there. By being there I am being their mentor and I am giving back to them what was given to me from my mentors.” By engaging in the other side of a mentoring relationship, they have experienced a shift in the power dynamic.

Not only did the participants interviewed want to engage in this type of relationship, but they also felt that some of their colleagues came to them when they needed guidance or assistance. Linda explained, “When you get your supervisor’s job, our supervisor’s job, I want to get yours. Is that possible? That’s the same thing I said to my supervisor so I said the same … I used the same thing my supervisor said, I said, ‘Learn everything that I do because I’m willing to show you everything that I do and not hide anything from you’ and that’s what my mentor supervisor said to me.” Jane thought guiding new employees was important, not just for the person she was helping, but for the overall success of her department. “We have a new job developer and she is supposed to go out to meet with employers. For the first couple, I went with her. She could do the talking, but if she didn’t really know what she was supposed to do, then I'd help her through it. So really trying to be there with them. I think that's important.”

**Theme #4-Empowered toward goals.** The participants who were interviewed felt they experienced a sense of empowerment towards completing their goals by being in a mentoring relationship. This sense of empowerment stemmed from having a mentor who had confidence in their potential and allowed them to experience assurance in their own aptitude for their career, holding them to higher standards to achieve their goals. These goals included career growth,
obtaining higher levels of education, and becoming a mentor for others. As Jane explained, the expectations and goals that the mentor set for themselves became, by extension, the goals and standards that they had for their mentee.

Many people thought she was tough, and she was, but you knew what she expected from you. She was very ethical herself, whether it was showing up on time, working while she was here, honest, and very hard working. You knew that she had expectations. I think I connected with her because I like that. I like knowing what she expected from me and I think it made it easy for me to choose her and then stick with it.

The participants felt that their mentor believed that they could go higher in their career and encouraged occupational development opportunities, training opportunities, and furthering their education. The participants felt that these higher expectations gave them something to strive towards and feel a greater sense of accomplishment when they did achieve that level of success. As Carrie explained, “She would let me come to meetings so that I wasn't just learning and doing residence life but I was doing more developmental things with orientation and with counseling and career services and all of that stuff. She was really instrumental in allowing me to realize other abilities I had.”

Within the context of experience, the participants believed that having higher expectations placed on them by their mentors motivated them to expect more from themselves. Shonda explained:

It's important to have someone who can support you in terms of your emotions as well as sort of ... I think it's good to have someone that pushes you also to do more and makes you feel like you can because it's a motivator. I think a mentor can be a big motivator too,
not just someone that you can double check with and make sure. Make you feel more confident about what you're doing, your activities and stuff, but also say, "You should do this. Why don't you do this," which I've had mentors do in terms of presenting at conferences, in terms of being more professionally out there and things like that. I didn't really highlight that that much, but that definitely is a big part of mentorship, too. Not pushing, but encouraging the person to go beyond, go above, not just be satisfied with what they're doing.

Since Shonda was not satisfied with her entry-level position, she went back to school and achieved higher levels of career success. Similarly, Carrie spoke of this empowerment to try for better things by explaining how her mentor coached her to aim higher, “Empowerment to do better, to go further, to try things, to take risks. I’m not a big risk taker. It's hard for me to change jobs and those types of things. With the right people that I trusted saying, "You can really do this. Challenge yourself. Trust yourself. Be confident."

The participants expressed that without their mentor, they would have not achieved their present level of success. Carrie said, “I would not be here in this position and being as successful as I am without my mentor. All of my mentors have contributed 100% to my career success and I am thankful and fortunate to have had all of them supporting me.” Linda further explained, “I don’t think I would have moved up, I wouldn’t have had the opportunities I have had, I would have advanced if it wasn’t for the relationship I have had with my mentor.”

Gina felt that having a mentor contributed to her achieving her goals. She acknowledged that she believed that she would have been successful without a mentor, but having a mentor gave her the edge to be even more successful. She explained, “I would have been successful
either way, but I think I'm better at it, than had I not had her. You can make a schedule. You don't have to be a genius to make a schedule or realize how many math tutors you need, or what schedule you need. But how you deal with people, how you deal with people above you and how to do you deal with people at your level, how you negotiate things even when you don't agree with the decisions, how you work around all of that, you can finally come to what you want. I think that that's why you need a mentor, to tell you, ‘Well, this person you need to approach in this way,’ or, ‘Don't go to that person,’ or, ‘This might be the group of people you want to work with.’ I think that would be more difficult had I not had a mentor.” Jane agreed that her promotion to director started with her mentor, “I think it started with her. I think it started with what she did and how she got me to the point where when she was leaving that I had confidence, I had skills, I also had a better reputation at the college and was more known because of things that she did. I definitely would contribute part of it to her and starting with her.” Kelly also explained that her mentor helped her with opportunities, “My mentor has always encouraged me to go for opportunities that she sees fit for me. She would actually keep an eye out too, and if she came across anything she would share it with me…her guidance gave me a sense of accomplishment and that I can do more than I was and to go after other opportunities”.

