A Dissertation

entitled

Women’s Career Development: The Lived Experience of
Canadian University Women Presidents

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Higher Education

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As of July 2011, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) reported 17 of Canada’s 95 universities were led by women. While this represents considerable change from 1974, when Pauline Jewett became the first woman president to lead a co-educational Canadian university, progress for women climbing the educational leadership ladder to the office of the university president in Canada has been slow. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the lived experience of Canadian university women presidents as they developed their career paths to the presidency. This was accomplished through an examination of the women’s own perceptions and experiences about the development of their careers specifically related to personal and professional opportunities and barriers, the role of gender, the integration of their work and non-work lives, and their advice to women who aspire to become university presidents. The participants included eight women presidents of Canadian universities and data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that each of the women journeyed through a unique path to the presidency, yet their stories shared common themes. Personal characteristics, family
background, educational experiences, and mentoring relationships were identified as critical influences on their career development experience. Challenges stemmed from the struggle to balance career goals with caring responsibilities, cope with the inherent difficulties of the role of a university president, and navigate gender issues. Advice for women aspiring to become university presidents, included (a) advice based on personal development and (b) advice based on professional development.
I would like to dedicate this study to the late Pauline Jewett (1922-1992), the first woman president of a Canadian co-educational university (Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, 1974-1978). Her tenacity and pioneering spirit forged the pathway for other women to follow. Her story inspired me to pursue this topic.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Dr. David Meabon, who reintroduced me to my Canadian roots through an academic course on comparative higher education that he developed and taught. The course included a field experience: a two-week, train trip adventure through Ontario and Quebec, where we visited educational institutions, studied Canadian post-secondary education policy, and immersed ourselves in Canadian culture (beaver tail, anyone?). This international dissertation study was a direct result of that experience. I am grateful to him for being an inspirational teacher, a patient mentor, and an unwavering coach. I would also like to acknowledge my committee of Dr. Penny Poplin Gosetti, Dr. Debra Gentry, and Dr. R. Bruce Way for their insight and helpful comments.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge and thank the women presidents who participated in this study. I sincerely appreciated their time, their personal reflections, and their absolute candor in providing the “life” to the lived experience. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to interview them.

Finally, I would like to thank all the people (family, friends, and colleagues) who gave me the support and encouragement not only to enter this dissertation marathon but to cross the finish line (and you know who you are). It is my hope that in achieving this professional accomplishment, I will serve as a positive role model for my students, my colleagues, and most of all, my children.
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2. Female role models
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      2. Lack of intentionality
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Chapter One

Introduction

Background of the Study

Since the 1960s, the representation of women on university campuses has followed an upward trend at the student level, the faculty level, and the administrative level. According to Turcotte (2011), for the past 25 years women have comprised the majority of full-time undergraduate students enrolled in Canadian universities, however as the education level increases, the representation of women decreases. For example, women in 2008 represented 62% of the total enrollment of undergraduate students, 54% at the master’s level, and 44% at the doctoral level.

In the same way that women have comprised the majority of full-time undergraduate students, they have also comprised the majority of individuals in the teaching profession. Figure 1 illustrates the same trend; as the education level increases, the representation of women decreases. For example, women in 2005 represented more than 65% of the total educator workforce, 69% at the elementary and secondary levels, 48.2% at the college and vocational level, and 35% at the university level (Lin, 2006).

Within universities the same trend continues; while the number of women occupying full-time faculty positions at Canadian universities has grown from 11% to 35% between 1960 and 2008, they are disproportionately represented in the lower ranks (Lee, 1993; Turcotte, 2011). For example, Table 1 shows the distribution of full-time teaching staff at Canadian universities by gender and rank between 2004-2009. In 2008-2009, more than 3 times as many men occupied the rank of full professor, nearly 2 times as many
men occupied the rank of associate professor, and about equal numbers of men and women occupied the rank of assistant professor or below.

![Women in Teaching Positions by Educational Level](image)

**Educational Level**


Similarly, at the administrative level, according to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), women in 2011 represented just 17.8% of Canada’s university presidents. While this undoubtedly denotes substantial growth since 1974 when Pauline Jewett became the first woman to lead a Canadian co-educational university, it also illustrates the slow progress for women climbing the leadership ladder in higher education in Canada.
### Table 1

*Full-time Teaching Staff at Canadian Universities by Rank And Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Both genders</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total rank</td>
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<td>40,567</td>
<td>41,306</td>
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<td>14,039</td>
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<td>13,195</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Total rank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate professor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant professor</td>
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<td>6,233</td>
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<td><strong>Females</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total rank</td>
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<td>Associate professor</td>
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<td>4,984</td>
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<td>4,677</td>
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<td>117</td>
<td>126</td>
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<td>183</td>
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</table>

*Note. Rank or level below assistant professor includes lecturers, instructors and other teaching staff. Other ranks include staff that do not fit in the above categories. Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table 477-0017. Last modified: 2010-12-23.*

One factor contributing to this trend of women’s lack of upward mobility in academe has been the way that career interruptions (e.g., maternity leave, part-time employment while raising and caring for young children) have been valued, particularly early in the academic careers of women, when work productivity is required for advancement. Research has suggested that marriage and family formation disadvantages women, but not men, in their careers because women have continued to assume (and have continued to be expected to assume) the largest share of domestic and other caring
responsibilities (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Sussman & Yssaad, 2005; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). The absence of female professors can be directly attributed to the inflexible nature of organizational structures that center around an outdated traditional male career model that forces women to choose between work and family (Wolfinger et al., 2008).

A second factor contributing to this trend of women’s lack of upward mobility is that gender discrimination and gendered barriers persist for women in the workplace. Despite educational attainment gains for women, workplace policies have disadvantaged those workers who assume primary care-taking responsibilities, disproportionately affecting women who remain in the primary caretaker role, not withstanding their increased participation in the paid workforce. Men are overwhelmingly represented in senior management positions because they have the kind of domestic support at home that enables them to work long hours, manage heavy workloads, and are therefore perceived as more productive and provided career advancement opportunities. Women continue to be disadvantaged because workplace and social policies do not support the value of women’s work as caretakers (Cool, 2010).

Authors have suggested that while women’s educational attainment may have closed the gender education gap, it has not closed the gender pay gap (Cool, 2010; Frenette & Coulombe, 2007). Equality of opportunity has yet to be realized for women as evidenced by the persistence of a gender wage gap. In Canada, the gender wage gap has remained one of the highest in advanced nations and ironically is the greatest for university-educated women, who in 2005 earned just 68% of what men earned, down from 75% a decade earlier (Canadian Labour Congress, 2008). Generally higher
educational attainment is associated with higher pay; however, occupational segregation appears to be a key factor in the gender pay gap. For example, women tend to be employed in lower-paying, public sector health and education jobs, while men are more likely to be employed in higher-paying, private-sector jobs, such as engineering, computer science, and commerce. Despite legislation that guarantees pay equity, gendered wage discrimination continues to be evident (Cool, 2010).

Culturally determined perceptions of the job value have also influenced pay equity. For example, men working in “blue collar” skilled trade jobs, such as construction and transportation, have been valued more highly and received higher salaries than females working in “pink collar” service jobs, such as cleaning, food service, and childcare. Men have been paid a “family-supporting wage” while women have been paid as “secondary income earners” (Canadian Labour Congress, 2008, p. 14). One reason for this pay discrepancy is that social and work policies have failed to recognize the realities of women’s lives that is, working women are more likely than their male counterparts to make career choices that offer flexibility to balance their work and family responsibilities. However, when women take short-term, temporary workforce leaves, or are forced take part-time jobs that allow family-friendly schedules, they incur long-term career and economic penalties.

**Statement of the Problem**

In July 2011, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) reported 17 of its 95 member institutions (17.8%) were led by women. While this percentage represents more than a three-fold increase (up from approximately 5% during the 1970s), progress for women climbing the educational leadership ladder to the office
of the university president in Canada has been slow. Similarly, in the United States, the latest report from the American Council on Education (ACE, 2012), *The American College President 2012*, has reported that the percentage of women presidents has grown to 26% in 2011, up from 23% in 2006, and 9.5% in 1986. Despite these gains, women in both the United States and Canada have continued to be underrepresented as university presidents.

Though Cohen and March (1974) concluded there is no single pathway to the presidency, they found that most American college presidents progressed predictably through the academy, gaining experience both in teaching and research before climbing the administrative ladder to the presidency. This traditional, predictable pathway through the academy to the presidency has been coined by Cohen and March as the “royal road” as it describes “a hierarchical pattern of promotion through academic administration toward the college or university presidency” (p. 212). If the career path to the academic presidency remains through the royal road and if women continue to hover in the lower academic ranks, there will continue to be few women in the office of the university president.

Research on the experiences of women leaders in higher education institutions has found that women presidents both of community colleges and universities shared similar career development experiences, such as attaining educational preparation, developing leadership skills, and incurring gender challenges (Campbell, Mueller, & Souza, 2010; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Madsen, 2007b). These researchers have called for additional studies focused on women leaders and their career development experiences to better comprehend the unique needs of women in order to inform and guide organizational
policies and practices to recruit, retain, and sustain more women leaders. Researchers have also suggested that exploring the experiences of women who have reached the highest levels of their professions will provide greater insight and understanding into the connection between women’s personal and professional lives (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Cormier, 2007). While some previous studies have examined the unique career development experiences of American women presidents (Jackson & Harris, 2005; Madsen, 2007) no studies have focused on the career paths and career development experiences of women presidents in Canadian universities.

**Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative research study was guided by four primary purposes. The first purpose of the study was to describe the lived experience of Canadian university women presidents as they developed their career paths to the presidency. The second purpose of the study was to identify critical influences that shaped the decisions participants made as they journeyed through their career development experiences. The third purpose was to examine the ways that gender did or did not influence their career development experiences. The fourth purpose was to explore the advice that women presidents of Canadian universities have for other women (both Canadian and non-Canadian) who may aspire to careers as university presidents. These purposes were accomplished through an in-depth examination of the participants’ experiences and perceptions about the development of their careers and the critical influences along their career paths--particularly as those influences related to (a) personal and professional opportunities and barriers, (b) the role that gender played in their career decision-making, (c) the
integration of their work and non-work lives, and (d) their advice to women who aspire to become university presidents.

**Research Questions**

To describe the career development experience of Canadian university women presidents, this qualitative, interview-based, phenomenological study focused on four primary research questions:

Research Question One: What are the career paths of Canadian university women presidents?

Research Question Two: What do the women identify as the critical influences along their career paths?

Research Question Three: In what ways do the women feel gender did or did not influence their career development experience?

Research Question Four: What advice do the women (presidents) have for other women who may aspire to a career as a university president?

**Conceptual Framework**

Research has suggested that women and men view their career experiences differently (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) based on their gendered perspectives. Women’s careers do not necessarily follow a linear, sequential career progression, and because of this, women may define their career success on their own terms. (In academe, this may result in fewer women in the pipeline to the presidency). However, workplace practices and policies continue to operate in a culture that rewards outdated models of career development that demand the separation of work lives and non-work lives. For women, career decisions are evaluated based on a holistic life context in consideration of more
than just paid work. For example, working long hours has been perceived as equivalent to increased work productivity, leading to increased opportunities for advancement, and an assumption of the achievement of career success. In contrast, working flexible work schedules has been perceived as equivalent to low career commitment, poor work productivity, decreased opportunities for advancement, and an assumption of failure to achieve career success (Waumsley & Houston, 2009). As a result, talented women have left organizations because they were dissatisfied with the lack of advancement opportunities and inflexible organizational structures that do not recognize and support the unique needs of women’s career development (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

Women tend to view career decisions through a relational lens, because women “operate relationally to others in both work and nonwork realms” (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, p. 106). Recent studies on the topic of women’s career development have suggested that women’s careers and personal lives are interconnected, and for many women, these two aspects of their lives cannot be viewed as separate (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). In their 1992 article, “Cross-Currents in the River of Time: Conceptualizing the Complexities of Women’s Careers,” Powell and Mainiero proposed a framework for understanding women’s careers that forefronts both work and non-work issues; subjective measures of success; and the impact of personal, organizational, and societal factors on women’s career choices. The authors have suggested that there are two types of concern that influence the lives of working women: (a) concern for career and (b) concerns for others. At any one point in time, women may place more emphasis on one concern than on the other. The concerns may be considered to be on opposite ends of the same continuum. Powell and Mainiero have conceptualized
these two types of concern as currents pushing women to either side of a riverbank as it flows through time, making them cross-currents in the river of time. Women lead complicated lives, often involving “trade-offs and temporary sacrifice” (p. 231). Concerns for career may be deemphasized at times in favor of concerns for others with an expectation that at a later time career will receive primary emphasis.

Using this model is appropriate to examine this research problem because it recognizes that both internal and external factors affect women’s career development. Additionally, the model incorporates both subjective and objective measures of career success and further recognizes the importance of the integration of work and non-work issues in the larger context of women’s lives.

**Research Design**

According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study describes the meaning of an experience for a number of individuals—in this case, the career development experience of Canadian university women presidents: “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” of the experience (p. 58). Thus, a phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study because the study’s aim was to provide insight and a deeper understanding of the lived experience of women who have developed their careers to the position of president in a Canadian university. All of the 17 women university presidents listed in the Association of Colleges and Universities of Canada (AUCC) directory as of July 2011 (including those with titles rector, principal, interim and acting) were invited to participate in the study, and eight agreed to do so. Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews conducted with each university president.
The semi-structured interview questions were designed to elicit detailed information about the presidents’ career development experiences and to encourage deep and rich descriptions of those experiences. Data were analyzed using Creswell’s (2005) six steps of qualitative data analysis using NVivo9 qualitative data analysis software.

**Significance of the Study**

This study provides a basis for further evaluation of workplace issues and development of interventions, such as organizational policies and practices, that will increase the proportion of women university presidents. As well, this study provides insight into the ways in which educational institutions can serve as role models by demonstrating their commitment to social justice and ethical issues related to diversity and gender equity. Additionally, this study will aid educational institutions to bring about cultural change that recognizes the value of care-taking responsibilities for both women and men. Moreover, this study provides information that will enable a change in workplace culture that recognizes the unique needs of women in the development of their careers as well as encourages policies that identify, develop, and sustain women leaders.

**Assumptions**

Two assumptions were inherent in this study. First, it was assumed the interview participants answered the interview questions honestly and fully participated in the interview process. Second, it was assumed that when checking the accuracy of the transcribed text and clarifying or elaborating as necessary, participants did so conscientiously and thoroughly.
Limitations

All research studies are limited in some ways by a variety of factors. However, illuminating and acknowledging these limitations can provide opportunities for future scholars and researchers to make improvements and advance scholarship in the area of women’s experiences in their career path development. This study was influenced by four particular limitations. Firstly, the pathway to the presidency is the focus of the study, which represents only one element of the career development experience. As well, presidents only were invited to participate; senior academic administrators may have had other experiences and perspectives.

Secondly, although self-report measures are appropriate for qualitative interviews, some cognitive distortion may have occurred as the participants responded to the interview questions. This distortion may have resulted from a variety of factors, including selective memory (i.e., choosing to remember only selected or important events), attribution errors (i.e., ascribing to themselves factors that contributed to their success when in reality other factors may have been responsible), and social validity (i.e., responding in ways that may be politically correct or appropriate from a social acceptability perspective). The degree to which these distortions may have influenced participants’ responses represents the degree to which they may have influenced the interpretation of the results and the overall research findings.

Thirdly, the obligation to maintain confidentiality of the participants may be considered a limitation in terms of the specificity with which the results have been presented. The obligation to maintain confidentiality required that some information from participants be withheld if it could potentially result in their identification, including
not only specific demographic data but also responses that could be used to identify them or their institutions. Because of the relatively low number of universities in Canada, any information that potentially revealed the location or even the region in which the universities were located was necessarily omitted. In this way, some information that otherwise might have been relevant in answering the research questions was not included in the results, the analysis, or the discussion sections of this study.

Finally, the experiences of the eight participants who chose to participate in this study may have been substantially and qualitatively different from the experiences of the nine other women presidents of universities in Canada who did not participate in the study. Had other women presidents of universities in Canada participated in the study, additional results may have emerged to enrich the study, confirmed the current findings, or potentially added new findings.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are choices made by the researcher to set boundaries that control the scope and purpose of a research study (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The delimitations for this study were framed around the goal of providing a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of women presidents in Canadian universities as they developed their careers. Therefore, the study is delimited in the following areas. Firstly, the study is delimited to four research questions, each of which focused on a specific aspect of the career development experience (i.e., career path, critical influences on the career path, the effect of gender on career development, and advice for other women with aspirations of the same career path). These four research questions were selected to provide a relevant but manageable scope to the project. Secondly, the population was
delimited to academic presidents only and not to other senior academic administrators in order to explore the perceptions of participants at a specific administrative level. Thirdly, geographic location was delimited to Canada because the vast majority of research related to women presidents has been conducted on women presidents in the United States, and relatively little research has been conducted on women presidents in other countries, particularly Canada. As well, the population of presidents was delimited to women, and not men, to make a contribution to the limited amount of research on the career experiences of women presidents in higher education. Finally, the study was delimited to the 17 four-year, degree-granting universities led by women, and not to community colleges, to provide a sufficient scope and sample size to provide rich detail and adequate depth of qualitative exploration without creating an unmanageable volume of interview data.

**Definition of Terms**

A number of terms and concepts as they relate to this study are explained in the following section:

**Academic career path.** Refers to those career pathways that included department or program chair and dean, followed by a position as a vice president (academic or research).

**Administrative career path.** Refers to those career pathways that met four criteria: (a) spending a short time (e.g., one year) as a faculty member, (b) bypassing the dean position, (c) holding positions that emphasized business aspects of the university rather than faculty/student aspects, and (d) holding fewer positions between becoming a faculty member and assuming the presidency.
**Canadian college.** Refers to public, non-degree-granting, institutions that may also be called colleges, regional colleges, centres, colleges of applied arts and technology, community colleges, or institutes. In Quebec, the term *college* refers to a form of post-secondary education (general vocational) specific to the Quebec education system: the CÉGEP (*Collège d’enseignement général et professionnel, College of general and professional education*). The Royal Military College of Canada falls under the category of a university. The term *college* also applies to separate entities within a university (usually referred to as *affiliated colleges* and *federated colleges*). These colleges are governed independently but in affiliation or federation with the university that actually grants the degrees.

**Canadian postsecondary education.** Refers to formal instructional programs beyond secondary school, including academic, vocational, technical, and continuing professional education offered primarily by universities, colleges, and institutes.

**Canadian university.** Refers to a four-year institution of higher education offering university degrees, which may include bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, and doctoral degrees. Universities in Canada are almost exclusively public institutions.

**Career pathway.** Refers to an integrated series of steps intended to develop career skills and competencies.

**Double standards.** Refers to standards applied unfairly.

**Family background.** Refers to participants’ personal experiences or recollections that involved interactions with family members (e.g., parents, grandparents, siblings).
**Gender.** Refers to biological sex as opposed to a socially-defined role or gender identity.

**Internal characteristics.** Refers to personal traits, desires, or goals.

**In vivo coding.** Refers to coding data in the words of the participants.

**Mentoring relationships.** Refers to interactions with individuals who played an important and active role in influencing participants’ career choices and direction.

**Phenomenology.** Refers to the study of experience from the participant’s own view.

**Public servant.** Refers to a person employed in the public sector in a government position.

**Role models.** Refers to individuals observed in professional positions but with whom participants did not necessarily engage in a mentoring relationship.

**Success.** Refers to the attainment of wealth, positions, honors, and/or achievements.

**University president.** Refers to the executive head of the university (as defined by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada) and may also be titled principal or rector.