All of the women interviewed believed that having a mentor was one of the best experiences they engaged in to achieve the position they currently had within the college. They all experienced opportunities and situations they believed they would not have encountered if it were not for the fact that their mentor put them in the position they did.
Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how female administrators at a community college made sense of their experiences of being in an informal mentoring relationship. The data was collected using a semi-structured interview approach that allowed the participants to give detailed responses to questions that provided a picture of how they developed meaning from their experiences. The responses from the interview protocol were transcribed verbatim and reported in this chapter. The selections that were illustrated in this chapter allowed the reader to develop their own perception of the participants’ lived experiences of being in an informal mentoring relationship.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to understand how female administrators at a community college made sense of their experience within an informal mentoring relationship. The guiding research question asked how female administrators at community colleges describe their experience with informal mentoring. A qualitative research method, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, was used to gain insight and understanding of how eight female community college administrators made sense of their experiences in an informal mentoring relationship. Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994) was used as a lens for interpretation. The purpose of chapter five is to discuss conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

A close analysis of the data uncovered four super-ordinate themes 1) Non-judgmental work environment 2) Self-worth and confidence growth, 3) Transfer of Power, and 4) Empowerment towards reaching goals.

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the findings related to the super-ordinate themes and their position with current literature, the implications of this research for current practice, the general limitations of this study and the reflection of this study.

Discussion of the Findings

**Non-judgmental work environment.** All participants mentioned the nurturing, safe and non-judgmental atmosphere that they felt when working with their mentor. The terms frequently used were, “safety net”, “judgment free”, “trust”, “encouraging”, “secure”, “protected” and “supporting risk taking”. All participants felt that the non-judgmental environment and their
experiences were one of the main reasons why their relationship was so successful. In their research, Ragins and Kram (2007) discuss the psychosocial aspects of mentoring and how it, “builds on trust, intimacy, and interpersonal bonds in the relationship that include behaviors that enhance the protégé’s professional and personal growth, identity, self-worth, and self-efficacy” (p. 5). Hayden (2006) adds that mentoring is also an opportunity for the mentee to express their problems and learn about their own strengths in a safe environment, which will ultimately help advance career goals. The non-judgmental work environment allowed the participants to feel like they could freely express themselves, take chances, fail, and dream without fear of repercussion or retribution. This ability to be comfortable with a mentor, to know that they would not be judged and that one could disagree with their mentor could be used as a learning experience for the mentee. It was within this safety net that they could discover their own voice. Ragins (2016) states, “…high-quality mentoring relationships also offer more than just instrumental outcomes relating to advancement or promotion. They provide safe havens that accept us for who we are giving us the freedom to find our best and authentic selves. Their reach extends well beyond the workplace, as they can give us the courage to forge new career paths and identities.” (p. 228)

The establishment of trust that develops in the mentoring relationship is inherently more natural in an informal mentoring relationship. The participants in an informal mentoring relationship choose to put themselves in this situation and chose whom they were going to engage in a mentoring relationship. The participants establish a trusting relationship more easily and are more willing to put themselves in a position where they are vulnerable (Ragins, 2016). In a formal mentoring relationship, it is forced and there tends to be greater difficulty developing a relationship. Conversely, in an informal mentoring relationship, the participants mutually select the person they are working with which lends itself to already having respect for the other person
and a willingness to be in the relationship. This willingness gives both members of the relationship a more open mind when it comes to being in this relationship and allowing them to share, build, and gain trust with each other.

Most of the women that participated in this study self-selected a woman as their mentor. Many of them agreed that they felt more comfortable talking with a woman about personal matters that affected their position (i.e. parenting, marriage, and workplace discrimination). Many of the women interviewed felt that women were naturally more maternal and therefore fostered a more nurturing environment. Studies suggest white males are better mentors for women if they want to be seen in an organization (Ramaswami et al., 2010), yet most of the women who participated in this study naturally self-selected a woman of the same ethnic background as themselves.

While the reasons can be numerous it was seen that the women did not necessarily enter a mentoring relationship to only achieve career success, but they also wanted someone to train, guide, support, and counsel them. Career advancement was an ancillary benefit of being in a mentoring relationship. It has been suggested that in order for women to be successful and advance in their careers, forming a mentoring relationship is needed ((Blake-Beard, 2001; Moyer-Driver, 2013; Parker & Kram, 1993; Ragins & Kram, 2007).

**Self-worth and confidence growth.** Throughout the literature, it has been established that mentoring helps with building confidence and with career trajectory and satisfaction (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011; Campbell et al., 2010; Feldman, Arean, Marshall, Lovett & Sullivan, 2010; Gander, 2012; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Tran, 2014; VanDerLinden, 2005). Previous studies have shown that fostering of self-worth within the workplace allows the
individual to become more productive and, in essence, become a better worker (Gander, 2012; Tran, 2014). Productivity in the workplace continues to be very defining of an individual and is important to maintain high productivity levels at work. The women who participated in this study unanimously agreed that having a mentor helped them become more secure within their jobs and the decisions they made. It also helped them to take risks within their job, allowing them to interview for jobs or complete assignments that they might not have felt more comfortable attempting without the influence of having a mentor.

Other positive outcomes from self-confidence growth could also be achieved, such as optimism for the future and a positive attitude in the work place (Ragins, 2016). The notion of positivity was very important to these participants. In turn, they were able to view their current and future workplace environment with sanguinity, something that may have been missing without a mentor to support them. One participant spoke of her ability to be resilient when faced with failure because of her increased feeling of confidence. In other words, she was more willing to tackle the problem again, instead of giving up or dwelling on the failure. Not only will the mentee be more willing to take risk, they will also be willing to try again if they fail (Ragins, 2016). The ability to keep trying in the midst of failure takes a special focus and dedication that again may not exist without the guidance of a mentor.

Transfer of power. In Kram’s (1983) seminal works, she described the life cycle of a mentoring relationship in four different phases. These phases are: (a) an initiation phase, (b) a cultivation phase, (c) a separation phase, and (d) a redefinition phase. In the separation phase, the protégé starts to develop and work independently from their mentor (Kram, 1983; Scandura & Pellegrini, 2007; Turban & Cheung, 2012). A beginning of the transfer of power that most of participants spoke of occurred during this phase.
Most of the participants have achieved equal status to their mentor, some even taking over the job their mentor once held. Participants stated that the importance of the transfer of power was that it allowed the mentee to function without their mentor. One described this transfer of power as going from being reliant on her mentor to their relationship becoming interdependent on each other, where her mentor started to seek her support in the decision-making process. Kram (1983) explains the transfer of power as a process where the mentor gauges the readiness and preparedness of the mentee and then relinquishes some responsibility, allowing the mentee to assume control. This cycle seems to develop naturally, with the mentor’s instinct gauging why and when the mentee is able to move from phase to phase. This happened at different times for each participant, but eventually they all achieved a level of interdependence within their mentoring relationship. A process like this is guided by the experience of the mentor and is used strategically to prevent mentees from making mistakes and poor decisions. (Kram, 1983)

In speaking with the participants, most of the women still have a relationship with their mentor. What started out as a working relationship that supported the mentee developed into a trusted friendship that allowed both participants to gain valuable knowledge and an ally. These friendships continued even when the mentor left the college. One of the participants interviewed, vacations with her former mentor while another socializes with her mentor outside of work in a public setting. The depth of these relationships extends far beyond the workplace and is guided by a true human bond that nourishes the mentee’s aspiration to move ahead.

**Empowerment towards goals.** The time spent with the mentors and the professional development that occurred influenced not only the participant’s current position, but also any future positions that the mentees will have. From modeling mentor behavior and work ethic, to
networking future job opportunities, the benefits of having a mentor extended past their current position to any future positions the women interviewed wanted to achieve. These goals included not only professional goals but educational and personal goals as well. The relationships that ultimately developed between the mentor and mentee had a profound effect on the overall life of the mentee.

Numerous studies have shown that mentoring plays an important role in professional development for future community college leaders (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011; Campbell et al., 2010; VanDerLinden, 2005) and other senior management positions at a community college. Most college presidents have admitted to having a mentoring relationship that they developed while working towards their goal of becoming a college president (Bryant-Shanklin & Brumage, 2011; Campbell et al., 2010; VanDerLinden, 2005). With the significant amount of community college presidents retiring, and the lack of potential in the presidential pool, the idea of mentoring is something that more institutions should consider to help with succession planning. Likewise, succession planning for other leadership positions may be warranted, as more institutions become more competitive for students. Having a mentor was one way the participants in the study were able to build upon their skills to assist in their career trajectory. Goals are something that people project into the future in hopes of attaining them, so the empowerment process that mentees undergo should be aligned with these goals in both their scope and timeframe. This theme showed how empowerment prepared mentees for positions that they aspired to attain in the future and helped to increase their readiness to achieve the next level of responsibility.