This chapter introduced the background of the topic, outlined the purpose for the study, provided a relevant conceptual framework, described a qualitative research design with a phenomenologic approach, and discussed the significance of the study for research and practice. Chapter Two reviews the pertinent literature to provide the background to inform this study, to establish a framework for the research questions, and to identify the current state of research related to this topic.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Researchers have called for more studies about women who have ascended to leadership positions to hear their viewpoints and to gain greater insight into the connection between women’s personal and professional lives. In addition, researchers have also called for studies that examine women’s experiences, particularly as they illuminate career development (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008; Oakley, 2000; Sotello Viernes Turner, 2007; Young, 1992). This chapter summarizes the structure of Canadian higher education and characterizes its size and scope, administration, and governance. In addition, this chapter describes research exploring the role of women in the Canadian workforce and in particular their representation in education. As well, this chapter reviews literature related to academic presidents; the role of university presidents and the career pathways of university presidents. Finally, this chapter examines career development theory, including theories specific to women as a framework for understanding the complexities of women’s career development.

Structure of Higher Education in Canada

Canada is a federated nation composed of 10 provinces and three territories. The Canadian constitution grants exclusive jurisdiction for the responsibility of education to the provinces. Therefore, each province and each territory has developed its own structures and institutions essentially creating 13 separate systems of education although the basic foundation of these systems are similar. For example, each system is comprised
of three levels: elementary, secondary, and postsecondary. In all jurisdictions, education at the elementary and secondary level is universal and free of charge. Postsecondary education is provided primarily through a public system, although a small number of private institutions now exist. The federal role in education consists of providing support for research funding for universities and financing student financial aid programs. Indeed, Canada is one of the only advanced nations in the world that does not have a federal department of education. However, there are three degree-granting institutions under federal authority, with a special mandate to meet the needs of Canada’s Aboriginal populations (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2009).

There is no national accrediting body responsible to evaluate degree programs; quality is ensured through a combination of legislative and administrative mechanisms. For example, membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) is generally accepted as evidence that an institution is providing university-level programs of acceptable standards. Originally established in 1911, the AUCC is an organization that represents and advocates for Canada’s higher education community. The organization’s membership consists of Canada’s 95 degree-granting institutions represented through their presidents, rectors, and principals. Additionally, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) is an organization composed of all of the provincial and territorial education ministers across the country. The purpose of this organization is to provide a forum for the ministers to discuss common policy issues and to provide educational leadership both nationally and internationally (CMEC, 2009).

**Size and scope.** Canada’s degree-granting institutions range in size from small liberal arts universities to large, comprehensive, research oriented institutions. University
colleges, college institutes of technology, and other specialized degree-granting universities tend to be small schools specializing in a particular program area (i.e., theology). Universities are generally organized into faculties, schools, and departments. University degrees are offered at three levels: undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral. Additionally, there are more than 200 public, occupationally oriented, colleges and institutes focused on diploma and certificate programs. Most of these non-degree granting postsecondary institutions were created by provincial governments during the 1960s to provide vocational training programs as an alternative to universities (CMEC, 2009). Canada is recognized as having one of the highest postsecondary participation rates in the world (Jones, 2007). Women continue to represent the majority of students on university campuses; 62% at the undergraduate level, 54% at the master’s level, and 44% at the doctoral level (Turcotte, 2011).

**Administration and governance.** According to Jones (2007) although heavily dependent on government funding, universities enjoy considerable autonomy with respect to academic policy and administration. “Institutional autonomy was a component of the Anglo-Saxon model of the university that the English-speaking institutions inherited from their British colonial roots” (p. 633). Most Canadian universities have a two-tiered or bicameral system of governance that includes a board of governors, and an academic senate. Boards generally provide fiscal management and academic senates provide academic management. In both arenas students, alumni, and community members are represented. Through bicameralism, Canadian universities have placed a high value on ensuring both internal and external stakeholders are adequately considered in university governance, a fact authors Jones and Skolnik (1997) have identified as a defining feature
that distinguishes Canadian boards from their American counterparts. All Canadian universities are led by a president, principal, or rector as the chief executive officer.

**Women in the Workforce**

In most advanced industrial countries, the participation rates of women in the paid workforce has risen steadily since the 1960s resulting in a reduction of the employment gender gap. In particular, Canada boasts one of the highest participation rates of women in the paid workforce: 73.5% of women aged 15 to 64 were working or actively seeking employment in 2006 compared to 60.8% of women in other advanced industrial countries (Canadian Labour Congress, 2008). However, across the world, the employment gap between men and women increases with family formation and women with families tend to participate in full-time employment at a lower rate than men with families. Although the high participation rates by Canadian women suggests that women are committed to their careers, women remain the primary caretakers of children (and others) and are more likely than men to make career accommodations in order to achieve a balance between their home and work responsibilities.

Despite the fact that women are participating at nearly the same rate as men in the paid workforce, and women have surpassed men in educational attainment, there is a persistent gap between what women earn and what men earn, known as the gender wage gap (Cool, 2010; Frenette & Coulombe, 2007). Within the gender pay equity discourse, a debate rages including those who argue that the pay gap does not reflect gender discrimination by employers, rather it reflects the choices women make related to career-life balance. While others argue that traditionally female-dominated occupations such as teaching and nursing have been historically undervalued and consequently underpaid
compared with traditionally male-dominated occupations such as engineering and commerce. Indeed, data collected from the 2006 Census confirmed women represent the overwhelming majority of the 20 lowest-paid occupations while men dominate the 20 highest paid occupations in Canada (Cool, 2010). “Gender gaps can and do result from cultural preconceptions of the value of particular jobs” (Canadian Labour Congress, 2008, p. 13). According to the Canadian Labour Congress, the gender pay gap is actually greater for university-educated women who in 2005 earned just 68 cents for every dollar a man earned, down from 75 cents a decade ago. Researchers have identified family formation as one of the factors that contributes to the persistence of a gender pay gap (Ballenger, 2010; Correll, 2007; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). Despite the fact that women are participating in the paid workforce at almost the same rate as men, women still bear the primary responsibility of managing the home including childcare resulting in a disproportionate number of women working in “precarious jobs” (Canadian Labour Congress, 2008, p. 15). Precarious jobs are those jobs that involve limited control of working hours and conditions, offer limited prospects for advancement, and are associated with low wages (Canadian Labour Congress, 2008). Despite the fact that women have surpassed men in the acquisition of formal educational qualifications, economic inequality is evidence that women continue to experience workplace barriers that men do not, and the social agenda to address this inequality of opportunity remains unfinished.

**Role of University Presidents**

A number of authors have described the difficult role of the university president (Barwick, 2002; Bornstein, 2003; Bornstein, 2008; Casteen, 2002; Green, 1997;
Greenberg, 1998; Hoyle, 2002; McGoey, 2007; Simon, 2009). Barwick (2002) found that the position is so different from any other in an academic institution that most presidents have little preparation for the job. The role of the university president requires facing competing demands from internal and external forces with a skill set that expands well beyond the typical academic resume. Barwick has described the university president as follows: “The president is the spiritual leader of the college’s learning philosophy, the sculptor of campus climate, the role model for ethical behavior, the builder of buildings, and arbiter of budgets, and the link between the college and its community” (p. 11). Much of the contemporary research about the presidency leads to the conclusion “that the job has become so difficult and complex [that] no truly rational person would want it” (Barwick, 2002, p. 8).

The role of the university president has continued to evolve as the challenges facing academic institutions have become more complex. However, guiding institutions through difficult times is not new to the role of the university president because many individuals in the past have faced difficult challenges including world wars, economic depressions, and social unrest (Simon, 2009). Yet, Simon has argued that “the rapid rise of technology and the nearly instantaneous access to information add a complexity to the role not previously imagined” (p. 2). In response to contemporary political realities, the role of the university president is no longer an intellectual vocation with a moral mandate led by a president who is “first among equals” (Casteen, 2002, p. 21). Greenberg (1998) has also supported the view that college presidents were once admired public figures enjoying the capstone of a distinguished scholarly career, but more recently have lost their power and prestige compared to chief executive officers of other organizations. In
response to shrinking public financial support and persistent pressures to “corporatize” institutions of higher education, the image of university presidents has been altered from that of “moral stewards” and “philosopher kings” to more commonly resemble politicians and corporate officers (Casteen, 2002). Consequently, the position now attracts “administrators and fund-raisers more than scholars and visionaries” (Hoyle, 2002, p. 3).

One way that the role of the university president has changed over time is that presidents have become less socially engaged. For example, in his study about college presidents and their level of civic engagement, Hoyle (2002) found that contemporary college presidents seek to influence society “in a quieter way” (p. 29). Hoyle observed that universities have grown into enormous, multifaceted organizations, and securing the resources to sustain these huge enterprises has become a key component of the role of the university president. Presidents have become more focused on raising money and “not alienating potential donors” (Hoyle, 2002, p. 29). Greenberg (1998) has also argued that the fundraising mandate has become so pervasive in the role that it has changed the type of person who becomes an academic president. McGoey (2007) also found that because fundraising has become so central to the role of the university president, presidential effectiveness is now largely measured by the president’s ability to attract resources, monetary and otherwise. Still, proponents of the role of the president in civic engagement have continued to assert that the role of the president in addressing public policy issues (e.g., affirmative action, diversity in the workforce, and financial aid for students) remains a critical factor “to the long term success and health of the nation” (Hoyle, 2002, p. 28).
Green (1997) has suggested that both national culture and organizational culture influence leadership roles. University presidents lead within the framework of their national as well as their academic and organizational cultures, and within these cultures are assumptions and expectations about the ways in which higher education serves society—for example, whether higher education provides a greater benefit to the common good or to the individual (Green, 1997). According to Green, although societies may differ in their conception of the role of higher education, who attends and who pays are often the fundamental issues that reflect the cultural values of that society. Historically and globally, higher education has served a small proportion of the population, although more recently worldwide efforts have been undertaken to create mass systems of higher education reflecting a cultural value of education as a common good. Consequently, the development of educational institutions capable of educating the masses has yielded large, complex entities comprised of thousands of students, employees, and large budgets (Green, 1997). Although there is growing resistance to the “corporatization” of the sacred grove of academe, “it is increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that complex enterprises must be expertly managed, especially because the public demands efficiency in return for its financial support” (p. 41). According to Green, what differentiates leadership from management is this cultural value dimension. “Leaders have moral obligations to their organizations and to society - to treat people decently, to encourage good citizenship, to promote collaboration, and to develop organizations that are humane and socially responsible” (p. 44).
Presidential Career Paths

In addition to understanding the evolution and the difficulties inherent in the role of the academic president, a number of studies have examined the demographic characteristics and career paths of academic presidents (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Delabbio & Palmer, 2009; Muzzin & Tracz, 1981; Wessel & Keim, 1994). Research has indicated that the presidential pathway has followed two career patterns: an academic career ladder or an administrative career ladder. The academic career ladder included positions as faculty, department chair, dean, and academic or other vice-president position prior to assuming the position of president. The administrative career ladder included minimal faculty experience but extensive administrative experience. However, in their study of Canadian university presidents, Muzzin and Tracz (1981) acknowledged little was known about the career paths of Canadian presidents in comparison to American presidents: “There is virtually no Canadian literature on university presidents, but an avalanche of American material on the subject” (p. 336). Muzzin and Tracz reported that presidential effectiveness was most often judged by academic experience, as evidence by few (just 11%) coming to the presidency from outside academe. Wessel and Keim (1994) also found academic experience to be the “principal entry portal to the college presidency” (p. 212). Consistent with the findings of Muzzin and Tracz, some of the presidents had achieved the requisite administrative experience outside of higher education but only a small number. “Individuals with successful top-level management/leadership experience, both inside and outside academe, are likely candidates for college or university presidents. The largest percentage of these leaders achieve the presidency after being a member of a college or university faculty” (p. 224).
A third study by Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) identified four presidential career paths: scholars, stewards, spanners, and strangers. Scholar paths were identified as traditional academic career paths consisting of teaching experience followed by a succession of administrative positions with increasing responsibility. Steward paths were also associated with academic experience but through administrative careers and not necessarily through teaching careers. Birnbaum and Umbach also identified two nontraditional paths to the presidency: spanners and strangers. Spanner paths consisted of career positions external to the academy, at some point in their careers, that eventually led back to academe ultimately leading to the position of president. Stranger paths were spent entirely outside of higher education. “Strangers come directly to their presidential positions from business, the military, politics, or some other nonacademic position, without previous experience in a college or university” (p. 206). Consistent with the findings from other authors, Birnbaum and Umbach also found only a small percentage (11.3%) of presidents followed this nontraditional path to the presidency.

In contrast to these studies, Delabbio and Palmer (2009) identified an increasing trend that the traditional academic career path is no longer considered the only or even the preferred route to the university presidency. “Given the significant demands being placed on such leaders, as well as the increased complexity and challenges facing higher education, we are likely to see more talent from outside academia being tapped to lead such institutions in the future” (p. 8). The most recent study of presidential pathways from the American Council on Education (ACE) has also shown an increasing trend toward nontraditional career paths. According to ACE, the incidence of presidents
coming from outside the academy increased from 8% to 20% between 1986 and 2011 (ACE, 2012; King & Gomez, 2007).

In terms of the demographic characteristics and the service tenure of academic presidents, Muzzin and Tracz (1981) found that Canadian presidents assumed the office of president at about 49 years of age and that presidential tenure lasted for about 8 years. With regard to gender, the authors reported that “there are virtually no women” (p. 343) and suggested that because women were underrepresented in positions of academic administration they were not eligible for the position. “Although much hoopla is made when a woman is appointed a university president, one might expect this to be a relatively rare occurrence because of the emphasis on administrative experience in presidents” (p. 343). In contrast, Wessel and Keim (1994) reported that the average age of the president was 55 years, the average tenure as president was 8 years, and that 81% of their participants were male and 19% were female. It appeared that over time the average age of the president had risen, the tenure of the president had remained constant, and although in the minority, women were now counted among academic presidents.

Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) also found the average age of presidents was about 55 years, length of tenure as president was about 7 years and, and somewhat less than Wessel and Keim’s (1994) study nearly a decade before, women accounted for about 16% of the presidents. Birnbaum and Umbach suggested that this underrepresentation of women in the presidency may reflect a problem stemming from their lack of motivation for career advancement. According to the authors, women have not put themselves forward as candidates for these positions perhaps because they have not received the proper advisement regarding fields of study, they have not had career opportunities, and
they have had limited access to social networks for support (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001). As well, there appears to be a “specter of discrimination” (p. 214) that has influenced individual aspirations and appears to propel men forward while holding women back.

In alignment with the previous studies, Delabbio and Palmer (2009) also found the presidential demographic pattern of mostly White, middle-aged men was consistent even among nontraditional presidents. However, the average tenure of these presidents was 9 years, slightly higher than the 8-year tenure of traditional presidents. According to ACE (2012), in 2011 the average age of the academic president has increased to 61 years, the average tenure is 7 years, down from 8.5 years in 2006, and the percentage of women presidents rose from 23% to 26% between 2006 and 2011. This evidence suggests that while the age of president has been increasing over time, and the representation of women presidents has risen slowly over time, it also appears that the tenure for traditional presidents is declining while the incidence of and tenure for the nontraditional presidents is growing.

**Career Development Theories**

A number of theories of occupational choice and career development have been proposed (Astin, 1984; Farmer, 1985; Gottfredson, 1981; Hackett & Betz, 1981; Super, 1980). These theories have provided insight into the process of career decision-making and the various factors that may influence the reasons and processes individuals experience in making their career choices. For example, Super proposed a lifespan developmental model of career development that focused on the conception of self through the various life roles one plays across a series of life stages. Super defined “career” as “the combination and sequence of roles played by a person during the course
of a lifetime” (p. 282). Super’s Life-Career Rainbow has helped individuals conceptualize multi-dimensional careers and identify the determinants of role selection and role performance across the lifespan. Gottfredson has also proposed a developmental theory focused on self-concept. Gottfredson’s circumscription theory of occupational aspirations has suggested that “people have different conceptions of themselves and therefore find different occupations compatible with their self-images” (p. 554). As well, the theory postulates that the perception of one’s self-concept is highly influenced by both their cognitive development and their social environment (e.g., gender, race, and social class). Likewise, Farmer has proposed a model of career development that includes three sets of influences on three motivational dimensions: background, personal, and environmental influences affecting aspiration, mastery, and career commitment. Farmer has contended that “understanding the factors that influence career and achievement motivation is important because motivation affects achievement, level of occupation achieved, and career satisfaction” (p. 363). While the early theories of Super, Gottfredson, and Farmer have provided a solid foundation for the exploration of career development, more recent theorists have pursued research related more specifically to understanding the career development of women.

**Women’s career theories.** Some authors have argued that women’s career development is not well understood because early career theories were developed mostly by men in a time when participation in paid work was an activity engaged in primarily by men (Astin, 1984; Coogan & Chen, 2007; Hackett & Betz, 1981). Interest in understanding more about the unique aspects of women’s career development has increased partly because women’s participation in the labor force has also increased. For
instance, in Canada women now represent 47.3% of the paid workforce, and 62.3% of working-aged women participate in paid work (Statistics Canada, 2012). Similarly, in the United States women now represent 46.6% of the paid workforce, and 58.1% of working-aged women participate in paid work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). “Women’s increased participation in the labor force has been accompanied by greater awareness on the part of psychologists that our ability to predict, explain, and modify women’s vocational behavior is at best inadequate” (Hackett & Betz, 1981, p. 326).

Hackett and Betz (1981) have proposed an approach to the conceptualization of women’s career development based on Bandura’s social learning theory. They have suggested that self-efficacy is largely shaped in response to early socialization experiences and is a critical component of career decision-making processes: “Largely as a result of socialization experiences, women lack strong expectations of personal efficacy in relationship to many career-related behaviors, and, thus, fail to fully realize their capabilities and talents in career pursuits” (p. 326). Further, these authors have identified four sources of information that may influence acquiring or altering efficacy expectations: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and, emotional arousal. Hackett and Betz have argued that women’s early socialization and learning experiences can create strong internal barriers that restrict women’s range of career options. “A stronger sense of self-efficacy with regard to specific career-relevant behaviors may enable women to realistically consider a wider range of alternatives and thereby enhance effective decision-making and improve chances for postdecisional satisfaction” (p. 337).
Astin (1984) has also examined the effects of early socialization experiences on women’s career aspirations. Astin has suggested that career choice is influenced by personal/social and institutional/environmental factors and that these factors are critically important in educational and career decision-making processes. Astin has proposed a career decision-making model that incorporates both psychological variables (personality characteristics), contextual-sociological variables (social forces), and the intersections of the two variables in shaping human behavior. Like Hackett and Betz (1981), Astin also has contended that women’s occupational expectations are shaped by early socialization experiences and has added a dimension referred to as “the structure of opportunity” (p. 117). Astin’s model has assumed that work behavior is a motivated activity intended to satisfy three basic needs: survival, pleasure, and contribution. Consequently, the value of work is the same for men and women in that “work is the principal activity of adult life” (p. 119) however, occupational choices may differ based on early socialization experiences and the availability and structure of opportunities. Although, the nature and type of work in which individuals participate may be influenced by gender, the reasons for working are the same for both genders (Astin, 1984).

Crozier (1999) has taken a different approach by combining Gilligan’s (1982) theory of women’s identity formation and Belenky’s (1986) theory of cognitive development to view career in the context of relationships. “Relational models offer a new way to conceptualize and understand development, particularly women’s career development, in the Western world” (p. 231). Relational theory is focused on relationships and connections and assumes that women construct their identity from a relational context that has implications for understanding women’s career choices.
Crozier has argued that it is the development of self that accounts for women choosing the “caring” professions and not their early gender role socialization. Women make career decisions that lead to the caring professions because these occupations “provide opportunities for developing relationships and serving others” (p. 235). However, because women have relational identities does not mean they are destined only for traditional female occupations. Women with a relational sense of self and a connected way of knowing should also be encouraged to see ways that nontraditional careers could offer relationships and be meaningful careers in the service of others (Crozier, 1999). Women’s relational identity has recognized the importance of relationships in women’s lives and the powerful influence they have on their career development.