By witnessing and taking part of a mentoring relationship, the participants were able to observe different aspects of leadership styles. Not only were they better educated in their current
position, they were also being prepared to take on leadership roles. One participant spoke of not only learning her job but also how to achieve better active listening skills, becoming aware of using more critical thinking skills, and gaining empathy and perspective. These skills helped in her obtaining a better position within the institution and she admitted that this was something she would not have learned in school.

**Linking the results to the framework - Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)**

This study utilized the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) for its theoretical framework. This theory attempts to provide an amalgamated framework for identifying, supporting, and predicting the development of educational and vocational interests (Brown et al., 2010; Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 1994). Based on Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) strives to provide a streamlined context that will assist in conceptualization of the process through which people develop vocational interests, make occupational choices and achieve varying levels of success in their work pursuits (Brown et al., 2010; Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 1994). The central theme of SCCT is the belief that personal inputs (gender, race, predispositions) and background contextual affordances (training opportunities, socioeconomic status, changes in social organizations, education systems) contribute to career-related learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994). These learning experiences are direct sources of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations, which contribute to the development of specific career interests, goals and actions (Lent et al., 1994). The following diagram depicts the connection between self-efficacy, outcome expectation, and
goals.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5.1 Model of person, contextual, and experiential factors affecting career-related choice behavior.** Adapted from “Toward a Unifying Social Cognitive Theory of Career and Academic Interest, Choice, and Performance,” by R.W. Lent, S.D. Brown, and G. Hackett, 1994, *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45*, p. 88.

**Learning experience.** The use of informal mentoring is the learning experience that all of the participants encountered in their career at the college. It is this learning experience that allowed them to develop self-worth and confidence growth, empowerment towards their goals, the perception of a non-judgmental work environment, and ultimately the transfer of power. An informal mentoring experience has a reciprocal relationship with contextual influences of transfer of power and the positive learning experience that the participants perceived they experienced. The perception of a non-judgmental work environment allowed the participants to accept the learning experiences of informal mentoring which led to the growth of their self-confidence and the ability to set higher goals for themselves and attain them. The perception of non-judgmental work-environment is not in the original diagram but was added into the new one to support the positive learning experience that occurred from the perception. The two way arrow clarifies that the perception and the experience are mutual and occurs naturally in this environment.
The learning experience helped expedite knowledge acquisition by the mentees. These mentees developed self-worth and confidence in an innovative manner, through the predicting principles within the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). In other words, inputs led to experiences, which led to influence, that resulted in anticipated outcomes.

**Self-efficacy expectations.** In this study self-efficacy is similar to the theme of self-worth and confidence growth. All participants experienced the growth of their self-confidence, which allowed them to attain career aspirations that they might not have had the chance of achieving without the use of informal mentoring. This growth was directly attributed to the experiences of the mentors, who relayed this information as part of the self-efficacy process. Mentees aspired based on this knowledge that propelled their self-worth and personal efficacy. Self-efficacy is an important achievement to occur for the participants because it is the growth of self-efficacy and the belief that they were able to achieve higher levels professional and personally that allowed the informal mentoring relationship to be successful.

**Outcomes expectations.** In this study outcomes expectations is similar to the theme of empowerment towards goals. Empowerment is a process that takes time and dedication, by both the mentee, who is being empowered and by the mentor, who is doing the empowering. The experience of being in an informal mentoring relationship helped the participants to identify their career goals and helped them gain the skills needed to achieve these goals. There is a direct reciprocal relationship between self-worth and confidence growth to empowerment towards goals. The higher levels of self-confidence, the more likely a person is to set higher goals for themselves. This connection is also depicted in Lents et al. (1994) SCCT diagram between self-efficacy and outcomes expectations. The findings show that with higher levels of confidence a person can achieve higher skills in their career. Mentees benefit from higher outcomes
expectations, because of the nurturing push that mentors have provided for them. The informal mentoring environment pushes information and experience to mentees, so they naturally begin to think bigger and expect more out of themselves and their futures.

**Contextual process.** The theme of transfer of power is more of a contextual process of the learning experience of informal mentoring. It was not the intention of the participants to experience the transfer of power but it was more of an organic growth of the informal mentoring process which when matured led to the mentee to become an equal to their mentor. This natural progression to the transfer of power is a built in benefit of informal mentoring. The transfer of power is reciprocal. In Lents et al. (1994) diagram the idea of contextual influences was connected to the person inputs via a one-way directional arrow, but it was found that the transfer of power was mutually related to the learning experience of informal mentoring. The transfer of power was the consequence of informal mentoring and it is through the transfer of power that the learning experienced occurred.

The combination of learning experience, self-efficacy and outcomes expectations and the contextual process are a perpetual result of informal mentoring. These concepts are interrelated and connected, showing the dependency they have on the process and how they, in unison, influence choice behavior.

In this study, the person inputs of the participants were not focused on but could be used in future studies of the effects of informal mentoring to a more diverse group of people. In addition, background information was not touched upon for the purpose of this study, which could also be used for future studies. Also not found in the results were the use of specific interest, goals and actions and how they affected self-efficacy and outcome expectations. It was
not intentional to leave these out of the results but from simply asking the participants to describe their experiences, the ideas of self-efficacy and outcomes expectations were highlighted with the addition of perception of non-judgmental work environment and the contextual influence of transfer of power.

**Implications for Practice**

Findings in this study are relevant to several areas of higher education practice, including staff training and development, succession planning, and overall human resource functions. The primary goals of this research were to discover how participating in an informal mentoring relationship affects the career trajectory of female community college administrators. Based on the research results, conclusions were able to be drawn and implications offered for practice in higher education. Implications for practice are discussed in terms of their applicability to community colleges in general, since these areas are relevant to mostly community colleges (or even 4 year and possible K-12).

Community colleges should examine their mentoring practices to assess the levels of mentoring that may or may not be taking place. A simple assessment strategy could inventory participation and the benefits of mentoring. Anyone who has not been part of a mentoring process could then be asked if this would be a relationship they wish to participate in. This study demonstrated that informal mentoring takes place significantly and often without the formal support or acknowledgement of the institution itself. Community colleges should support the intrinsic desires of informal mentoring which the participants of this study experienced. Without this informal mentoring, the participants may not have been able to amass the knowledge and experience they did. During informal mentoring, staff are able to embed themselves in learning
within a very holistic and experiential context. This is done without stringent rules or expectations, within an environment that is conducive to learning on the job through informal means. In reality, this context may not exist if formal mentoring becomes institutionalized. For example, informal mentoring is an outlet for information sharing, where deeper understandings are developed to understand future situations or circumstances. Mentees are given opportunities to contemplate decisions, process information and benefit from the experiences of others as they navigate their own progressions.

Community colleges can also take the lead from the corporate world, where mentoring is an established process. Based on literature, the use of mentoring in the business world has been well utilized and been shown to be very positive for all involved (Bryant & Terborg, 2008; Desimone et al., 2014; Ghosh & Reio, 2013; Kram, 1985; Parise & Forret, 2008; Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Marchese, 2006). In some of these examples, Presidents, CEOs and other leaders in business and industry have emerged because of being taken under someone’s, “wing”. The business world provides a true and tested environment in which community colleges can learn to develop their mentoring tactics. As the workforce ages in the United States, community college will be able to benefit tremendously from this corporate lead, as they look to fill key positions with the next generation of employee. Succession planning is not a common practice in all organizations, so mentoring offers community colleges a look into their future, where leaders are developed earlier, so they are ready to handle their new roles and responsibilities.

Furthermore, existing mentoring practices in higher education could be leveraged by community colleges. There have been studies of how the use of mentoring can benefit faculty and staff at the community college level (McDade, 2005; Wunsch, 1994). The benefits found in
these studies certainly outweigh the costs and have proved to be beneficial, allowing mentees to benefit tremendously from knowledge that they may not have had access to otherwise. Pairing experienced faculty with new faculty offers a mentoring opportunity on several levels. In addition to sharing subject matter expertise, faculty can share knowledge about the culture of the institution, past practices and develop futures practices based on this interaction.

Over the next few years, the workplace will see a mass exodus of retiring baby boomers. This will leave gaps in leadership positions from the executive level down to the managerial base, creating opportunities for women in the workplace. Having more women in positions of power will only generate a momentum for more diverse working environments. Gender diverse groups provide varied points of view, which make for better decision making and more entrepreneurial thinking. To achieve this status the use of informal mentoring aids woman in being successful in these higher-level positions.

Informal mentorship has the potential to help any employee feel less isolated as well as encourage them to interact more with others, particularly new hires. Mentors can provide tips on career growth and introduce the employee to other professionals. As the mentee matures within her career growth, a mentor may remain a valued adviser. Informal mentorship programs can help with employee retention because top talent employees stay and thrive at organizations in which they see themselves achieving their career goals and receiving the guidance that they need in order to grow as professionals and individuals. Mentoring is one of the best methods to confirm that your employees feel supported by your organization.

Additionally, it is important for women to own their careers. By utilizing mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching it women can learn to turn weaknesses into strengths. Owning one’s
career is also critical to success. In order for mentorship to be effective, it is important for women to realize their ambitions, weaknesses, and strengths. Women need to learn to advocate for themselves; this includes learning how to promote themselves well, to recognize and understand the gaps in their skills and to develop plans to improve their skills. In order not to get too comfortable, it is important to expose yourself to different experiences. These experiences allow you to continue to grow and gain a better understanding of your environment.