Powell and Mainiero (1992) have also proposed a conceptual framework in which to understand women’s career development. Their approach has taken into account women’s work and non-work lives and has incorporated subjective and objective measures of career and life success. Their model has considered the influences of personal, organizational, and societal factors on women’s career choices and outcomes, and has not assumed that women’s careers go through a predictable sequence of stages over time. They have argued that women’s careers or work lives cannot be understood in isolation and that their non-work lives must also be considered. They have identified two types of concerns that influence the lives of women related to work: (a) concerns about their careers and (b) concerns about their relationships. Along a continuum, women may be primarily concerned with personal achievement at work on one side or primarily concerned with family and personal relationships on the other side, or they may attempt to balance these two factors: “They are likely to be concerned with both career and others
at all times, but they place different degrees of emphasis on career versus others in their actions and decisions at different times” (p. 219). The authors have suggested that women look for personal satisfaction at both ends of the continuum.

According to Powell and Mainiero (1992), the concept of career success has been rooted in a traditional patriarchal definition that objectively measures career in terms of salary, title, or position on a hierarchical ladder. However, these authors have proposed that career success may also be subjectively measured in terms of job satisfaction, perceived opportunities for advancement, and perceived job stability: “We believe that women may focus more on measures of satisfaction that represent how they are feeling about their careers, rather than what their careers actually look like” (p. 220). Powell and Mainiero emphasized the importance of time in their conceptual model, recognizing that success in career and relationships exists in relation to time. For example, “Individual women may choose to defer present satisfaction in one realm (e.g., relationships with others) and focus on the other realm at present (e.g., career) in anticipation of greater satisfaction in the first realm at a later date” (p. 221). Therefore, at any one point in time (viewed as flowing like a river), a woman may place primary emphasis on success in career (one side of the riverbank), versus placing primary emphasis on success in relationships with others (the other side of the riverbank), or she may try to find a balance between the two. “The two types of concerns then act as ‘cross currents in the river of time’” (p. 222). The primary difference between this and other career theories is that it does not confine women to occupying specific life or career stages along a sequence of steps at specific points in time; rather, it illustrates that women are on a fluid journey that ebbs and flows like a river (Powell & Mainiero, 1992).
Table 2 provides a summary of the four women’s career theories, their theoretical foundations, and the factors identified as influencing women’s career development.

Table 2

Factors that Influence Women’s Career Development

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<tr>
<th>Theoretical foundation</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
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<th>Factor 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hackett &amp; Betz (1981)</td>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Vicarious</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powell &amp; Mainiero (1992)</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Societal</td>
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</table>

Influences on Women’s Career Development

Defining moments. Defining moments are powerful occasions that can shape career paths (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). These defining moments can provide the “building blocks of leadership confidence” that enable women to approach leadership challenges and opportunities (p. 254). Women leaders have reported that one type of defining moment has come in the form of influential mentors. Women leaders in Dahlvig and Longman’s study reported that they sought challenging positions in leadership because they were encouraged by others to do so. Eddy (2008) also found that women do not consider a presidency because “no one has encouraged them to seek such a level of leadership” (p. 64).

Internal (Intrapersonal). Researchers have identified several intrapersonal characteristics that are associated with career paths involving leadership activities and
leadership positions. For example, Sotello Viernes Turner (2007) suggested that two particular intrapersonal qualities characterize women seeking career paths in leadership: “a pioneering spirit and a commitment to making a difference” (p. 8). Boatwright and Egidio (2003) identified a third interpersonal quality exhibited in women aspiring to career paths in leadership: “Women must intrinsically possess an interest in aspiring to leadership roles before they can take full advantage of emerging opportunities: ‘Glass ceilings’ are broken by opportunity accompanied by desire” (p. 654). In addition to a pioneering spirit, commitment to making a difference, and interest in leadership, women in leadership positions view themselves as leaders when they stand up for something greater than themselves (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010).

**External (Environmental).** In addition to intrapersonal characteristics, researchers have indicated that environmental influences can also shape leaders’ career path decisions. For example, Madsen (2007a) suggested that school experiences and the habit of reading during formative childhood years had an impact on the development of potential leaders. Madsen reported that women leaders “found joy in these activities because of their desire to learn, their interest and curiosity, their sense of competition (even within themselves), their love of challenges and achievement, and their desire to keep their minds busy and active” (p. 115). Likewise, Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, and Keyser Wentworth (2007) found that women who chose female-dominated careers oftentimes made career decisions based more on “early developmental experiences than did women who chose gender-neutral careers” (p. 232). For example, participants in female-dominated careers received strong messages from their parents in their formative years that supported career choices that were “excellent for women” (p.
230), such as teaching and social work. These strong messages may influence opportunities to actively engage in the career exploration process resulting in “an early foreclosure of their career options” (p. 234) that restricts their career paths to female-dominated careers. In contrast, women who followed a gender-neutral career path, received encouragement and support from influential people outside of their families. The authors highlighted the important role parents and school counselors can play in encouraging career exploration experiences for girls that endeavor to keep their career options open.

**Role models.** Although it is not uncommon for women aspiring to leadership advancement in education to lack female mentors and role models, research has indicated that the influence of positive female role models is an important factor in women’s career development (Cormier, 2007; Madsen, 2007a; Okpara, Squillace, & Erondou, 2005; Sherman, Muñoz, & Pankake, 2008; Sotello Viernes Turner, 2007). Strong female educators serve as important early role models who help instill confidence and inspiration in young women in their formative years (Sotello Viernes Turner, 2007). Madsen (2007a) reported that the women presidents in her study “spoke often and highly of the influence of school teachers” (p. 115), and Sherman et al., found women leaders identified family members or close friends as “sources of inspiration or supporters of their success” (p. 247). Cormier (2007) suggested that female role models are also a source of aspiration for young women thinking about their career paths: “Women leaders are also role models and mentors for their aspiring successors” (p. 263). Oakpara, Squillace, and Erondou (2005) also have recommended that female academics in the higher ranks become mentors to others and “become more visible as leaders in the field”
Not only are female role models important from the perspective of younger women seeking to advance their careers, but research has also shown that women in leadership positions exhibit a clear awareness of their own responsibilities as role models.

The presence of female role models in institutions of higher education has helped actualize equity policies for evaluation and scrutiny, and proponents have advocated for the inclusion of more women in leadership positions, pointing out the numerous benefits of doing so in colleges and universities. Highly visible female leaders in academia provide examples for other women academics to consider participation in management. It may also signal that the university is serious about improving gender equity in academic leadership positions (Ismail & Mohd Rasdi, 2008). This “signaling” represents an important function in efforts to establish and maintain equality in gender representation in the university environment. For example, Boatwright and Egidio (2003) have indicated that institutions have a responsibility to show equality of opportunity for women: “College administrators also need to remain cognizant of how their policies affect not only female faculty and staff but also female college students who notice the absence of women in the university system who hold professional and familial responsibilities” (p. 665). Educational institutions should serve as role models of their organizational commitment to social justice issues such as diversity and equality of opportunity, therefore institutional leadership should reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, including gender diversity. In order to attain this diversity, institutions of higher education must be deliberate in their efforts to establish and maintain gender equity policies and practices (Brown, 2005; Valian, 2005).
**Mentoring.** According to a number of researchers, mentors and mentoring relationships are critical factors in facilitating career decisions and empowering women toward career advancement (Brown, 2005; Cormier, 2007; Dahlvig & Longman, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, & Keyser Wentworth, 2007). Women pursuing academic careers, especially those pursuing academic careers in high-level leadership positions, benefit from engaging in the mentoring process, receiving support from others through encouragement, establishing and maintaining interpersonal connections, and seeking out strategic career planning advice. Dahlvig and Longman (2010) found that mentoring programs were critical for leadership development: “Either formal or informal mentoring programs can be significant in building confidence and skills in the next generation of leadership” (p. 255). Mentoring relationships are an invaluable tool for advancing women through the ranks of higher education administration and are therefore a legitimate and valuable vehicle for increasing the representation of women university presidents (Brown, 2005). Additionally, women leaders view mentoring others as an important part of their professional responsibility. Women leaders should actively seek out and mentor the next generation of women to prepare them to take on leadership roles (Sotello Viernes Turner, 2007).

Research has indicated that the impact of encouragement cannot be overstated as an influential factor in the career development of women leaders. For example, Dahlvig and Longman (2010) found when women encounter mentors “speaking potential” (p. 247) into their lives, they experience a defining moment that can empower a life-course change. This process of “speaking potential” has been identified as a key component of the mentoring experience. However, Eddy (2008) found that the critical role of
mentoring “is a two-way street” (p. 63). Administrators should identify and develop individuals for leadership, and women should seek out mentors to emulate and aid them in accessing critical career skills.

**Friendships.** Regarding the value that women place on relationships, the research is clear: women value relationships. According to Arthur, Patton, and Giancarlo (2007), the “centrality of relational values” (p. 9) is an important factor for women’s career development. Interpersonal connections, including those acquired through relationships from family and peers, are important in validating the experiences of women in leadership positions and instilling in them a belief in their potential to succeed (Sotello Viernes Turner, 2007). However, Sherman, Muñoz, and Pankake (2008) have suggested that although friendship as a source of support is valuable for women in leadership positions, it does not provide the kind of mentoring that leads to career advancement. “While friendship and collegial support are important, they are not necessarily synonymous with mentoring” (p. 254).

**Networks.** Researchers have agreed that professional networks and the acquisition of skill development opportunities they provide are critical factors that influence career advancement (Cormier, 2007; Sherman, Muñoz, Pankake, 2008; Sotello Viernes Turner, 2007). According to Arthur, Patton, and Giancarlo (2007) peer networks are an important source of career support: “The dissemination of ‘acquired wisdom’ from the professional network enhances the acquisition of career competencies” (p. 8). Women in leadership positions value formal professional networks that focus on leadership skill development and the opportunity to network (Campbell, Souza, and Mueller, 2010). However, Coleman (2010) has found that all-women networks have
been gradually disappearing because women no longer view these networks as a necessary part of their career development. Despite the past success of women’s-only networks in providing emotional and practical career support and a collective “voice” to women’s issues, shrinking support has led to the “terminal decline” of these networks (p. 769). Cormier (2007) found many women viewed networks as “a luxury, not a necessity” (p. 265) and therefore failed to use them to optimize their career advancement. “Women expressed both the desire and the intention to schedule networking and social time with colleagues, yet their aspirations did not equate with successful follow-through” (p. 265). This suggests that women do not use networks for career advancement in the same way that men do.

Without collective political activism and the gender equality initiatives of the feminist movement of the 1960s and the 1970s (such as affirmative action), women would not have made advances into upper-level administrative positions. However, even with these equality of opportunity initiatives, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions. “A half-century after the women’s movement, women have only moved to the halfway mark in the corporate world and other organizations in the industrialized Western societies; most are stuck in middle management” (Cheung & Halpern, 2010, p. 183). Authors have further suggested that in pursuit of equality of opportunity, women need to return to the practice of examining unequal power relationships inherent in organizational policies that impede the appointment and promotion of women into leadership roles in higher education. “The feminist mode of inquiry emphasizes the exploration of not only who has the power and how it is utilized to either change or maintain the status quo, but also what forces exist that prevent women
from fully experiencing themselves and their values” (Oakley, 2000, p. 322; Ballenger, 2010).

As Oakley (2000) has argued, “Female underrepresentation is an important ethical issue” (p. 322), and deliberate efforts must be made to attain and sustain gender equity in higher education; in other words, institutions should be models of their own missions. Academic leaders should be a reflection of the diversity of the students, faculty, and staff they serve. It is the social responsibility of institutions of higher education to visibly demonstrate an inclusive environment as well as “equality of opportunity for success” (Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009, p. 27). In order to achieve these social goals, it may be necessary for women to resurrect the networks that worked so well during the women’s movement in promoting the advancement of women’s issues. According to Leatherwood and Williams (2008), “Women should become more active in legislative relations” (p. 271), because “legislative actions are necessary to enable women to be more proactive in pushing public policy that affects gender issues beyond the campus” (p. 271).

**Barriers to Women’s Career Advancement**

**Gendered organizational structures.** Researchers have found that despite the growth in the number of women employed within organizations over the last few decades, organizations have remained male-dominated (Ballenger, 2010; McMahon, Bimrose, & Watson, 2010; O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). Consequently, organizational structures have remained dominated by a traditional “male” model and conception of work in which work and life are separated. Organizations continue to be structured around this traditional model in which workers are completely available to meet all work obligations, and in which family and other care-taking responsibilities are
delegated to a supportive spouse at home (usually a woman). However, for women, their work and non-work lives cannot be separated; women’s careers are embedded in a larger life context, and career decisions are often made in consideration of the other responsibilities in their lives. Nevertheless, women are motivated to succeed both in their personal and professional lives: “Women’s careers are complex and multi-dimensional yet work practices appear to exist in a single dimension -- the male-defined organizational dimension” (O’Neil et al., 2008, p. 735). Traditional organizational structures have supported the status-quo and maintained the balance of power in the hands of the majority (i.e., men). Employees demonstrating a single-minded devotion to career have been viewed as more committed to their careers, which benefits the organization and has resulted in “no compelling reason for change” (O’Neil et al., 2008, p. 736).

Waumsley and Houston (2009) studied the effects of working flexible schedules on women’s career success. They found that individuals who worked long hours (> 40 hours/week) were perceived to be more productive and were therefore more likely to be promoted than individuals who worked flexible schedules (< 40 hours/week). Women with caring responsibilities were viewed to be less productive and less committed to their careers when they opted for more flexibility in their work schedules. “Flexible working is seen as detrimental to work performance and career progression when compared to long or regular hours of work” (p. 46). The authors concluded that flexible working, professional success, and being female have been perceived to be incompatible.

**Defining success.** It may be that men and women define success differently. Indeed, as Young (1992) has stated, “attempting to understand the notion of a ‘career’
differently - for both women and men - implies new connotations for the term ‘success’” (p. 158). Traditional organizational structures continue to define career as “a series of paid-work opportunities” (p. 158) that reward conventional measures of career commitment through hierarchical progression. Women define success in a way that has less to do with “externally defined, traditionally male, corporate criteria and may be more likely to rely on internal criteria such as a sense of personal achievement, integrity, balance, etc.” (O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008, p. 734). However, measures of opportunity and success are only given meaning through organizational policies and practices (Young, 1992).

Motivation. Without question, men and women are both motivated to achieve excellence in their career endeavors. In fact, Lepkowski (2009) found there were no gender differences in career advancement aspirations and that although women have been underrepresented in the highest levels of leadership, they do not differ from men in their aspirations to advance. Boatwright and Egidio (2003) studied the influence of psychological variables on female college students’ leadership aspirations and reported that connectedness needs exerted the most important influence on women’s leadership aspirations. They concluded that “these women have not yet been exposed to the traditional, hierarchical leadership model that allows minimal room for leader-employer collaborative relationships” (p. 663). In other words, Boatwright and Egidio suggested that the college women in their study did not yet perceive connectedness needs and leadership aspirations as mutually exclusive. As well, Boatwright and Egidio found that many young women continue to perceive leadership as a male endeavor. They reported that our culture continues to show “masculine images of achievement and status” (p. 664)
and that this absence of female role models acts as a powerful influence on reducing women’s leadership aspirations.

Killeen, López-Zafra, and Eagly (2006) also found that young women more than young men had difficulty envisioning themselves in leadership roles. Although they found no gender differences in their aspirations for leadership roles, the men in their study regarded these roles as “more possible” (p. 319) than did the women. As well, the women worried more about how the leadership positions would influence their close relationships. More women than men believed that participating in leadership roles would limit their chances for good, close relationships. “Facilitation of close relationships was the strongest predictor of perception of possibility of achieving leadership positions” (p. 319). These researchers have shown that women aspire to advance their careers but may not perceive leadership roles as a possibility because the absence of female role models socializes them to believe leaders are men. In addition, Killeen et al., concluded, “This weaker sense of possibility appeared to be rooted in women’s belief that occupancy of leadership roles can produce problems for close relationships” (p. 320).

**Motherhood.** Dominici, Fried, and Zeger (2009) examined the root causes of the persistence of gender inequity in academic leadership and found that for women, the “tenure clock” and the “biological clock” conflict. Consequently, women in academe with children, especially young children, “are less likely to be in a tenure-track job than their male counterparts” (p. 25). By contrast, for men both marriage and children increase the likelihood of career advancement (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007). Through the experiences of senior women faculty who participated in focus groups, Dominici et
al., found that the paths to leadership are slower for women, particularly mothers, and that women were often treated differently than men. For example, women were recruited into positions that led to the top jobs less frequently than were men. As well, when women occupied leadership positions they were not as well recognized or rewarded within their institutions as were men in similar positions. Moreover, men within organizations built substantive collegial relationships with other men and women were often excluded from these networks, preventing them from accessing the skills and connections they need for career advancement: “The decreased access to informal networks appears likely to reduce mentorship and increase marginalization” (p. 27). The authors concluded that institutional change towards organizational cultures that foster a climate of inclusiveness and equality of opportunity is necessary for women’s career advancement.

Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) also found that motherhood imposed a substantial penalty for women in terms of their career advancement opportunities. For example, mothers were rated as less competent and less committed to paid work than non-mothers and consequently were less likely to be recommended for management career tracks. As well, these authors found that mothers, but not fathers, were victims of discriminatory practices related to hiring and salary decisions: “The fact that evaluators offered higher salaries to fathers suggests that cultural beliefs about gendered labor markets and a family wage still shapes the allocation of organizational resources” (p. 1332). These authors suggested that cultural beliefs perpetuate the continuance of gender inequity, resulting in a “motherhood ceiling” (p. 1334) that persists both historically and internationally. This motherhood ceiling is a consequence of society’s continued cultural
perception that mothers are not committed to their jobs and therefore should not be promoted to higher positions.

In addition to studies conducted by Dominici, Fried, and Zeger (2009) and Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007), a third study byWolfinger, Mason, and Goulden (2008) also found marriage and family formation were impediments to the advancement of careers for women but not for the careers of men. They found that concerning dual career issues, women often make career choices to support their husbands’ careers but that the opposite was rarely true. Like Dominici et al., they also found that married women, especially those with young children, were less likely to take tenure-track positions in academe after receiving a PhD. In contrast, single women without children were more successful in obtaining academic careers. These studies concluded that dual-career issues and childcare responsibilities affect women’s opportunities for career advancement, resulting in the persistence of gender inequity in academe.

Okpara, Squillace, and Erondu (2005) studied gender differences in career satisfaction and found that there was a difference in reported career satisfaction between male and female university academics. Female academics earned less and were less satisfied with their salaries than their male colleagues. The authors argued that women encountered conflicting demands between their job and their family responsibilities; however, male academics did not seem to encounter the same conflict and were therefore able to devote the necessary time to engage in activities that led to promotion (i.e., committee work, scholarship). Women academics were dissatisfied with their promotion opportunities, often resulting from the burden of dual responsibilities at work and at home and leaving them less time to devote to their career goals. Female academics,
however, were more satisfied with their relationships with co-workers and their work as teachers. According to Okpara et al., job satisfaction for women seems to result more from a sense of personal accomplishment, a sense of professional challenge, and opportunities to be creative.