More in-depth research could be done examining the benefits of mentoring for both male and female administrators at a community college and also four-year universities and colleges. In addition, it would be interesting to have studies focusing on support staff at colleges and the use of mentoring to achieve administrative levels. In other words, studies that focus on the impact of mentoring on one’s ability to move up in an organization or improve their employment stature would be warranted.

In addition to these implications, this study can reach further outside of higher education. Gender studies in the workplace have shown gender gaps in salary and earnings between men and women in similar positions, especially at executive levels. Mentoring geared towards female employees has the potential to level out the gender wage gaps that our society continues to face. Female to female mentoring would position the mentees with knowledge and information that would help them achieve equal pay, because they would be given information from a hindsight perspective. Mentees would use this knowledge to better their position with respect to gender salary gaps, in hopes of eliminating any unfair practices of the past.
Limitations of the Study

The choice of methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) imposed certain limitations to this study. The small sample size of eight participants may make the findings not generalizable to the larger population. Nonetheless, this size maintains the idiographic commitment of a well-developed IPA study, which focuses on the particular experience of a specific group and not generalizability (Smith et al., 2009).

Another factor that limited this study was the choice of doing it at one specific institution. It was observed how the culture in this college dealt with the idea of informal mentoring. This specific institution neither supported nor discouraged the use of informal mentoring at the workplace but another institution who actively supported or discouraged the use of informal mentoring might have yielded different results. Institutions of higher education are unique entities that are run by different leaders with diverse ideas. At other institutions, there might be a more welcoming attitude towards this type of training. Conversely, there may be institutions that discourage the use of informal mentoring as a means of training for their administrators.

The study took place over a relatively short period and did not seek mentoring that took place over an extensive amount of time. In other words, another study that captures informal mentoring over a ten-year period may better describe the long-term benefits of informal mentoring.

In addition, the lack of diversity in the administrators could have proved limiting. Once again, there were certain criteria that were needed to be eligible for this study. There were not many women who had a diverse ethnic background, fit the profile and responded to the initial email. Future studies within the realm of informal mentoring should consider focusing on a
more diverse group of participants, breaking down race, gender and age barriers to determine how informal mentoring potentially helps or hurts individuals. Nonetheless, the researcher does not believe it dettracted from the study or made it any less factual for the institution that was being researched. This study provided eight, unique voices and experiences within one community college.

Finally, the researcher’s own bias may have limited the research. Not only did she have a personal knowledge of the college, she worked with the women interviewed. The researcher was still surprised about the answers and experiences they had and she felt like she did not know them enough that they would have had different answers had an outside person conducted the interviews. The researcher did have her own set of expectations and beliefs about mentoring, but the results of the interviews were not influenced by the beliefs, as she was able to successfully bracket her opinions and let the experiences of the women interviewed come through.

**Reflection**

I know as I entered into the research and data gathering part of this research study I had opinions and thoughts on how mentoring affected woman in the workplace. Part of me felt a little envious of the women who I saw who were taken under the wing of their mentors and received special treatment and better opportunities from having a mentor. From the articles I read and other studies conducted, I know that being in a positive mentoring relationship was one of the most effective ways to grow in your career. I was envious because I really did not have the opportunity to develop a relationship with someone in my workplace. I did feel that I had to navigate and blindly pursue my ambitions and there were many times in my tenure at my college where I felt lost and I knew that having a mentor would have helped me. I was lucky that I did become friends with many colleagues that I was able to draw strength and encouragement from.
however, there was not one person who I felt took an active interest in my career and wanted to see me be successful.

After completing my research and interviewing these women, I realized that the relationship, while not sought out by the mentee, was formed because they were open and willing to take guidance, advice and criticism from another person. Perhaps I was not ready to be that vulnerable to another person in a work environment. I also know that I never actively sought out a mentor even though I knew that it would have been better for my career. As I reflect on that thought, I do not understand why I never took advantage of the people in higher positions whom I respected and whom I wanted to emulate in my work ethic and career decisions. Instead of being personally guided by one person, I observed the people who I respected and tried to learn that way. Eventually, I did achieve success within my career. Currently, I am working with my supervisor in a mentoring type relationship where I accept unsolicited advice and let them know that I am interested in moving up at the college.