Inflexible organizational structures have also been reported as barriers to women’s careers (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). For example, organizational policies and practices have often prevented women from being able to enter and leave their career tracks without substantial financial consequences. According to Hewlett and Luce, these inflexible organizational policies have created an “opt-out revolution” (p. 43) in which women have chosen to leave these types of organizations in order to meet both their home and career responsibilities. Men leave the workforce for a variety of reasons (job change, job training, starting a business) but the factors that pull women away from their careers are most often related to the demands of caring responsibilities. While only 12% of men indicated that they leave the workforce because of their caring responsibilities, 44% of women indicated they did so. The difficulty for women is the re-entry back into the workforce because “on-ramps are few and far between” (p. 46). Additionally, Hewlett and Luce found the glass ceiling is still a barrier for women advancing their careers. Women have continued to experience decreased opportunities and limited recognition, which precludes them from reaching their full potential within organizations. The consequences for failing to recruit and retain qualified women could be detrimental to organizational growth in the form of an untapped talent pool (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

Ledwith and Manfredi (2000) also found that having children was a major influence on the careers of women in university settings. Senior women reported they
accommodated their career development needs around the needs of their families, while the younger women in this study accommodated the needs of their families around the needs of their careers. The authors reported that younger women were more self-confident “in a post-feminist period” (p. 7) and assumed that gender equality had been accomplished. Neither the senior women nor the younger women showed signs of collective networking to further their own interests or the interests of women in the university, suggesting that generational differences may exist. In particular, generational differences may exist in the ways that senior women and younger women perceive the functional role of collective networking efforts to change organizational power structures.

Cheung and Halpern (2010) proposed finding a metaphor of work-family balance that recognizes the integration of work and family roles. Like other researchers, these authors found family and work are both important to women. Women leaders in Cheung and Halpern’s study redefined their own norms for being a “good” mother and being a “good” leader to bring a new meaning to life satisfaction that was determined on their own terms. Women leaders defined success as work and family. They identified family support as a critically important factor in achieving satisfactory integration of their dual roles. Women relied on support from their spouses, extended family members, and hired help to accomplish this integration. Cheung and Halpern also reported that supportive husbands not only provided support and encouragement but also took on a substantial share of the domestic responsibilities.

**Emotional responses to work family conflict.** While the interface between work family conflict has been associated with higher levels of life stress, specific emotional responses to work family conflict has not been well studied. Livingston and
Judge (2008) investigated the effects of gender, emotions, gender role orientation, and work-family attitudes. They found that work family conflict (whether work interfering with family or family interfering with work) was associated with feelings of guilt for both men and women. However, research has shown women experience emotional consequences of work life balance more so than men do. For example, according to Young (1992) women experience “competing urgencies” (p. 148) related to managing the dual responsibilities of domestic work and paid work. Waumsley and Houston (2009) argued that women experience greater work family conflict due to the fact that little has changed in family demands for women and therefore women must have “the right mental approach to balancing family and work” (p. 40). Consequently, women don’t advance in their careers because typically women must choose between a career and a family, a choice many men do not face (Waumsley & Houston, 2009). As well, women have reported feelings of fatigue and burnout due to the conflicting demands of work and home responsibilities that men, in general, don't experience (Okpara, Squillace, & Erondu, 2005).

Women encounter feelings of disappointment and discouragement when they do reach senior positions in organizations because they find the glass ceiling is still in place, “despite years of diversity initiatives” (Hewlett & Luce, 2005, p. 50). Once in management positions women often experience exclusionary practices and become marginalized in male-dominated environments and encounter feelings of isolation and loneliness (Ballenger, 2010; Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000). However, Arthur, Patton, and Giancarlo (2007) found that women with relational support were less likely to experience feelings of anxiety related to the stress of work-life conflict.
Much of the work-life research has assumed that ‘life’ is analogous to ‘family’ and therefore has defined ‘life’ only in relation to the roles of parent or spouse (Hamilton, Gordon, & Whelan-Berry, 2006). However, Hamilton et al., found never-married women without children also experienced work-to-family conflict, often at similar levels to other groups of working women. These authors have advocated for a broader definition of work-life as traditionally defined “to think more broadly about life roles other than spouse and parent that may have implications for conflict” (p. 393).

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature that formed the foundation for this study of women’s career development. The major areas of research identified from the literature were (a) the context of Canada, the structure of Canadian postsecondary education, and the representation of women in the Canadian workforce (b) the role of university presidents and presidential career paths (c) challenges to the advancement of women’s careers, and (c) career development theories, including women’s career theories, as a means to conceptualize the complexities of women’s career development.

As the role of the university and its responsibility to the social contract has evolved, so has the role of the institution’s principal leader. Women continue to encounter challenges in higher education even while they are present in ever increasing numbers on university campuses in both the United States and Canada, in the ranks of students, faculty, and administrators including in the office of the university president. A thorough review of the literature reveals that a gap exists related to the career development experiences of women university presidents in Canada. This study attempted to fill this gap by exploring the phenomenon of developing a career to the
academic presidency through the examination of the perceptions and experiences of Canadian university women presidents. This study’s goal was to use narratives to identify themes and provide insight and a deeper understanding of how this small group of women developed their careers paths to the presidency to help illuminate the pathway for other women to follow.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

The general purpose of this study was to explore and examine the experiences and perceptions of Canadian women presidents as they developed their careers. More specifically, the purpose of this study was to describe the lived experience of Canadian university women presidents as they developed their career paths to the presidency. The focus was on the women’s experiences in the development of their careers and the factors they described as critical influences along their career paths.

For the purposes of this study, a qualitative design was chosen. Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002) have suggested that “qualitative research aims to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans’ lives and social worlds” (p. 717). Patton (2002) has further supported this design, noting that “qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (p. 39). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have defined qualitative research as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3) and noted that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). A qualitative research design was suitable for this study, as the researcher did not manipulate the phenomenon of interest and no control group was used. Additionally, this study sought an in-depth exploration of the women’s views of their career development.
experience as they reflected on their career pathway to the presidency, and the research was centered on the experiences of and the conversations with the women presidents.

Within qualitative research, a number of methods are available. The research method selected for this study was a phenomenological approach. Amedeo (1997) described phenomenological research as a method with a rigorous descriptive approach that offers a method for assessing the difficult phenomena of human experience. The phenomenon in this case was the career development experience of Canadian university women presidents. Moustakas (1994) has recommended this approach for research questions seeking depth, detail, and individual meaning: “Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings” (p. 58). Patton (2002) also has recommended using a phenomenological approach when researchers are focused on the exploration of the meaning of human experience both individually and in a shared capacity. Patton has stated the following:

This requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon – how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others. To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is, they have “lived experience” as opposed to secondhand experience. (p. 104)

In this study, the focus was on the women presidents and the meaning they ascribed to their career development experience in their own words. The major advantage of the phenomenological approach over other qualitative methodologies in this study was the
ability of the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the human experience (of the women) of a particular phenomenon (career development), that may lead to better ways of responding to a social problem, in this case the underrepresentation of women in the office of the university president.

**Research Questions**

The four research questions that guided the study were as follows:

- **Research Question One:** What are the career paths of Canadian university women presidents?
- **Research Question Two:** What do the women identify as the critical influences along their career paths?
- **Research Question Three:** In what ways do the women feel gender did or did not influence their career development experience?
- **Research Question Four:** What advice do the women (presidents) have for other women who may aspire to a career as a university president?

**Study Approval and Ethical Considerations**

In recognition of the ethical considerations inherent in qualitative research, approval for this study was sought from the University of Toledo Social, Behavioral, and Educational Institutional Review Board. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received on July 1, 2011. Confidentiality of the participants was ensured in the following three ways:

- **One:** the signed consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s University of Toledo office.
Two: study codes were used on data collection instruments (audio and text files) in place of identifying information. A separate document linking the study code to the subject’s identifying information was kept in an encrypted and password protected electronic file on the researcher’s computer. A backup copy of the identification file was stored on the university hard drive also encrypted and password protected. Only the principal investigator/faculty advisor, the student researcher, and the professional transcriptionists had access to the data.

Three: after the completion of the dissertation all electronic files related to the study will be transferred to the dissertation advisor for appropriate storage and disposal.

Participant Selection

According to Creswell (2005), in qualitative studies the intent is not to generalize to a population, rather “to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (p. 203). Therefore, to best understand the phenomenon of the experience of career development among Canadian university women presidents, the researcher used what Patton (2002) described as “a common qualitative sampling strategy: studying a relatively small number of special cases that are successful at something and therefore a good source of lessons learned” (p.7). The participants in this study were selected as a convenient sample of women who were serving in a Canadian university (as of July 2011) in an executive leadership position (i.e., president, principal, rector, [including acting or interim]) as described in the membership directory of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC).
Creswell (2007) has recommended researchers interview from 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon under study. Patton (2002) has offered another viewpoint regarding adequate sample size:

There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources. (p. 244)

Rubin and Rubin (1995) have discussed two principles with regard to qualitative interviewing and sample size. The first is completeness, “you choose people who are knowledgeable about the subject and talk with them until what you hear provides an overall sense of the meaning of the concepts, theme, or process” (p. 73). And the second is saturation, the point at which no additional information is being learned. Kvale (1996) concurred with the concept of completeness when he wrote:

In current interview studies, the number of interviews tends to be around 15 (plus or minus 10). This number may be due to a combination of the time and resources available for the investigation and of the law of diminishing returns. (p. 102)

Given that the purpose of this study was to explore and describe in detail the lived experience of the women as they developed their careers and not to make statistical generalizations or test hypotheses of differences among groups, the richness of the information collected from the participants and the quality of the analysis was determined to be more meaningful to validity than the size of the sample.
At the time the study was conducted (August through October, 2011), the potential participants represented 17 of the 95 AUCC member institutions. The researcher personally contacted all 17 potential participants directly or through their executive assistants (via telephone) based on contact information provided by the AUCC. Interested participants were sent an electronic letter of invitation (see Appendix A) with additional information about the study’s purpose, data collection and storage procedures, expected time commitment, potential risks and benefits, and a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix B). The researcher made a follow-up phone call to the potential participants who did not initially respond and then sent an email one week later. If potential participants still failed to respond, the researcher sent an additional follow-up email one month later. Of the 17 women leaders invited to participate in the study, eight accepted the invitation, eight declined to participate, and one did not respond. The final study participants represented a diverse range of institutional types (both small and large institutions) and were situated across Canada.

**Data Collection**

In a phenomenological study, evidence is derived from first-person reflections of life experiences therefore data was collected from in-depth, individual interviews. The advantage of using qualitative interviewing in this study was that it gave the participants an opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words. “It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience” (Seidman, 1998, p. 1). After a focused review of the literature, a draft of an interview guide was developed (see Appendix B). The semi-structured probing questions were
designed to extract detailed information about the presidents’ career pathways and to encourage deep and rich descriptions of their career development experiences. The questions were reviewed by an expert panel, consisting of a former Canadian university woman president, a senior administrator in a Canadian university who has career aspirations to become a university president, and an experienced researcher who has used qualitative interviewing in her research about American university women presidents. The interview questions were selected specifically to give the participants the opportunity to speak to and expand on the research questions.

After receiving IRB approval in July 2011, all 17 of the women presidents (as described in the previous section) were invited to participate in the study. After confirmation of participation, the researcher scheduled 60-minute interview appointments with each study participant and an informed consent form (see Appendix C) was sent electronically to each participant. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and that they could withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences by notifying the researcher. Eight interviews were conducted by the researcher between August and October, 2011. Three of the interviews were conducted in person, in the office of the president on her university campus; four interviews were conducted via telephone in a conference room on the campus of the University of Toledo; and one interview was conducted via Skype in the office of the researcher, also on the campus of the University of Toledo. Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes. Subsequently, a professional transcription service was used to transcribe the audio texts verbatim.
After each interview, the researcher sent an electronic note to each participant thanking her for participating in the interview. After the interviews were transcribed and the analysis was completed, an electronic copy of her interview transcript was sent to each participant. Included in this document was a list of the identified themes and quoted material, in context, from her individual interview for her review and approval. At this point, participants were provided an opportunity to clarify, elaborate, or omit any remarks they had made during the interview process. During this process, known as member checking, (Creswell, 2005) participants requested only minor grammatical changes to the transcripts.

**Computer-aided software.** Following a review of the literature of qualitative research design, and following the investigation of a variety of qualitative data analysis tools, the researcher determined that the use of a computer software program for storing, coding, and organizing the data would be beneficial to the process of data analysis, especially considering the potential volume of interview text. The main advantage of the computer software is that it can provide time saving elements to assist with data analysis including the ability to retrieve and code data in a variety of ways. Weitzman (1999) offered this advice for using computer software: “Software for qualitative data analysis can benefit the researcher in terms of speed, consistency, rigor, and access to analytic methods not available by hand. Software, however, is not a replacement for methodological training” (p. 1241). Creswell (2005) has agreed that computer software is a valuable tool for data analysis but does not perform the data analysis, “Qualitative computer programs do not analyze the data for you. However, they do provide several convenient features that facilitate your data analysis” (p. 235). Other authors have
debated the advantages and disadvantages of using computer-based qualitative data analysis software (Brown, 2002; Creswell, 2005; Lu & Shulman, 2008; MacMillan & Koenig, 2004; St. John & Johnson, 2000; Webb, 1999) with the majority concluding that software programs can assist the researcher with storing, organizing, coding, and retrieving data, and confirming that the biggest advantage is related to time saving with manual tasks. A disadvantage identified is that time is also required to learn which programs are best suited to the research study and subsequently time spent in learning how to use the program to achieve the best results. Additionally, cost and access to initial and ongoing training are reported as important considerations.

Another issue in using computer-based data analysis software, identified by Weitzman (1999), was the potential disadvantage of the researcher being removed from, or less connected to, the original data. Weitzman reported that some researchers fear that working with qualitative data on a computer program will distance them “from the feeling of deep immersion in the data that comes from reading and flipping through piles of paper” (p. 1259). However, Weitzman also argued that many of the features of the computer software may actually allow the researcher to become closer to the data, for example: enabling large amounts of data to be seen on the screen at all times; showing search results by scrolling to the highlighted location or “hit” and permitting the text segment to be seen in its full context, thus allowing the researcher to access related data quickly. Indeed, Weitzman concluded that the main benefit of using computer-based data analysis software, is that, “using software speeds up analysis tasks a lot” (p. 1259).

Welsh (2002) specifically described using the computer software program NVivo in the qualitative data analysis process. Her study is particularly relevant to the present study as
she also used interview transcripts as her main source of data. She chose the NVivo software program after attending day courses on different qualitative data analysis software products. The reasons for ultimately choosing NVivo over the other software products was because it was new at that time and had addressed some of the problems encountered by earlier versions of the products, and because it was easy to use. Other advantages were that NVivo could import documents directly from a word processing package and code these documents directly on the computer screen. Welsh recommended using NVivo primarily as an organizing tool, “Qualitative data analysis software is designed to carry out administrative tasks of organizing the data more efficiently and should therefore be exploited to the full on this basis” (p. 5). The College of Nursing at the University of Toledo, where the researcher is a faculty member, had recently purchased the most recent version of the NVivo software, NVivo9. The researcher attended a two-day live training workshop to develop the necessary skills and expertise to be able to use NVivo9 software as an analysis tool. As an additional benefit of acquiring this expertise, the researcher will be able to act as a resource to other researchers at the University of Toledo that may require assistance in using NVivo as a qualitative data analysis tool.

Data Analysis Procedures

Patton (2002) has described the process of qualitative analysis as the transformation of data into findings. “The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data” (p. 432). A number of authors have described guidelines for analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2005; Kvale, 1996; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Sanders, 2003; Seidman, 1998) and all agree there is
no absolute formula for this process. Creswell (2005) has suggested six steps for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data, and these six steps were used as a framework for guiding the data analysis in this study:

Step 1: Prepare and organize the data.
Step 2: Explore and code the data.
Step 3: Describe and develop themes.
Step 4: Represent and report findings.
Step 5: Interpret findings.
Step 6: Validate the accuracy of the findings.

Each interview was digitally recorded and subsequently downloaded as an audio file onto the researcher’s desktop computer. These audio files were assigned a unique identification number and uploaded to a professional transcription service’s website. Next, the audio files were transcribed by the transcription service and placed into MS Word text documents and electronically returned to the researcher. The MS Word text documents were assigned the same study code as their corresponding audio files, and both the audio files and the text documents were imported into the NVivo9 software program for the purposes of backup storage and analysis. The researcher then read the transcripts completely approximately five times to get a broad sense of the data and made notes of key words and significant phrases to record emerging ideas and insights.

Next, the researcher initially coded the text. Coding is a process that begins to organize and make sense of the data by locating specific words or phrases, referred to as “text segments” that are related to the phenomena, and assigning a label to them. Each interview transcript was individually coded line-by-line, producing hundreds of coded
text segments. The initial coding was organized by interview question and produced a total of 28 initial codes. Redundant codes were merged, and resultant codes were aggregated into a hierarchy producing what NVivo9 refers to as “parent nodes” (general categories at the top of a hierarchical structure) and “child nodes” (more specific subcategories related to the parent node). For example, one participant discussed the positions she held prior to the presidency: “I had a traditional academic career path. I started as a faculty member, then moved to department chair, then dean, and finally I was a vice-president prior to my taking on the presidency.” This text segment was coded within the parent node “Career Path.” Another participant described the lack of intentionality of her career path to the presidency: “It wasn’t an aspiration I held, as I advanced forward - it was never a conscious thing to go for the presidency.” This text segment was coded within the parent node “Career Path” and a child node was created entitled “Unintentional Destination.”

The researcher continued to code each of the eight transcripts, looking for meaningful patterns or themes across interviews. Coding and building categories continued until no new themes or subthemes were identified and saturation was reached. Using this process, data was ultimately reduced to four main themes: (a) career path variations, (b) critical factors influencing advancement, (c) challenges along the career path, and (d) advice for women pursuing leadership roles. The four themes were common among all eight participants’ descriptions of their career development experiences. When discovering themes, Creswell (2005) has suggested that researchers should “identify the five to seven themes by examining codes that the participants most
frequently discuss, are unique or surprising, have the most evidence to support them, or those you might expect to find when studying the phenomenon” (p. 239).

After the data were analyzed, a summary narrative of the findings was constructed in response to the research questions. Included in the narrative report were direct quotations or exemplary text segments from the interview data that provided support for the identified themes.

To interpret the findings, the researcher created formulated meanings (Sanders, 2003). For example, the following three text segments were consolidated into one formulated meaning:

Text Segment 1: “I really hadn’t started out thinking of academics, however, it is not something I am particularly proud of because it was a lot of randomness. A lot of stumbling into something I had never thought of.”

Text Segment 2: “It [the presidency] never occurred to me. It never occurred to me.”

Text Segment 3: “I’ve never planned my career at all. It was not a long-term goal of mine to become a university president.”

These text segments resulted in the following formulated meaning: “The career development process can occur serendipitously.”

To validate the accuracy of the findings, the researcher sent each participant an electronic copy of her individual interview transcript. In addition, a summary of the identified themes and supporting quotes extracted from her individual interview was included for her review.
Summary

The researcher chose the methodological approach of a qualitative design because the purpose of the study was exploratory in nature and understanding oriented. The interview process provided the necessary perspective for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of Canadian university women presidents related to their career development. The inductive coding process allowed the researcher to examine and analyze the data, identifying words and phrases that supported the emergent themes and ideas. Chapter Three has described the research design, participant selection procedures, data collection methods, steps used for data analysis, and strategies for ensuring accuracy and validity of the findings. Chapter Four provides a summary of the findings from the data analysis.
Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to gain a better understanding of Canadian university women presidents’ career development experiences and the factors that critically influenced their career paths. The four research questions that guided this study were as follows:

Research Question One: What are the career paths of Canadian university women presidents?

Research Question Two: What did the women identify as the critical influences along their career paths?

Research Question Three: In what ways do the women feel gender did or did not influence their career development experience?

Research Question Four: What advice do the women (presidents) have for other women who may aspire to a career as a university president?

These research questions were answered by analyzing participants’ reflections on the development of their career paths to the presidency. This chapter presents the findings of the study and is divided into three primary sections: (a) description of the participants, (b) answers to each research question, and (c) summary. The researcher identified themes within the transcript data through the process of data reduction and analysis using NVivo9 qualitative data analysis software, and these themes have been organized in this chapter according to each research question with which they most closely align. When appropriate, quotations and descriptive examples in the participants’ own words have been included to illustrate and support the emergent themes. To
preserve confidentiality, participants were assigned codes: P1 = Participant 1, P2 = Participant 2, etc. As an additional method of ensuring participant confidentiality, some participant descriptors were omitted or slightly modified. However, as much profile information as possible has been reported within the results without revealing the identity of individual participants or their institutions.

**Description of Participants**

At the time of the interviews, the average age of the participants was 56.1\(^1\) years, and the majority of the participants were married without children. The majority of the participants held doctoral degrees in academic disciplines from Canadian institutions. Their years of university experience prior to attaining the presidency ranged from 5 years to 25 years, and the majority had served in an academic vice-president position immediately prior to assuming the presidency. The average tenure of their current position as president was 4.8 years.

**Description of Theme Development**

At the beginning of the coding process, the researcher used the interview questions to form the basic structure of the data coding (i.e., a priori codes). For example, using NVivo9 qualitative data analysis software, “parent nodes” (NVivo nomenclature used to describe general categories at the top of a hierarchical coding structure) were assigned to text segments that represented each of the four interview questions: (a) career paths, (b) opportunities and challenges, (c) critical incidents, and (d) advice. Important statements and phrases from the interview transcripts were identified

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\(^1\) The age of one participant was unavailable.
and coded at each of these parent nodes. As the coding process continued, subcategories emerged, and “child nodes” (more specific categories grouped under the parent nodes) were developed in vivo (i.e., in the words of the participants). The coding process continued in this way until no new nodes were identified. As redundant codes were merged (collapsed) and the data reduced, general patterns and themes emerged. A theme was identified based on two criteria: (a) if the majority of the participants provided information related to the theme and (b) if a concept appeared to be interesting, unique, or surprising (Creswell, 2005). An example of theme development from the coding process using NVivo9 qualitative data analysis software is shown in Table 3.

Findings for Research Question One

The following section presents the findings related to Research Question One: “What were the career paths of Canadian university women presidents?” Canadian university women presidents held a variety of career positions prior to entering the academy. Although all eight entered the academy initially through a faculty position, they did not follow a single career pathway to the presidency.

Career positions prior to entering the academy. All participants held career positions prior to entering the academy. The total number of years of work experience prior to entering the academy ranged from 5 years to 25 years. The career positions held prior to embarking on academic careers were classified into two general categories: (a) education and (b) professional. Table 4 illustrates the sector in which participants worked, their prior positions, and their total years of work experience before entering the academy as faculty members.
**Table 3**

*Example of Coding Qualitative Data Using NVivo9*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent node</th>
<th>Child node</th>
<th>Text segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career path</td>
<td>Academic path</td>
<td>“I began as a faculty member, then I became chair of a department and then dean. I was there four years—I was one year as a faculty member and moved into a chair very early in my career. I was four years as a chair of a department and then moved into another university where I became a dean. I was five years as a dean and then I moved into a vice presidential position, Vice President Academic Development, and I was seven years in that position before I became president.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career path</td>
<td>Academic path</td>
<td>“I certainly had a traditional career path.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career path</td>
<td>Administrative path</td>
<td>“I was involved in management positions for quite a few years; my teaching and research career was very short lived.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career path</td>
<td>Administrative path</td>
<td>“I didn’t have a traditional academic career because I didn’t come up through the ranks of being a department head, and then a Dean, then a Vice-President.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career path</td>
<td>Unintentional destination</td>
<td>“It wasn’t an aspiration I held, as I advanced forward—it was never a conscious thing to go for the presidency.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career path</td>
<td>Unintentional destination</td>
<td>“However, it [planning a career path the presidency] is not something I am particularly proud of because it was a lot of randomness—sort of stumbling into something I had never thought of.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Sector, Position Held Immediately Prior to Entering the Academy, and Total Number of Years of Work Experience before Entering the Academy as a Faculty Member*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant no.</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Prior position</th>
<th>Total years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Education (K-12)</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Education (K-12)</td>
<td>Elementary school teacher</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Public servant</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Education (PSE)</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. P = “Participant.”  PSE = Post-secondary education*

*Education.* Five of the eight participants worked in the education sector--two as graduate students, two in K-12 education, and one in another branch of post-secondary education. Of the two participants who worked within K-12 education, one served in an administrative position, and the other served as a classroom teacher. The participant who worked in post-secondary education (PSE) had spent extensive time (14 years) in an administrative capacity before changing course and entering the university in a faculty position. The participants from the education sector spent an average of 7.8 years before entering the university in a faculty position.

*Professional.* Three participants worked in professional careers before entering the university--one in the private sector and two in the public sector. The participants from the professional sector spent an average of 11.7 years before entering the academy as a faculty member.

*Career positions within the academy.* All participants spent a relatively short amount of time as a faculty member (range = 1-6 years, \( M = 2.5 \) years). Five participants
spent only one year as a faculty member before advancing to administrative positions. Three participants spent 4, 5, and 6 years, respectively, as a faculty member before advancing to administrative positions.

**Pathways to the presidency.** Participants followed pathways to the presidency through two principal routes: (a) academic and (b) administrative. A visual representation of the pathways that emerged from the findings are depicted in Figure 2.

**Academic.** Traditionally the pathway to the presidency has been through a predictable sequence of positions on a hierarchical academic career ladder: (a) faculty member, (b) department chair, (c) associate dean, (d) dean, (e) vice president, and (f) president. For the purposes of this study, academic pathways were defined as those pathways that included department or program chair and dean, followed by a position as a vice president (academic or research). Six out of eight participants followed the traditional academic pathway.

**Figure 2.** Academic and administrative pathways to the presidency.
Table 5 shows that within the academic pathway, the mean number of positions held between becoming a faculty member and assuming the presidency was 3.1.

**Table 5**

*Number of Positions Held between Becoming a Faculty Member and Assuming the Presidency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>Tot.</th>
<th>M.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. P = “Participant.”*

Table 6 shows that within the academic pathway, the mean number of years of university experience prior to assuming the presidency was 18.

**Table 6**

*Number of Years of University Experience Prior to Assuming the Presidency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>Tot.</th>
<th>M.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>108</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. P = “Participant.”*

**Administrative.** The data analysis revealed a second pathway to the presidency.

For the purposes of this study, administrative pathways were defined as those pathways that met four criteria: (a) spending a short time (e.g., one year) as a faculty member, (b) bypassing the dean position, (c) holding positions that emphasized business aspects of the university rather than faculty/student aspects, and (d) holding fewer positions than in the academic pathway, between becoming a faculty member and assuming the presidency. Based on these criteria, two out of the eight participants followed the administrative pathway. Within the administrative pathway, the mean number of positions held between becoming a faculty member and assuming the presidency was 1.5 (see Table 5). Within
the administrative pathway, the mean number of years of university experience prior to assuming the presidency was 12 (see Table 6).

**Unintentional destination.** Data analysis revealed that career development experiences are subjective interpretations that consist of an individual’s passions, values, and beliefs. Additionally, an individual’s perception of his or her career development experience may be influenced by a combination of internal factors (e.g., self-confidence and personal achievement) as well as external factors (e.g., serendipity and the passage of time). While the pathway to the presidency was marked both by similarities and by differences, the data uncovered that none began her career with a conscious plan to become a university president. All the participants began their academic careers in traditional faculty roles and then followed a variety of career channels; however, without exception, all the channels that participants followed did not involve a conscious, deliberate career plan leading to the presidency. Instead, after entering the university environment, participants accepted administrative positions with increasing responsibilities that helped them develop their leadership skills and ultimately, though unintentionally, placed them on a career pathway to the presidency.

The descriptions of their career experience showed that they perceived their career paths as “evolving and unfolding” rather than consciously and deliberately planned. Each statement that participants made describing their career development experience was studied carefully before formulating its meaning. Table 7 illustrates an example of the process of creating formulated meanings from important statements related to careers paths to identify the theme of unintentional destination.
Table 7

Participants’ Comments about the Evolving and Unfolding Nature of Their Career

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text segment</th>
<th>Formulated meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I didn’t really plan for it, but I really enjoyed working in this institution and I was very passionate about my job.”</td>
<td>Passion is a component of an individual’s career development experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It wasn’t an aspiration I held, as I advanced forward - it was never a conscious thing, I’m going to go for the presidency.”</td>
<td>The process of career development can occur without a deliberate or conscious plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[My career path] “It evolved and unfolded. It was more a matter of having - of enjoying doing certain things, and really throwing myself into them, and then finding I was good at them, having a good experience doing them, and then having a next opportunity come along.”</td>
<td>Self-confidence and personal achievement are integral aspects of the career development experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I really hadn’t started out thinking of academics, however, it is not something I am particularly proud of because it was a lot of randomness. A lot of stumbling into something I had never thought of.”</td>
<td>The career development process can occur serendipitously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[The presidency] “It never occurred to me. It never occurred to me.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’ve never planned my career at all. It was not a long-term goal of mine to become a university president.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I had already decided that the university wasn’t going to be my professional activity. I’m interested in all kinds of things, so I don’t quite fit the profile.”</td>
<td>The career development experience is unique to an individual’s own values and beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I didn’t set out to be president. I set out to teach and wanted to stay out of all administration.”</td>
<td>The experience of career development is a process that evolves and may change over time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resistance to academic administration. Data analysis revealed that for two participants, the pathway to the presidency was not only unplanned and unintentional but also actively resisted. One participant perceived that she did not “fit the profile” of an academic and therefore discounted the possibility that she could successfully pursue an academic career in the university. She believed that because she held a variety of interests and did not maintain a narrowly focused research agenda, she was disqualified.
from pursuing a career as an academic. Only when a mentor persuaded her to consider a faculty position in the university did she begin to see in herself the potential of a career as a university professor. She stated:

> When I graduated from the university, I had already decided that the university wasn’t going to be my professional activity. Usually, people who recruit university professors are looking for a straightforward path and also publications in a very specialized area, and they want stability and consistency in that path. I’m interested in all kinds of things, so I don’t quite fit the profile.

Although her career path ultimately led her to the position of a university president, her initial resistance to the development of an academic career was based on her personal values and beliefs about the qualifications and requirements necessary to pursue a career in an academic environment.

A second participant reported that she not only felt reluctant but also actively resisted accepting a position within academic administration. She had spent more than two decades in the public sector in an administrative role. She worked in a number of positions with increasing responsibilities that ultimately led her to obtaining the top position in the organization in which she worked. Although she enjoyed her job, she felt she was no longer satisfied with the expectations to raise money and the responsibilities that accompanied being the ultimate decision maker for the organization. Her perception was that an administrative career was no longer satisfying to her. Her desire was to return to university to pursue a doctorate and an academic career as a university professor. After completing her PhD and accepting a faculty position in the university, she was almost immediately recruited to assume administrative responsibilities because
she was recognized for her leadership skills and abilities. However, even though she clearly possessed administrative competence, she was reluctant to lead: “I did not put my name forward. I didn’t have any aspirations to do academic administration at all. I can’t say that I ever had designs on the seat of power.” Although she had not charted a course to become a university president, she possessed a passion for learning and teaching and acknowledged that she enjoys her job as a university president “most days.”

All participants confirmed their collective belief that there is no singular pathway to the presidency although they all had academic experience as teachers and scholars. A management-focused trajectory aimed at developing the kinds of leadership skills necessary to become highly effective academic administrators (e.g., managing budgets, building teams, and developing strategic plans) was evident in only two of the eight presidential pathways. More apparent was the well-trodden path of predictable progression through sequential rungs of the traditional academic career ladder. Regardless of whether participants’ took an academic or an administrative pathway, their ability to serve as administrators, along with their strong desire to accomplish goals, facilitate change, and create a meaningful vision, characterized their career decisions and defined their career development experiences--their pathways were opportunistic rather than strategically planned.

**Findings for Research Question Two**

The following section presents the findings related to Research Question Two: “What did the women identify as the critical influences along their career paths?” Analysis of the data showed that the critical factors that influenced Canadian university women presidents’ career behaviors toward advancement included (a) internal
characteristics (including job enjoyment, seeking challenges, mission driven, and love of learning), (b) family background, (c) experiences within the university environment, and (d) mentoring relationships and role models.

**Internal characteristics.** The data analysis showed that internal characteristics of the participants were motivating factors that influenced their career development toward advancement (see Table 8). For the purposes of this study, internal characteristics were defined as personal traits, desires, or goals that the participants discussed in their responses to the interview questions. Although the participants reported that a variety of factors influenced their career decision making, common characteristics emerged among them. For example, five of the eight participants shared specific statements supporting the formulated meaning that job enjoyment and seeking challenges were critical factors that influenced their career decision making. Additionally, four participants shared specific statements supporting the formulated meaning that they were internally motivated by a strong sense of mission and vision. As well, three participants described the powerful impact that the activity of reading and having a love of learning played in their career development experiences.

**Job enjoyment.** The data analysis identified specific statements that showed that the participants enjoyed their jobs and that their careers had brought them a deep sense of personal fulfillment, not merely job satisfaction. They described their career experiences with words such as “rewarding,” “special,” “privileged,” “thrilling,” “wonderful,” and “amazing.” The participants clearly articulated a humble appreciation for the responsibility inherent in their role as a university president. Their statements specifically described their deep desire to be viewed as positive role models by students
Table 8

**Internal Characteristics that Influenced Career Behaviors Toward Advancement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text segment</th>
<th>Formulated meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I think I decided that although I did love research and teaching, it was kind of slow. I like the speed of all the things you have to do as an administrator. I like all the decisions you have to make, the opportunities you have for new projects and to build things. I found I not only liked it [the job], but people seemed to think I was good at it.”</td>
<td>Job enjoyment is a critical factor that influences career decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I always wanted to study more. I wanted to come back and do a doctorate and teach.”</td>
<td>Love of learning is a critical factor that influences career behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I was doing public service work and I found it exciting at first, but then I found it very boring, because it was repetitive and I wasn’t excited anymore. So when the offer came to come to [the university] it was a Godsend because as soon as I landed here, I just flourished. I had finally found what I was looking for.”</td>
<td>Job enjoyment and seeking challenge are both critical factors in the career development process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I wanted to be challenged to do more, I loved committee work after that kind of period being a graduate student, sort of being on the fringes of efficacy and influence. Now I actually got a chance to make things happen, and to be able to shape outcomes.”</td>
<td>Job enjoyment and seeking challenge are both critical factors in the career development process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am a very faith-based person. I believe that I was called to do this, which is really hard to quantify, but I know I was being asked to make a difference here and I think that I’m doing that.”</td>
<td>Having a personal sense of mission (i.e., being mission driven) is a critical factor that influences career decision making.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“And every time I read something that was interesting, fiction or nonfiction, I thought there’s a much larger world out there and I want to part of it. So, for me, it was important to go to university because I wanted to see what was possible.”</td>
<td>Love of learning is a critical factor that influences career behaviors.</td>
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and others in the university community. Participants were passionately committed to their work as academic administrators and keenly aware that they were among the first women to achieve higher-level academic or executive positions. For example, one participant was the first woman at her university to serve on the senior administrative
leadership team, another was the first woman at her university to serve as an academic
dean, another was the first female vice-president, and the overwhelming majority of
participants were the first women to serve as a university president at their respective
institutions. Although the participants provided examples of their passion and dedication
to their jobs, they also acknowledged the inherent difficulties of the role of a university
president. Some described the personal sacrifices they made in advancing their careers to
this position. For example, one participant described a long period of a “commuting
marriage” between herself and her husband necessitated because of dual careers in
different parts of the country. She described the experience as “lonely.” Other
participants discussed the sacrifices they felt their families had made because the
presidential role requires that they attend university functions in the evenings and on the
weekends.

Seeking challenges. A second common internal characteristic that emerged
through the data analysis was the participants’ strong desire to be challenged. Once they
had achieved mastery in one area (e.g., developing a new program), they were compelled
to pursue new and even more challenging opportunities. This characteristic propelled
them in their careers as they continued to seek more diverse experiences. In doing so,
they acquired the requisite knowledge, honed the essential skills, and developed the self-
confidence required for their leadership positions. Participants consistently remarked that
they had regularly faced adversity in their jobs but found excitement in being the “fixer,”
the “builder,” the “saver.” Not only was challenge seeking an important characteristic in
propelling participants toward opportunities for career advancement, but it was also an
impetus for making career-changing decisions. As one participant explained:
I wanted to be challenged to do more...I think I'm always just sort of going into places where I'm not quite prepared, don’t really know what I'm doing because I like challenge, and then that kind of catapults me into another level of learning, and trying to master something, so I can do a decent job of it.

The participants exhibited an innovative spirit and a willingness to accept positions with increasing responsibilities because they had an appetite for challenge, an excitement for change, and a “passion for action.”

**Mission driven.** A third common internal characteristic distilled through the data analysis was their drive to fulfill a personal sense of mission. Participants were inspired in their careers by a sense of service to others, and they described this as “a sense of mission,” “a sense of privilege,” and a sense of responsibility to “make a difference.” Their statements revealed they were motivated toward achieving excellence and consistently referred to the role of their family in instilling this innate sense of service to others as a fundamental core value. These participants were not motivated by position titles or status on the career ladder; rather, they were steered by an innate sense of purpose toward personal achievement. For example, one participant described her sense of mission and vision in this way:

Certainly part of what drives me is a sense of mission. It’s that service piece, but also I want to create an educational environment that’s just a fantastic experience for young people and people returning to it, and I believe in education as fundamental to saving the world – it’s really corny, but I really do think it’s the transformational set of tools.


**Love of learning.** The fourth common internal characteristic discovered through data analysis was that a love of learning and the influence of reading were critical factors in their career development experience. Participants were motivated toward personal achievement by the empowering effects of learning that ultimately led them to pursue advanced education. Their statements revealed that they felt they never “knew enough” and that they were inspired to “learn more.” One participant, in particular, described the influence that reading books had on inspiring her “to dream” and to imagine a world beyond her own experiences. She described the exhilaration she felt when she read about other people’s lives and how their stories moved her to expand the horizons of what might be possible in her own life. The participants’ descriptions showed a powerful connection between the activity of reading and the process of learning in fostering their ambitions to seek out and experience educational opportunities. The powerful impact of reading and a love of learning was not only evident in developing their aspirations, but it was also a critical component in their career decision making. One participant reported how her love of learning influenced her career decision making:

> I wasn’t really thinking about what my career was going to be until really late. I wasn’t even thinking about being an academic. I was just thinking about how I really loved learning, and then I started to get doctoral fellowships and was given courses to teach, and I loved it.

**Family background.** In addition to the internal characteristics of the participants, the data analysis showed that their family background comprised a second critical factor that influenced their career development experience. For the purposes of this study, “family background” was defined as participants’ personal experiences or
recollections that involved interactions with family members (e.g., parents, grandparents, siblings). These experiences or recollections related to family background were grouped into three primary categories: (a) parental educational background, (b) role models, and (c) encouragement and support.

**Parental educational background.** Six participants reported information about the educational level of their parents. Of these six, only one participant reported that her parents had completed education beyond the high school level. Two of the remaining five participants reported that both parents had completed only an elementary school education. The remaining three participants reported that at least one parent had completed high school. Both parents of one participant had completed education only at an elementary level but still valued education: “My dad...had a grade six...my mom had a grade eight...[but] education was really important for them.” Another participant reported that “neither of them [her parents] had high school, and it was their big desire that their children be much better educated than they.” A third participant reported that “my mom finished grade eight, my dad finished high school.” Even though the parents of the participants had personally experienced a limited amount of formal education, they nevertheless were successful at instilling the core value of education in their children.