As I move further in my career and as a new member to the research community, I will now have to challenge myself on what I propose to do with the results of this research. I was not shocked by any of the themes that developed in this study. I assumed that there was trust in the mentoring relationship which is what most of the women spoke. The safe environment theme made sense to me because the different women felt somewhat protected and free of judgment from their mentor, which allowed them to fully trust their mentors’ advice and benefit from the experience fully. The safe environment theme can relate to the theme of trust in that trust and feeling safe coincide when dealing with sensitive information. During many of the interactions between the mentor and mentee, questions were asked in a safe environment, which may not have otherwise been asked. Without this safe environment, opportunities for informal mentoring
are missed. The risk taking aspect of the safe environment was one that I did not fully understand. Once again, I thought being in a mentoring relationship was a way to achieve success while being sheltered by their mentors. I did not realize that the women felt that they took more risks because of the mentoring relationship. As Kelly said during her interview, the safety net provided by the mentor allowed her to take chances knowing that even if she failed, it would not be a true failure because she would learn from the experience. This was spoken in context of going for job interviews. I would not apply for a position that I did not think I was “qualified” for even if I knew I could do the job. This participant did go for a job, thinking that even if she did not get the position she would gain valuable interviewing experience that she could use later if another opportunity presented itself to her. Risk taking, therefore, also relates to the previous two themes that provide conditions that allow the mentee to take chances and extend themselves beyond their traditional boundaries.

The growth of self-confidence from being in a mentoring relationship also made sense to me. Achieving more success, having a “cheerleader”, and having a set path would help a person achieve a higher level of confidence. The notion of self-worth or value that a mentee placed on them was an interesting consideration. I think that because another person believed in them and saw their potential, it made the mentee view himself or herself differently and with higher self-esteem. In many participant cases, the mentor helped expedite the building of self-confidence, which otherwise may have taken a lot longer to develop.

The theme of transfer power also seemed like a logical theme to me, as it was something I saw in the workplace. I always assumed that the person was, “grooming” their successor for their position. What I now recognize from doing the interviews was that if the mentor did not have faith or trust in the person they were mentoring they would not want them to take over the
positions that they built and achieved success. It was not grooming, but training the mentee for a job where they would ultimately achieve success. In addition, based on the experiences from the women interviewed, their mentors not only wanted them to replace them, but it was their hope that the mentee would surpass their own position. This result of surpassing their own performance showed the stake in both parties to not only improve individual performance, but also influence the community college in a positive way. In other words, informal mentoring is a process that the mentor undertook voluntarily, to develop individuals who may surpass their own contributions to the community college and therefore improvements to the community itself.

The final theme of empowering mentees to achieve their goals was also something that I witnessed firsthand within the college. Mentors and mentees seemed to spend time outside of work and engaged in information sharing about much more than just work. This process of empowerment also ties into the remaining themes since mentoring is a process that builds and develops over time. Additionally, this supports the premise that informal mentoring could be more beneficial than formal mentoring because of the level of choice involved.

What did surprise me during the interview process was how many of the participants spoke to proximity to their mentor as one of the outside influences that affected the choice of their mentor. Most admitted that having someone whose office was close was how they first became engaged in the relationship. It did make me wonder if these women would have had a different mentor if they were in a different physical location in the college.

In addition, the sole, outlier theme that was not discussed in chapter 4 was the perception that one participant felt about how other people viewed her mentoring relationship. Since this theme was not found within the experiences or interviews with most of the participants, it was
not included as a theme. However, I felt that it was noteworthy as it was very surprising to me. The participant felt that others negatively perceived her in her workplace because she was in a mentoring relationship. She felt that others thought she was the, “favorite” employee and was given opportunities because she was friendly with her mentor, not because she earned the position. When speaking with her, she talked about the new, “old boys network” of women helping other women to succeed and granting favors to these women based on gender and friendship and not merit. She felt that she had to overcome these perceptions in the workplace and that she was successful in spite of these perceptions.

The themes developed from the research were separate themes, but all had central tenants in common. Each of the four themes, trust, self-confidence, transferring of power and empowerment to new goals, took time to develop. Each theme had multiple steps and phases and in order for it to be a successful dyadic relationship, each participant in the relationship had to allow the phases to develop organically and fully. The process of mentoring, especially with the development of the themes found through this research does help expedite the process of learning and growing in an organization, yet the end goal is not achieved overnight. There is no instant gratification with being in a mentoring relationship and some of the benefits are not known until many years later. I found the key aspect of these successful mentoring relationships was the willingness and commitment each person put into the relationship. All eight women I interviewed said that their mentor was just as invested in seeing them succeed as they were. Their mentors were also willing to be vulnerable with them. I feel that to have a successful mentoring relationship, the four themes that I discovered must be experienced.
Conclusion