Of particular interest was the manner in which the parental values of education were transmitted to the participants despite the low level of education that the parents had attained. For these participants, it was not just the presence or absence of parental education that critically influenced their career decision making; rather, it was the importance that their parents placed on education as a core value and how this value was transmitted to the participants. The data analysis showed that the value of education was
transmitted through three circumstantial contexts. The first context was the physical absence (death) of one parent. For example, the academic career of one participant’s mother remained influential even though she [the mother] had died when the participant was a child. Despite being physically absent from the participant’s life, her mother played an important role in helping her to internalize the value of higher education. “My mom sadly died when I was young, but she had been an academic. So, there was probably some residual history there.”

A second context through which the value of higher education was transmitted was the indirect influence of one or both parents. For example, one participant reported that her parents were supportive but did not provide active encouragement toward participating in higher education. When asked whether her family encouraged education, she replied, “Not that much. My parents...didn’t go to university, they were working folks. Although they encouraged me to do well in school, the university world was not something that they understood very well.” Another participant also described how the value of higher education was transmitted indirectly when she reflected that her mother was “a real reader” and was pleased that she went to university, but a university education wasn’t necessarily an aspiration that her family had for her, “It was my aspiration.”

A third context through which the value of higher education was transmitted was the unspoken influence of one or both parents. For several participants, going to university was not the result of encouragement or choice; it was simply an unspoken expectation. One participant reported how her father emphasized the value of education despite his limited amount of formal education:
My father...had a grade four education, and yet we never questioned that we would be going to university. It was never an option; it was just a given--not if but when and where. So he supported that [education] as a value although it wasn’t a learned experience for him.

For these participants, unspoken expectations and the importance of education were integral threads woven into the fabric of the family’s core values. The data analysis revealed that parental educational levels provided both direct and indirect influences on the participants’ career decision making, and, for some, the echos of their parents’ academic lives reverberated within the family context and were communicated despite the absence of their physical presence.

**Role models.** Three participants specifically commented on the critical influence of role models among their family members. These participants described the strength of character among their family role models as well as their commitment to values that reflected social change and positive social contributions. For example, one participant described the “big impact” of having had a working mother who was successful in a very male-dominated field. Another described her mother as “the strongest person I know,” and despite the fact that she did not work outside the home, was an influential role model in setting an example for her about what could be achieved in life. Another participant discussed her grandmother as an inspirational role model in her life because she was “essentially an activist throughout her life.” In all these examples, participants reported that their parents and other family members modeled the importance of core values, including working hard, holding high expectations, making social contributions, and serving others.
Encouragement and support. Three types of support emerged from the data analysis. The first type of support was active encouragement, in which participants received positive and affirming messages about their academic and vocational goals. The second type of support was passive or neutral encouragement, in which participants witnessed parents or family members engaging in activities that fostered the pursuit of knowledge and self-development. The third type was active discouragement, in which one participant reacted or rebelled against negative messages by becoming even more determined to be successful in her chosen career. Regardless of the source of encouragement and support and the type (e.g., positive/negative, direct/indirect), participants perceived that encouragement and support fostered a self-confidence and a sense of self-worth that were critical to their career success.

Participants derived encouragement and support from a number of different family members, including parents, grandparents, siblings, and others. Seven out of the eight participants reported that they received encouragement and support from their parents. Of these seven, five participants reported that the encouragement they received was positive and direct; however, one participant reported being indirectly encouraged, and one was actually discouraged from pursuing advanced education.

Several participants reported that they were encouraged to view education as a means of avoiding poverty and experiencing more productive, fulfilling lives. For example, one participant reported that her parents knew that education was “certainly a way out of poverty.” Another participant also reported that her parents believed that education was a means of achieving economic independence and that education would “open doors toward a better future.” A third participant described her parents’
encouragement this way: “She [her mother] loved learning. She loved reading, and both she and my dad really pushed us to achieve academically.” This participant acknowledged that her parents were living out their own dreams through their children and that process served as a kind of encouragement.

Even though most participants reported that their parents encouraged them to pursue an education, one participant reported that her parents’ actually discouraged her from pursuing an academic career because they did not have an understanding of the university environment. She stated:

They didn’t encourage me to do that [pursue an academic career]. They thought that it wasn’t prudent because then I wouldn’t get a job. My mother even told me at one point that I had wasted my life because, for them, being successful in life meant, you know, being a doctor or a lawyer.

Despite this kind of active discouragement the participant continued along an academic career path that ultimately led her to become the president of a university.

**Experiences within the university environment.** The data analysis uncovered that experiences within the university environment comprised a third critical factor that influenced the participants’ career decision making. Six of the participants acknowledged the benefits of having educational opportunities and described the powerful impact of the university experience on their aspiration to pursue academic careers. One participant, for example, recounted a day when she was a student and found herself in the building that housed the offices of the academic administration. She recalled that there were “no women, only men” in the administrative offices, except for the secretaries, yet she proclaimed to herself in that moment that she would one day
occupy a leadership position “in one of those offices.” She recalled that although the moment had been fleeting and had occurred many years before, she nevertheless described the experience as a critical incident in the development of her career aspirations.

The university experience provided for some participants a freedom of opportunities (e.g., opportunities to explore career options, opportunities to engage in self-development, opportunities to develop leadership skills). One participant reported that it was not until she entered the university environment that she realized the countless number of opportunities that were available to her there. She described how the university experience influenced her aspirations despite her economic circumstances:

I went to university, and fell in love with being in university. I didn’t come from a moneyed background, but what I found there was opportunity. You can learn whatever you want to learn and explore whatever you want to explore. I found it just extraordinary. I wasn’t thinking about being an academic; I was just thinking about how I really loved learning.

Although most of the participants reported that they had encountered positive experiences within the university environment, one participant recalled that she encountered a negative experience within the university environment. She described a troubling incident that had occurred during the time she was a university student. She reflected that the experience had been a learning opportunity for her that demonstrated her own resolve in turning a potentially demoralizing experience into one she remembered as significantly affecting the development of her resilience and one she recalled as a critical incident influencing her career path:
I ran into this unbelievable wall of sexism. There were only a few young women in this program, and they [the male professors] assumed that we were there to sleep with them, and if we weren’t interested in that, they were not supportive of advancing our success. So I dealt with it. I organized all the students to, unfortunately, make a formal complaint through the institution, so...it was less fought on gender bias; it was more on the evident favoritism in the classes...but it was useful as an experience. I’m pretty resilient, so I certainly found a way to resolve that without feeling diminished by it.

Even though she considered this experience to be a negative one, she reported that it nevertheless proved to be critically influential.

The data analysis showed that experiences within the university environment, both positive and negative, were instrumental in shaping the participants’ career paths. Time spent in the university environment, as students, was particularly meaningful in guiding the participants to make choices that ultimately led to their current careers as university presidents.

**Mentoring relationships.** The data analysis showed that mentoring relationships comprised a fourth critical factor that influenced the participants’ career decision making. For the purposes of this study, mentoring relationships were defined as interactions with individuals who played an important and active role in influencing their career choices and direction. Role models were defined as individuals whom participants observed as being in professional positions but with whom participants did not necessarily engage in a mentoring relationship. All but one of the participants emphasized the importance of mentoring relationships. The researcher grouped these mentoring relationships and role
models into three primary categories: (a) mentors, (b) female role models, and (c) professional networks.

**Mentors.** Participants emphasized the valuable role of mentors and mentoring relationships in facilitating career decisions and empowering women. Most of the participants reported that mentors influenced their career choices. Significant statements revealed that one of the primary roles of mentors is to promote and foster a strong sense of self-efficacy or, as one participant stated, to “see the potential in you that you don’t see in yourself.” One participant described how two particular mentors helped her to believe in her own capabilities: “One person identified in me a capacity to study at the university level, and the second one recognized my capacity to operate as a manager in a university environment; they were both very encouraging and supportive.” Another participant described positive experiences with male professors and recalled that these male mentors were “always respectfully encouraging my brains and my abilities.” She explained that her male mentors had never discouraged her from climbing the career ladder toward senior leadership because she was a woman. She went on to state that in her current role as a university president, she has been “getting some amazing mentoring now” from some of the retired women presidents and that “it’s never too late to be mentored.”

Mentors and mentoring relationships with both men and women were critical influences related to participants’ career development experiences. Participants described these mentors as influential people who fostered the development of their self-confidence, believed in their abilities, and encouraged their potential for leadership positions.
Female role models. In addition to the valuable role of mentors and mentoring relationships, the data analysis showed that the participants clearly recognized the importance of role models. The participants recalled positive professional development experiences with male role models and aspired to the excellence they saw in these male role models. The participants acknowledged that they did not believe emulating their male role models’ achievements and ambitions was gender related. However, some of the participants consistently conveyed that their career experiences were critically influenced by a paucity of professional female roles models to inspire them. For example, one participant described an experience concerning the absence of professional female role models while at the same time reporting a positive experience with male role models: “A lot of them [role models] were men. I had really no university professors who were women. I had no role models of women who had succeeded.” Another participant suggested that women’s accomplishments are often invisible. She recalled she had encountered some successful women as professional roles models; however, she observed that in that environment, they did not receive recognition for their accomplishments. She described these female roles models as “very strong women” but that they were “behind the veil; the power behind the throne....I never saw women in that era get corporate recognition--whereas now, I mean, if you survive, you get corporate recognition.”

In addition to the absence of professional female role models and participating in mentoring relationships as proteges, the data analysis showed that the participants highly valued the opportunity to be a role model and a mentor to others. For example, one participant described the “critical importance” of mentorship and that she tried to mentor
whenever she could. Another participant voiced a similar sentiment regarding the importance of being a role model for others of both genders. She described the opportunity to be an influential role model as a “nourishing” experience for herself. “I’m aware that I am a model and a mentor, and it represents a lot that I am here.” However, one participant shared a different perspective related to having a women in the role of the university president and inspiring female students in their career choices: “Just because a woman is president of a university, I don’t think it [being a university president] necessarily translates to female students as a viable job option.”

**Professional networks.** All of the participants discussed the opportunities that professional networks have afforded them in the development of social and professional support. One participant emphasized the importance of networking and building supportive relationships relative to career development, including taking the time to network and build legitimate, authentic friendships and connections. “These kinds of relationships are critical...they keep your sense of humor, balance, sense of perspective, and they also, in the end, help you move along to the next position.” Another participant discussed the fact that mentoring may come in different forms: professional networks, peer friendships, collegial relationships, are all necessary for developing and maintaining professional and social support. However, the data analysis showed that women’s participation in these networks appears to be related more towards their individual career development rather than towards the collective advancement of women into leadership positions as they have been in the past. The data suggested that women’s networks currently function more for the purpose of social support with an emphasis on individual career development, while men’s networks appear to function more for the purpose of
practical support with an emphasis on individual skill development and resource acquisition towards career advancement.

In terms of professional mentoring, participants emphasized the importance of meeting together in professional organizations, for example, several participants specifically mentioned the Senior Women Academic Administrators of Canada (SWAAC) annual conference. The mission of this organization has been to provide networking opportunities for women in senior academic leadership positions. Participants agreed that these types of organizations are an integral part of professional development and support. One participant explained the value of professional networks to foster personal and professional support:

We are often the only woman in a senior leadership role within our organizations, and we’re dealing with the same kinds of challenges, and this [meeting at the conference] gives us an occasion to get together and support each other.

Even though the participants emphasized the important role these organizations play in providing networking opportunities, they admitted that they have only recently begun to meet together as “a soft caucus” of women presidents. Participants described these meetings as opportunities to “engage and enjoy each other’s company” and to meet together as a small group to discuss common issues related to being a woman university president. One of the participants offered the following reason for why the women presidents had not been meeting regularly: “We just don’t take the time to meet. We meet once a year and that’s about it, but usually most of the network has been very male dominated.” Although participants discussed the important function of professional networks, they admitted they did not participate in these networks as often as they would
like, and they acknowledged that they have not utilized the women presidents’ network until recently as it seems to be just beginning to develop its function for them. In the future, they see this type of network being useful for strengthening supportive relationships with each other, and as an avenue to address common issues collectively.

The data analysis identified common internal characteristics that were critical influences on participants’ motivation to pursue a career path to the presidency, such as job enjoyment, seeking challenges, mission driven, and love of learning. Additionally, external factors such as family background, including parents’ educational background, family role models, and family encouragement and support, also appeared to be critical factors that influenced their career decision making. Moreover, experiences within the university environment, particularly access to opportunities that the university experience provided, were also recognized as critical factors that influenced participants’ career development experiences. Finally, the value of mentoring relationships, role models, and professional networks emerged as critical factors that influenced their career paths.

**Findings for Research Question Three**

The following section presents the findings related to Research Question Three: “In what ways do the women feel gender did or did not influence their career development experience?” Participants reported that gender issues played a role in their career paths in three primary areas: (a) gender and work/non-work life integration, (b) consequences of assuming multiple roles, (c) double standards, and (d) gender and the role of the president.

**Gender and work/non-work life integration.** The data analysis revealed that balancing work and non-work lives was a challenge for these women. Consistently, they
described the “all consuming” nature of the job of a university president and emphasized its “tremendous cost” to personal relationships. However, despite the inherent difficulties of the job, the participants were equally committed to their careers and their families. They described the challenge not to just balance but also to integrate their work and their non-work lives in an attempt to achieve a work/lifestyle that reflects not only their academic and professional priorities but also their personal priorities. The data showed that this attempt at integration was influenced by gender roles. In particular, managing relationships, challenging traditional gender roles, and negotiating the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities were gender-related issues that influenced their career development experiences. For the participants, domestic responsibilities were heavily weighted, suggesting that women continue to be expected to assume responsibility for domestic responsibilities (e.g., shopping, cooking, cleaning), making it difficult for women to advance in their careers because of the time required to carry out these responsibilities.

Managing relationships. The participants described the stress of being in a high profile job and that they experienced emotional consequences, particularly related to trying to achieve a balance between their personal and professional responsibilities. However, the participants acknowledged that accepting this challenge and its concomitant sacrifices was an implied component of the job description: “It’s something we have to deal with as a professional...you’re in a relationship, and there’s life beyond the job, and it’s a struggle to balance everything.” Having children at home influenced not only their career choices but also how they managed their day-to-day activities as university presidents. One participant reported that raising children while maintaining a
high-stress career requires intentionality: “It [the job of a university president] consumes you, so you need to think about how you can involve your family in your job and I’ve tried really hard to do that.” A second participant explained that her stress level had been substantially reduced now that her spouse had recently retired and assumed the domestic responsibilities:

I’m very happy to say that my husband...does all the cooking, all the shopping, all the laundry, all the errands, so I have the kind of spousal support that mirrors what men have been accustomed to for generations. It kind of makes you realize why they fought so hard against it [gender equity in the workplace]...it certainly made their lives easier to have stay-at-home wives.

Whether the participants referred to their relationships with their spouses, partners, children, stepchildren, aging parents, siblings or friends, the need to establish a satisfactory and balanced life was a common sentiment across all of the interviews.

**Persistent traditional role expectations.** Participants reported being aware of systemic and cultural contexts within their current and prior academic institutions that continue to favor traditional patriarchal attitudes. For example, one participant stated that “the old boys society is alive and well and thriving, no matter how we delude ourselves that we’re in a brand new age.” A second participant described an institutional environment at her university that has remained relatively unchanged in terms of the values placed on traditional roles. Her comments reflected the belief that traditional roles are not only assumed to be a tacit influence within the academic environment but also an influence on the ways that women make career decisions often based on their spouses’ careers. She expressed the persistence of traditional gender roles with this remark:
Our roles are still traditional...we are still care giving. We are still raising
children and caring for aging parents...responsible for all sorts of aspects of taking
care of the home; not much in that regard has really changed.

Women are still expected to assume the traditional role of caregiver (e.g., child-care, care
of aging parents). These gendered expectations have not changed substantially over time
and continue to affect the value of women’s work (caretaking) and influence women’s
career decisions both related to initial career choice and later career advancement.

One participant offered an explanation that illuminated her perception of how
traditional gender roles have influenced women’s career advancement. She described the
fact that women in the academy seem to experience less social support than men and that
men seem to have well-developed support systems: “There’s more of a camaraderie
between men in academia...young men run in packs...young women don’t run in packs.”

Another participant described the challenges related to multiple and competing roles,
particularly for women who choose to advance in their careers: “If you really have tried
to live your life in a holistic way, it becomes more and more difficult, I think, when
you’re taking on these types of roles.” Women are working hard during the day and then
going home at night to take care of the needs of others, “we are busy and don’t have time
to go down to the club to chat.” Implicit in their comments is the notion that women who
are not included in academic networks or who do not participate in the academic social
community may be unable to advance in their careers as a result of a gendered culture of
exclusion.

Consequences of assuming multiple roles. Although the data showed that the
participants were satisfied with their achievement of a university presidency, it also
showed that assuming multiple roles did not come without both emotional and career consequences. Several of the participants described experiencing feelings of regret and/or guilt when reflecting on their struggle to integrate their work and family lives. One participant noted that the difficulties of assuming multiple roles were more prominent for women than they were for men. “Women are much more likely to be agonizing in guilt all the time about whether they’ve given enough to the family, whether they divided their time equitably between their personal responsibilities and their work responsibilities.” Another participant described her experience with feeling guilt as a consequence of assuming multiple roles:

> There’s not a day that goes by that there isn’t some kind of guilt. Either I’ve chosen to focus on something at work or something at home, and either way I’m feeling guilty. Every single day there is a portion of my life that I have some guilt over.

In addition to emotional consequences, career consequences are evident for women related to taking time away from their careers to assume caring responsibilities, such as raising children or caring for aging parents. No matter the reason, the data suggested that the consequences for making career decisions based on family considerations were clear:

> I think some young women are basically saying, ‘Okay, maybe I’ll do this [pursue a career] later. But, right now I’m going to have my children and I’m going to raise my children.’ And then when they come back [into the academy], they just hit a stone wall.
Participants discussed the deleterious consequences that an interrupted career path has on women’s academic careers in terms of advancement: the collision of the clocks. “Many men, not all men, still have the kind of support, authorization, and domestic backup to put those hours in and reach the top of their profession, but for women…their biological clock and the tenure clock collide horribly.” The participants described the “agony of choice” for women and their careers when they try to make decisions around when and if to have a family. One participant reflected on her feelings of regret as she recalled trying to efficiently manage both her family and her work:

The family was almost like a business too, and this was the way that I would see myself as a mom…trying to coordinate everything. I find that the hardest thing to accept – the way that I was just managing my family as I was managing my job.

The data suggested that men still enjoy the benefit of having domestic support that allows them the opportunity to advance in their careers, which many women in high-ranking positions have not enjoyed. The data exposed how the difficulties of assuming multiple roles influence women’s career experiences in a way that blurred the lines between career and family roles and that these blurred lines were influenced to a large extent by persistent traditional gender roles.

**Double standards.** The data suggested that double standards (i.e., standards applied unfairly) based on gender differences were present in a variety of forms. The participants described that standards applied to women but not to men were evident, but subtle, and therefore not easily identifiable. For example, with regard to career opportunities, formal career opportunities for women may be available, but informally there are elusive, cultural barriers, and organizational impediments based on gender that
create one standard for women and another for men. For example, one participant stated that women are more vigorously scrutinized than men; women need to demonstrate they are twice as good to be given half the chance.

We haven’t gotten past the fact that women have to be twice as good [as men] to be successful. And I say that with great regret. I think women are subjected to a much more difficult or a much more rigorous examination.

Two participants described a mirrored experience with gendered double standards. In one instance, gender was seen as a positive reflection of the institution but was perceived as a barrier for the individual. In the second instance, the reverse was true: gender was perceived as a positive for the individual but as a negative reflection on the institution. The first participant described her experience of being the university’s first woman president:

Being the first woman president has been very positive. The university is perceived as being progressive, but as I look back, I don’t see my gender opening any doors for me. I’ve definitely had gender challenges throughout my career. For example, when I’ve brought up a point at a meeting, I’ve been ignored, but then a male colleague brings up the same point and he’s acknowledged.

A second participant reported that her experience was positive on an individual level but perceived as a negative reflection of the institution.

I never felt that because I was a woman, I was prevented from accessing the positions I wanted; nobody showed a lack of respect for me because I was a woman. I always felt I was treated fairly. Gender didn’t become an issue until my name was being circulated to be the president of the university. I was sad to
learn that, for the first time, it became clear that the fact that I was a woman was a problem.

She concluded the challenges she faced were rooted in a “transformational change in management and a culture that was very paternalistic.” Change in that situation was foreboding and because her presence threatened the status quo, she was personally attacked, not because of anything job-related, but because she was a woman.

**Gender and the role of the president.** Several of the participants described the demanding requirements of the job of a university president and that sometimes the requirements are linked with gendered expectations. A commonality among the participants’ stories was the concept that they had been treated differently not because of their professional competencies but because of their gender. Three of the participants reported gender challenges related to traditional organizational structures and provided detailed examples of the gendered expectations surrounding the role of the university president. For example, one participant described the reaction she often encounters from people who assume university presidents are men: “Often I’m in a room and I’m with a group of people and I’m introduced as a president of a university, and the first reaction is astonishment on people’s faces.” She goes on to say that when she is introduced while standing with her husband, or any man, at professional gatherings, people “automatically put their hand out [to shake hands with] the man – automatically.” In addition to the assumptions made in social settings, a second participant also described that she had encountered gendered assumptions about the role of the university president in institutional job descriptions:
There were some unusual descriptors in people’s job descriptions. I think they were based on the fact that in the president’s position, there has been a tradition of men. It was assumed, in these job descriptions, that the university would support the wife of the president in planning social events. And while my husband is very supportive, he has a full-time career and does not think it’s part of his job, as my spouse, to plan parties.

These examples showed that gendered expectations were prevalent in the role of the president; female spouses of male presidents are expected to support the social obligations of the presidency, but male spouses of female presidents are not expected to do the same.

The descriptive analyses exposed that gender did in fact play a role in the career development experiences of these participants. In addition, the data showed that the participants experienced stress and sometimes emotional consequences, when trying to integrate their work and non-work lives. As well, they also encountered gendered double standards, including gendered expectations embedded in the role of the university president.

**Findings for Research Question Four**

The following section presents the findings related to Research Question Four: “What advice do the presidents give to women aspiring to a career as a university president?” The advice that participants discussed related to their career paths emerged in two categories: (a) professional career development strategies and (b) personal development.
**Professional career development strategies.** The data showed that participants provided practical advice for career development. While all the participants described an unintentional and unplanned career pathway to the presidency, most of their advice to other women was to “make a conscious, strategic career plan” although one commented that “you don’t have to commit to a path from early on.” As well, their advice was to “be ambitious” and to “have a sense of mission.” Additionally, they advised that women should “work hard” and “network” and “put yourself in positions that lead to the presidency.” As well, their advice focused on building and supporting relationships. For example, “support and help other women to advance” and “learn the importance of time off and a balanced life.”

Additionally, the data showed that participants’ advice also emphasized the importance of networking relationships as a career development strategy. For example, they advised networking with both men and women to create support systems, both internal and external, to the institution. “You really also need to create your support base outside the institution so that people who analyze your performance see it reflected not only inside but outside, so I think that sort of double positioning is really critical.” Networking with other women was also advised as a supportive strategy to achieve professional goals:

Network with other women because they’ll keep affirming that you can do it, and they’ll keep you assured about your worth, your identity, and your ability, and then obviously network with the guys as well because they will be part of the decision-making process as you move along.
**Personal development.** The data showed that while participants provided both practical and strategic professional career advice, they also included advice related to personal development. Participants considered self-confidence a very important factor to their career development experience, and they advised other women to pursue and develop this self-confidence. When referring to advice for building self-esteem, the participants used expressions such as “believe in and nurture your ‘self’” and “be a good listener, but first of all listen to yourself” and “use your experiences to empower and not imprison you.” One participant advised, “Live a life that you feel is rewarding.” Another advised, “be prepared to face feelings of guilt.” Another recommended, “Be attentive to your intuition and your feelings; intuition and feelings are your data.” Another advocated, “Remember the importance of being with your family; be ‘present’ in your own life; it’s important to have a balanced life.”

While most participants advised women traversing their career paths to listen to their inner voices, one president advised not to listen to the voice inside you that promotes self-doubt and to reject “the voice that says you can’t because you are a woman.” Instead she advised to consider the difference women can make, in these positions, to be role models for the next generation. “We’ll never know the difference we’ve made.” Another participant instructed that women should pause for self-reflection. “Take time to reflect, to be a reflective practitioner. I think as senior women administrators that’s the best thing we can do for those who are younger of either gender.”

**Summary of the Findings**

Findings from this research revealed that each of the participants journeyed
through a unique path to the presidency, yet their stories shared common themes. The experiences of these women leaders showed that navigating a career pathway to the position of university president was a complex process. As the participants described their pathways to their current positions one notable finding was that none of the women set out with a deliberate plan to become the chief executive officer of a university.

Common themes emerged with respect to the critical influences that shaped their career paths: internal characteristics (e.g., enjoying their jobs, seeking challenges), family background, experiences within the university environment, and mentoring relationships.

Each of the participant’s stories illuminated the challenges along their career paths, including balancing career goals with family responsibilities, coping with the inherent difficulties of the role of a university president, and navigating gender issues. As well, participants described the ways in which gender played a role in their career paths in four primary areas: (a) gender and work/non-work life integration, (b) consequences of assuming multiple roles, (c) double standards, and (d) gender and the role of the president. Finally, regarding advice for women aspiring to become university presidents, participants’ responses included (a) advice related to self-development and (b) advice related to professional development.
Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

Powell and Mainiero’s (1992) river of time conceptual model of women’s career development provided a framework for this study. Support for this model emerged from the data analysis. For example, it appeared that all of the women in this study faced complex choices and constraints in their career development process. It was also apparent that to understand women’s careers it is necessary to take into account the holistic context of their lives that includes both career and relationships. It became clear in the data analysis that internal, external, and organizational factors are critical influences that affect women’s career decisions. The analysis of the career experiences of these women leaders produced common themes with respect to the concepts of career success and life satisfaction. The research reported here found that for women success may be subjectively measured and defined in terms of personal achievement and perception of quality of life. Consequently, the river of time conceptual model was helpful in framing this intersection between career and relationships to contribute to a better understanding of women’s career development.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the lived experience of Canadian university women presidents as they developed their career paths to the presidency. More specifically, the purpose of this research study was to gain insight and a deeper understanding of the women’s career development experiences through the exploration of four primary areas: (a) career paths to the presidency, (b) critical
influences along the career paths, (c) the influence of gender, and (d) advice for other women considering a career as a university president.

**Summary of the Findings**

An analysis of the career development experiences of eight Canadian university women presidents uncovered that although these women all followed a unique path to the presidency, their stories shared common themes. For example, all of the participants entered the university in faculty positions and subsequently followed one of two career paths that led to the presidency. Although none were charting a pathway to the presidency, they were seeking challenge and were open to opportunities. Each of the participant’s stories identified the critical factors that influenced their career development including internal characteristics such as enjoying their jobs, seeking challenges, being mission driven, and loving learning. As well, the findings recognized the role that external factors such as family backgrounds; experiences within the university environment; and mentoring relationships, role models, and professional networks played in shaping their career decision-making. In addition, common themes emerged related to gender challenges including integrating their work and non-work lives, coping with the emotional consequences of assuming multiple roles, and facing gendered double standards. Finally, the results showed that the advice shared by the participants was focused on strategies for both professional career development and personal self-development.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Career paths. No single pathway.** Previous research on the career pathways of college and university presidents has indicated that there is no absolute career pathway
but “well-trodden paths” are evident (Muzzin & Tracz, 1981, p. 339). The predominant career pattern for academic presidents, including women presidents, has been the traditional scholar career path (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Muzzin & Tracz, 1981; Wessel & Keim, 1994). Consistent with the previous studies, the results of this study showed that Canadian university women presidents also did not follow a single pathway to the presidency. However, all of the participants entered the academy through a faculty position and proceeded to follow one of two pathways: (a) an academic pathway (i.e., a career pathway that led through a series of academic-related positions) or (b) an administrative pathway (i.e., a career pathway that led through a succession of administrative-related positions with broader responsibilities) before assuming the position of university president. Academic presidents have almost always been drawn from inside academia and usually have been teachers and scholars before climbing the academic rungs of the career ladder to senior academic administrative positions that lead to the presidency, suggesting the importance of academic life as preparation for an academic president. (Muzzin & Tracz, 1981; Wessel & Keim, 1994). Alternatively, the administrative career pattern includes little or no faculty experience but extensive academic administrative experience. The fact that all the participants in this study held a senior academic administrative position prior to becoming the president adds to the existing literature that suggests this type of experience is necessary to become a university president regardless of which path is taken (i.e., academic or administrative).

More recent research has indicated a new trend in the career pathways of academic presidents may be emerging to suggest that the traditional academic pathway to the presidency is neither the only nor the preferred route (Delabbio & Palmer, 2009).
Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) referred to presidents who come from outside academe as “strangers”. Muzzin and Tracz (1981) reported that the percentage of nonacademic presidents in Canadian universities was about 11%. According to the most recent American Council on Education study, 20% of US academic presidents in 2011 came directly from a position outside academe, up from 13% in 2006 and 8% in 1986 (ACE, 2012). This trend was not found to be occurring from the results of this study, as all eight of the participants were appointed from within academe. However, no other data related to academic presidential pathways is currently available to make a comparison of whether or not this evolving trend is also occurring in Canada. Nonetheless, one of the participants in this study commented on the difficulties confronting leaders who come from outside academe: “There’s an inherent distrust among faculty colleagues of someone who has come up a different pathway. I think it makes it more challenging if you don’t share that common [academic] culture with the faculty.”

Although the primary pathway to the university presidency has been the traditional academic route both for men and women, a new trend appears to be developing. As the role of the president continues to evolve based on the changing needs of higher education institutions, the traditional pathway to the presidency may be challenged or augmented by new pathways that do not include prior positions within academe. The increase in the number of strangers occupying presidential offices could result in an unlevel playing field for women who are currently in academic administrative pipeline positions (e.g., associate dean, dean, vice president). If the number of women bound for the university presidency in the traditional academic pipeline has only recently begun to increase, their ascent into leadership positions, including the presidency, could
be jeopardized by this developing trend, thereby contributing to the persistent underrepresentation of women academic presidents. Conversely, if the paradigm is changing, women may have greater access to the academic presidency because they don’t have to go through the academic pipeline. However, Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) found nontraditional presidents frequently come to academe from professions such as the military or government; professions still male-dominated. Therefore, whether the pathway is through the academy or through emerging nontraditional paths, the implication for women is their continued underrepresentation in the academic presidency.

**Lack of intentionality.** Researchers have found that women in academic leadership positions often have not intentionally planned a career path to the presidency (Eddy, 2008; Sotello Viernes Turner, 2007). Studies on the unique nature of women’s career experiences have suggested that women are motivated more by “who they were as individuals” (Campbell, Mueller, & Souza, 2010, p. 29) rather than what title or position they held and that motivation to advance to the position of president does not differ by gender (Lepkowski, 2009).

Consistent with other studies, all of the participants in this study reported that their career path to the presidency was not consciously or strategically planned. The participants described a career path that “evolved and unfolded” and that they required support and encouragement from others in order to pursue career opportunities. As well, they did not view their career success in terms of achieving a particular title or position, but rather their motivation was derived from the contributions they believed they could make in “creating an incredible educational experience” in their role as university president.
The results of this study add to the understanding that women’s careers have more variation than men’s careers because women make career choices based on a holistic life view and with regard to their relationships and caring responsibilities in contrast to a single-minded career goal. However, this lack of intentionality should not be interpreted as a lack of motivation for advancement; women are motivated toward achievement in both realms of their life, personal and professional. This concept of career decision-making based on a holistic life view was evident when one of the participants in this study commented that “women are ambitious but not myopic about their careers.” The participants clearly articulated their intrinsic interest for leadership roles when they described their “passion for action” and their desire “to make a difference” in educational environments. Boatwright and Egidio (2003) referred to this intersection between opportunity and desire as the force through which “glass ceilings are broken” (p. 654).

The fact that participants did not consciously plan a career path to the presidency may be considered a positive attribute, especially for leaders being prepared for a rapidly changing world. Because women’s career approaches have been less structured and more fluid, women may be better able to adapt to fast-paced and shifting, political, educational, and corporate settings [than men], especially as those environments continue to evolve, expand, and transform (i.e., as the role becomes more complex and multidimensional).

**Critical Influences. Internal characteristics.** Researchers have found that a number of different influences play important roles in shaping the career development experiences of women in executive-level leadership positions (see Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Dahlvig & Longman, 2010; and Madsen, 2007b). More specifically, personal characteristics and family background have been shown to be critical factors that have
shaped the career decisions made by women academic administrators (Campbell, Mueller, & Souza, 2010; Madsen, 2007b). For example, Madsen (2007b) studied 10 American women presidents and identified that an individual’s family background and her childhood experiences were critically important to her development as a leader. Related to their parent’s educational background Madsen found that 9 of the 10 presidents had mothers who attended at least some college after high school; one earned a master’s degree, and 6 of the 10 presidents had fathers who attended college; two earned a master’s degree. Contrary to Madsen’s findings, in this study, six participants reported information about the educational level of their parents. Of these six, only one participant reported that her parents had completed education beyond the high school level. Two of the remaining five participants reported that both parents had completed only an elementary school education. The remaining three participants reported that at least one parent had completed high school. It was surprising that the overwhelming majority of these educationally accomplished women had parents with very little formal education. Madsen’s conclusions were that having mothers (and fathers) with higher educational backgrounds provided a strong influence and model for the women presidents in her study. Paradoxically, the findings from this study also showed that parents provided a strong influence for the women presidents but it was despite their personal lack of educational backgrounds.

If one of the goals of higher education is to achieve gender equity in senior levels of leadership, positive change can begin in two stages. In their formative years, young women can benefit from being encouraged by influential people including parents and teachers. These years are particularly influential for building self-efficacy and helping
young women explore their career options. Teachers, parents, and counselors have a strong influence in helping young women recognize their own leadership potential by identifying their career interests, teaching them skills they will need to advance, and encouraging them to pursue higher education, whether or not their parents have attained educational achievements. Recognizing and developing these personal characteristics and encouraging educational attainment in potential women leaders in their formative years may be one way to achieve greater gender equity in leadership roles.

*Experiences within the university environment.* Without question educational opportunities within the academic environment can provide empowering and meaningful experiences that may have an effect on career decision making. Researchers have reported that the impact of educational opportunities and achievement builds self-efficacy and provides tools for upward mobility (Madsen, 2007a; Sotello Viernes Turner, 2007). The results of this study also found that educational experiences provided exposure to influential individuals, often educators, and opportunities to develop leadership skills through mentoring as well as the chance to enjoy academic success, resulting in the validation of one’s own abilities. Participants provided examples of experiences that occurred within the university environment that were influential in shaping their career paths; however, they pointed to different elements of the university experience as critical factors. For example, one participant discussed the importance of the freedom of opportunity she found in the academic environment (e.g., opportunities to explore career options, engage in self-development, and opportunities to develop leadership skills). Another participant provided an example of experiencing, confronting, and eventually overcoming sexism in the classroom. She recalled finding this experience useful in
learning about herself and teaching her about her own capabilities. A third participant reported becoming aware of her growing sense of confidence in light of her academic accomplishments and success in the university environment, such as obtaining fellowships, teaching students, and publishing scholarly work.

The diversity in their recollections of the university experience suggests that faculty and administrators may find it difficult to identify with certainty which part of the university experience may ultimately be influential on the career development process of future leaders. Knowing, however, that the university environment does in fact provide opportunities for meaningful--and indeed, career-shaping--experiences, faculty members, administrators, and others should be more aware of their role in influencing the career decisions of potential university presidents.

**Mentoring relationships and role models.** Consistent with previous research, the findings of this study showed that mentors and mentoring relationships are critical influences on the career development experience (Brown, 2005; Dahlvig & Longman, 2010; Sherman, Muñoz, & Pankake, 2008; Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, & Keyser Wentworth, 2007). The data were rich with examples from the participants on the specific ways in which mentors and mentoring relationships provided validation of their abilities and empowered them to believe in their potential to become successful leaders. Most participants credited individual mentors with providing encouraging statements that helped build their self-confidence, encouraging them to pursue higher education, and steering them toward challenging positions that developed their leadership skills.
While support and encouragement from mentors and mentoring relationships clearly play a central role in the career success of many educational and industry leaders, the unique role these characteristics play in the career trajectories of women should neither be underappreciated nor overlooked. More specifically, while encouragement and support may play a role in the advancement of men in their careers, it seems to be even more prevalent and essential to sustaining the career advancement of women.

While the overwhelming majority of the participants recalled the critical influence of mentors and mentoring relationships on their career development experience, the data also revealed their recounting an absence of professional female role models. Previous research has also identified that a lack of female role models and mentors available as a source of inspiration acts as a barrier to women’s career advancement (Sherman et al., 2008; Whitmarsh et al., 2007). Most participants articulated the fact that they had not encountered female professors in their classrooms while they were students, and they all specifically mentioned that they observed a paucity of female role models in leadership positions as they moved through the academic ranks. However, even though participants encountered few, if any, female role models in the workplace environment, they nevertheless ultimately followed a career path that led them to the presidency; they attributed their success in large part to the support and encouragement provided to them by their mostly male mentors.

Career aspiration for these participants did not appear to be negatively influenced by this absence of professional female role models as they were all successful in achieving a position as a university president. However, a common theme that emerged across interviews was that the women acknowledged a lack of professional female role
models in their own career development experiences, specifically a lack of females in positions of leadership. An absence of female role models socializes women to believe that men are leaders which has a powerful effect on women’s intrinsic leadership aspirations and may be a contributing factor in the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership positions.

Despite the absence of professional female role models, all participants spoke frequently and favorably about the positive influence of the female role models in their personal lives, particularly in their formative years. Like Madsen (2007a), the women presidents in this study gave credit to these women (mothers, grandmothers, teachers) as formidable role models who encouraged them to pursue and value higher education even though they often had little formal education themselves. These women modeled the values of hard work, perseverance, and tenacity despite their often meager circumstances. Furthermore, the participants described the value of role models not only in their own personal and professional experiences but also with regard to their responsibility to set a leadership example. Results from this study have shown that the participants were cognizant of their visibility as women leaders and were deeply committed to mentoring other women, including students, colleagues, and others because they are keenly aware that by serving as a role model and mentor, they provide a powerful source of inspiration for other women to emulate.

**Professional networks.** One way that support, encouragement, and exposure to role models is manifested is through professional networks. However, for women, the value of professional networks for career advancement has been under realized. Figure 3 (The CMQ Gendered Network Timeline Model) represents a conceptual model
developed from the findings of this study depicting the evolution of gendered approaches to networks for career advancement. Women’s only networks were created during the 1960s and 1970s to counter the perception of male privilege. During this era of the feminist movement, women’s only networks were successful in bringing attention to the issues of gender inequality through collective activism. At that time, the function of these networks was to provide opportunities for women to organize to bring about socio-political change as well as to provide opportunities for women to create supportive relationships with each other. Consequently, these networks were able to achieve equality of opportunity for women in education and in the workforce through legislative reform and social change.