This study attempted to gain a better understanding of mentoring in the workplace, specifically the use of informal mentoring at a community college. By gaining insight on the lived experiences of the participants, a reasonable representation of mentoring was established. This led to recommendations for future studies about mentoring and how it may influence the career of men and women in higher education. It is my hope that the findings in this research study convince all senior management in higher education about the positive benefits of mentoring, specifically for succession planning and utilizing internal talents. The relevant findings from this study can and should be applicable to several areas of higher education practice including, staff training and development, succession planning, and overall human resource functions. The professional development opportunity that occurs from informal mentoring has broad reaching affects that may serve an institution well.
REFERENCES

http://www.aacc.nche.edu/AboutCC/Pages/default.aspx


APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter
Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies

**Doctoral Thesis Title**: Understanding the impact of mentoring on female mid-level community college administrators: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Dear [insert potential research participant’s name],

As you may be aware, I am a doctoral candidate in Northeastern University’s College of Professional Studies pursing an Ed.D in Higher Education Administration. In partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree, I am conducting a research study that examines the impact of informal mentoring to female administrators at a community college.

I am writing to ask you to contribute to my study by participating in an interview. If you decide to participate, I will schedule an interview at a mutually agreed upon time and place or through web conferencing program (GoToMeeting). The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. As this study is utilizing an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, the interview will be semi-structured. I will ask for your permission to record the interview. The interviews will be transcribed by a third-party transcription services. Once the transcript is received and approved, the third-party transcription service will delete the audio file they sent. All identifying information, including your name, will be removed from the transcript and you will be assigned a pseudonym. Your participation in this study will be confidential.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort associated with your participation in this study.

There is no compensation or remuneration for participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or my thesis advisor, Dr. Tova Sanders, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please contact me either by email at moscariello.d@husky.neu.edu or by phone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX to schedule an interview time.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Dawn M. Moscariello
APPENDIX B

Transcriber’s Confidentiality Agreement
Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies

Doctoral Thesis Title: Understanding the impact of mentoring on female mid-level community college administrators: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

I, [transcriber’s name] understand that I will be hearing tapes of confidential interviews. The individuals who participated in this research project have revealed the information on these tapes on good faith that the information would remain strictly confidential. I agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts with anyone other than the researcher(s).
2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks tapes, transcripts to the researcher(s) when I have completed the research tasks.
4. After consulting with researcher(s), erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the researcher(s) (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).

Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

Research Assistant/Transcriber

________________________________________  ________________________________  ________________
Print name  Signature  Date
APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol
Northeastern University
College of Professional Studies

Doctoral Thesis Title: Understanding the impact of mentoring on female mid-level community college administrators: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Name of Interviewer: Dawn M. Moscariello, Student Researcher
Interviewee: _______________________________________

Time of Interview: ________________________________

Date of Interview: ________________________________

Location of Interview: ______________________________

Introduction/Description of the Research Study

A. Purpose of the study

B. Data Collection Process

C. Explanation of what will be done with the data to protect the confidentiality of the participant

D. Describe the interview process including how long the interview will last

E. Answer any questions from the participant

(Turn on recording devices)

Interview Questions

Participants Background:

1. Please tell me about yourself
2. How long have you been working in Higher Education? What was your career path that led you to be an administrator?

3. How long have you been working for the community college?

4. What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

**Research Study Questions**

1. You have self-identified as having a relationship with one or more individuals that you will identify as an informal mentoring relationship. Can you please share a story of this relationship? What were the characteristics of the relationship?

2. Tell me at what point in your career did you first start working with a mentor? What role did the mentor have? Can you tell me your experience with career progression by having a mentor? What role does your mentor have in your career currently?

3. If you were to become an informal mentor to other administrators what part(s) of this relationship would you try to replicate for your mentee? What parts would you change? What experiences would you want your mentee to have?

4. How do you feel that having an informal mentor(s) has effected your position at the college?

5. Do you see the differences between you having an informal mentors and other females at the college not having an informal mentor?

**Conclude the Interview**

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about experiences with informal mentor?

Thank the interviewee for their participation
APPENDIX D

Consent Form

Northeastern University, Department of Education

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Tova Sanders (Principle Investigator), Dawn M. Moscariello (Student Researcher)

Title of Project: Understanding the impact of mentoring on female mid-level community college administrators: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Request to Participate in Research

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of informal mentoring on female community college administrators and their career trajectory.

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

The study will take place at ______________ and will take about 45 minutes. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you answer a series of questions about your experiences with informal mentoring.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about how informal mentoring affects career trajectory for female community college administrators.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call Dawn Moscariello, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Tova Sanders, the Principal Investigator. If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan
C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish. You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.

Dawn M. Moscariello