As these collective efforts toward gender equality have been realized, gains for women have been evident. However, what is also apparent is that the socio-political function of the women’s only networks has decreased over time as the relational function has increased. Though women have gained access to the classroom and the boardroom, an imbalance of power and representation in decision-making persists. Since the 1990s, progress for women in accessing positions of leadership has stalled. Coincidentally, women’s only networks are showing evidence of “terminal decline” (Coleman, 2010, p. 769). Coleman surmised that one reason for this decline is because a new generation of women perceives the gender issue has been solved and therefore these networks are no longer relevant to them. As well, the women’s only networks are viewed as less powerful organizations and therefore less beneficial to them, as individuals, compared to the men’s networks (Coleman, 2010). However, the men’s networks continue to advance the interests of their majority members (men) despite the presence of women. The
declining support of women’s only networks to support women’s career advancement through collective action may be a factor in the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. What is also clear is that the current function of women’s only networks is toward relational support focused on individual career development, whereas the continued function of men’s networks is toward practical support focused on career advancement.

This study of women’s career development experiences and the critical influences of gender on the process of career decision-making toward advancement has enriched the understanding of the role of professional networks resulting in the development of an integrated network approach model of career. The CMQ Gendered Network Timeline Model encompasses a more complete view of how gender has influenced women’s career advancement over time. It includes a recommendation for the future that includes incorporating the three functional components of professional networks: (1) relational, (2) socio-political, and (3) practical to achieve an integrated networking approach that would advance both women’s and men’s careers. The model recognizes the importance of the socio-political function of women’s only networks as a vehicle for collective action leading to policy reform and social change to achieve gender equity.

**Gender.** The results of this study are consistent with other studies that have identified gender-based barriers to women’s career advancement (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Waumsley & Houston, 2009). Dominici, Fried, and Zeger found, that leadership positions are less attractive to women because of expectations that leaders are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and that “success in such positions often seems to depend on having a spouse who can shoulder domestic
The CMQ Gendered Network Timeline Model

Figure 3. Model depicting the evolution of gendered approaches to networks for career advancement.
responsibilities” (p. 26). In support of this view, the participants’ accounts described the “all consuming” nature of the job of a university president and indicated that it often comes with “personal sacrifices” and a “tremendous cost” to personal relationships. The women discussed the personal sacrifices associated with assuming multiple roles or accommodating dual careers that sometimes resulted in feelings of guilt or regret. Though they did not dwell on these emotional responses, it is however the cost to women of persistent traditional gendered expectations. Despite the inherent difficulties of the job, including accepting personal sacrifices, participants were nevertheless committed both to their personal and professional lives but found it a challenge to “achieve a balance.”

The majority of the participants were married without children, however they all discussed the challenge to balance their work and family lives, whether or not ‘family’ included the role of parent. In such a culture, decisions based on the perception of work productivity and career success disadvantage women with care-taking roles. As Waumsley and Houston (2009) found “working long hours is still viewed as one of the key ways of obtaining career success and flexible working hours are seen as detrimental to work performance and career progression....It appears that flexible working hours, being female, and having a successful career are still perceived by many to be incompatible” (p. 47).

Within many organizational cultures, individuals working long hours are perceived to be more productive than those who worked regular hours or worked flexible schedules (Waumsley & Houston, 2009). Because men traditionally have not been the primary caregivers for children at home, they have been more available than women to work these extended hours. As a result of these gendered assumptions and
misperceptions, women who work flexible schedules have been viewed as less productive and less committed to their careers and therefore often disqualified from promotions and career advancement opportunities. Gendered assumptions create a double standard based on gender bias where men are advantaged and women are disadvantaged. “The presence of children signals stability and responsibility for men, who are assumed to be better workers because of their roles as breadwinners. The identical situation for women has the opposite effect....The choice for highly successful women has been clear: Choose either a baby or a briefcase” (Cheung & Halpern, 2010, p. 183).

Women’s career decisions are embedded in an interdependent life view where individual needs and the needs of others are considered. As well, women define their career success on their own terms that include both internal and external measures. For example, women don’t necessarily define career success by the position they occupy within the organization or by financial remuneration, but they do expect to be treated fairly and paid equitably.

In the current system of higher education, value is placed on career paths that are continuous, upwardly mobile, and based on a traditional career model that generally favors the lifestyle characteristics and values of men, and women have struggled both to gain access to this traditional pathway as well as to change it. One reason that this pathway has been so highly valued is that changes in higher education have been influenced more by economic circumstances and corporatization of the organization than by social justice issues such as gender equity. Although policy making has to some degree advanced in terms of valuing alternative approaches, the educational community, especially at senior levels of administration, has failed to fully embrace values and
practices that reflect the personal characteristics of women (e.g., flexible working hours, relational decision making). These policies and practices have persisted in spite of the knowledge that valuing alternative approaches to hiring and developing talent have not only been successful but also profitable. Despite the implementation of diversity initiatives, such as affirmative action, which were founded upon a desire to integrate principles of social justice into the fabric of society, these policies have failed to bring about the intended goal of gender equity.

Guilt. Most of the participants agreed that managing the responsibilities that accompany a high-level leadership position have resulted in emotional consequences. Both guilt and regret framed some of their accounts related to managing the stress that accompanies multiple and sometimes conflicting role responsibilities. As Livingston and Judge (2008) found “Individuals who adhere to traditionally accepted norms of gender are more likely to feel guilt when their family responsibilities interfere with their work responsibilities but are less likely to feel guilt when their work responsibilities interfere with their family responsibilities” (p. 212). All eight participants in this study reported that balancing their work lives and non-work lives was a difficult challenge. Although some participants reported that they felt guilt or regret related to their role conflict or related to the sacrifices they had made to achieve career success, they also saw themselves as change agents and felt privileged to have had the opportunity to be leaders. Many believed they were making positive contributions to their educational environments that made the personal sacrifices worthwhile.

Conflicting role responsibilities have emerged as a result of complex social and psychological phenomena related to the ways women experience the various roles they
are expected to carry out. In part, these conflicting roles can be attributed to the discrepancy between workplace expectations based on traditional models and traditional workplace values (i.e., an emphasis on continuous employment, upward mobility, an uninterrupted career path) and a desire to achieve a more integrated life. As more women have participated in the workforce and advanced to higher-level positions, they have continued to maintain domestic responsibilities (along with workplace responsibilities), therefore exacerbating the role conflict and subsequent emotional consequences of being women university presidents.

The values represented in a traditional organizational model clearly advantage men who are domestically supported at home and disadvantage women who are not. This traditional structure raises two important issues. First, if women know the expectations and inherent limitations in a traditional structure, and how difficult it is to adapt to the demands of this structure, they may actively choose to reject advancement opportunities; in this way, the existing climate continues to perpetuate the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. As well, Dominici, Fried, and Zeger (2009) point out because of the strict demands placed on senior-level administrators, “Leadership positions, as currently defined, are less attractive to women than men and are possibly becoming unattractive to an increasing number of men” (p. 26).

**Advice.** As the number of women leaders grow, so too will the advice they give to other women aspiring to become leaders. The advice from these participants showed that the significant impact of role models and mentoring cannot be underestimated in providing motivation for other women to follow a presidential career pathway. Female
role models provide both the inspiration and the aspiration for other women to recognize
career possibilities and to pursue them. Table 9 displays the advice given by the women
presidents in this study for other women who may aspire to become a university
president. While a gender component can be recognized in all the advice offered by the
participants, on the whole, some advice reflected gender-neutral suggestions (i.e., advice
that might be likely to arise from those in leadership positions regardless of gender) and
some reflected suggestions that might be expected from women to women (i.e., advice
that might be likely to arise from females in leadership positions). Some advice appears
to be universal, and some seems to be gendered. In this respect, the nature of the advice
participants offered could be considered “lightly gendered.” More specifically, the
advice can be characterized along three dimensions: (a) professional, (b) personal, and
(c) relational.

Rather than offering advice focused on structured, practical, and tangible, career-
advancing strategies, participants offered advice primarily focused on personal growth
and development, suggesting that for women university presidents, becoming a university
president was as much a journey of personal discovery as it was a series of specific and
intentional career steps leading to a specific career goal. Campbell, Mueller, and Souza
(2010) reported that women participants in their study “were motivated more by who they
were as individuals than what role they played within the academy” (p. 29). This
emphasis on identity and self-discovery suggests women may have a deeper sense of
personal responsibility not only for making a meaningful contribution as a university
president but also for serving as a role models for others.
Table 9

*Dimensions of Gendered and Non-Gendered Advice*

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<th>Non-gendered professional</th>
<th>Gendered personal</th>
<th>Gendered relational</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Have a sense of mission.”</td>
<td>“Live a life that you feel is rewarding.”</td>
<td>“Support and help other women to advance.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Network.”</td>
<td>“Use experiences to empower and not imprison you.”</td>
<td>“Learn the importance of time off and a balanced life.”</td>
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<td>“Put yourself in positions that lead to the presidency.”</td>
<td>“Be a good listener, but first of all listen to yourself.”</td>
<td>“You really need to create your support base outside the institution so that people who analyze your performance see it reflected not only inside but outside, so I think that sort of double positioning is really critical”</td>
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<td>“You don’t have to commit to a path from early on.”</td>
<td>“Believe in and nurture your ‘self.’”</td>
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<td>“Work hard.”</td>
<td>“Be prepared to face feelings of guilt.”</td>
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<td>“Be ambitious.”</td>
<td>“Be a reflective practitioner.”</td>
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<td>“Make a conscious, strategic career plan.”</td>
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Participants’ advice reflected personal responsibility for being role models for other women and recognized the challenges and difficulties unique to women as they develop their careers. Despite the challenges they faced, none of the participants offered advice encouraging women not to pursue the presidency. Rather, the participants in this
study remarked that they felt a sense of privilege and it was clear they enjoyed the opportunity to serve as a university president.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The findings of this study were based on the career experiences of a small group of women serving as academic presidents in Canadian universities. The goal of this study was to gain insight about the women who have made it to the top of their profession, to hear about their career development experiences, and to increase the understanding of why women remain underrepresented in positions of senior leadership in higher education, particularly in the office of the university president.

Inherent in the research findings are five recommendations for individuals and institutions to guide and inform organizational policies and practices related to achieving gender equity and removing the cultural and structural barriers that impede women’s career advancement.

The first recommendation is for individuals and organizations to adopt an egalitarian outlook where care-taking responsibilities are both valued and shared. Women and men, as partners, should create and negotiate a domestic contract that divides responsibilities equally. In this way, Cheung and Halpern’s (2010) proposal to replace the metaphor of work-family balance with one that recognizes the integration of work and family roles and rejects the idea that women must choose between career and family, could be adopted.

The second recommendation is that women should actively and intentionally resurrect and maintain women’s only networks for the purpose of organization and collective action. The findings from this study provided evidence that although women
acknowledged the value and necessity of networks to their individual professional success, they have failed to recognize their important function in providing opportunities for political engagement and collective activism. These networks are a critical vehicle to regaining momentum towards the achievement of gender equity.

Additionally, these networks are a vital source for women to access female role models and mentors and contribute to the feeling of belonging. Inherent in the findings of this study was the identification of the critical importance of providing examples of women succeeding in organizations to support and nurture women’s career aspirations and to demonstrate alternative models of leadership to both men and women. Continuing these efforts, through the women’s only networks, are imperative to the strategic plan to “assure and sustain the quality and supply of current [women] leaders and those in the pipeline” (Oakley, 2000).

The fourth recommendation is for individuals and organizations to adopt a broader conceptualization of the term ‘career’ and ‘success’ that considers internal, subjectively defined, personal criteria rather than external, traditionally defined, corporate culture criteria. Women value relational achievement across a range of life roles. However, this does not imply women lack professional motivation or have low career commitment, rather women have a different perspective about what career means to them. Women remain an untapped resource in organizations that do not appreciate the complexities of their lives. Organizational policies are needed that support rather than punish those that take nonlinear career paths or those that take alternate or slower career routes.
The fifth recommendation is for organizations to identify and abolish exclusionary policies and practices that perpetuate gender discrimination. This can be accomplished, on university campuses, by establishing a committee on the status of women. The purpose of this committee would be to evaluate and eliminate the policies and practices that (a) prevent equal access to leadership opportunities for women and (b) ignore the gender pay gap. It is also recommended that this committee would monitor benchmarks of gender equity: recruitment, retention, salaries, and time in rank (Valian, 2005). “Gender is a lens on institutional effectiveness” (p. 2). It will be through these efforts that the unfinished gender agenda can finally be completed.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative, interview-based study presented findings about how eight women developed their careers to become university presidents in Canadian universities. Their narratives provided rich descriptions of their perceptions of the critical influences on their career development experience. An important recommendation for future research is to continue to explore the intersection of women’s work and non-work lives, and the relationship between institutional policies and women’s career advancement. This could be accomplished through additional studies that examine the career development experiences of high level women in other arenas (business, health care, government) to provide additional insight into the factors that encourage and discourage women’s career advancement. As well, using focus groups and comparing women with more diverse backgrounds or across cultures (e.g., other countries) or generations as well as institutional type (e.g., community colleges) in a multi-case study approach would provide additional depth to understanding the complexities of women’s careers.
Additionally, more information is needed to understand how organizational structures have impacted women’s career advancement in the academy, for example, the extent to which parental status advantages or disadvantages women’s economic and career capital, and to determine institutional benchmarks of social responsibility. While qualitative studies, such as this one, are important to provide detailed descriptions and narratives from a few individual’s experiences, they are limited in their ability to provide broad generalizations. Therefore, it would be important to conduct quantitative studies that could collect data from a larger sample to provide more generalizable results. For example, a survey could be distributed to all of the 95 university presidents in Canada to collect information about a number of components of the career experience to confirm or contradict the results from this qualitative study. As well, this type of national study could compare data by region, institutional type, and other demographic variables including gender. Possible survey topics could include:

- family background (parental education)
- career planning and motivation to advance their careers to the presidency
- career paths (previous positions held, length of time in each position, age at assuming positions, including presidency)
- rate and nature of mentoring relationships
- utilization of professional networks, goals for participation
- marital and parental status (status of spouse’s career)
- household and childrearing responsibilities/time spent in these activities
- emotional consequences of work/life balance (e.g., stress, regret, guilt)
- perceptions of work/life balance
Conclusion

The 1982 Constitution Act patriated Canada’s constitution from the United Kingdom and included a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that provides protection of civil liberties. Inherent in the Charter is constitutional protection against gender discrimination, yet gender inequity continues to be evident in the lives of Canadian women. While women now participate in the paid workforce at nearly the same rate as men, they remain concentrated in the lowest paying occupations and underrepresented in leadership positions even in the education and health care sectors where they make up the majority of the workers. Although the Charter should guarantee equity for women in opportunity and in wages, the gender pay gap in Canada is one of the highest in industrial nations.

While women’s participation in the workplace has increased, the power structures remain dominated by men: the result of inequality of opportunities for women. The Women’s Movement brought gender inequality issues to the political forefront with resultant legislation to protect the rights of women (e.g., affirmative action, sexual harassment, gender discrimination in the workplace). Initial advances were apparent when women gained access to the classroom and to the boardroom, but fifty years after the feminist era, women remain dismally represented, in every industry, in positions of management and policymaking. Consequently, the perspectives of women are not equitably considered in decisions that profoundly affect their lives.

The findings from this study confirmed that women have a dual commitment to both their work and family roles and that women’s career decisions are often made in consideration of their holistic life view. However, disparity of domestic responsibilities
continues to be a substantial barrier for women’s career advancement. In order to achieve gender equity, it is imperative to equalize the home workload. In this regard, the conceptualization of career that includes the integration of work and non-work lives and a differentiation between career evolution and career planning remains inadequately explored. Moreover, it is essential to broaden the definition of work-life to include those who are unmarried and those without children as the evidence shows that they also experience emotional consequences of work-life role conflict (Hamilton, Gordon, & Whelan-Berry, 2006).

Although women have been successful in attaining education, skills, and competence, they continue to face obstacles to advancing their careers that are evidence of gender discrimination. For example, men are advantaged in the workplace by their parental status while women are disadvantaged, women are subjected to more rigorous examination than men in the same work-related situations, and women continue to be excluded from networking opportunities that are necessary to acquire the kind of career capital that leads to advancement. Networks provide friendship, social support, and “instrumental resources” (Coleman, 2010) that can lead to career advancement. Women’s only networks were a critical vehicle to giving ‘voice’ to women and their concerns at the local and national level during the feminist era. This study provides evidence that the women’s only networks should be resurrected for the purposes of organization and collective action to bring the issue of gender discrimination back into political focus.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of women presidents of Canadian universities related to the development of their careers. It became evident,
during the interviews, that these were extraordinary women. Extraordinary because it remains a steep climb for women to positions of power and influence in the academy, and they simply would not have made it to the top if they were not exceptional women. And while the focus of this study was on women presidents in Canadian universities, few differences were found between their experiences and those represented in the literature describing the career experiences of academic women in the United States, Australia, or the United Kingdom (Arthur, Patton, & Giancarlo, 2007; Coleman, 2010; Ledwith & Manfredi, 2000; McMahon, Bimrose, & Watson, 2010; Waumsley & Houston, 2009).

Despite the fact that women comprise the majority of those working in the field of education and comprise the majority of undergraduate students on university campuses, women comprise the minority of university leaders. As the needs of the global community change, the social mandate to educate the next generation of leaders becomes a critical responsibility of educational institutions. The fact that within these institutions equal opportunities for women to advance their careers has not yet been realized is an ethical issue of great concern.
References

Washington, DC: Author.


Appendix A

Letter of Invitation

University of Toledo
Judith Herb College of Education
Gillham Hall
2801 W. Bancroft St.
Toledo, OH 43606
419.530.2495

June 2011

Dear (insert President’s name):

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a research study I am conducting as part of my PhD in Higher Education degree in the Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership at the University of Toledo (Ohio) under the supervision of Dr. David Meabon. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Despite gains, women continue to be underrepresented in positions of senior leadership in higher education particularly in the office of the university president. The literature reports women encounter unique barriers and challenges to their career development, yet there are few studies that explore the experiences of women who have been successful in achieving the position of a university president and none that have focused on Canadian university women presidents. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Canadian university women presidents as they developed their career pathways to the presidency.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve a face to face interview of approximately one and a half to two hours to take place at a mutually agreed upon time on your university campus or alternate location at your request. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis using a computer software program. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any manuscript or report resulting from this study however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for a period of five years in a locked office in my advisor's lab. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 419 356-6206 or by email at colleen.quinlan@utoledo.edu. You can also contact my advisor, Dr. David Meabon at 419-530-2666 or email david.meabon@utoledo.edu.
I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Department for Human Research Protections (DHRP) at the University of Toledo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Barbara Chesney, Ph.D., Chair, Social, Behavioral & Educational IRB at 419.530 4075 or e-mail IRB.SBE@utoledo.edu.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to those participants directly involved in the study, other potential women leaders not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader higher education research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Colleen Quinlan
Appendix B

Structured Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your career path to the presidency.

2. Describe some of the opportunities and challenges you experienced along your career path?

3. What do you consider the “critical incidents” along your career path?

4. What advice can you give to other women who aspire to become university presidents?
Appendix C

Consent Form

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Colleen Quinlan and Dr. David Meabon of the Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership at the University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the dissertation and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Department for Human Research Protections (DHRP) at the University of Toledo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at 419.383.6905. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any dissertation or publication that comes of this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

Participant Name: ____________________________ (Please print)

Date: ______________________________________

Participant Signature: ____________________________